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Exploring Public Opinion on the Israeli Palestinian Conflict: A Critical and Comparative Empirical Analysis

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Abstract:

The Israeli Palestinian conflict represents one of the most complexed and long-standing disputes of contemporary international politics, whose relevance crosses regional borders of the Middle East to shape the global discourse on security, political legitimacy and human rights. This dissertation analyzes to which extent individual characteristics as nationality, political orientation, education level, religion, occupation, age and gender influence perceptions on responsibility, victimization, legitimacy and future possibilities regarding the conflict. The starting hypothesis is that demographic variables are not neutral, but rather exert perceptual dependency, especially when combined with media coverage and public debate. The research lies within the field of Critical Security Studies (CSS), which emphasizes the socially constructed nature of security and threats. This hybrid approach combines the conceptual background of critical theory with the empirical evidence of a multilingual questionnaire (Italian, English, and French), distributed online via snowball sampling and completed by about 430 respondents. This instrument investigated the sociodemographic dimension as well as sources of information, attitudes toward the main actors and future perspectives. The data was analyzed through the application of descriptive and inferential tools, as chi-square test, cluster analysis, and sentiment analysis, in order to identify possible associations and assess their statistical significance, identify recurrent patterns, and delineate the general sentiment of the sample. The results, show that variables such as nationality and political orientation have a greater impact than other factors, albeit with weak effects. This suggests that security narratives are rooted not only in national affiliations, but also in ideological and moral predispositions – although conclusions must bear in mind the non-probabilistic nature of the explanatory sample, which does not allow for generalization.

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1. Introduction

Nowadays, we live in an age of continuous and pervasive exposition to information. News about the state of the world, particularly conflicts, breach our screens daily, even when these occur countless kilometers away. Through newspapers, television news, social media and public debate, wars and violence are permeating through our lives and contribute to the molding of our opinions, emotions and stances. The constant flow of images, data and narrations not only informs us, but it drives us to emphasize, to side with and to develop our own ideas on realities that we have no direct link with or no direct experience of. Within this context, the Israeli Palestinian conflict represents an emblematic case, able to depict clearly how international disputes are filtered and interiorized by the public on a global scale, as it becomes fertile ground for political, cultural and identitarian confrontation, well beyond the Middle East, as visible in solidarity movements and shifting attitudes across Western publics.

The Israeli Palestinian conflict is one of the longest running and more complex of contemporary history. Its persistency – pervading through different generations and historical phases – turned it into an “intractable conflict”, characterized by a zero-sum logic, recurrent violence and by its apparent impossibility to reach a definitive resolution. The duration and intensity of this dispute have had dramatic consequences, not only on the populations directly involved and on the geopolitical balance in the Middle East, but also on the international collective imagination. In fact, in the last decades, the conflict has become a paradigm for understanding broader dynamics of political violence, occupation, identity, and security, with authors such as Edward Said emphasizing its theoretical significance (Said, 1979). Simultaneously, the spread worldwide of solidarity campaigns and changes in public perception show how the Palestinian question and Israel’s stance became the focus of constant and polarized debate.

From a theoretical point of view, the Critical Security Studies (CSS) framework offers useful tools to analyze these dynamics. CSS was born in the 1990s as an academic discipline with a critical approach

to traditional security studies, opposing the realist conception of security as merely defense of the State from external threats. It insists upon the social and discursive nature of security, whereas what is perceived as a danger is not neutral and objective, although rather constructed through political practices, narratives and power dynamics (Buzan et al., 1998). On the merit, authors from the Copenhagen School as Barry Buzan, Ole Waever and Jaap de Wilde have theorized what is known as the “securitization” theory, meaning the process of presenting a non-threatening issue as an existential threat, and consequently legitimizing the adoption of exceptional measures – at times extreme. Within this framework, the Israeli Palestinian conflict stands as a textbook example of securitization process and social construction of threat: for both sides, insecurity became an integral part of the narrative, particularly surrounding identity and belonging, where the other is projected as the enemy.

In this context, the relevance of public perceptions becomes evident. The citizens’ opinions do not only reflect collective and identity visions, but also contribute to legitimate specific security narratives and, potentially, influence foreign policy decisions and diplomatic dynamics. The perceptions on the conflict, fueled by the media, political institutions and international organizations, have a dual role: on the one hand, they are the result of processes of political and cultural socialization; on the other hand, they themselves become the instruments to guide political choices and legitimization strategies.

It is from these considerations that the current dissertation stems from. The central question guiding this study is: *to what extent do individual characteristics such as nationality, political orientation, level of education, religious affiliation, and gender influence perceptions of the Israeli Palestinian conflict?*

The main objective of this study is to understand whether and how personal and social factors contribute to differentiating views of responsibility, victimization, legitimacy, and the possibility of conflict resolution. In particular, the analysis aims to investigate the possible existence of recurring patterns among different national and social groups, hypothesizing that individual background is not

neutral but profoundly affects the construction of meaning attributed to conflict and the justification of political decisions and military actions.

The originality of this work resides in the integration between the CSS critical approach and the use of empirical tools of data analysis for social sciences. On the one hand, the former serves as the theoretical framework necessary to understand perceptions, not as objective data, but as expressions of personal narratives and dynamics of power. On the other hand, the use of statistical methods makes it possible to investigate the existence of significant associations between sociodemographic variables and individual opinions.

Empirically, the research is based on data collected through an online questionnaire, prepared in three languages (Italian, English and French) and disseminated via social media, using a snowball technique. The survey collected 427 complete responses, combining closed questions, Likert scales and open-ended questions to allow for both multivariate statistical analysis and qualitative exploration of the language used by respondents. It is essential to highlight from the onset the exploratory nature of the sample: given the structural characteristics of the interviewees, and the sampling technique adopted, it cannot be considered representative of the general population.

The analysis was conducted using RStudio and integrated several techniques: descriptive and inferential analyses, as contingency tables and Chi-square tests with p-value Monte Carlo, association indices such as Cramer's V, cluster analysis with Gower distance and PAM algorithm, up to sentiment analysis tools and representations via word cloud.

The thesis is divided into two main parts, corresponding to the two pillars of the research: theoretical reflection and empirical investigation. The first part focuses on the Israeli Palestinian conflict read through the lens of Critical Security Studies. First, an introductory chapter reconstructs the historical and political context of the conflict, from its origins during the British Mandate to more recent developments, with a focus on power asymmetries and the normalization of the state of exception. It also analyzes the processes of securitization that have helped shape opposing collective identities, as

well as the politics of recognition and invisibility. The third chapter, on the other hand, addresses the role of perceptions, identity and narratives on security, showing how media, education, religion and culture influence how conflict is understood and interpreted.

The second part presents the empirical study. The fourth chapter explains the research design, hypotheses made, questionnaire structure, sampling, and ethical considerations adopted. This is followed by the fifth chapter, which provides a descriptive overview of the sample and general trends in perceptions, highlighting the main demographic variables and opinions collected. The sixth chapter delves into statistical analysis, evaluating the factors influencing perceptions through inferential tests and cluster analysis, while the seventh offers a critical discussion of the results, comparing them with other studies and linking them back to the theoretical findings of CSS. Finally, the last chapter presents conclusions, summarizing the results obtained, highlighting the limitations of the research and outlining possible future directions, both theoretically and empirically.

2. The Israeli Palestinian Conflict through a Critical Security Studies (CSS) Lens

2.1 Historical Background and Power Asymmetries: from the British Mandate to the Present

Although the historical complexity of the Israeli Palestinian conflict deserves an in-depth and independent analysis, this paper will provide a brief overview of the main stages, starting from the British Mandate to the present day. The aim is not to present a detailed account of events, but to outline the essential framework of the dynamics and power asymmetries that have shaped the conflict, so as to provide the necessary context for the critical and empirical understanding of the following chapters.

2.1.1 The Origins Under British Mandate (1917-1948)

What we today refer to as the "Palestinian question" has its roots in the policies adopted when the territory was under the responsibility of the League of Nations, the predecessor of the United Nations. The League of Nations granted Britain control of Palestine through the Sanremo conference in 1920 after the Ottoman Empire collapsed during World War I. British conduct, however, was inherently contradictory from the start (Terry, 2018). On the one hand, Britain committed itself to supporting the creation of an independent Arab state, promising its support for Arab independence in the territories defined by the borders proposed by the Sharif of Mecca (Husayn-McMahon Correspondence) (Ginat, 2018; The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2024). On the other hand, in 1917 the Balfour Declaration was issued: a document expressing the British government's support for the creation of a "national home for the Jewish people" in Palestine, with the provision that the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities would not be discriminated. This document aimed to explain British objectives in Palestine, although it was significantly ambiguous, as it never truly addressed the dilemma of reconciling support for Zionism with the protection of the rights of the Arab majority, and consequently contributed to increase tensions (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2025a).

During this period, Palestine was the site of intense Jewish migration (Aliyah), often driven by the wave of anti-Semitism in Europe and the spread of Theodor Herzl's nascent Zionist movement. At the same time, Palestinian nationalism emerged, initially as a reaction to the first wave of Jewish migration and land acquisition, and then solidified under the British Mandate, which gave Palestine a clear geopolitical identity. The Zionist leadership, from the onset, appeared as more centralized, opposing itself to that of the Palestinians, who was divided and unable to stand a collective front. Tensions erupted in violent clashes, like the Great Arab Revolt of 1936-1939, which although suppressed, it made Britain reconsider its policy in Palestine, opting instead for a more accommodative policy vis-à-vis the Arab people.

2.1.2 The Birth of Israel and the 1948 War

World War II was a crucial turning point, leading Britain to step back and refer the Palestinian question to the United Nations. On November 29, 1947, the UN General Assembly approved Resolution 181, which proposed the partition of Palestine into two separate states, one Arab and one Jewish, with Jerusalem as an international zone (United Nations General Assembly, 1947). This decision was accepted by Jews but rejected by Arabs, as the Arab population was then twice that of the Jews but the plan allocated 56% of the territory to the latter (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2025b; Winder, n.d.).

Failure to comply with the partition plan led to an escalation of the conflict and the Arab Israeli War of 1948, which coincided with the birth of the State of Israel in May of that year. The war saw the involvement of five Arab forces: Egypt, Transjordan (Jordan), Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon, defending the apportionment of land dedicated to Arabs in southern and eastern Palestine (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2025c). Being able to repulse the attacks on various fronts, the war ended with the victory of Israel, who not only defended itself but expanded its territory to 78% of Palestine. For Palestinians, this period is remembered as "Al Nakba" (The Catastrophe), which marked the forced expulsion of 700,000 Palestinians from their villages, with the destruction of hundreds of them.

The narrative of this war has been subject to "mythologizing": Israeli historians praised the heroic spirit of the Jewish people, who fought as an unarmed minority against a united Arab front, while Palestinians remember the Nakba as a collective disaster and symbol of the loss of their territory and national aspirations (Pappe, 2006). The opposing historical accounts from both sides continue to affect modern understanding and prevent peace negotiations. As the Palestinian community lacked a formal authority, it entrusted the Arab League with its representation, although the members of the League often pursued their own national goals, rather than standing for a common front, hindering a coherent collective policy. The refugee crisis emerged as the main point of contention, with Arab regimes insisting on the right of return, while Israel rejected this possibility, advocating integration into host societies and ignoring the historical and cultural ties of Palestinians to their homeland (United Nations Human Rights Council, 2013).

2.1.3 Post-1948 Conflicts and the Ongoing Occupation

After the 1948 war, the Israeli Palestinian conflict fell into a permanent state of instability, which endures to this day. The Six-Day War of 1967 brought a decisive shift as Israel took full control of historic Palestine, which included the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and East Jerusalem (Fischbach, n.d.-a). The diplomatic discussions now concentrated on restoring occupied territories and achieving mutual acknowledgment between parties. The extended period of military control together with unsuccessful peace negotiations sustained ongoing instability in the region.

The First Intifada, from 1987 to 1993, gave rise to a Palestinian civil disobedience movement, and Hamas emerged as a new Islamist political and military organization (Fischbach, n.d.-b). The Oslo Accords established peace efforts through mutual recognition between Israel and the PLO, which recognized the Palestinian Authority's governance of parts of the West Bank and Gaza Strip (Fischbach, n.d.-c). However, negotiations failed to resolve key issues, including the status of Jerusalem and the right of return of refugees, as well as the expansion of Israeli settlements and the management of Palestinian water resources. The conditions imposed created an imbalance that placed

greater responsibility on the Palestinian sides. The breakdown of the Oslo Accords led to continued lack of stability that triggered the Second Intifada in 2000 (Fischbach, n.d.-c).

2.1.4 The Current Situation and Persistent Asymmetries

Between 2000 and 2006, the Oslo process collapsed definitively, with the outburst of the Second Intifada and Israel's harsh military response, culminating with the invasion of the territories under the control of the Palestinian Authority and the construction of a separation barrier. Peace negotiations, although briefly reopened in Taba and through the Quartet's "Road Map", produced no results, while Israel reinforced its unilateralism with its withdrawal from Gaza and the expansion of settlements in the West Bank. Furthermore, the death of Arafat and the 2006 election of Abbas marked the end of a Palestinian political era, paving the way for the electoral rise of Hamas (Fischbach, n.d.-d).

Since 2006 attacks and fighting have been regular in the region, with significant escalations reportedly in 2014, 2015 and 2017 when US President Donald Trump announced his intention to move the US embassy to Jerusalem, effectively recognizing it as Israel's capital (SkyTG24, 2025).

In September 2020, after the signature of the Abraham Accords between Israel, United Arab Emirates and Bahrein, a new era in the geopolitical dynamics of the Middle East kicked off, characterized by the formalization of relations between these countries. Despite the symbolic significance of this agreement, the Palestinian issue remained largely excluded from the institutional agenda, while tensions on the ground kept escalating. In the years that followed, violent clashes continued to occur: in 2022, civilians clashed with Israeli forces in the West Bank, resulting in numerous casualties during police exercises or military operations. These pressures erupted on October 7, 2023, when Hamas launched brutal attacks on several Israeli cities, with thousands of rockets entering the territory and causing over 1,000 casualties. These killings were complemented by raids and kidnappings, with approximately 250 people taken hostage. Israel responded with Operation Iron Spade, calling up reservists and formally declaring war, worsening the humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip and reopening the wounds of the conflict (Sky TG24, 2025).

The Hamas attack on October 7, abruptly awakened Israeli authorities and the international community, but it also strengthened Palestinian resistance and Israel's rejection of a two-state solution. Both sides are often obstinate in respect to their positioning, due to a strong attachment to their own “narratives of victimization” that hinder mutual recognition and the acceptance of respective sufferings. Despite the two-state solution remains the primary objective of the international community and for a minority of both peoples, its implementation is made increasingly difficult by the situation on the ground.

2.2 Securitizing Narratives: how both sides construct Threat and Legitimacy

The concept of securitization narratives is crucial to understand the dynamics of the Israeli Palestinian conflict within the framework of this case study. The securitization theory, developed by the Copenhagen School – in particular by the abovementioned scholars Buzan, Waever and de Wilde – elucidates how a problem is framed as a security threat, thus justifying extreme measures and moving it from normal politics to an emergency condition that requires immediate attention. Security threats are not objective facts, but rather social constructions created by political elites through a process of securitization. This process involves the formulation of a narrative that presents the problem as a threat to the survival of a group or society as a whole. A key element of this theory is the role of language and discourse in the securitization process. Understanding how political elites use language offers insights into how security threats are constructed and transformed into pressing political issues (Buzan et al., 1998).

In the context of the Israeli Palestinian conflict, both sides employ narratives of securitization, each with its own "referent objects" and specific discourses, creating a complex web of threats and counter-threats that make simple solutions difficult (Otukoya, 2024).

2.2.1 The Israeli approach to securitization: Survival and Civilization

Israel's approach to securitization is deeply rooted in a complex interaction between the constant perception of an existential threat to its survival and the construction of a Jewish national identity

defined in terms of “civilization” (Donderer, 2021). Israel is recognized as an emblematic case study for understanding how a state deals with existential threats, where securitization manifests itself through historical narratives, social and political contexts, images, media, institutions, and physical acts (Wertman, 2021; Olesker, 2013). Since its founding in 1948, Israel has lived in a state of near-permanent war, punctuated by truces, perceiving persistent hostility from the surrounding Arab world (Gomel, 2025). The 1948 Arab Israeli War, celebrated by Israelis as the “War of Independence,” is a fundamental pillar in the narrative of national survival and in the definition of the threat (Wertman, 2021).

This perception of danger is constant for the security of the Jewish population. Israeli security doctrine has evolved from a multilateral perception of the conflict (against the “Arabs”) to a bilateral one (recognition of the Palestinian national problem) and then back to a multilateral one, incorporating the Palestinian question into broader regional upheavals (Ghovari, 2018). Security has become a central element of Israeli collective identity, and political elites tend to avoid evoking victimhood during wars to motivate soldiers and citizens (Markiewicz & Sharvit, 2020). Israeli military actions are frequently justified as counterterrorism operations, such as the previously mentioned Operation Iron Spade, with the need for self-defense as a constant leitmotif to ensure Israeli security (Santoso et al., 2024). However, some critical analyses have raised the question of whether the Israeli actions in Gaza, which caused significant civilian casualties and destruction, can be defined as “state terrorism” (Bythrow, 2024). The trauma resulting from the attacks on October 7, 2023, has intensified the sense of insecurity in Israel, provoking massive and aggressive responses (Gomel, 2025). Arab demographic growth has historically been perceived as a threat to the State's exclusively Jewish nature, and post-October 7 proposals explicitly aim to “remove the demographic burden” of Gaza's 2.2 million Palestinians, suggesting a transfer to the Sinai (Adler, 2023). This reveals a strategy based on terror, both through rhetoric and concrete means, to push Palestinians to abandon their homes.

Parallel to the narrative of survival, there is a powerful component of “civilization”. Zionist ideology presents itself as a project of modernization for the Jewish nation and community, leading to a self-perception of Israel as a democratic state, aligned with Western values and implicitly “more civilized” (Donderer, 2021). In this narrative, Palestinians are often conceptualized as “underdeveloped and backward” and their land as “uncultivated and effectively empty”, creating an “*Other*” that becomes a source of existential threat to Israeli identity (Busbridge, 2020, as cited in Donderer, 2021). This discourse is reinforced by the idea of an exclusively Jewish past and future on the land of Israel, and the construction of this image of the “enemy as a monster” serves to legitimize Israel's position as the “true victim” (Steele, 2014). The media, especially in the West, often displays a pro-Israel bias, disproportionately emphasizing Israeli victims and dehumanizing Palestinian suffering (El Masry et al., 2025). Media and political language “disciplines discourse” to promote pro-Israeli views, for example by equating anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism and using the rhetoric of marginalization to justify the conflict. This rhetoric is essential in protecting Israel from critiques (Stern, 2021; Levine, 2024). Securitization policies take the form of expanding settlements and occupying Palestinian territories, justified by security needs but perceived by the international community as violations of international law and obstacles to peace. Although UN Resolution 242 established the principle of “land for peace”, Israel has often interpreted this concept flexibly, using the occupied territories as bargaining chips or for security reasons. Altogether, Palestinian citizens in Israel suffer institutional discrimination and are securitized as a minority threat (Olesker, 2013).

In conclusion, Israel’s approach to securitization is an intricate intertwinement of historical imperatives of survival and an identitarian vision defined in opposition with the “*Other*”, perceived as a threat to its own civilization (Donderer, 2021). This mechanism, constantly reinforced by political and mediatic discourses, justifies the occupation and military actions as a fair and necessary response to existential pressures, habitually at the expense of Palestinians’ rights and aspirations, making it difficult to de-securitize the conflict (Olesker, 2013). The resolution of the conflict requires for the

promotion of coexistence based on mutual trust rather than peace founded solely on the force of arms or permanent occupation (Gomel, 2025).

2.2.2 The Palestinian approach to securitization: Freedom and Resistance

On the other side of the dispute, Palestinian narrative focuses on the Palestinian people, its sovereignty and its national self-determination. Its approach to securitization is inherently connected to its perception of existential threat to its identity and its very existence as a people, climaxed with the event of the Nakba and the enduring process of dislocation, expropriation and denial of fundamental human rights (Khalidi, 2020). For Palestinians, securitization is not enacted as a political choice like others, but as a vital condition of their fight for freedom and resistance against the colonial power and aimed at eroding its presence on the land (Nishikida et al., 2025). This process mutates their struggle for self-determination into a national imperative, where the absence of a formal sovereign State and the prolonged submission to a military regime impose an approach that excuses extraordinary measures (Ghovari, 2018). The Nakba is therefore recognized as the starting point for a collective consciousness that defines Palestinian identity in terms of exile and loss, making the right of return a crucial and inalienable demand. The collective memory of the Nakba, together with daily experiences of oppression, form a solid basis for resistance (Nassar, 2008).

The concept of “*muqawama*” (resistance) is multifaceted in the Palestinian context, encompassing both armed struggle and nonviolent forms of opposition. Historically, the emergence of Palestinian resistance factions, such as Fatah, which adopted armed struggle after the Arab defeat of 1967, rekindled hope and dominated Palestinian and Arab discourses. The First Intifada (1987-1993) represented a significant popular uprising, characterized by mass civil disobedience, general strikes, boycotts of Israeli products, and demonstrations, where the Palestinian population, including women, children, and the elderly, opposed the Israeli army with stones and slingshots, highlighting the asymmetry of the conflict (Gallo & Marzano, 2009). The Second Intifada (2000-2005), although it began with similar characteristics, turned into an armed uprising with the use of suicide bombers and,

on the other side, the use of tanks and helicopters by the Israeli occupation forces (Allen, 2008; Khalidi, 2020).

Hamas (Islamic Resistance Movement), founded in 1987 as the operational arm of the Muslim Brotherhood, has emerged as a crucial player, distinguishing itself for its radical vision and rejection of the peace process, adopting armed struggle as a political tactic and as a validating element of its existence (Khalidi, 2020). Hamas frames resistance through an Islamic lens, considering the liberation of Palestine a legitimate activity and its Islamization a prerequisite for national independence. The group has demonstrated a pragmatic approach to political issues, potentially accepting the 1967 borders as part of a unified Palestinian state, while maintaining the ultimate goal of an Islamic-Palestinian state over the entire historical territory (Singh, 2012). Its actions, including rocket attacks, are often aimed at influencing perceptions of Israel's vulnerability rather than achieving concrete military victory. However, its strategy has generated tensions with the Palestinian Authority (PA) and Fatah, particularly after the Oslo Accords and its electoral victory in 2006, contributing to a fragmentation of Palestinian leadership and “fragile stability” (Nishikida et al., 2025).

Palestinian identity is also constructed through literature and artistic expression, which serve as a form of resistance and a means of preserving memory and affirming existence (Said, 1979; Ashley & Jayousi, 2013). Poets such as Mahmoud Darwish have given voice to Palestinian identity, describing resistance through the pursuit of beauty in poetry and nature, and emphasizing that Palestinians "cannot be defined by our relationship, positive or negative, with Israel. We have our own identity" (Ashley & Jayousi, 2013). Palestinian women, in particular, have been active in producing and preserving knowledge and history, enduring multiple forms of oppression since 1948 and resisting through their life stories. Their narratives reveal courage, heroism, and difficult choices in contexts of violence and trauma (Kassem, 2011).

The Palestinian struggle is also a battle for legal recognition and a war of narratives. Internationally, Palestinians have achieved some successes in the field of lawfare with the support of the Global

South, highlighting Israel's fragility both domestically and internationally (Nishikida et al., 2025). However, the application of international law is often blocked by divergent interpretations and a political context that does not guarantee full implementation. The international community, and the United Nations in particular, finds itself in an obvious political and legal stalemate on the Palestinian question. Despite having adopted numerous resolutions recognizing the rights of the Palestinian people, including the right to self-determination and to establish an independent state within the 1967 borders, these pronouncements often remain ineffective, lacking binding force and, even more so, concrete means of implementation. The standstill stems mainly from the political impasse within the Security Council, where the veto exercised by some permanent members – in particular the United States – has systematically blocked any attempt to adopt coercive measures or sanctions against Israel (UNDPI, 2008). This decision-making imbalance has weakened multilateralism and undermined the credibility of international law, fueling a sense of double standards among Arab and Palestinian populations.

2.3 Recognition as Strategy: Identity, Diplomacy, and the Politics of (Non)existence

In the Israeli Palestinian conflict, mutual and international recognition of the Palestinian state are political and symbolic tools of enormous importance, but they are also the source of a profound identity dilemma. On the one hand, formal recognition by other states confers international legitimacy, access to multilateral bodies, legal means to claim rights, such as territorial sovereignty, respect for international law, and self-determination (Ferragamo & Roy, 2025). For example, UN General Assembly Resolution 43/177 (1988) recognized the proclamation of the State of Palestine, calling for the use of the name “Palestine” in UN international relations instead of the acronym PLO, without immediately granting full sovereignty or full membership in the UN (UNGA, 1988). At the same time, the mutual recognition agreement between Israel and the PLO signed during the Oslo Accords established that the PLO recognized the right of the State of Israel to exist in peace and security, while Israel recognized the PLO as the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people

with whom to negotiate; however, Israel did not guarantee direct recognition of Palestinian sovereignty as a state at that time (Singer, 2021).

On the other hand, the fact that Palestine is not yet universally recognized means that it remains in a state of legal and political limbo: it is not a full member of the UN, and its status as a non-member observer state limits its voting power and affects its ability to enter into international treaties or seek legal reparation before international organizations (UN News, 2024). This has concrete effects: it reduces the possibility of enforcing its legal claims against Israeli policies considered illegal (such as settlements in the occupied territories) and weakens Palestine's ability to obtain concrete multilateral support. Nevertheless, recognition by approximately 147 of the 193 UN member states indicates significant diplomatic support, albeit often conditioned by domestic political considerations or external pressures (AJLabs, 2025). It is significant that influential countries such as France, the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia have recently announced their intention to recognize Palestine, with conditions such as demilitarization, free elections, or the exclusion of groups such as Hamas, and in some cases alignment with Israeli actions on the ground, signaling how recognition is being exploited for diplomatic purposes (Ferragamo & Roy, 2025). In fact, although humanitarian rhetoric dominates public debate, some analysts argue that the recognition of Palestine by countries such as France or the United Kingdom is primarily a response to domestic political dynamics aimed at winning political support, in particular within the Muslim community. In line with a strongly pro-Israel stance, the Trump administration has condemned efforts toward a two-state solution, calling them “a slap in the face to the victims of October 7 and a reward for terrorism,” and saying it would “not participate in this insult but continue to lead real-world efforts to end the fighting”, and has almost completely suspended the issuance of visas to Palestinian passport holders, limiting their access even to United Nations premises or travel for medical and study purposes (Ferragamo & Roy, 2025).

As anticipated, this scenario creates an identity dilemma for Palestinians: on the one hand, the aspiration for an internationally recognized state that legitimizes their national identity; on the other,

the reality that such recognition does not automatically guarantee freedom, an end to occupation, or effective control over the proclaimed territories. International recognition thus becomes a symbolic and legal battle, but also a reflection of global power dynamics, where the decisions of powerful states and the use of the veto in the Security Council remain central to unblocking or neutralizing any resolution that could concretely change the status quo (Alcover et al., 2024). It shows that identity and legitimacy are not just cultural issues, but instruments of foreign policy, international law, and diplomatic pressure, whose real implications for the daily lives of those involved in the conflict remain ambiguous as long as recognition remains incomplete or conditional.

3. Constructing Narrative: The Drivers of Perception and Public Consciousness

The perception of a complex and deeply rooted conflict such as the Israeli Palestinian one is the result of a dynamic and profound interaction between various socio-cultural factors, including the media, education, religion, and culture. These elements do not act in isolation, but intertwine, reinforce each other, and contribute to forging collective narratives that shape identity – understanding of the “self” and the “other” – and, ultimately, political positions at both the national and international levels (Steele, 2014). Understanding how these pillars of society influence perception is crucial to analyzing any conflict, as it reveals how realities are socially constructed and not objectively given.

3.1 Mediated Conflict: Mainstream and Social Media in the Narrative Battle

The media, in particular, play a fundamental role in constructing social reality, acting as powerful institutions that actively participate in the dissemination of narratives and the formation of public opinion (Taufiq et al., 2025). Through tools such as language, style, structure, and images, the media can apply “framing” that profoundly influences public perception (Reese et al., 2001). This process is not neutral; on the contrary, it privileges specific interpretations of events over others, actively constructing social reality. The media have the power to set the public agenda, to focus attention on certain aspects of an issue (agenda-setting), to suggest how to think about it (priming), and to frame events in ways that orient the public toward specific interpretations (framing) (McCombs, 2004; Cacciatore et. al, 2015). Their influence extends to the ability to shape policy responses, as demonstrated by the “CNN effect” in US foreign policy. This power to define and frame a conflict becomes a significant dimension of the struggle itself (Taufiq et al., 2025). The impact of the media is further amplified by the tendency to generate massive stereotypes, which are then perpetuated by public discourse, creating a conceptualization of the “Other” based on media images and not necessarily on reality (Steele, 2014).

In the context of the Palestinian question, the influence of the media is particularly evident. As previously stated, in-depth studies have revealed a persistent pro-Israel bias in Western mainstream

media coverage (Taufiq et al., 2025). This bias is often attributed to existing power structures in the West, the influence of pro-Israel entities such as the Israeli government and the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), and commercial interests (Khan, 2023). The media uses emotional storytelling techniques while choosing specific information to present. The Israeli media portray Palestinian fighters as terrorists while showing Israeli military personnel as combatants (Steele, 2014; Jackson, 2023). The unbalanced media coverage creates a situation where Israeli military operations gain approval, but Palestinian military operations receive condemnation.

A recurrent critique to Western media coverage is its lack of historical contextualization. Complex events such as Israeli occupation and its consequences are often omitted, reducing the dispute to mere ethnical and religious clashes. This excessive oversimplification depicts today's conflict to a "Israel-Hamas war", ignoring the long-standing issues relative to territorial quarrels and governance (Bythrow, 2024; Khamis & Dogbatse, 2024). Until recently, predominant narratives tended to portray Israel as the "legitimate victim" which acts in the name of legitimate defense, while its opponents were described as a "terroristic threat" (Steele, 2014). This framing contributes to the dehumanization of Palestinians, who are often reduced to mere statistics or "violent villains" rather than human beings with legitimate revindications and complex lives (Khamis & Dogbatse, 2024). On the other hand, Palestinian media, as analyzed by the content reported online, tends to depict the conflict in terms of territorial rights and "true victimhood", highlighting the Israeli army's violence and aiming for empathy. These media often depend on framings as "dominance", "inhumane", "military violence", "occupier/colonizer" and "apartheid" to describe the State of Israel and its actions (Steele, 2014).

The advent of social media has introduced new dynamics, challenging established narratives and traditional power structures (Taufiq et al., 2025). Social media platforms serve as essential tools which enable marginalized Palestinian voices to reach wider audiences while filling in the gaps that mainstream media leaves uncovered (Khamis & Dogbatse, 2024; Taufiq et al., 2025). Online "citizen journalism" allows ordinary people to share personal stories, images, and real-time updates, providing

diverse perspectives that may not be present in traditional media (Khamis & Dogbatse, 2024). The viral spread of alternative narratives through Instagram and TikTok platforms enables users to become prosumer¹ content creators (Potenza, 2023). The Instagram movement "All Eyes on Rafah" demonstrated how social media enables fast image sharing which creates public pressure that eventually forces governments to act when people worldwide express their outrage. However, the uncontrolled circulation of information has also encouraged the proliferation of false or manipulated content, making the adoption of fact-checking tools and digital literacy programs increasingly urgent. Understanding the impact of social media during conflict therefore means analyzing in depth how it influences collective perceptions and emotional reactions among international public opinion (Nasereddin, 2024).

3.2 How Education, Religion, and Culture Shape Perception of the Conflict

Education is another key player in socialization, responsible not only for the transmission of knowledge, but also for the inculcation of values, symbols, norms, collective memories and attitudes in newer generations (Vered, 2013). In situations of prolonged conflict, the educational system can exercise a dual role: igniting the narrative that sustains the conflict, contributing to its perception or setting the grounds for peace promotion and reconciliation (Vered, 2013). In Israeli's society, the schooling system historically instilled a Zionist approach, emphasizing national myths and presenting a unilateral vision of the dispute, stressing on negative stereotypes on Arabs and refusing to recognize a Palestinian entity. Through a study of Israelis and Palestinians attitudes toward reconciliation, it was found that there has been some resistance to the changing of school curricula to socialize children against irredentist ends, as although about half of Israelis agree with such a move, only 13% of Palestinians agreed (Shamir, 2007). On the other hand, Palestinian textbooks have been regarded as means of incitement, although their analysis must consider the daily realities experienced by children under occupation, such as violence and starvation (Jayousi, 2013).

¹ The term "prosumers" depicts the idea of a user being an active producer and simultaneously a consumer of content.

Religion is nowadays often underestimated but it is rather a decisive factor in international conflicts, capable of fueling tensions and driving politics. The Middle East is the cradle of the three main monotheistic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam), and the Israeli Palestinian conflict has deep roots in ethnic and religious disputes (EBSCO, 2025). Religion takes part in securitization processes which allow for the preservation of Israeli and Palestinian identities in opposition to each other. In the Israeli context, Zionism has become deeply intertwined with Judaism, attributing vital importance to the territory and linking the values of the diaspora, exile, and the concept of the Promised Land to national identity (Safran, 2012). From the Palestinian perspective, Hamas sees Palestine as *“a land whose status has been elevated by Islam, a faith that holds it in high esteem, that breathes through it its spirit and just values and that lays the foundation for the doctrine of defending and protecting it”*, while it asserts that its conflict is with the Zionist project, not with Jews due to their religion. Hamas does not fight against Jews because they are Jews, but against Zionists who occupy Palestine. However, they state that it is the Zionists who constantly identify Judaism and Jews with their colonial project and their illegal entity (The MEE Staff, 2017). Religious rhetoric can transform a political conflict into a “holy war”, making the possibility of compromise far more difficult. However, reciprocal religious comprehension can also improve interactions between the parties.

Finally, culture is a powerful builder of identity and “imagined communities,” shaping concepts of class, ethnicity, race, and nationality, often in a context of ‘us’ versus “them” (Anderson, 2006). Culture perpetuates stereotypes of the “Other,” reducing people to a few simple and fixed characteristics, and this stereotyping intensifies in the presence of marked power inequalities (Steele, 2014). A central element of both Israeli and Palestinian narratives is the claim to be the “true victim.” This position is considered extremely convincing, as it is believed that the “true victim” has the right to be “vengeful with justice” (Steele, 2014; Santoso et al., 2024). Narratives of victimhood, therefore, are not only shared social beliefs, but also motifs employed by the ruling class to influence their constituents, gain international support, and strengthen internal solidarity (Markiewicz & Sharvit, 2020).

The 1948 Nakba stands as a fundamental historical event which formed Palestinian national consciousness while creating their collective memory (Santoso et al., 2024). The Palestinian nationalist movement along with their cultural resistance, through letters, poetry and songs, expresses their experiences of exile and their fight for self-determination which drives them to unite. The Palestinian cause gained international recognition through the efforts of intellectual and cultural figures including Edward Said who raised public awareness about the conflict (Ashley & Jayousi, 2013). The Israeli narrative focuses on survival and rebirth to establish their modern state through historical patterns of exile and return (Santoso et al., 2024). The security language creates both descriptive and prescriptive effects which determine how people envision their communities while validating political stances. The process of identity formation occurs through social exchanges while people receive their understanding of reality from shared stories (Taufiq et al., 2025).

Summarizing, the perceptions of the Israeli Palestinian conflict are the product of a intricate web of influential factors as media, education, religion and culture. These elements not only form oneself, but they contribute to polarize, distort and in many cases, dehumanize the “Other”, obstructing mutual comprehension and the path to peace. The dominance of moralized narratives and the reiteration of stereotypes are a striking example of how perceptions, in particular referring to security, are never neutral but socially constructed through discourses that distribute legitimacy and blame. Moving on from this polarization demands for conscious commitments to more balanced and contextualized accounts, which will allow for a better understanding of the complex human reality at the foundation of the conflict.

4. Research Design and Methodology

4.1 Research Question and Hypothesis

As anticipated in the introduction, this study revolves around a fundamental question: How do individual characteristics as nationality, political orientation, education, religion, etc. influence perceptions of the Israeli Palestinian conflict? This investigation takes shape from everyday life, marked by my own constant exposure to information flows and the increasingly intense public debate surrounding the Israeli Palestinian conflict.

This research question is situated within the theoretical framework of Critical Security Studies outlined in the first part of the thesis, translating conceptual reflections into empirical investigation. As underscored, security is neither neutral nor universal, but rather a socially constructed notion, shaped by narratives, collective identities, and power relations. Within this context representations of the conflict, the attribution of responsibility, and the assessment of legitimacy emerge as filtered through cultural, political, and social lenses that fundamentally condition their meaning. The relevance of this question lies in the possibility of capturing not only the political opinions or sentiments expressed by respondents, but also the mechanisms through which personal experience shapes the understanding of a complex international conflict.

Investigating perceptual differences in relation to sociodemographic and identity variables allows us to understand whether and how dominant narratives are perceived in different cultural contexts, to assess the extent to which specific social groups develop greater empathy towards one of the parties, and to reflect on the impact of political and media socialization in constructing the image of the conflict. In this sense, the research question is not limited to exploring individual attitudes but is part of a broader reflection on the processes of political legitimization and the social construction of international security. Therefore, this second part of the thesis will be devoted to outlining an empirical analysis of the data collected through the questionnaire, in order to identify correlations and

possible causal relationships between the personal characteristics of the respondents and their perceptions of the Israeli Palestinian conflict up until early June 2025.

The hypothesis I formulated prior to data collection assumed that demographic and sociopolitical characteristics were determining factors in shaping perceptions of the Israeli Palestinian conflict. In particular, I believed that nationality, age, and political orientation would be the most significant variables in explaining differences in positioning. This prediction was justified both in the literature on political socialization processes, which showed how national affiliations and historical contexts contribute to profoundly shaping the collective imagination and social memory of conflicts (Dettmer, 2024; Halbwachs, 1992), and in political psychology studies, which have shown that age and generation can influence the adoption of long-term values and ideological orientations (Norris & Inglehart, 2019). Similarly, political orientation has repeatedly been identified as a robust predictor in the formation of attitudes toward foreign policy and international conflicts (Hurwitz & Peffley, 1987; Rathbun, 2007). I also hypothesized that age could significantly influence perceptions of the conflict: on the one hand, younger people, who are more exposed to explicit and highly polarized content disseminated by social media pages such as @eye.on.palestine, would tend to take a more critical stance toward Israel; on the other hand, older generations, having lived through different phases of the conflict and with a different historical background, might show more neutral attitudes or sometimes be more favorable towards Israel.

Consistent with the Critical Security Studies approach, the initial hypothesis therefore assumed that individuals' identities and sociocultural backgrounds played a central role in defining who is perceived as a “threat”, “aggressor” or “victim”, as well as in assessing the legitimacy of the actions taken by the parties in conflict.

4.2 Sampling Method, Survey Design and Ethical Considerations

The questionnaire was designed as an empirical survey instrument to gather information which would understand how personal and social aspects of participants affect their views about the Israeli

Palestinian conflict. Its structure combined demographic information with specific questions to study knowledge levels, information sources, political and moral beliefs and views about conflict parties and international involvement.

The research project was administered on the online website “Lime Survey”, distributed through social media platforms and a snowball sampling strategy in order to reach as diverse a sample as possible in terms of background, particularly from a geographical perspective. The questionnaire was distributed mainly on Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp, particularly in various types of group chats, such as university course channels, families and friends, communities of interns abroad, etc. While recognizing that this method inevitably leads to distortions in the representativeness of the sample, such as a likely overrepresentation of younger and more digitally active users, it is the most effective means of collecting a large number of responses quickly and economically, while amplifying the geographical reach.

To allow people to feel more comfortable with the questions and express more freely their own words, the survey was stipulated in three languages: English, Italian and French. The availability of choice in the language was pointed out in the message broadcasted with the link to the questionnaire and the interviewee was able to switch the idiom on the starting page.

The structure of the questionnaire was divided into six sections. The first was devoted to collecting basic demographic data, including age (reported as a numerical value and then aggregated into groups), gender, nationality, highest level of education completed, occupation, religious affiliation and political orientation. These data aimed at drawing a detailed sociodemographic profile of the respondents and analyze differences in conflict perception as a function of the dependent variables of interest.

This was followed by a section on degree of knowledge and information sources. In it, the surveyee was asked to assess how familiar he or she considers themselves to be with the history of the conflict, as well as to indicate how often they follow news stories related to the topic. To gain a more precise

understanding of how individuals update their knowledge, respondents were asked to indicate their primary sources of information type, selecting from multiple options including social media, television news, newspapers, online websites, radio, academic publications, government reports/statements, or other sources. If a single category was chosen, an open-text field appeared, allowing respondents to specify the particular outlet they relied on – for instance, within the category of “social media”, one could indicate platforms such as Instagram or X. Additional questions were included to evaluate the perceived influence of these sources on respondents’ views of the conflict, as well as the degree of trust they place in media coverage of the issue.

The third part of the questionnaire focused on perceptions of the conflict and opinions regarding the parties to the dispute. Respondents were asked to express who they hold most responsible for the continuation of the conflict, whether they perceive an imbalance of power between the two sides, and what descriptive adjectives they associate with Israel and Palestine between the words presented (oppressor, victim, defender, aggressor, justified, unjustified, neutral). There were also questions designed to investigate whether respondents believe that both populations suffer equally from the conflict and open fields in which to freely insert additional words or concepts that emerge spontaneously when thinking about the two sides.

The following section examined participants’ political and ethical views by asking them to indicate their level of agreement with a series of statements on a five-point Likert scale, where 1 corresponds to “totally disagree” and 5 to “totally agree”. Indicators such as the support for a two-state solution, the importance of historical traumas (such as the Holocaust and the Nakba) in the current conflict and the possibility of an effective peace or ceasefire in the near future were examined. In addition, it was inquired whether or not Israel, Palestine, or both are justified in their use of military force. The perception of the role of the international community and third-party actors, such as the United Nations, the European Union and the United States, in the conflict resolution process was also

investigated, asking them to rate their actions as very favorable, mostly favorable, mostly unfavorable or very unfavorable.

In the fifth section, the questionnaire included a module devoted to personal and social influences, through which it is intended to understand the respondent's degree of relational involvement with the conflict. This section examined whether individuals' views have shifted over the course of the conflict, with particular attention to any increased support for one side over the other. Furthermore, the survey asked if cultural or religious background is perceived to influence their perception, as well as investigating if there is direct experience of debates or discussions on the topic, and how often such conversations occur with friends or family members. On this matter, there is also a question dedicated to the willingness to engage with people of opposing views.

In conclusion, the questionnaire asked the interviewee to develop more on personal views on a voluntary basis. In fact, contrarily to the rest of the survey, the last section was not mandatory and presented several open-ended questions that allowed for free expression of thoughts regarding key events, the role of the Israeli authorities, Hamas, Benjamin Netanyahu and the impact of the war on civilian populations on both sides. These were designed to capture participants' spontaneous thoughts and expressions, with the goal of enabling further investigation, such as sentiment or topic analysis or word cloud creation, to explore general reactions and identify recurring patterns.

Overall, the questionnaire was designed as a comprehensive and balanced instrument capable of combining closed multiple-choice questions, rating scales, and open fields in order to collect thoroughly the data. Its architecture made it possible to link socio-demographic and background variables with opinions and attitudes about conflict, laying the foundation for multivariate statistical analysis aimed at identifying causal relationships and predictive factors in the formation of public perceptions.

Before delving into the observations and the statistical analysis of the study, it is important to underline that the survey was conducted in full compliance with the fundamental ethical principles

of social research. The questionnaire was structured in such a way as to guarantee the anonymity of participants, avoiding the collection of personal data that could allow individuals to be directly identified. The information collected has been used exclusively for this dissertation and will not be used for purposes other than those stated under any circumstances. Respondents were clearly informed of the voluntary nature of participation and the possibility of discontinuing the questionnaire at any time without any consequences. The academic purpose of the research was also specified, emphasizing that the opinions provided would be analyzed only in aggregate form, so as to prevent any traceability to individual participants. Particular attention was paid to the sensitivity of the topic, bearing in mind that the Israeli Palestinian conflict can touch on deeply personal identity, religious, and political issues. For this reason, the questionnaire was formulated in neutral and non-judgmental language, with the aim of minimizing any possible discomfort or psychological pressure.

4.3 Statistical Methodology and Analytical Approach

The empirical analysis was conducted entirely with the RStudio software, using dedicated statistical packages and replicable procedures, documented in a personalized R code. The choice of this work environment is in line with the knowledge of data analysis for social sciences that I acquired by attending the homonymous course, taught by Professor Luca Secondi during the 2023-2024 academic year. The R script was developed and implemented based on my notes, slides, and course materials, with the support of digital tools such as Chat-GPT for a more in-depth examination.

First, a descriptive analysis of sociodemographic and perceptual variables was conducted. This phase included the production of summary measures (modes, means, medians and standard deviations – only when applicable), and graphical representations (histograms, box plots, bar charts), in order to provide a preliminary picture of the sample composition and response trends.

Subsequently, crosstabulations and Chi-square tests of independence were performed, accompanied by p-values estimated using Monte Carlo simulations to compensate for low frequencies in some

cells². To assess the strength of the associations that emerged, Cramer's V index was also calculated, allowing information on statistical significance to be integrated with a measure of effect size. To avoid distortions due to sparsely populated categories, a recoding process was also applied that grouped the less frequent modalities into residual classes ("Other").

At the same time, exploratory techniques were used, in particular cluster analysis based on Gower's distance and the PAM (Partitioning Around Medoids) method, to identify homogeneous subgroups of respondents based on perceptual variables. The approach was divided into thematic sections of the questionnaire (knowledge and sources of information, perceptions of conflict, political and ethical opinions, personal and social influences), in order to obtain distinct profiles and subsequently cross-reference them with demographic characteristics. The adequacy of the clustering solutions was assessed using the average silhouette index, interpreted as a measure of the internal consistency of the groups.

Finally, a sentiment analysis and word cloud was developed based on the open-ended questions, with the aim of enriching the interpretation of the structured data with a qualitative look at the vocabulary and symbolic associations used by respondents.

Overall, the approach adopted is characterized by a combination of descriptive, exploratory, and inferential techniques, aimed at ensuring a multi-level reading of perceptions of the Israeli Palestinian conflict, while remaining aware of the sampling limitations associated with the non-probabilistic and online nature of the survey.

² The Monte Carlo method consists of generating a large number of random simulations (in this case, 50,000 replications) to estimate the p-value more reliably when the expected frequencies in some cells are too low. This approach avoids the use of asymptotic approximations, which, in the presence of small samples or unbalanced distributions, risk producing distorted results. In this study, this technique was adopted to ensure the robustness of inferences in all cases where the tables crossed variables with rare or underrepresented categories.

5. Descriptive Statistics and Sample Overview

5.1 Demographic Composition

The online questionnaire collected a total of 631 responses, of which 429 were complete and 202 incomplete, with a response rate of 67.99%. The dataset was then cleaned to eliminate incomplete cases and invalid responses, for example with many inconsistencies within them. Following this procedure, the final number of valid observations used for the analysis was 427.

Conducting a thorough demographic analysis of the sample that completed the questionnaire is an essential step for the entirety of the research, particularly as the hypothesis lays foundation in the independent variables investigated to answer to the research question.

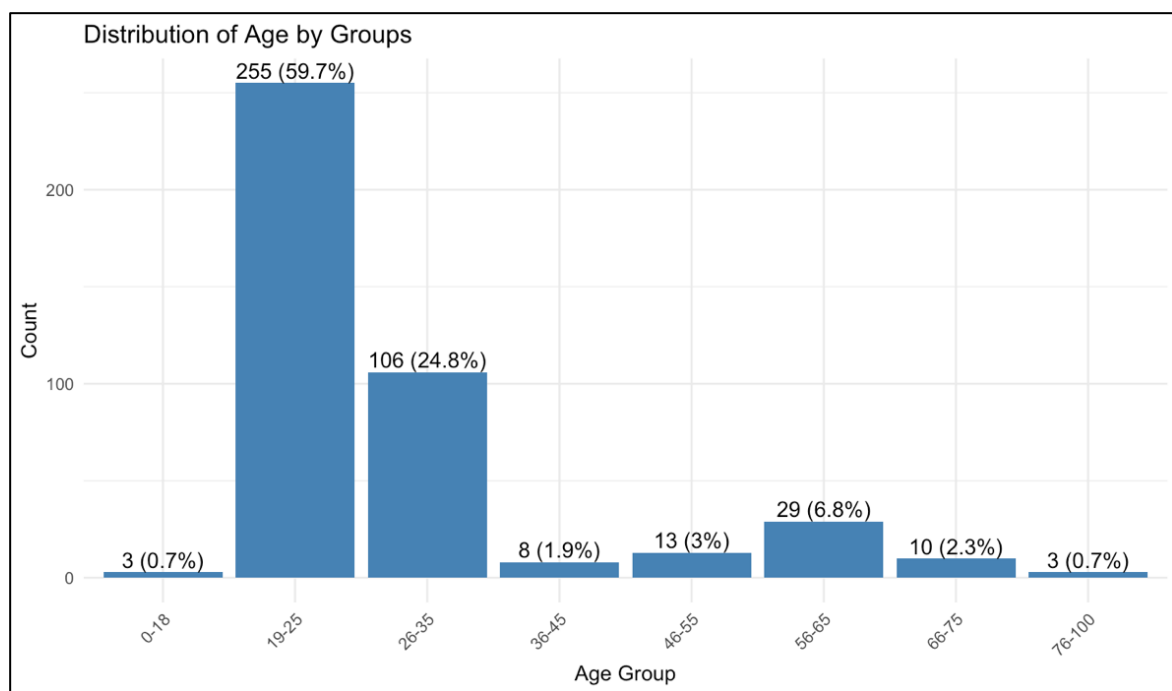


Figure 1 - Distribution by Age Groups

The majority of respondents are between the ages of 19 and 25, with a more than half of the sample being part of this group (59.7%). A smaller, but still significant, percentage is represented by the participants between 26 and 35 with a value of 24.8%. Below age 18 and above 76, participation is residual (less than 1.5% of the total), while in the range of 36 to 75 the number of respondents varies,

with a rise in the value of the 56-65 age group (6.85). This finding suggests that the sample is strongly representative of the young adult segment of the population, likely university students or recent graduates, with little presence of individuals in the older age group. The particular rise in the 56-65 age group can be explained by the diffusion of the survey by my parents and relatives to their friends and colleagues.

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# A tibble: 1 × 8
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	Mode	Mean	Median	SD	Q1	Q3	Min	Max
	<dbl>	<dbl>	<dbl>	<dbl>	<dbl>	<dbl>	<dbl>	<dbl>
1	23	28.8	24	13.0	23	26	16	90

Table 1 - Descriptive Statistics for Age Distribution

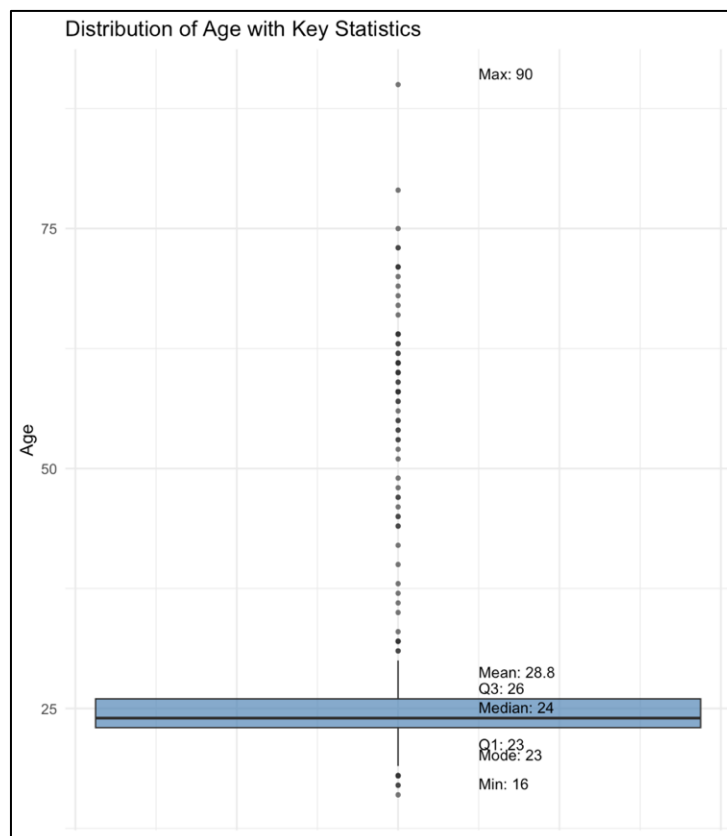


Figure 2 - Boxplot of Age Distribution

As it can be graphically seen in the boxplot above, the distribution of respondents' age is relatively concentrated in the younger categories, with many outliers "outside the box". The median age is 24 years, with the mode and first quartile both at 23, indicating that most participants are in their early twenties. The third quartile is 26, and the mean is slightly higher at 28.8, suggesting a small right skew due to older respondents. The standard deviation is 13, confirming that despite the central clustering of the sample around the early twenties, the overall age distribution is quite dispersed due to the presence of older participants. The minimum age recorded is 16, while the maximum is 90, but these extreme values are clear outliers and do not reflect the central tendency of the sample. Overall, the boxplot confirms that the dataset is heavily skewed toward younger individuals, consistent with the expected bias from an online, snowball-sampled survey.

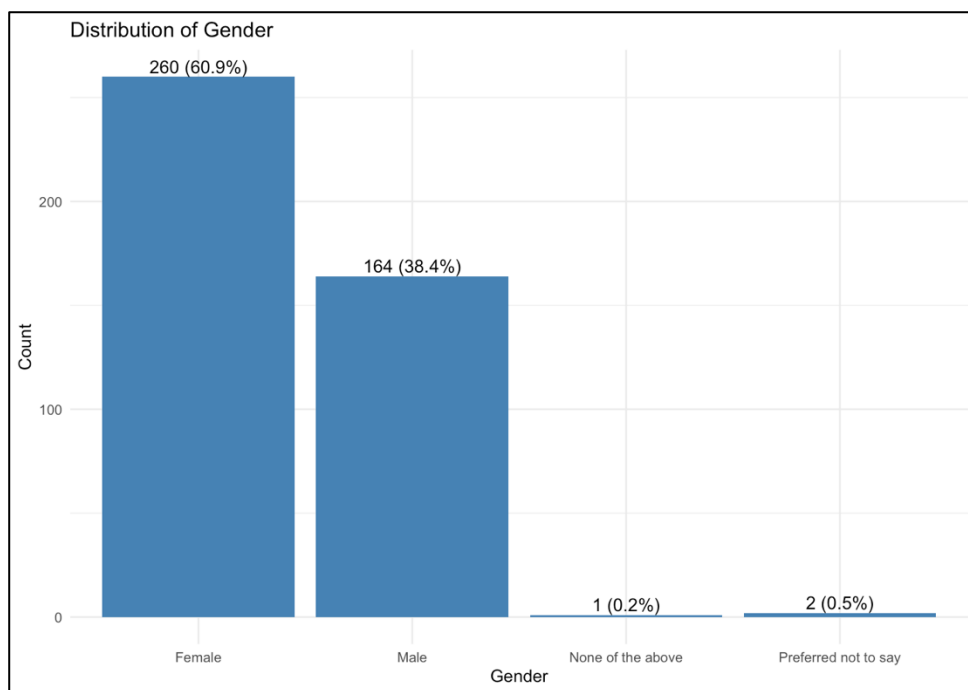


Figure 3 - Distribution by Gender

The gender distribution shows a greater presence of women than men in the sample. Female participants make up about 61 percent of the total, while men account for 38.4 percent. A very small portion of the sample (less than 1 percent) chose "None of the above" or preferred not to declare their gender identity. The category "Female" represents the mode of the distribution. This imbalanced

representation toward the female gender is an important element to consider when analyzing opinions, as perceptions about the conflict could also be influenced by gender-related factors.

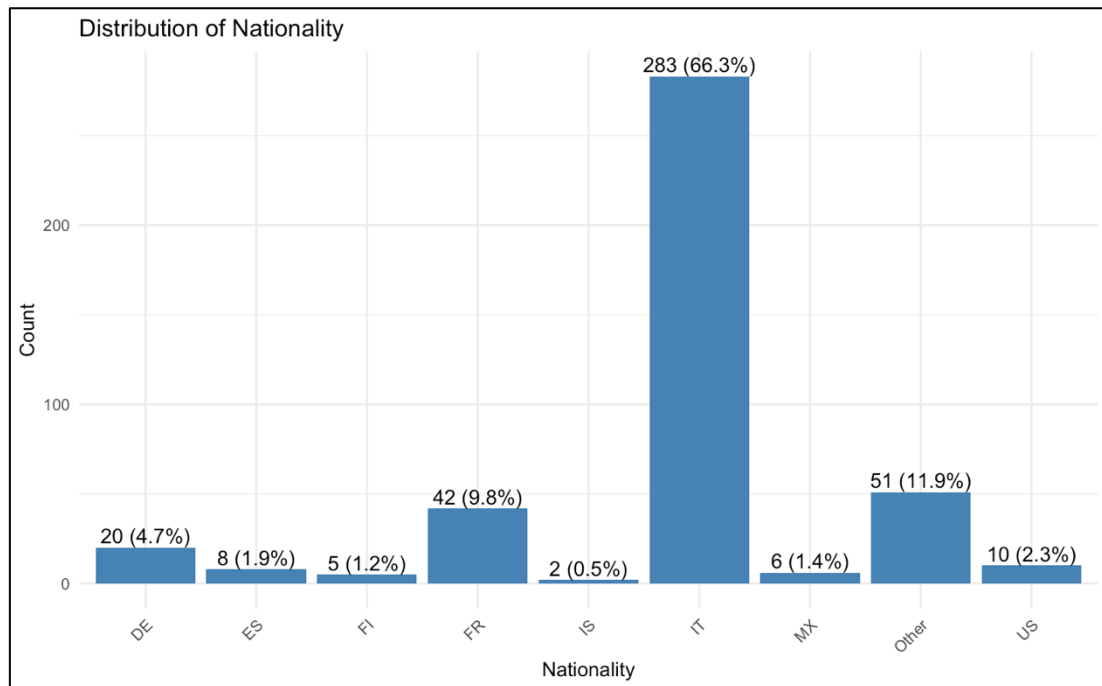


Figure 4 - Distribution by Nationality

The nationality variable shows a marked predominance of Italian nationals, making up about 66 percent of the sample. However, numerous other nationalities are represented, totaling 45 different countries, among which France (about 10 percent), Germany (4.7%), the United States (2.3%) and Spain (about 2 percent) emerge in order of frequency. The remaining nationalities have much lower frequencies, often being presented only once or few times, therefore for the sake of the dissertation I decided to group them in the “Other” category. The mode of the distribution is “Italian”.

This distribution indicates that although the sample is predominantly Italian, there is a fair amount of cultural and geographic heterogeneity, which is useful for comparative analysis of perceptions.

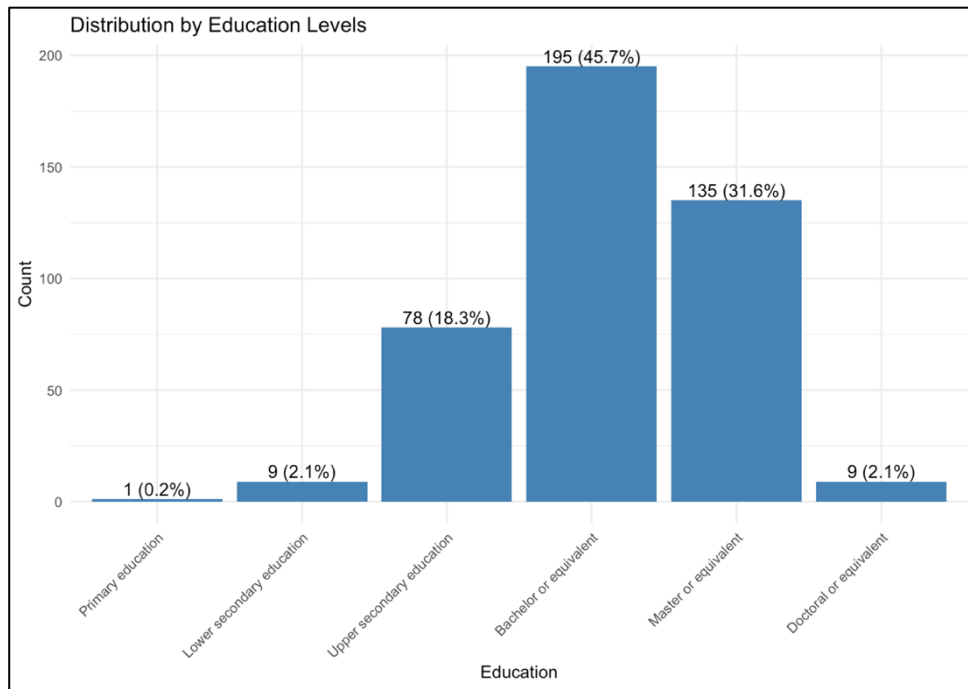


Figure 5 - Distribution by Education Level

In terms of educational level, the sample is characterized by a highly educated population, whereas about 46 percent of the participants hold a bachelor's degree or equivalent diploma, 31.6% percent have attained a master's degree, and a minority of about 2 percent hold a Ph.D. The remaining 20.1 percent of individuals is distributed within the lower end of the scale, including circa 18.3% of obtainers of an upper secondary education, 2.1% of lower secondary education and with the presence of responders with a primary education or less being negligible. The mode, as well as the median and the first quartile (Q1) of the distribution are represented by the category “Bachelor or equivalent”, while the third (Q3) is “Master or equivalent”. This distribution highlights the prevalence of academically educated individuals, which could influence the ability to understand and critically process the conflict under consideration.

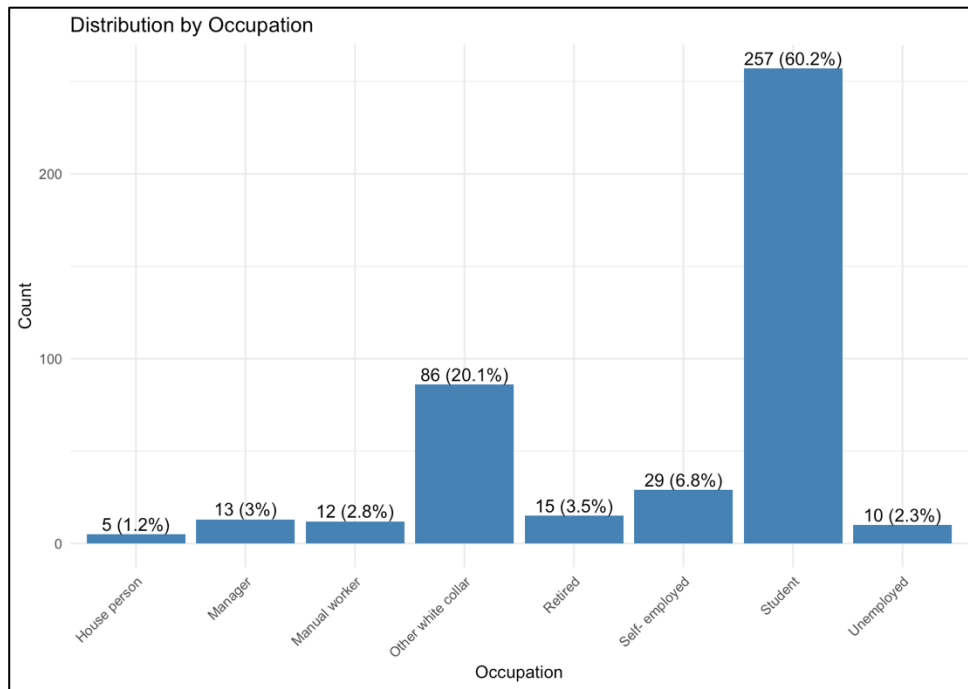


Figure 6 - Distribution by Occupation

The analysis of employment confirms the young age of the sample, with a significant presence of students, accounting for about 60 percent of the total. This is followed by the “other white collar” (about 20 percent), workers in self-employed positions (6.8 percent) and a smaller share of retired (3.5%), managerial positions (3%), manual workers (2.8%), unemployed (2.3%) and lastly house persons (1.2%). Being the mode of the distribution the category “Student”, it suggests a sample in which the majority of individuals is still actively part of the educational system rather than the workforce.

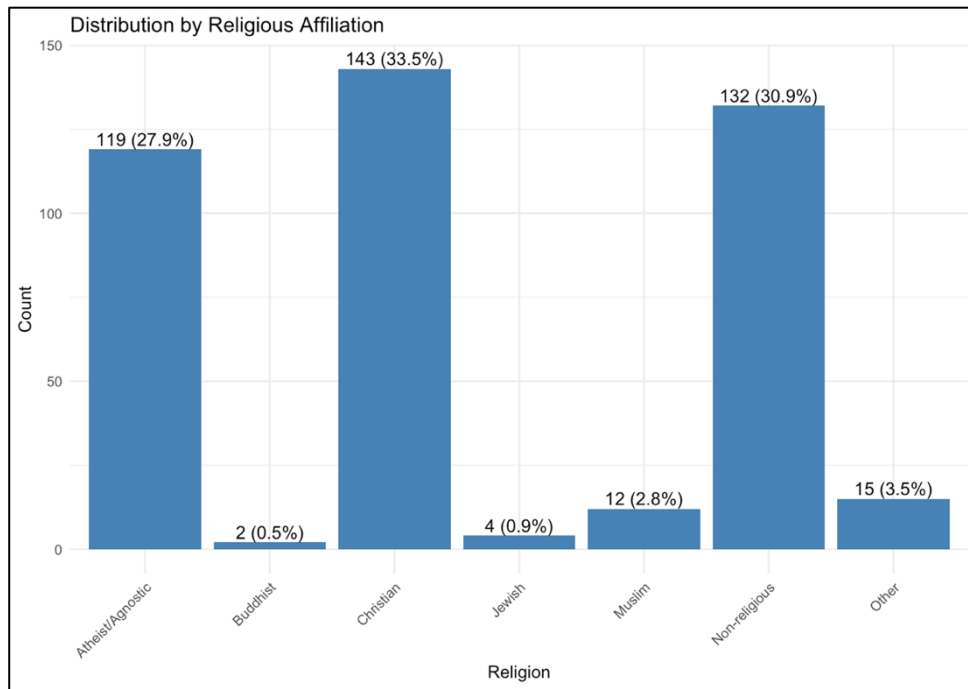


Figure 7 - Distribution by Religious Affiliation

From a religious perspective, the majority of respondents declare themselves Christian (33.5 percent) or nonreligious (30.9 percent), while people who identify themselves as atheist or agnostic make up about 28 percent of the sample. While Islam is recorded in 2.8 percent of the cases, other religious denominations, such as Judaism or Buddhism, are present in very small percentages, less than 2 percent overall. About 3.5% of the sample is part of a residual category labelled as “Other”, although not specified what it entails. These data outline a predominantly Christian (as it represents the mode) and unreligious population – a characteristic that could be reflected in a biased view of the Israeli Palestinian conflict.

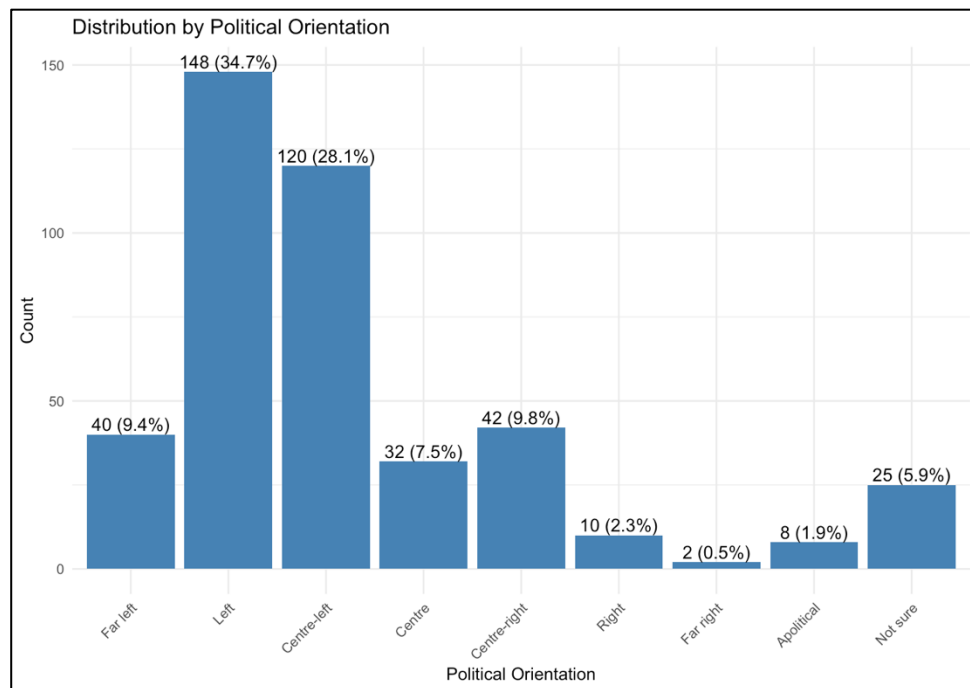


Figure 8 - Distribution by Political Affiliation

Regarding political orientation, the sample shows a skewed distribution among different ideological positions. Slightly more than half of the respondents make up the left-wing and moderate left area, whereas 7.5 percent lays in the center and about 12 in the moderate right and right-wing area. It is interesting to notice that about 10 percent falls in the far-left position, where only 0.5 in the far-right orientation. A portion of the sample, about 8 percent, describe themselves as apolitical or uncertain. This plurality of political positions enriches the analysis, allowing us to assess the influence of ideological beliefs on the perception of conflict, although there is a clear skew to the left of the political axis. The mode of the distribution is the category “Left”, and the median/quartiles were not calculated for political orientation, as the category “Not sure” cannot be meaningfully ordered along the left–right political spectrum.

Overall, the population analyzed is composed mainly of young adults, with a stronger female presence, a predominance of Italian citizens but a good representation of other nationalities, especially France and Germany, a very high level of education and an occupational status dominated by students. It tends to be Christian, atheist or non-religious, with a propensity for the left-wing positions. These

demographic characteristics not only describe the composition of the sample but also constitute key elements for interpreting the empirical results, as they can significantly influence the opinions and perceptions expressed by the participants.

5.2 General Trends in Perception

The following section will provide a descriptive overview of the general trends that emerged from the distribution of the main perceptual variables included in the questionnaire. These descriptive results constitute a first interpretative tool for understanding how the conflict is framed by the participants, providing the basis for subsequent inferential analyses.

Knowledge and Information Sources

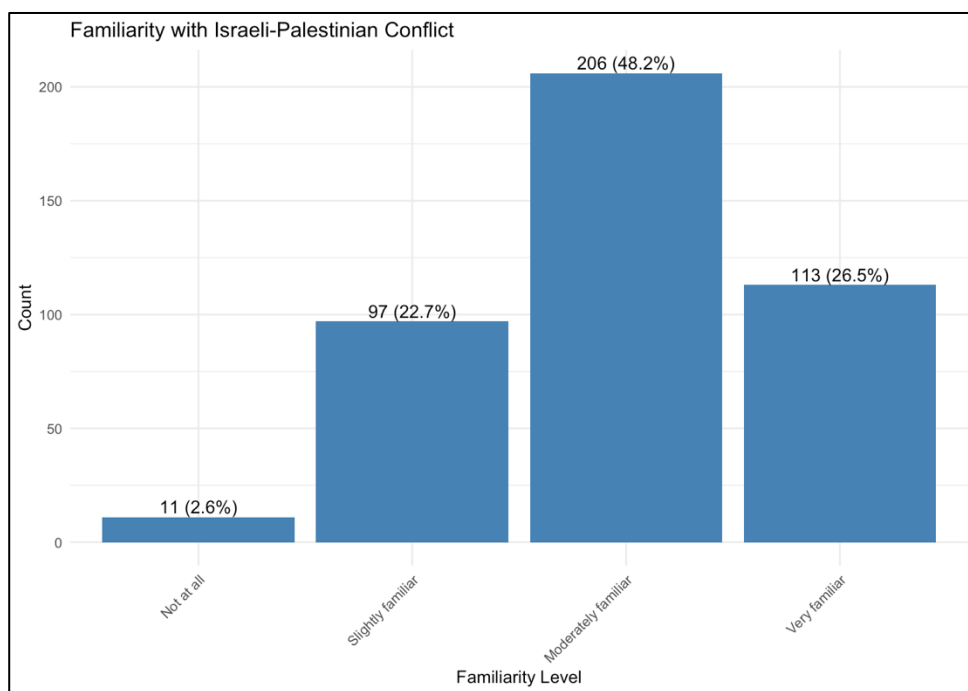


Figure 9 - Distribution by Level of Familiarity with the History of the Conflict

Regarding the level of knowledge of the conflict, in answering the question “How familiar are you with the history of the Israeli Palestinian conflict?” about 48 percent of participants say they are "moderately familiar" with the history and dynamics of the conflict, while 26.5 percent say they are "very familiar." A share of 22.7% consider themselves only "slightly familiar" and 2.6% percent "not

familiar at all”. This figure shows that the majority of the sample has at least a sufficient information base, with a significant portion stating good knowledge of the topic. As both the mode and the median of the distribution fall under the category of “Moderately familiar”, we can assume the perception will be influenced by the familiarity which allows for better understanding of the current state of dynamics and more will to be informed on evolutions. The first quartile (Q1) corresponds to “Slightly familiar”, while the third quartile (Q3) corresponds to “Very familiar”.

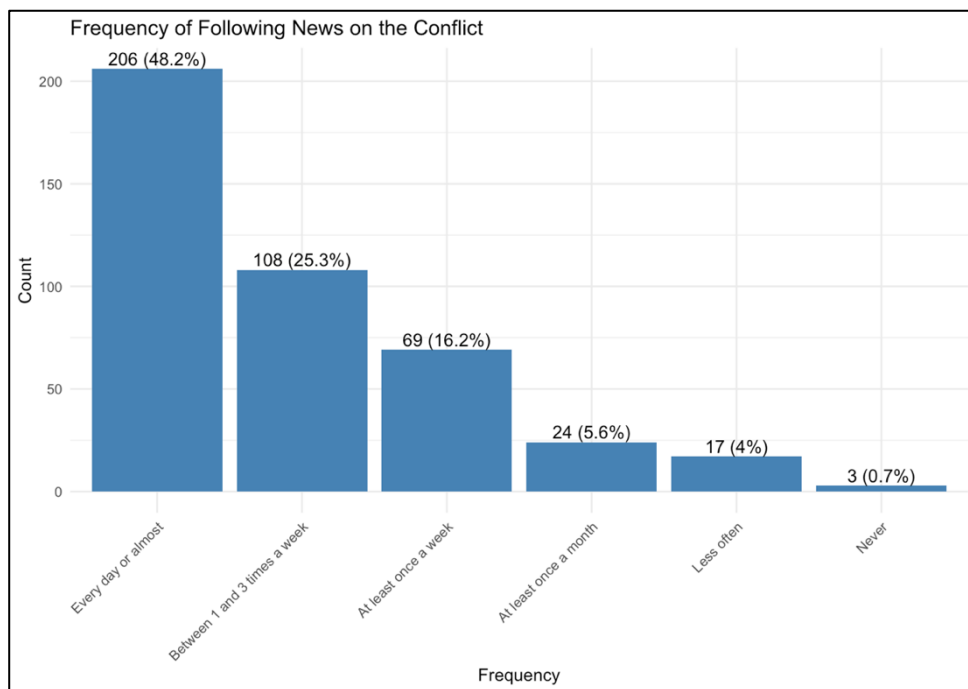


Figure 10 - Distribution by Frequency of News Update Related to the Conflict

The frequency with which participants keep updated on the news related to the conflict is relatively high: about 48 percent say they inform themselves daily, 25.3 percent between one and three times a week, and 16.2 percent at least once a week. An additional 5.6 percent follow the news at least once a month and 4% less than that. Unsurprisingly, only less than 1 percent say they never inquire about the topic. This element, combined with the stated level of knowledge, suggests that the sample consists of average individuals who are attentive and informed about geopolitical issues related to the conflict. The mode is “Every day or almost”. The median is “Between 1 and 3 times a week”. The

first quartile (Q1) corresponds to “At least once a week”, and the third quartile (Q3) corresponds to “Every day or almost”.

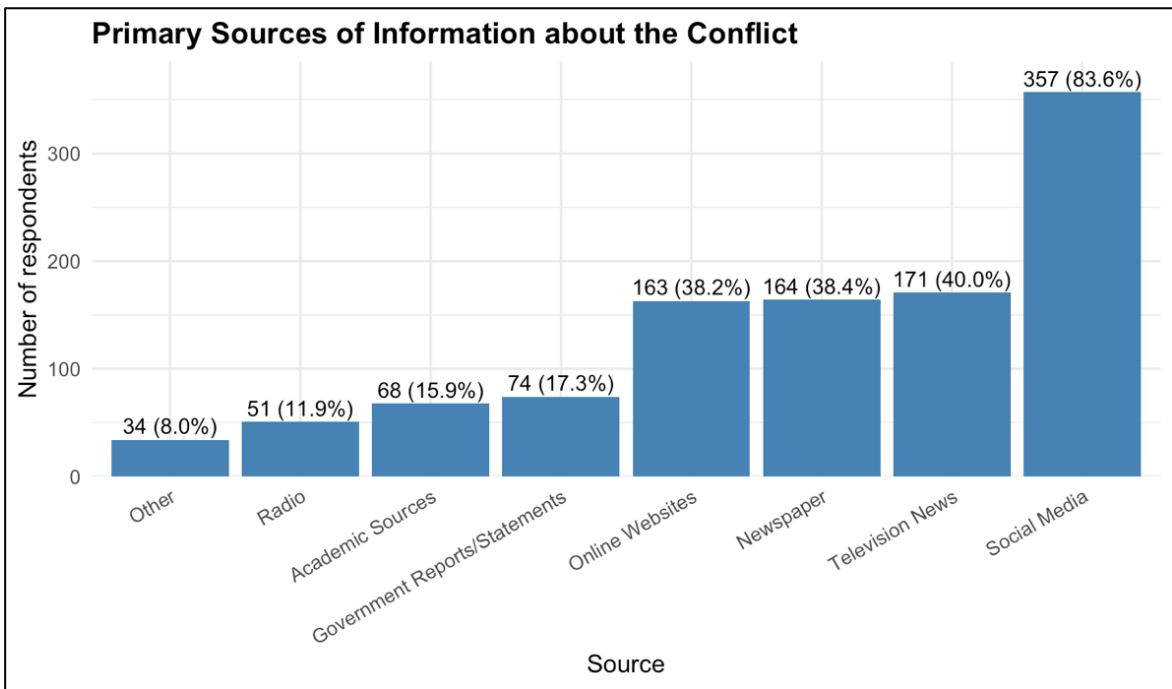


Figure 11 - Distribution of the sample within each different News Source Types



Figure 12 - Word Cloud of the most used Information Sources by respondents

The investigation on the type of sources used to gather information on the conflict, reported above, shows a clear prevalence of social media, used by 83.6% of the sample, followed at a distance by television news (40%), newspapers (38.4%), and websites (38.2%). Academic sources and government reports play a more marginal role, with 15.9% and 17.3% of respondents respectively, while radio and other sources are residual. When allowed to specify the particular source utilized within a category, Instagram clearly emerged as the leader, being cited by over two hundred respondents; other platforms as TikTok and YouTube followed, confirming that visual and immediate platforms are the main gateways to news. Italian newspapers like Corriere della Sera and Repubblica, as well as the French Le Monde, and international news outlets such as Al Jazeera, the New York Times, BBC, and The Guardian stand out as the most relied on, probably because the majority of these are consultable in different formats, e.g. as articles on the source's website, as a pop-up notification from the app or as an interactive Instagram story. The overall picture therefore shows a strong centrality of social media, although still accompanied by significant use of traditional journalistic sources.

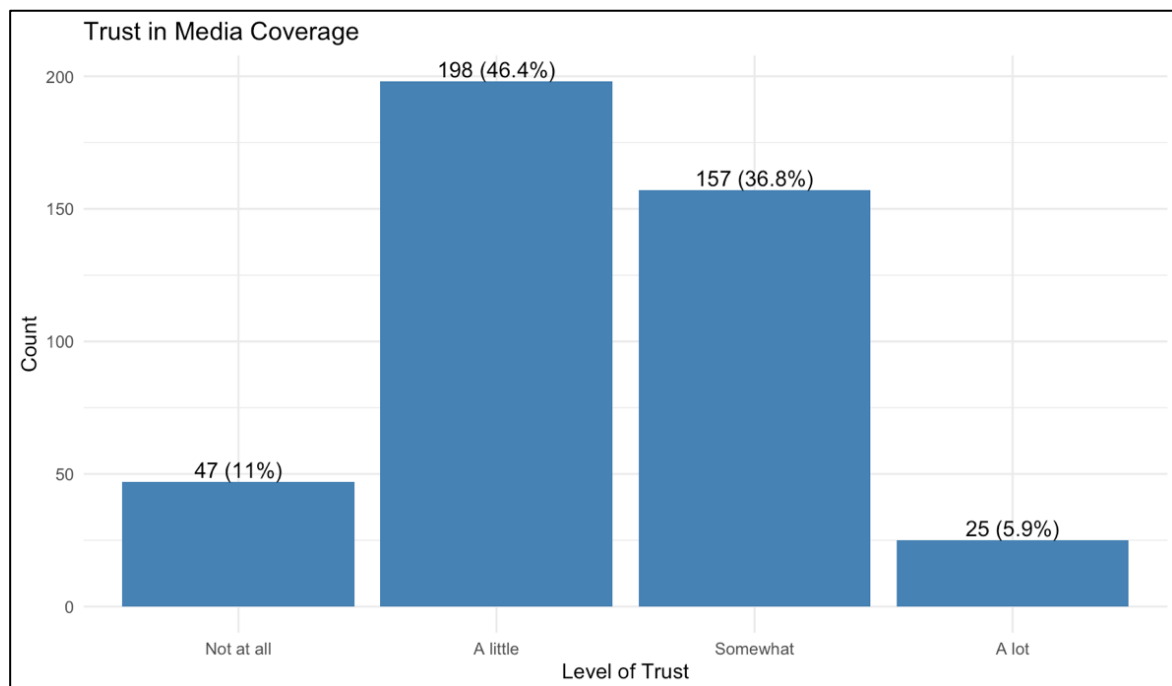


Figure 13 - Distribution by Level of Trust in the Media Coverage of the Conflict

The graph shows that the majority of respondents have a limited level of trust in media coverage of the conflict. Almost half of the sample (46.4%) say they have “little” trust, while a further 36.8% express “moderate” trust. Only a small proportion fall at the extremes: 11% say they do not trust it at all and just 5.9% say they have a lot of trust. Overall, the data show a prevalence of critical and cautious attitudes towards information, with an apparent lack of full and widespread trust in the media. The mode, as well as the median and the first quartile (Q1) fall under the category “A little”, while the third quartile (Q3) corresponds to “Somewhat”.

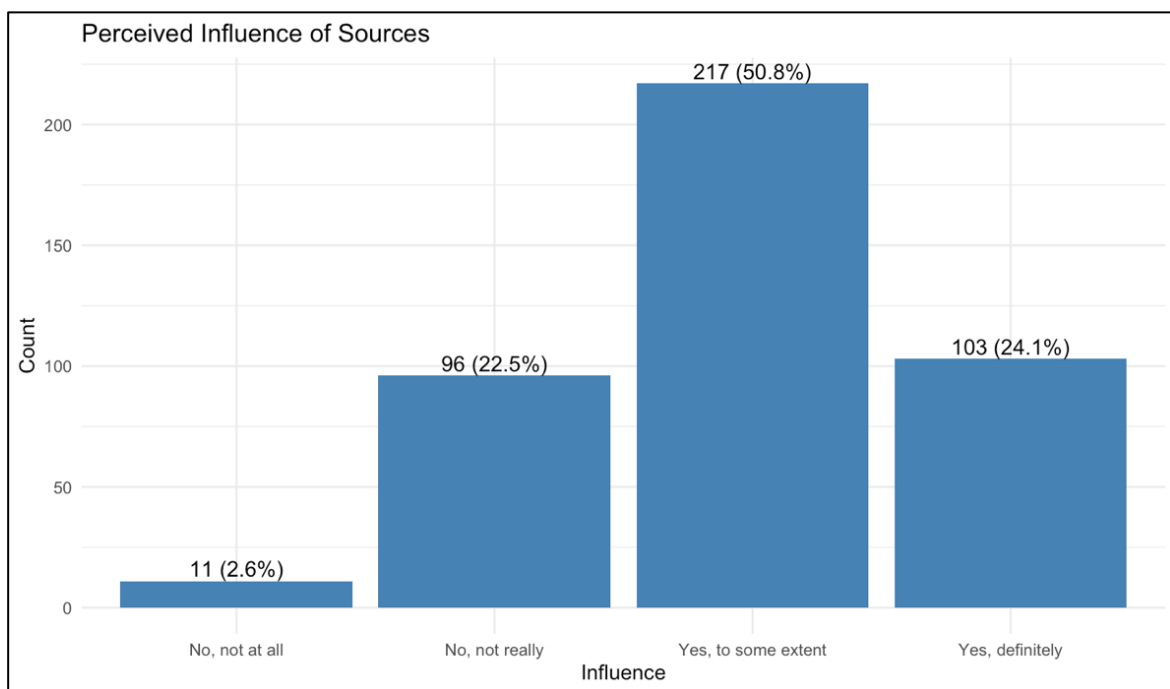


Figure 14 - Distribution by Level of Perceived Influence of the Information Sources used on the respondent

Most respondents perceive the information sources as influential in shaping their opinions on the conflict. About half of the sample (50.8%) believe that they have an influence “to some extent”, while a further 24.1% say that they have a “definite” impact. Only 22.5% tend to downplay their importance, stating that they do not feel influenced by them as “much”. A residual share (2.6%) claims not to be influenced at all. Overall, the data highlight a widespread recognition of the role of the media and information sources in shaping perceptions – with varying degrees of intensity. The mode, as well as

the median and the third quartile (Q3) fall under the category “Yes, to some extent”, while the first quartile (Q1) corresponds to “No, not really”.

Perceptions of the conflict

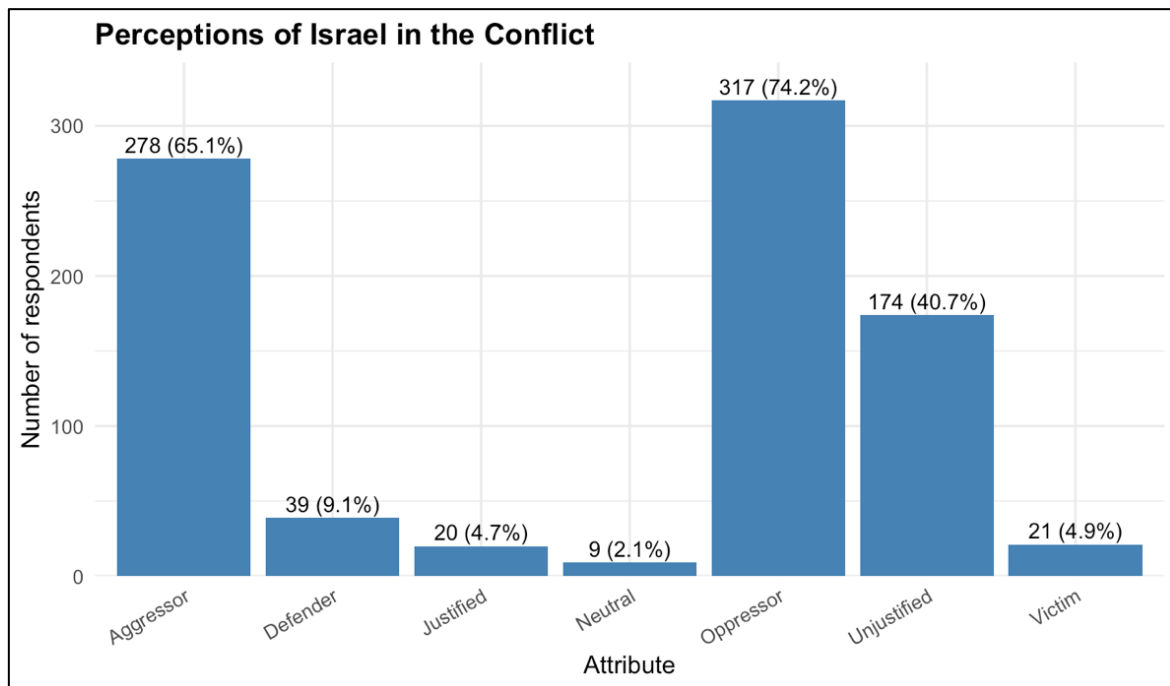


Figure 15 - Distribution of Perception of Israel in the Conflict within 6 given adjectives

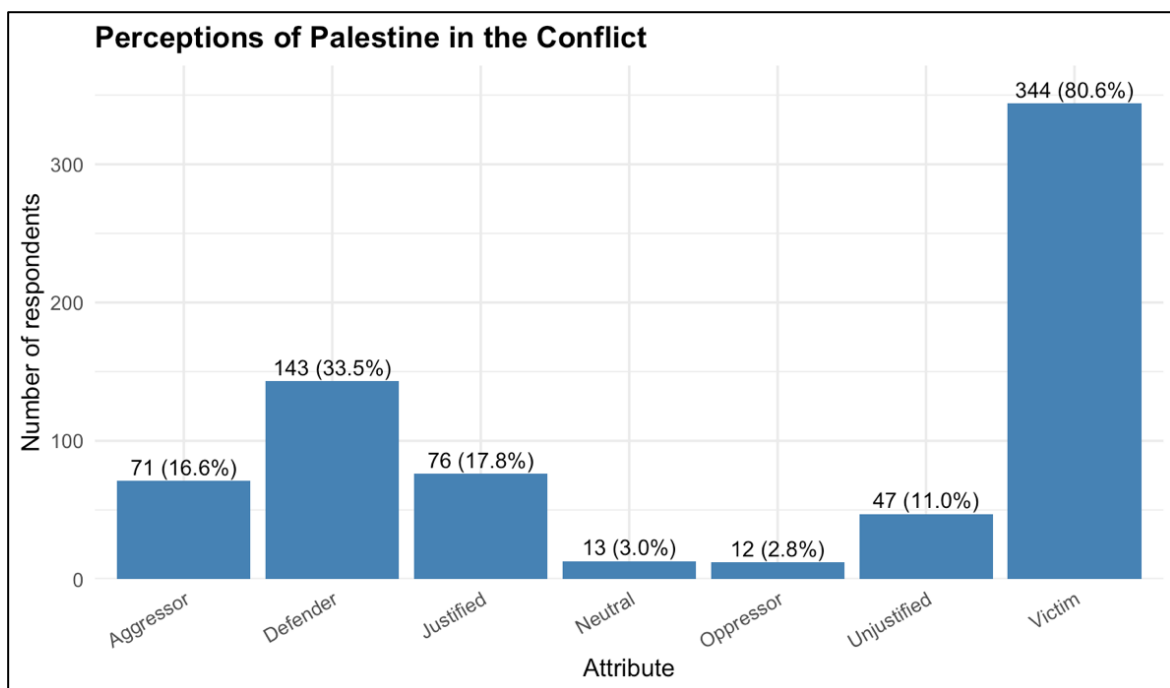


Figure 16 - Distribution of Perception of Palestine in the Conflict within 6 given adjectives

What emerges from a comparison of the two graphs is a very clear discrepancy in the perception of the two main actors and the narratives consolidated around them. Respondents were allowed to choose two adjectives per country from the set proposed which better represented their views.

The former is largely identified with strongly negative categories: over 74% of the sample describes it as an oppressor and more than 65% as an aggressor. “Positive” attributions, such as victim, defender or justified, remain more marginal, almost irrelevant, and this tells us a lot about the general perception around the country and its role in the conflict. On the contrary, when we look to Palestine, the picture changes radically: here, the prevailing representation is that of victim, chosen by over 80% of respondents, followed by a third who also considers it a defender. Other attributes, as oppressor or aggressor, were chosen by far fewer participants, accounting for less than 20% in each category. In essence, Israel is perceived by the population as the dominant party responsible for the use of force, while Palestine is seen as the party suffering the consequences of the conflict.

This imbalance tells us that the opinions gathered are not neutral, but are part of a polarized collective imagination, in which the roles of victim and oppressor are firmly depicted. Although, from these graphs we can also collect that, as the majority of responders have similar views on both Israel and Palestine, their background does not play an influencing role on their perception.

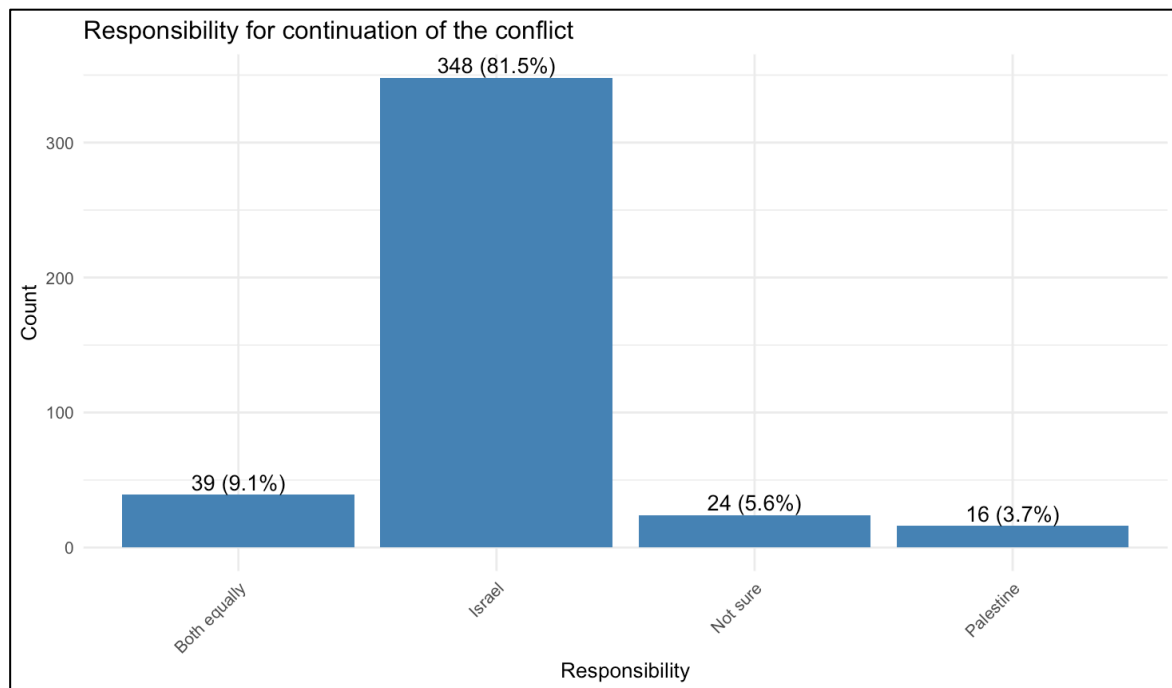


Figure 17 - Distribution by Perceived Responsibility for the Continuation of the Conflict

To corroborate the previous comments, from the graph above we can clearly see a strong concentration of respondents attributing primary responsibility for the continuation of the conflict to Israel, adding up to a total of 81.5% of the sample and representing the mode of the distribution. This overwhelming percentage shows a widely shared perception that Israel is the key player in maintaining hostilities. In contrast, only an exceedingly small proportion of the sample considers Palestine to be responsible (3.7%), while a further 9.1% believe that both sides are equally responsible. Overall, the trend shows a clearly unbalanced orientation, in line with the profiling seen above where Israel represents the “Oppressor/Aggressor” and Palestine the “Victim”.

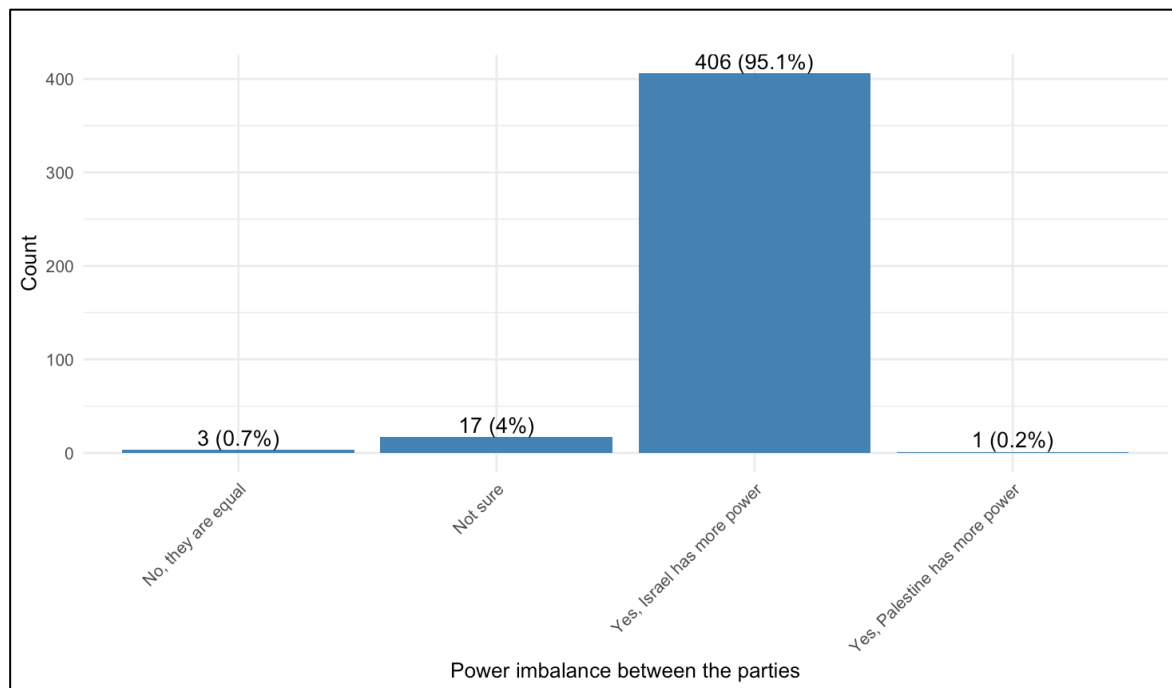


Figure 18 - Distribution by Perceived Power Balance in the Conflict

As proof of what has been stated so far, an almost unanimous perception of power imbalance between the parties in conflict can be inferred, with an overwhelming majority of the sample (95.1%), recognizing Israel (the mode) as the actor with greater power. The other three categories show drastically lower percentages – accounting for less than 5% of the total when combined. This trend shows that, within the sample analyzed, there is widespread and unanimous agreement on the asymmetrical nature of the conflict, in which power is predominantly attributed to Israel.

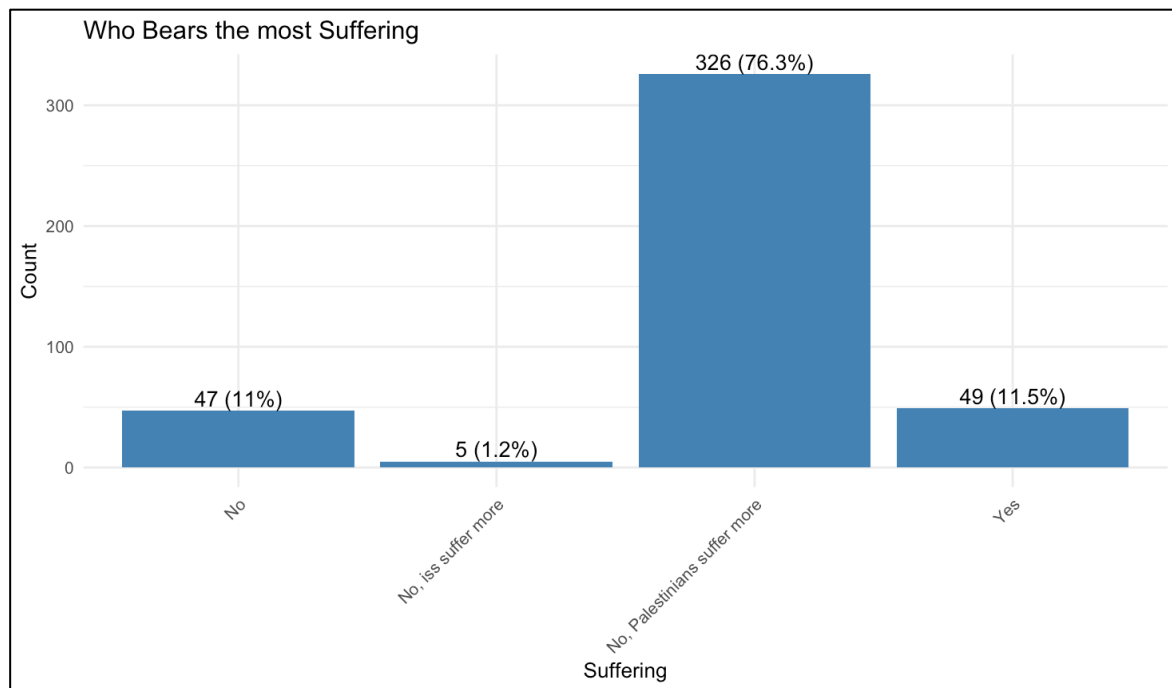


Figure 19 - Distribution by the Perceived Suffering Balance in the Conflict

Lastly, in line with the greater power imposed by Israel, the graph investigating if both sides suffer equally clearly shows that the vast majority of respondents, 76.3%, believes that Palestinians bear the brunt of the conflict. Only a residual minority attributes this condition to the Israelis (1.2%), while around 11.5% consider that both peoples suffer in comparable manner. The remaining 11% of the sample chose to state that the two parts do not bear the same pain, although not stating which side they lean on. This trend bolsters the general idea reported throughout the survey, which identifies the Palestinian population as the main victim of the consequences of the conflict, underlining the asymmetrical impact of the dynamics of violence and occupation. However, it should be noted that there may be a limitation due to the wording of the question, which may have caused confusion between the answer options “No”, “No, Israelis suffer more” and “No, Palestinians suffer more”, with the risk of interpretative overlap on the part of respondents. The mode of the distribution is the category “No, Palestinians suffer more”.

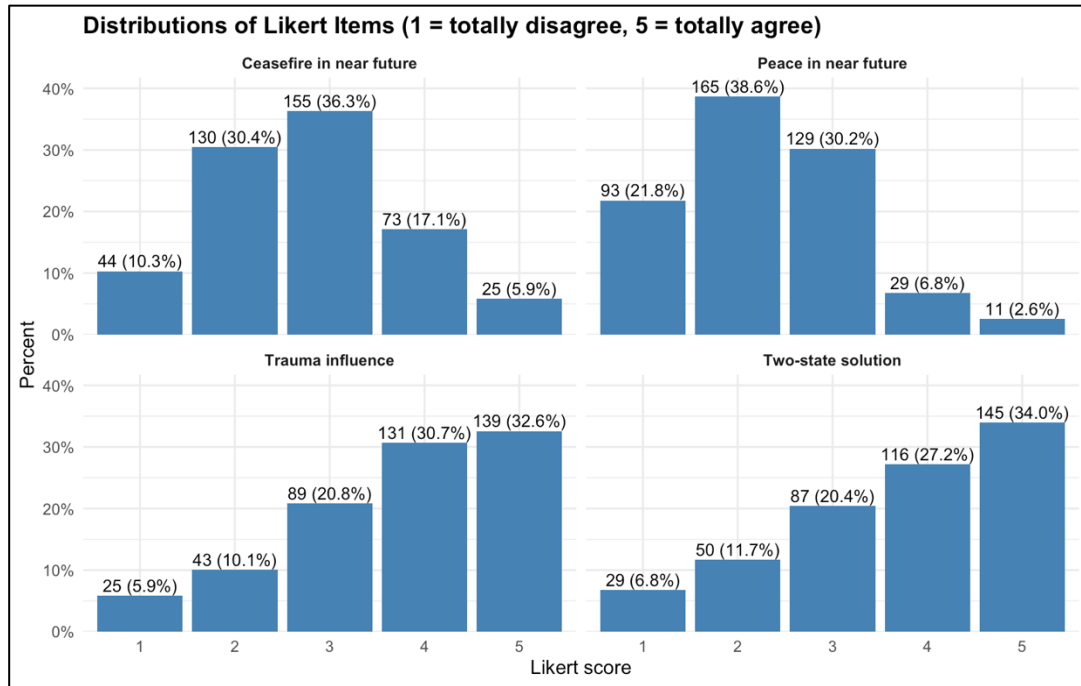


Figure 20 - Distribution of 4 different Likert scales, respectively investigating the respondents' agreement with: a ceasefire in the near future, peace in the near future, the influence played by historical traumas, a two-state solution

The graph shows the distribution of the sample on four Likert scale items, where the interviewees were asked to take a stance on a 5-point scale, with the lowest end representing “Totally disagree” and the upper “Totally agree”. It reveals an interesting picture of perceptions regarding the possibility of a ceasefire and peace in the near future, the influence of past traumas, as the Holocaust or the Nakba, on the conflict, and the support for a two-state solution. The comparative analysis shows that, as far as a ceasefire in the near future is concerned, moderately pessimistic positions prevail, with the majority placing themselves in the lower-middle range (2 and 3), while only a small proportion tends to agree mostly or completely (respectively 17.1% and about 6%). The prospect of lasting peace appears slightly more pessimistic: about 60% are concentrated between ‘1’ and ‘2’, indicating skepticism and distrust in the possibility of a stable resolution to the conflict. On the contrary, trauma as a factor influencing perceptions collects very high consensus, with 63,3% placing themselves in the highest agreement positions (4 and 5), confirming the centrality of the emotional and identity

dimension in shaping attitudes towards the conflict. Finally, the two-state solution receives varied support levels, with a tendency towards the upper end of the distribution, with 61.2% of respondents expressing high agreement (4 and 5), indicating that this remains the most recognized and shared institutional perspective among the sample, despite continuing skepticism about peace in the short term. The modes and medians of the four distributions are respectively: 3 for the ceasefire, 2 for the peace possibility, 5 and 4 both for the trauma and the two-state solution.

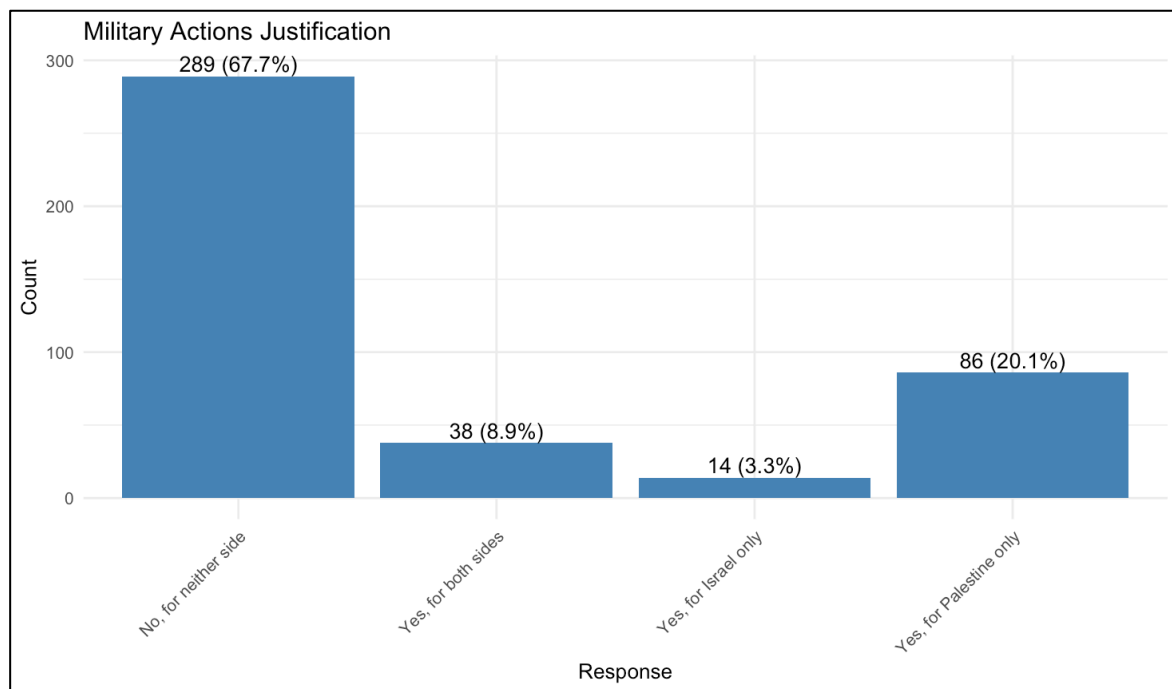


Figure 21 - Distribution by Perceived Justification of the Use of Force by each side

Relating to the findings of the previous graphs, a strongly critical position also prevails with regard to the justification of military actions, with the majority of the sample rejecting the use of force by both sides. The graph shows that 67.7% of the sample believes that the implementation of force cannot be justified by either participant in the conflict. This is a clear position that reflects a general-widespread rejection of violence. A minority of about 9% considers military actions to be justified by both sides, while only 3.3% support justification exclusively for Israel, compared to 20.1% who recognize it only for the Palestinians. This imbalance suggests that, although there is an overall opposition to the use of force, among those who consider it acceptable there is a greater tendency to

attribute legitimacy to the Palestinian side – probably as a mean of defense, given the perception of Israel as an aggressor. The mode of the distribution is by far the category “No, for neither side”.

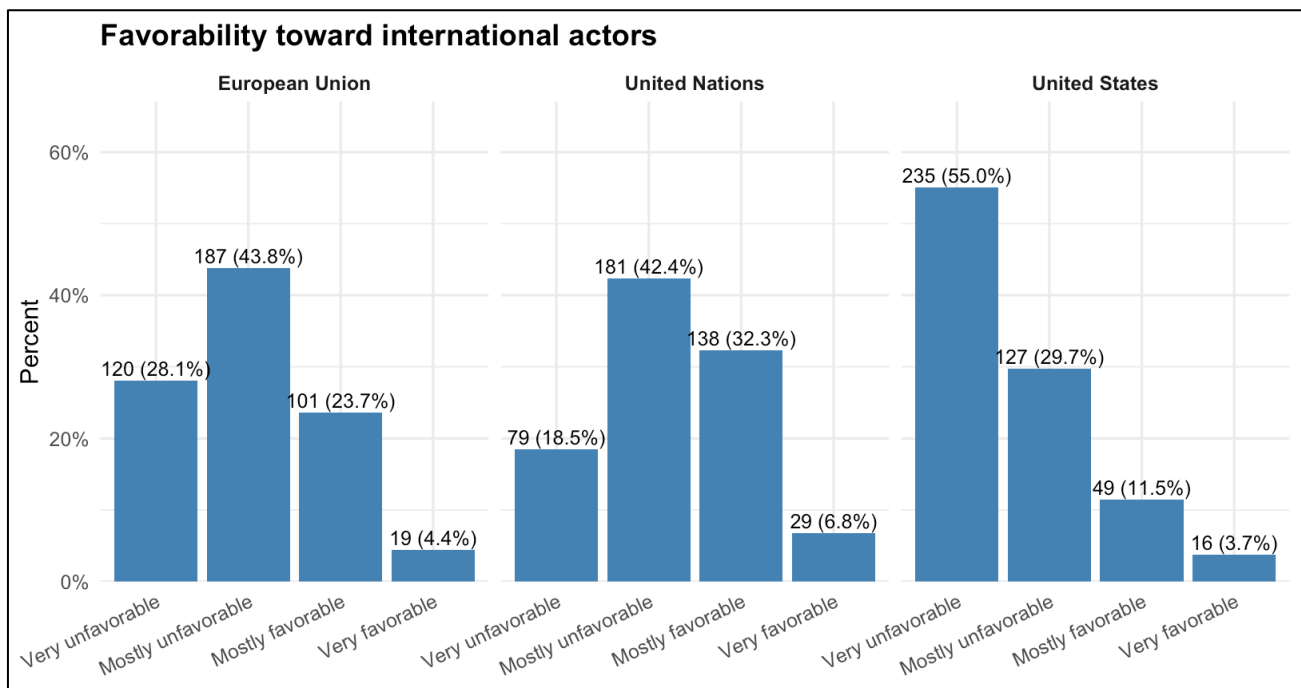


Figure 22 - Distribution of the Perceived Role of 3 different international actors, respectively: European Union, United Nations and United States

As far as the role of external actors in the conflict, there is quite a differentiation in the perception of the sample towards the three international actors investigated – with a general tendency towards the unfavourability of these intervenients playing a role. The European Union receives relatively negative assessments, with a prevalence of “mostly unfavorable” opinions (43.8%) and a 28.1% opting for “very unfavorable”; a quite-significant share of positive perceptions (about a quarter “mostly favorable”) and a small percentage of 4.4 being very favorable. The United Nations shows a similar trend but with a slight skew of the population towards the favorability of its intervention: while 42.4% express a “mostly unfavorable” opinion, 32.3% of the sample tends to recognize its positive role. The picture changes radically for the United States, which is perceived in a clearly negative light: more than half of respondents rate it as “very unfavorable” (55%), while positive evaluations, both moderate and strong, remain in the minority accounting for about 15%. The mode and the median for

the first two distributions lay in the “mostly unfavorable” category, while for the role of the United States, they are represented by “very unfavorable”. In summary, while the EU and the United Nations are viewed ambivalently – with a higher tendency toward skepticism – the United States appears to be the most contested and least legitimate actor in the eyes of the sample.

Personal and Social Influences

The last mandatory section of the questionnaire aimed at investigating the engagement of the respondents with the conflict, rather than focusing merely on their perceptions, to assess whether they are open to dialogue and if they feel as their background influences their own views.

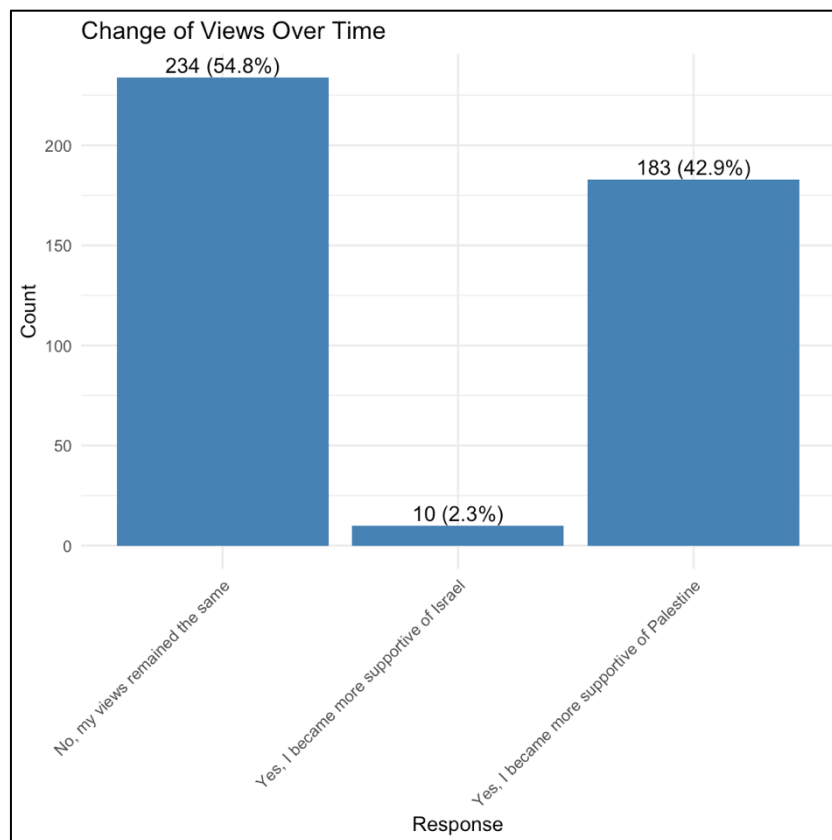


Figure 23 - Distribution of Perceived Change of opinion over the course of the Conflict

For example, this graph shows how respondents' opinions on the conflict have evolved over time, as it acquired more and more news' spotlight. Over half of the sample, 54.8%, say they have not changed

their positions, thus maintaining a stable view consistent with their initial one³. However, a very significant proportion, about 43%, say they have become more favorable towards Palestine, highlighting a significant shift in public opinion. Only a marginal percentage, 2.3%, said they had developed greater sympathy for Israel. Overall, the data suggest that, although a substantial proportion of respondents have not changed their position, among those who have changed their views, there is a clear prevalence of attitudes favorable to the Palestinian cause. Both the mode and median lay within the “unchanged view” category.

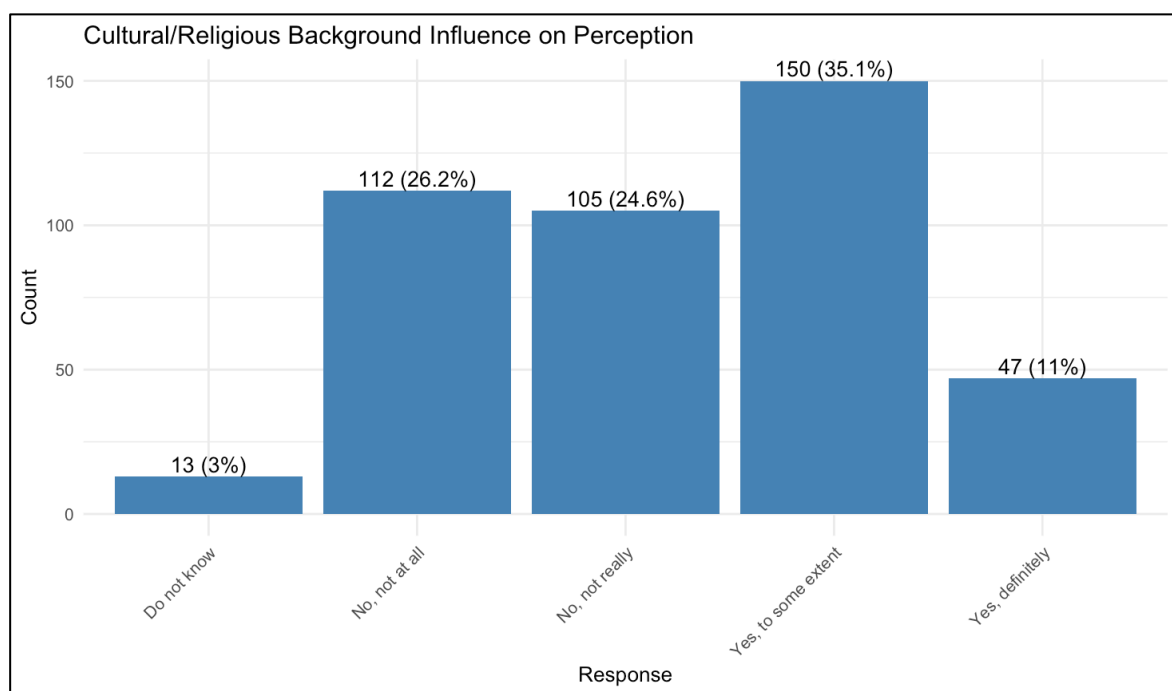


Figure 24 - Distribution of Perceived Influence of own cultural or religious background on the Perception of the Conflict

From this graph, it can be inferred that the sample is rather divided on whether it considers the influence of their cultural or religious background to be significant in shaping their perceptions of the conflict. A relative majority, 35.1%, recognize an influence “to a certain extent,” while a further 11% firmly state that this factor has an impact a great extent. However, a significant proportion say the opposite: 26.2% believe that background plays no role, and 24.6% consider it to be of little relevance.

³ The initial one refers to the opinion they formed successively the events of October 7th, 2023, and the reinvigoration of the conflict.

Overall, the data show a fairly balanced distribution between those who perceive their cultural and religious background as a conditioning factor and those who tend to exclude its impact, confirming the subjective and complex nature of this type of influence. The mode is “Yes, to some extent”, although the median is “No, not really”.

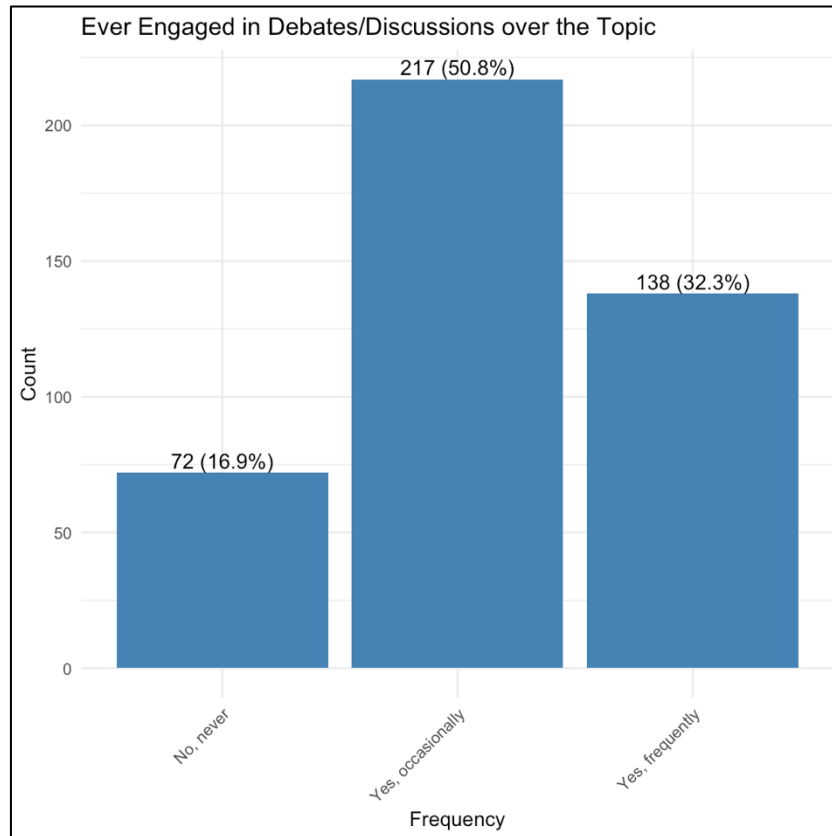


Figure 25 - Distribution of the Sample whether they ever Engaged in a Discussion over the Conflict

As far as engagement in discussions over the topic, the graph shows that the majority of respondents have engaged in discussions, albeit with varying frequency. More than half of the sample (50.8%) say they have done so “occasionally” – the mode and median of the distribution – while 32.3% say they have engaged in such discussions “frequently.” Only a minority, 16.9%, had never participated in debates or discussions on the subject. This suggests that the issue is not only perceived as relevant but also represents an active forum for debate for a significant portion of the population, reflecting the highly controversial and polarizing nature of the conflict. To analyze more in depth the frequency of debate with friends and family I furthered my investigation with a subsequent question.

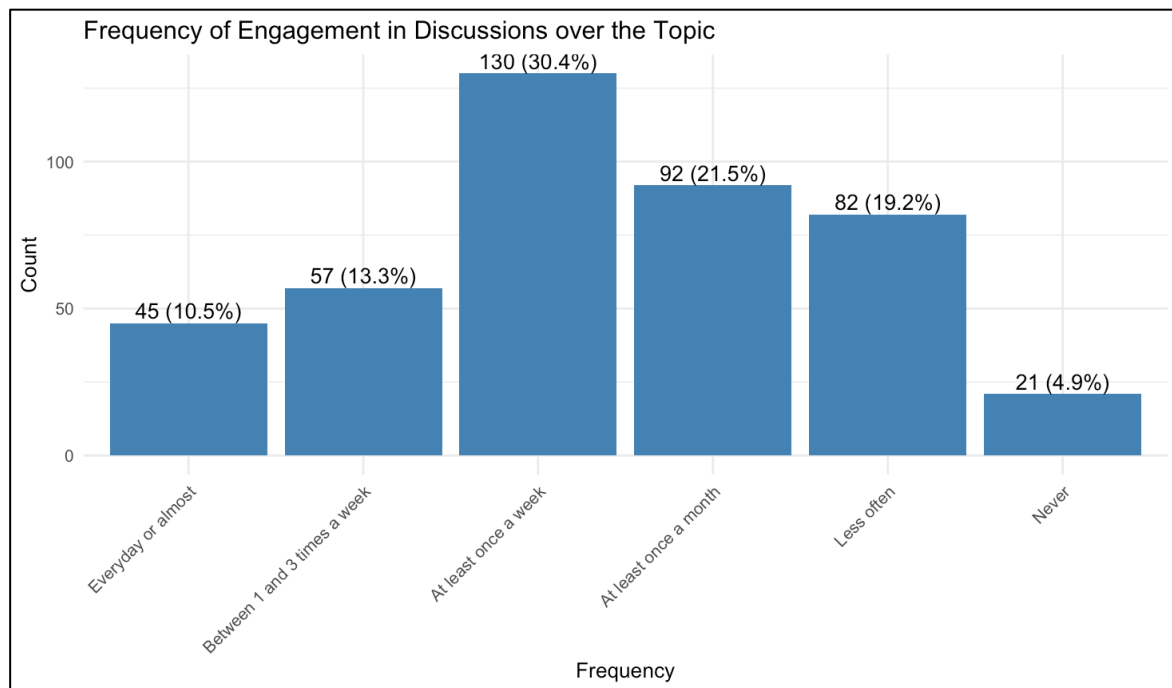


Figure 26 - Distribution by Frequency of Engagement in Discussion over the Conflict

The distribution in frequency of discussions confirms what emerged from the previous one regarding the overall level of engagement: the Israeli Palestinian conflict is a recurring topic of conversation for most of the sample. The largest proportion of respondents (30.4%) say they talk about it at least once a week, followed by those who do so once a month (21.5%) and those who engage less often (19.2%). The groups that discuss the issue several times a week or everyday sum up to 23.8%, indicating a particularly intense level of involvement. Only a small minority (4.9%) say they never talk about it. The mode and median of the distribution fall under the category “At least once a week”. When viewed in relation to the graph on general engagement, this data reinforces the idea that the conflict is not only a topic of active debate, but also a significant component of social interactions, ranging from occasional exchanges to regular and frequent discussions.

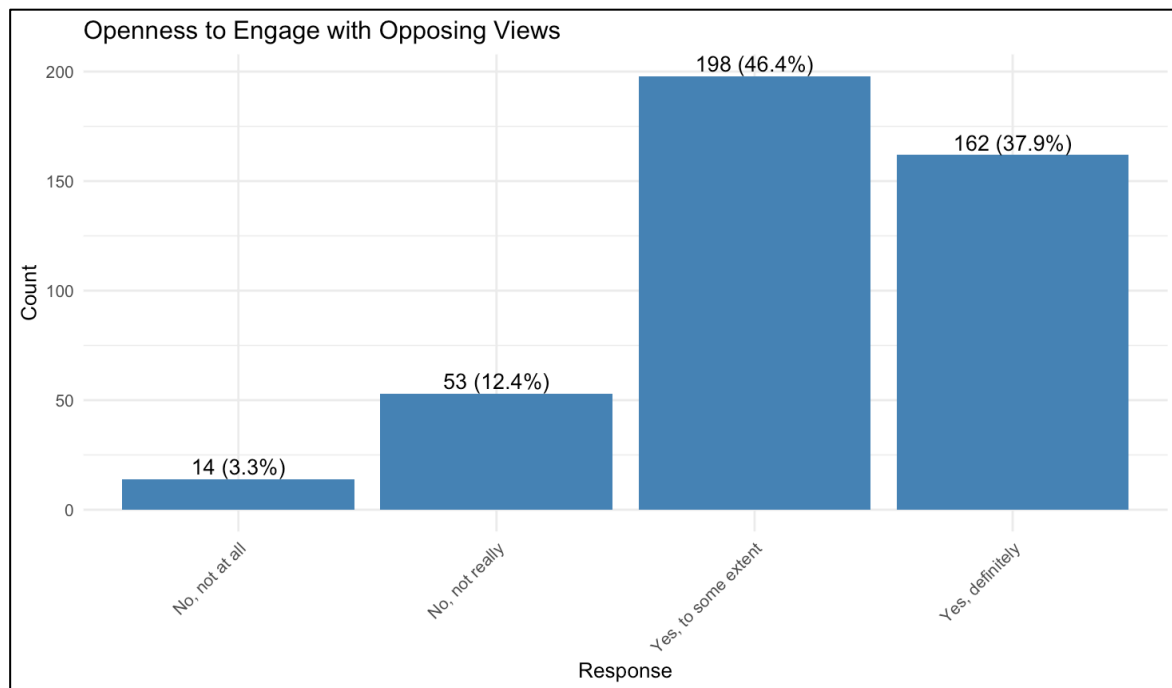


Figure 27 - Distribution by Respondents' Openness to Engage with people with Opposing Views

Lastly, the openness to engage with opposing views was investigated, reporting elevated levels of willingness to interact. A relative majority, 46.4%, say they are keen to participate “to some extent” in this type of dialogue, while a further 37.9% say they are “definitely” disposed to do so. Only a small minority show resistance: 12.4% respond “No, not really” and just 3.3% not at all. Overall, we can infer a favorable attitude towards debate with divergent positions, a finding that suggests the representation of a sample predisposed to critical and pluralistic debate, despite the sensitivity and polarization that characterize the Palestinian question. “Yes, to some extent” represents the mode and median of the distribution.

In summary, the overview of general perceptions reveals a broadly consistent picture within the sample: Israel is seen primarily as the dominant actor responsible for the continuation of the conflict, while the Palestinians are largely perceived as victims. This representation is part of a highly polarized narrative in which the conflict appears to be characterized by a clear imbalance of power and asymmetrical suffering. Despite widespread skepticism about the possibility of a ceasefire and subsequent peace in the near future, the two-state solution continues to be widely supported as an

institutional prospect. The role of external actors is also viewed critically, with particular distrust of the United States. Finally, the data confirm strong social involvement and a general openness to discussion, a sign that the Palestinian question is not only a subject of information, but also of active participation and critical debate.

6. Inferential, Cluster and Sentiment Analysis

After having analyzed the variables under investigation individually and outlined the main findings emerging from the descriptive statistics, it is now necessary to move on to a more in-depth statistical analysis in order to test the hypothesis formulated and assess whether the patterns observed can be explained by statistically significant relationships between the variables.

6.1 Crosstabulations and Tests of Association

The inferential analysis proposed in this section is based on the use of contingency tables (crosstabulations), accompanied by the Chi-square test of independence to verify the existence of a statistically significant association between demographic – therefore independent – variables and dependent variables. As further support, the analysis will refer also to the Cramer's V index to measure the strength of the association with values between 0 and 1 – generally interpreted as weak (about 0.10), moderate (0.30), or strong (above 0.50). The joint interpretation of p-values and Cramer's V allows not only to establish whether an association exists, but also to assess its intensity and therefore the substantive relevance of the results⁴.

As anticipated in the methodology, to increase the reliability of the inferential analysis conducted, the Chi-square test was enhanced with the Monte Carlo simulation method, which allows for more robust estimates of the p-value in the presence of cells with low frequencies, as often recurrent in many variables of this study. Furthermore, to prevent rare cases from distorting the results, these cases were grouped together under the “Other” category, e.g. nationality, or eliminated, thus ensuring greater stability and consistency in the interpretation of the associations observed, without compromising comparability between groups.

⁴ Once again, bearing in mind that the investigation is aimed at exploring the population's perception on the matter rather than generalizing the results to the broader public.

The analysis conducted showed that the associations between sociodemographic variables and perceptions of conflict are existent, with statistically relevant differences emerging in some dimensions – albeit being too weak in most cases.

With regard to age, most associations have Cramer's V values below 0.20, indicating a limited impact. However, the perception of the possibility of future peace varies significantly⁵ according to age ($p = 0.02296$, $V = 0.19$): younger respondents tend to express greater optimism, while adults show more skeptical or polarized positions. The frequency of discussion of the conflict ($p = 0.00036$, $V = 0.20$) and openness to dialogue ($p = 0.02982$, $V = 0.19$) are also associated with age: young people in the sample discuss the issue more often and are more willing to engage with opposing views. The overrepresentation of young respondents in my survey has to be taken into account while acknowledging these results, particularly regarding frequency of discussion and openness to dialogue.

In terms of gender, the differences are minor – most variables show no significant associations, and Cramer's V values are low. Three exceptions are: the trust in the media ($p = 0.0306$, $V = 0.13$), with responding women tending to be more concentrated in intermediate positions, support for the two-state solution ($p = 0.00266$, $V = 0.16$), where men show more frequently higher values of agreement, and lastly, openness to opposing opinions ($p = 0.00388$), albeit of limited intensity (Cramer's $V = 0.18$) – where women tend slightly more than men to declare themselves only “partially” open, while men in the sample are more polarized toward complete openness. These weak associations suggest that gender is not a determining factor in my study but still contributes to modulating attitudes toward the conflict.

Nationality, on the other hand, is one of the most influential variables. Matters such as familiarity with the conflict, trust in the media, perception of trauma, support for the two-state solution, change in opinions over time, and the influence of background show significant associations with Cramer's

⁵ As a clarification I'd like to state that, from now on, I use the term “significantly” in the sense that it is “statistically significant”, despite being correlated to often weak values and not accounting for a meaningful difference within the sample.

V values between 0.19 and 0.23. For example, the perception of justification of force ($p = 0.0458$; Cramer's $V = 0.19$) shows that respondents in almost all countries reject military legitimacy, but differences emerge: in Italy and France, there is a significant amount of support for the use of force by the Palestinians, while in Germany and the United States, positions of interviewees appear to be more distributed, including a certain level of justification for Israel. These values place the associations between the weak and moderate ranges, highlighting how, within the sample, national contexts might have a substantial impact on defining the dominant narrative and historical memory of conflicts. Albeit the impact of nationality is to be addressed carefully as the sample reports overrepresentation of countries like Italy and France compared to the rest.

The level of education shows a more limited influence. The perceived influence of the media ($p = 0.01276$, $V = 0.19$) and openness to dialogue ($p = 0.01494$, $V = 0.18$) vary according to educational qualifications: here, graduates tend to express slightly greater openness to discussion with opposing views and critical awareness with regard to the media.

The occupational status also shows some real associations, for example in declared familiarity with the conflict ($p = 0.03798$, $V = 0.16$), in the attribution of responsibility ($p < 0.05$, $V \approx 0.17$), in the assessment of the role of the United Nations ($p = 0.04086$, $V = 0.16$). The association between employment and the frequency with which the conflict is discussed ($p = 8e-05$, $V = 0.19$) shows that students and self-employed workers are the most active groups within the sample in discussions, while retirees and unemployed people show significantly lower levels of involvement. This indicates that the occupation might affect the propensity to discuss the issue, although lightly. Once again, we have to take into consideration the distribution of the sample among the “occupational” categories, as students represent over half of the population and might skew the association.

Political orientation is definitely more relevant within this study, emerging as one of the strongest variables with V indexes of moderate intensity. Familiarity with the topic is higher on the left (Far left/Left) and lower among the undecided ($p = 6e-04$, $V = 0.24$). In terms of evaluation, responsibility

is strongly linked to political orientation ($p = 2e-05$; $V = 0.30$): the sample's Left attributes it almost exclusively to Israel, while the Center-Right shows more balanced proportions; trust in the media varies moderately ($p = 0.0018$; $V = 0.20$), with the left more polarized between "Little" and "None." Regarding solutions, support for the two-state solution increases toward the Center-Left and decreases on the Right ($p = 0.00056$; $V = 0.20$), and the justification of the use of force is clearly politicized ($p = 2e-05$; $V = 0.28$), with the Far Left more inclined to justify only the Palestinian side, while Centre, Centre-Right and Centre-Left reject both. Perceptions of the role of the EU/US are more critical on the left (EU: $p = 0.03002$; $V = 0.17$; US: $p = 0.00092$; $V = 0.23$), while the role of the UN does not show an association.

As far as religion, the association with the familiarity with the history of the conflict varies according to religious affiliation ($p = 0.0077$, $V = 0.18$), showing slighter higher knowledge from Muslims and similar attitudes from Atheist, Christians or non-religious. Differences also emerge in perceived suffering ($p = 0.038$; $V = 0.17$), the possibility of peace ($p = 0.04128$; $V = 0.15$), and the justification of force ($p = 0.01102$; $V = 0.17$), with non-religious people more inclined to justify its use for Palestine alone and Christians more often opposed to it for both sides. In all cases, the magnitude of the associations remains small and should be interpreted with caution, especially for categories with low numbers, as Muslims and Jewish.

Overall, the results cautiously suggest that demographic variables within the sample are not entirely neutral, but their influence on perceptions appears to be generally weak. Cramer's indices are always below 0.30, indicating light associations; moreover, the internal heterogeneity of the categories considered (in terms of size and composition) limits the robustness of the inferences. In this context, nationality and political orientation seem to be the factors most closely associated with assessments of the conflict, but the level of the effects remains limited. It can therefore be argued that the hypothesis is only partially confirmed. For valid confirmation, it will be necessary to replicate the

analysis on larger and more homogeneous samples, capable of reducing uncertainty and improving the stability of the estimates.

6.2 Cluster Analysis

The goal of a cluster analysis is to group respondents into homogeneous profiles based on their multivariate similarity, highlighting recurring patterns of attitudes and perceptions that do not emerge from isolated indicators alone. As stated in the introduction of this chapter, similarity was calculated using Gower's distance, which is suitable for mixed variables⁶. The PAM algorithm was applied to this matrix, selecting the number of clusters using the silhouette index and representing the groups in two-dimensional space with MDS to facilitate substantive interpretation. The analysis was implemented both from a broad perceptual set, obtained by excluding personal data variables and open texts, and for thematic subsets consistent with the structure of the questionnaire (knowledge and sources, perceptions of conflict, political-ethical dimensions, personal and social influences), as well as random sets of variables⁷, in order to verify the stability of the patterns identified using the same method. Following segmentation, the clusters were profiled in terms of the demographics using contingency tables with chi-square tests with Monte Carlo simulation and Cramer's effect measure, so as to link the profiles that emerged with structural differences in the sample. Overall, this procedure allows to identify perceptual profiles of the conflict, and to assess their empirical relevance both descriptively (internal consistency and separation between groups) and associatively with respect to the main background variables.

⁶ The majority of the variables investigated are categorical, although some, as the Likert scales, report numerical values.

⁷ I randomly created 4 groups through Random.org to avoid biases.

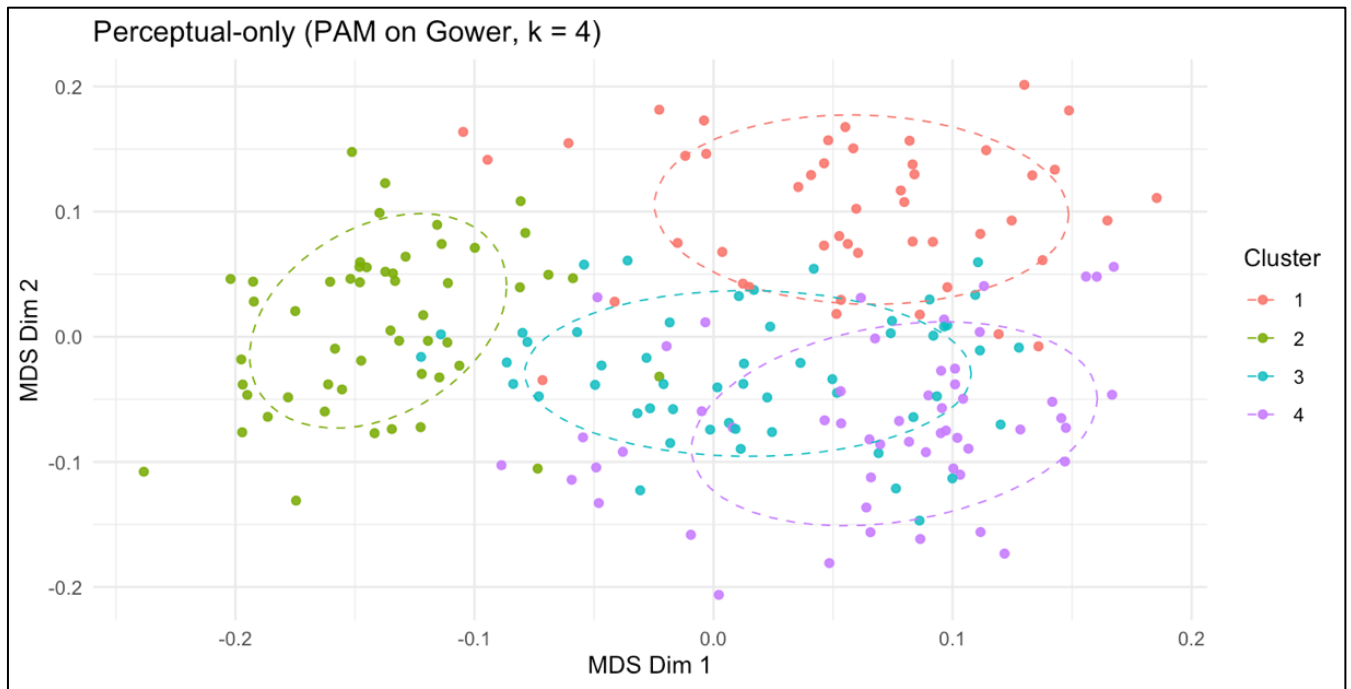


Figure 28 - Cluster Distribution of the Sample in 4 distinct groups according to all the perceptual variables investigated

The MDS graph shows a “perceptual-only” segmentation into four groups of comparable size (47, 52, 53, 54 cases), well separated in two-dimensional space with partial overlaps, indicating distinct but not significantly different perception profiles. Demographic profiling confirms that the differences between clusters do not depend heavily on age, which remains comparable, nor on educational attainment or occupation, where the effects are small and not statistically significant. No conclusive evidence emerges for gender and political orientation either, due to the distribution of categories and the number of cases per cell.

```

--- Nationality (row %) ---
  DE  ES  FI  FR  IT  MX  US  Other
1  0.0  0.0  0.0 19.1 61.7 0.0 2.1  17.0
2 13.5  1.9  0.0  5.8 50.0 3.8 1.9  23.1
3  5.7  7.5  0.0 13.2 64.2 1.9 1.9   5.7
4  3.7  3.7  1.9  1.9 70.4 0.0 3.7  14.8

Chi-square (Monte Carlo p-value):

      Pearson's Chi-squared test with simulated p-value (based on 50000 replicates)

data:  tab
X-squared = 36.45, df = NA, p-value = 0.01044

Cramer's V: 0.243 (small/medium)

```

Table 2 - Statistical Description of the Association between the Cluster Profiling and Nationality, with reference to Chi-square and Cramer's V index

The only statistically significant association is with nationality, with a small/medium-low effect ($p = 0.01044$, Cramer's $V = 0.243$), suggesting a partial concentration of certain countries in specific clusters (e.g. Germany in the second cluster or France in the first). Overall, the four-cluster solution appears consistent and interpretable: the MDS maps show some internal cohesion and sufficient separation between groups, although the tests indicate that these profiles are driven primarily by perceptual patterns rather than demographic traits, with the moderate exception of nationality.

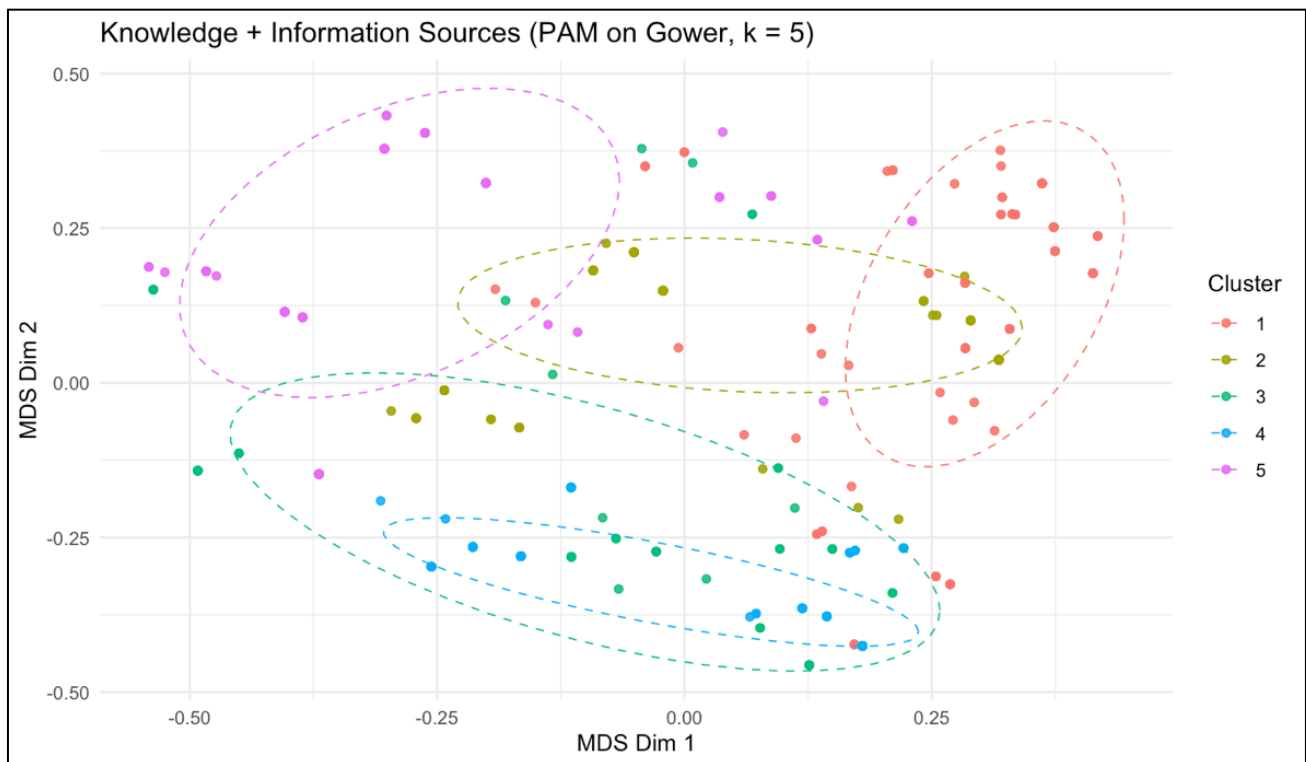


Figure 29 - Cluster Distribution of the Sample in 5 distinct groups according to the variables regarding Knowledge and Information Sources

The graph shows the distribution of the five clusters that emerged from the variables on knowledge and information sources – trust in media, familiarity with the conflict, frequency of update and perceived influence of the source of information. The subdivision shows some level of coherence, albeit with great overlap and, most of all, values scattered within the distributions. Profiling indicates that age, gender and level of education are not discriminating factors, while nationality, religion, and political orientation show weak but statistically significant associations (respectively $p = 0.0205$, $p = 0.00452$, $p = 0.00168$, with Cramer's V valued between 0.162 and 0.187), suggesting a marginal impact on the composition.

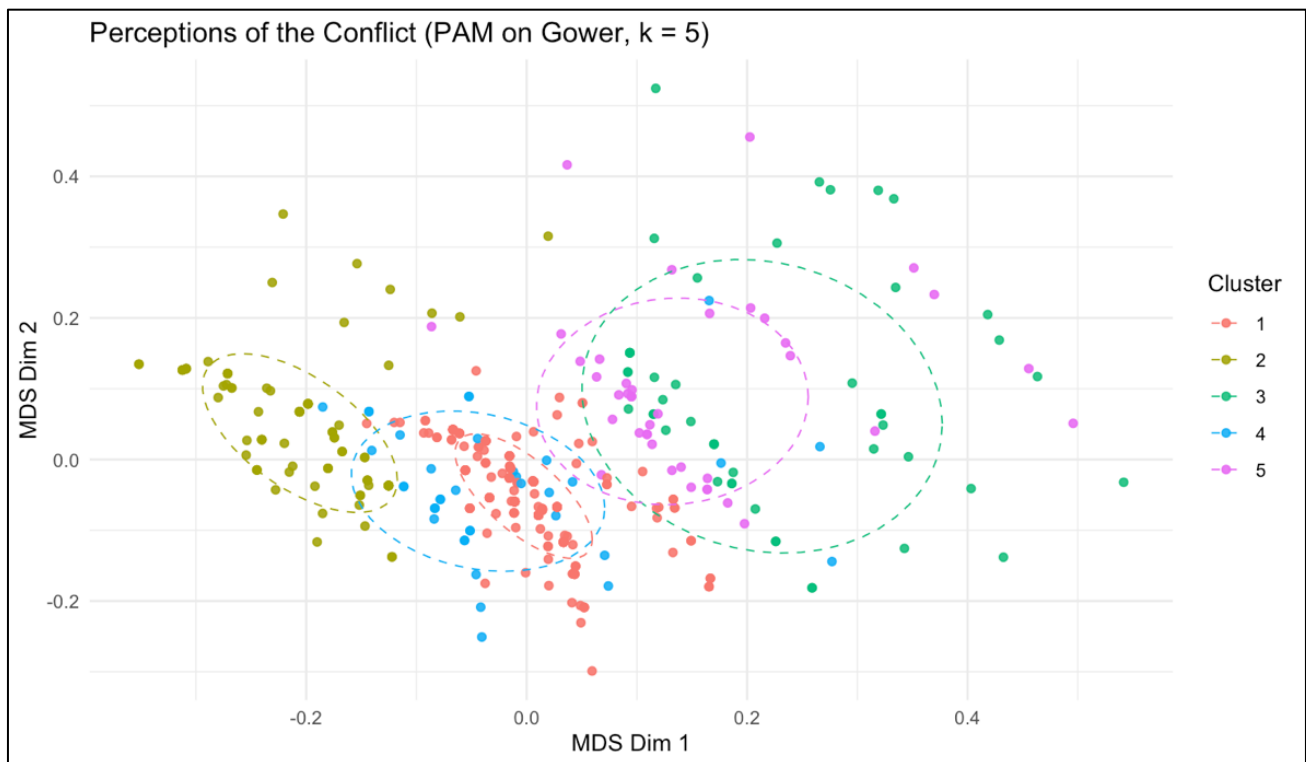


Figure 30 - Cluster Distribution of the Sample in 5 distinct groups according to the variables regarding the general perception of the conflict

The graph shows the distribution of the five clusters identified based on variables related to perceptions of the conflict, as responsibility for the continuation and the power imbalance between the parties, including also Likert values as the agreement with the two-state solution. It highlights distinct groups, albeit with great overlaps of the groups and scattered values, reflecting different interpretations on the issues. From a demographic profiling perspective, the clusters are numerically unbalanced, with one exceptionally large group (215 respondents) and others of smaller size (respectively 86, 48, 37, 41), but without substantial differences in age, gender, or education level. The only relevant associations emerge with religion and political orientation, which, although showing limited influence (Cramer's V at 0.20 and 0.24), appear statistically significant. This indicates that opinions on the distribution of responsibility, the balance of power, and the prospects for peace do not depend decisively on general the demographics but are partly influenced by faith and political belonging.

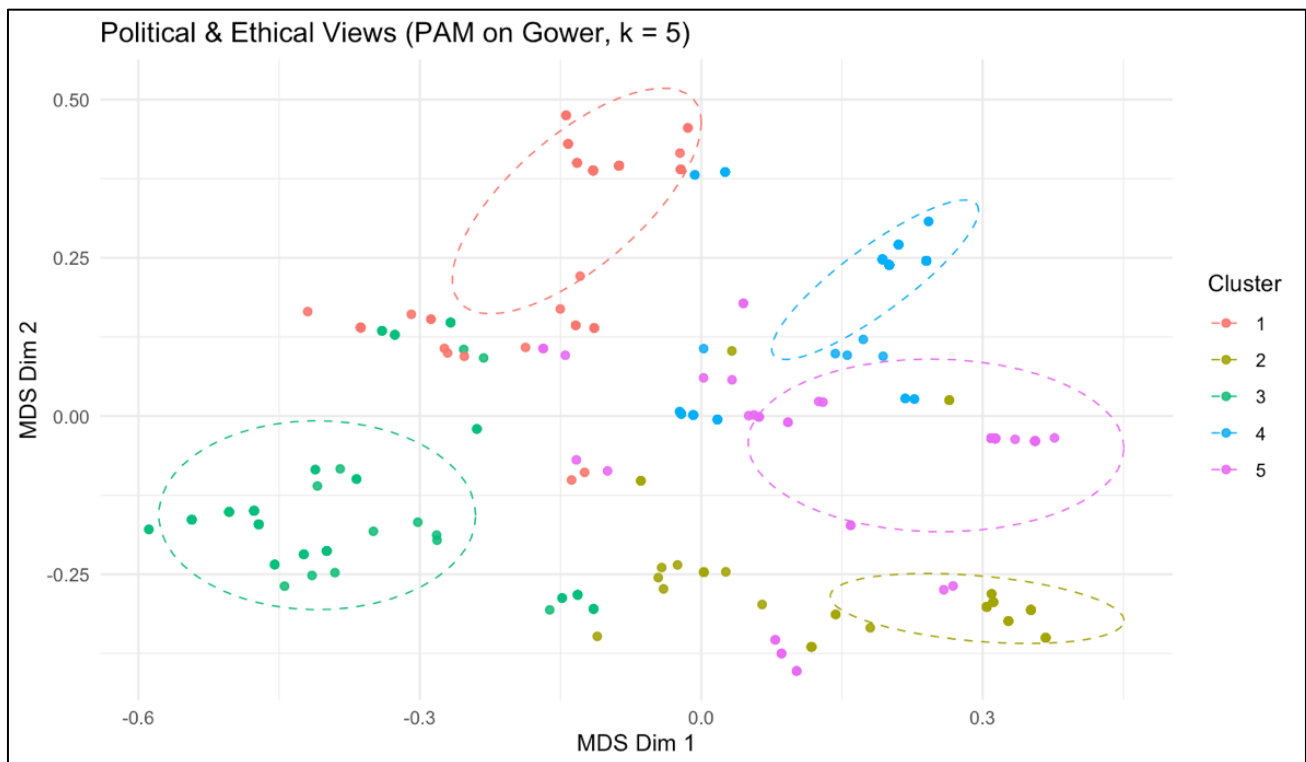


Figure 31 - Cluster Distribution of the Sample in 5 distinct groups according to the variables regarding Political and Ethical Views on the Conflict

The graph shows the distribution of the five clusters identified based on variables relating to the influence of past traumas and the roles of external actors. The MDS representation highlights distinct groups with a certain extent of coherence, although most values fall out of the patterns. From a demographic profiling perspective – as seen in other distributions above – nationality, religion and political orientation seem to be the only variables having a statistically significant impact on cluster formation, albeit weak (Cramer's V respectively 0.16, 0.15 and 0.17). This suggests that representations of the role of international institutions and the ethical dimension of the conflict within the sample are only marginally affected by socio-structural characteristics.

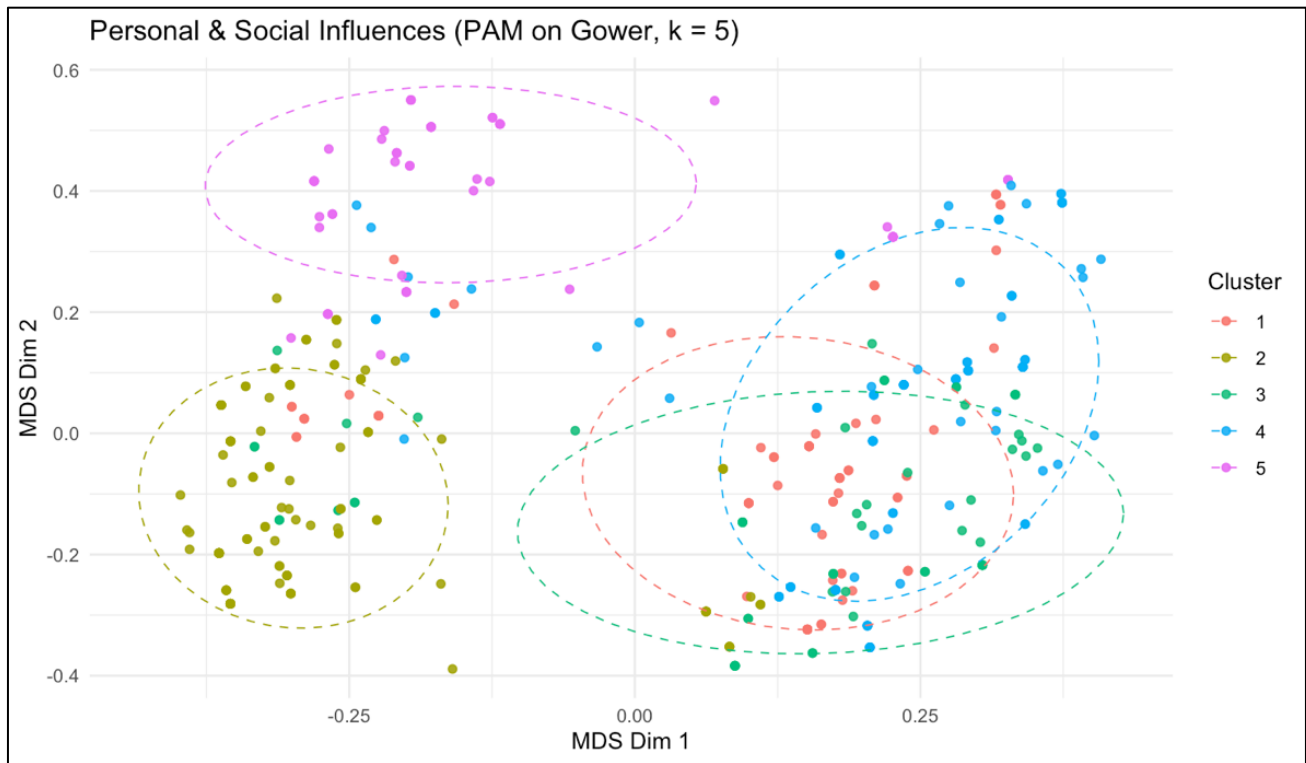


Figure 32 - Cluster Distribution of the Sample in 5 distinct groups according to the variables regarding Personal and Social Influences

The clustering within the variables regarding social and personal influences presents five groups, but with significant overlap between some of them and no clear boundaries. The dispersion ellipses show clusters that are not well separated in the MDS space, suggesting that the differences in social and personal perceptions of conflict are nuanced and share common traits across the distinct groups. The results of demographic profiling also confirm this interpretation: age, gender, nationality, education level, religion and occupation show no significant effects, with incredibly low Cramer's V values and insignificant p-values. The only variable that exerts a weak influence, is political orientation, which reaches Cramer's V values around 0.18. In summary, the graph and statistics suggest that, when it comes to subjective experiences and social dynamics, the sample population appears to be fairly homogeneous, with clusters reflecting marginal differences and substantial continuity between individual positions.

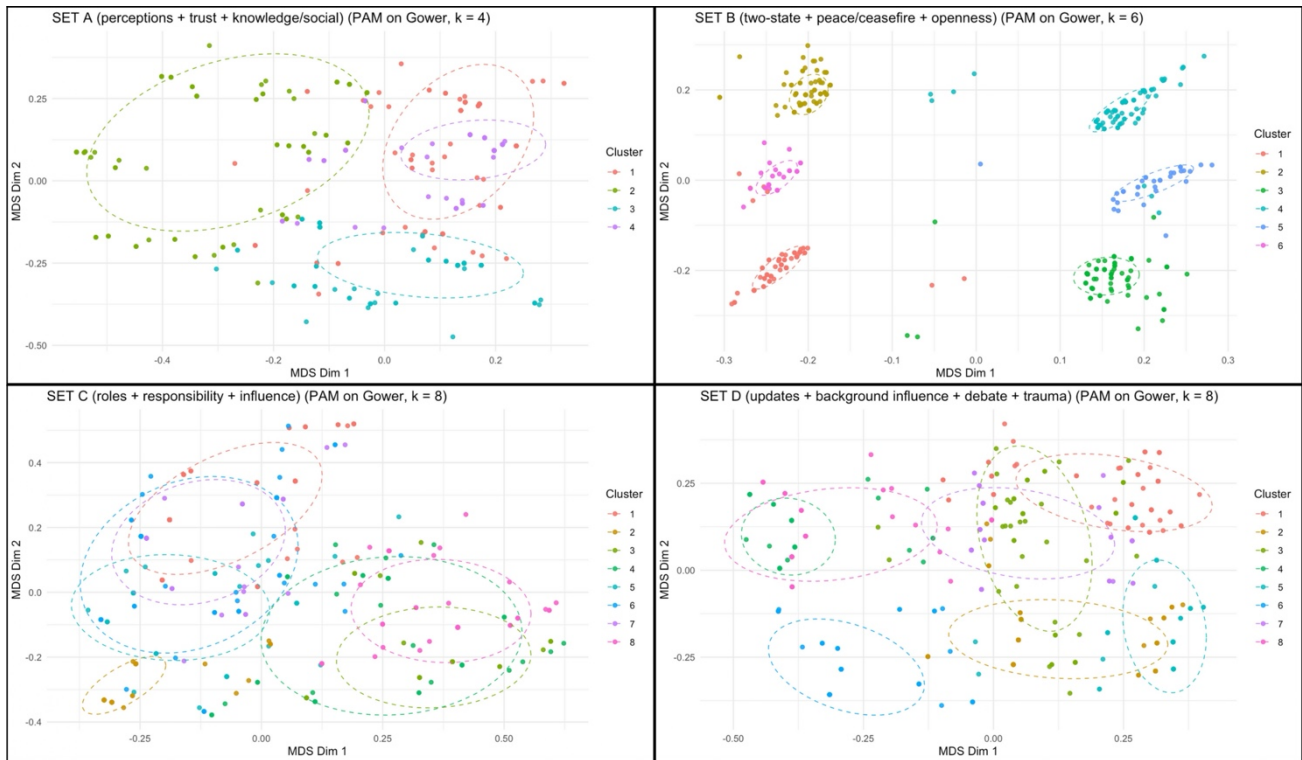


Figure 33 - Representation of 4 distinct clusterizations with randomized sets of variables

The four cluster analyses conducted on the four randomly generated groups of the perceptual variables show a generally consistent picture: the groups identified do not show clear boundaries or markedly polarized tendencies. With the exception of the clustering of Set B, the dispersion ellipses overlap extensively, indicating that individuals' positions are scattered in the distribution rather than being in rigid blocks. This visual impression is confirmed by the results of demographic profiling, which in almost all cases returns exceptionally low Cramer's V values and insignificant p-values, indicating weak or negligible associations between socio-demographic variables and the clusters that emerged. As developed in previous analysis, the most inferential variables remain nationality, religion and political orientation.

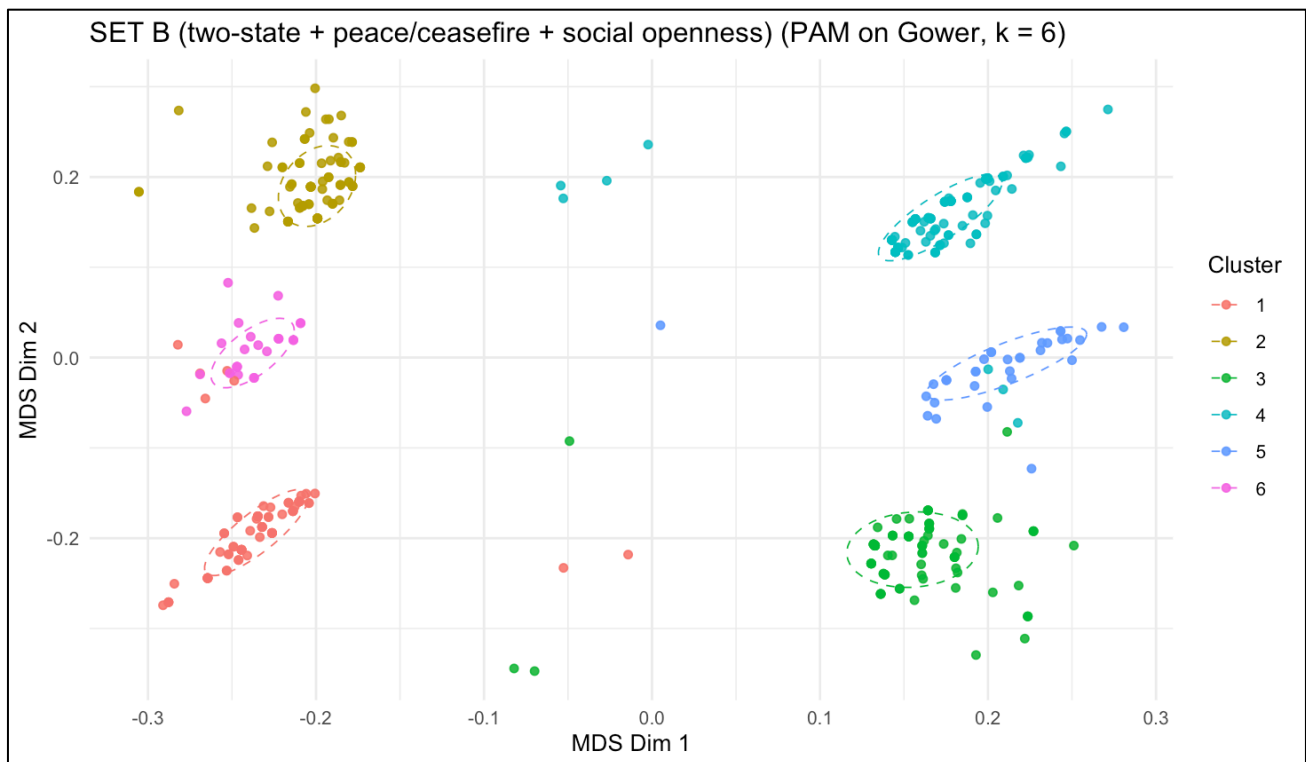


Figure 34 - Cluster Distribution of the Sample in 6 distinct groups according to a randomized set of variables composed by: agreement with a two-state solution, possibility of a ceasefire and peace in the near future, openness to engage with opposing views

The only significant exception emerges from the so-called Set B, which includes variables related to the two-state solution, a ceasefire and peace possibility, and openness to dialogue. It shows a clearer structure than the other sets analyzed as the six clusters appear well separated in the two-dimensional MDS space, with ellipses forming compact groups with little scattered values.

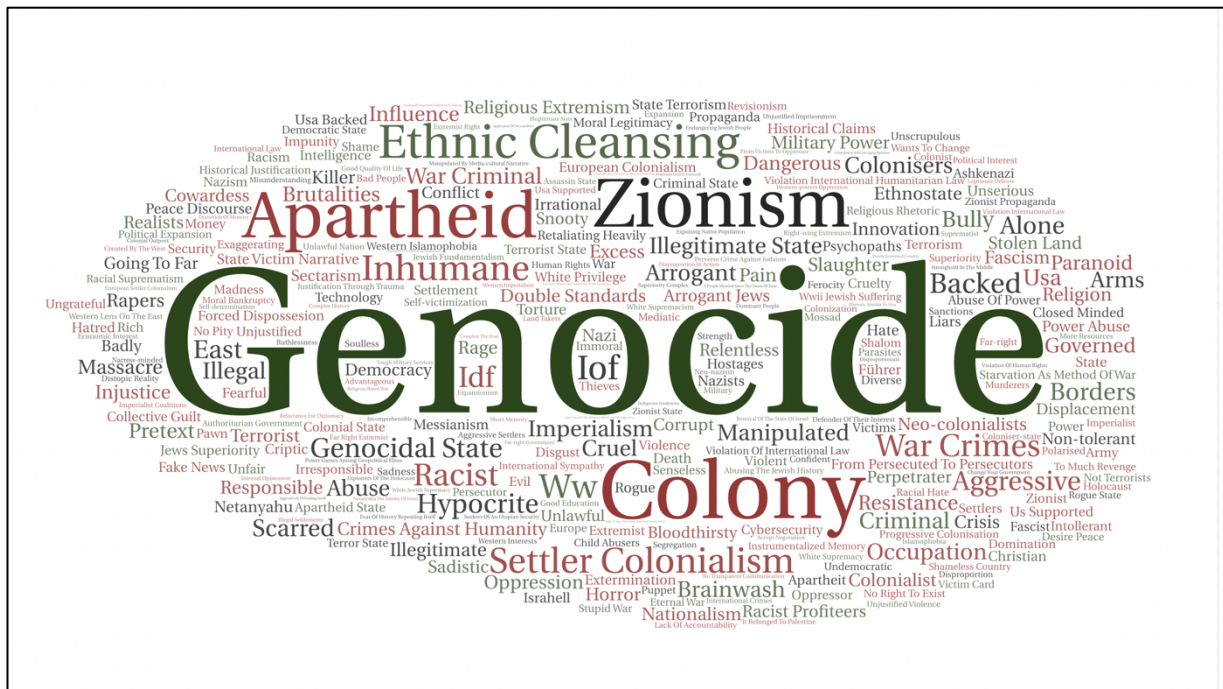
Demographic profiling supports this observation. The gender variable shows a significantly different distribution between clusters ($p = 0.00058$; Cramer's $V = 0.19$): for example, cluster 1 is mainly composed of men (59.7%), while clusters 2, 5, and 6 are characterized by a very marked female majority (over 70%). Nationality also shows significant differences ($p = 0.00288$; $V = 0.17$): cluster 5, for example, is largely composed of Italians (81.8%), while cluster 6 has a much more heterogeneous distribution, with a significant proportion of French (25%) and a strong presence of other nationalities (33.3%). Finally, political orientation contributes to distinguishing the groups ($p = 0.04664$; $V = 0.162$): cluster 2 is dominated by left-wing (44%) and far-left (15.5%) individuals, while

cluster 1 has a higher proportion of center-left (33.8%) and center-right (10.4%) individuals, and cluster 5 is characterized by a significant presence of right-wing (6.1%) and ‘other’ (3%) orientations.

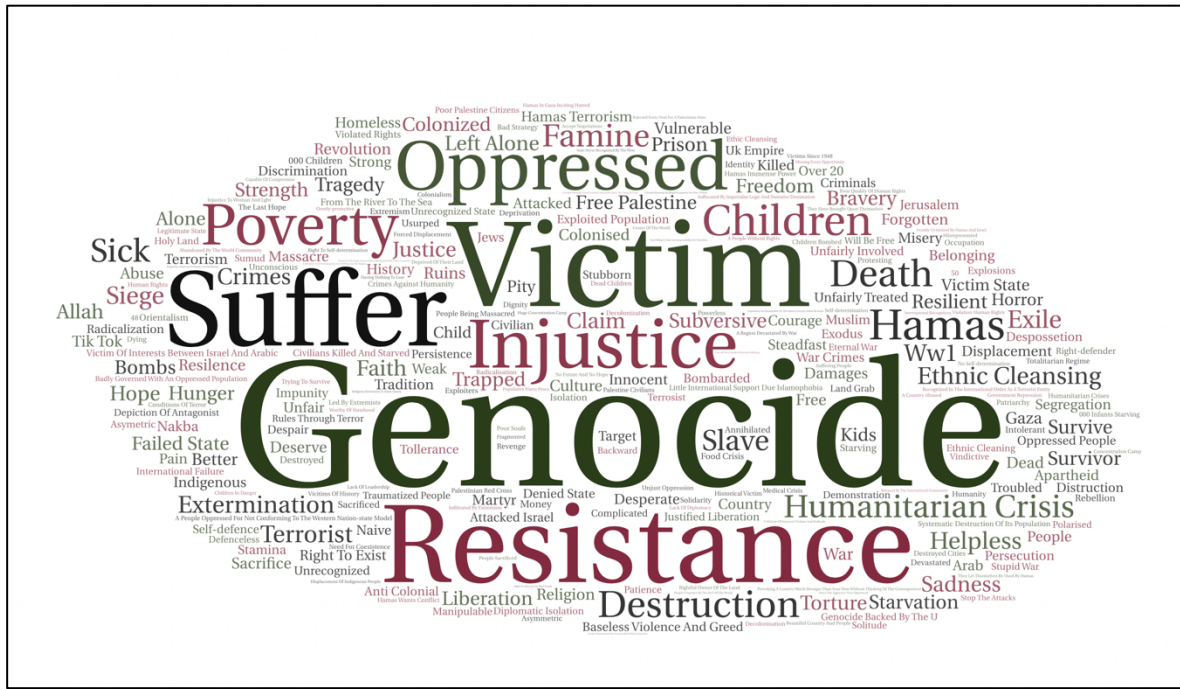
Overall, the cluster analysis therefore confirms that the socio-demographic variables of the sample do not substantially explain the differences in perception, with the exception of the area relating to prospects for a two-state solution, ceasefire/peace and openness to debate. These analyses also corroborated the idea that, albeit weak, nationality and political orientation are the demographic variables that exert the most influence.

6.3 Sentiment Analysis and Word Cloud

This section focuses on the qualitative analysis of the open-ended questions included in the questionnaire, using a “word cloud” visual representation and conducting a sentiment analysis to explore the perceptions spontaneously expressed by respondents. The aim is not to produce generalizable or inferentially valid results, but to bolster the statistical part with an exploratory reading of the language used, which is useful for capturing the idea on the general perception and establish recurrent themes in the conflict discourse. This will highlight the most frequent words associated with Israel and Palestine, as well as opinions on specific events (such as the reaction to October 7), political and military authorities (Netanyahu and Hamas), the impact of the conflict on civilian populations, and the role of combatants. I would like to emphasize that this analysis is purely additional as it is not possible to distinguish the results based on the sociodemographic background of the respondents and, moreover, the questions were not mandatory. It is therefore an exploratory study, aimed at completing the picture outlined by the quantitative analysis and offering further insights into understanding the collective representations of the conflict.



The word cloud constructed from responses to the open-ended question “What other words come to your mind thinking of Israel?” paints a picture that is heavily skewed toward a negative perception of the State of Israel. The visual predominance of terms such as “genocide”, “apartheid”, “colony”, and “ethnic cleansing” highlights how the country’s image is associated almost exclusively with direct responsibility for practices perceived as violent, oppressive, and in violation of international law, that have been in place for generations. Recurring expressions such as “war crimes”, “oppression”, and “inhumane” further reinforce this representation, placing Israel as the main perpetrator of systematic suffering and injustice. The almost total absence of positive or neutral terms suggests that, for the sample population, the discourse around the Israeli state is deeply marked by moral and political accusations, which focus on accusations of colonialism practices, racism and delegitimization. This trend is consistent with other empirical evidence that has emerged, confirming that perceptions are not limited to a balanced reading of the conflict, but identify Israel as the primarily guilty party.



On the other hand, the word cloud associated with the question “What other words come to your mind thinking of Palestine?” returns an image that starkly contrasts the one emerged for Israel. In this case, the central words “Genocide”, “Suffer”, “Victim”, “Oppressed”, “Resistance”, “Injustice”, highlight a deeply empathetic and compassionate picture of the Palestinian population, described mainly as victims of violence, oppression, and suffering. The frequency of terms such as “Poverty”, “Children”, “Humanitarian Crisis”, “Famine”, and “Destruction” underscores the perception of extreme vulnerability, in which references to humanitarian crisis, material deprivation, and collective pain are dominant and do not spare anyone, particularly children. At the same time, the significant presence of the term “Resistance” alongside concepts such as “Liberation”, “Revolution”, and “Bravery” indicates that Palestinian suffering is perceived not only in passive terms of victimization, but also as foundation for resilience, and fight for legitimacy. In this sense, the image of Palestine appears dualistic: on one hand, a victim of oppression, genocide, and injustice; on the other, an active subject of resistance and emancipation. The absence of words with negative connotations towards the

of domination; on the other, the prediction/accusation of a disproportionate Israeli response (“excuse to overreact,” “genocide as retaliation”), with fears for Gaza. Some respondents initially supported Israel but then revised their positions as the conflict escalated and as they learned more about the historical and political context, showing how perceptions are dynamic and influenced by the process of critical learning.

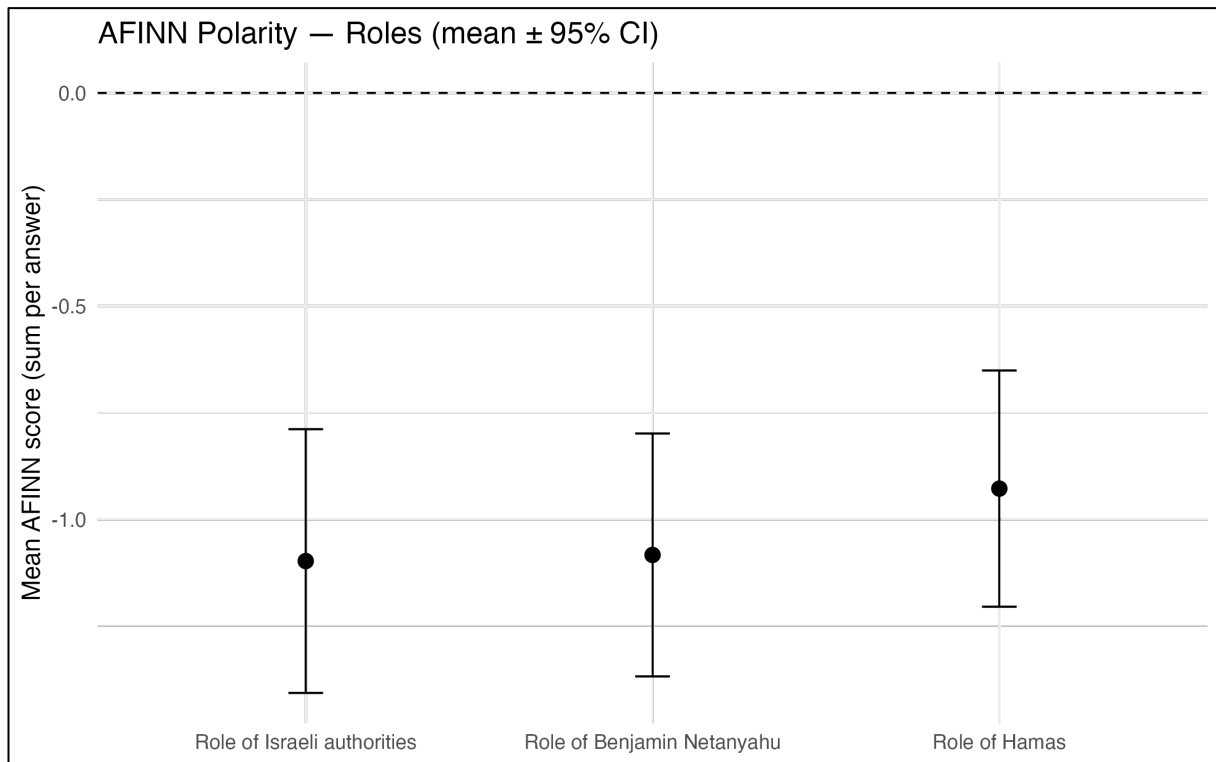


Figure 38 - Representation of AFINN Sentiment Analysis regarding the Role of different Actors within the Conflict

The analysis presented is based on AFINN sentiment analysis, which is a reference lexicon, developed by the data scientist Finn Årup Nielsen, that indicates a score between -5 and +5 to each word, allowing for the calculation of the overall polarity surrounding a topic. This makes it possible to measure the tone expressed by respondents when asked how they view the role of the Israeli authorities, of the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu⁸, and of Hamas. The graph clearly shows that the average scores are all negative, indicating a predominantly critical and unfavorable

⁸ I decided to investigate the figure of Netanyahu as separated from the Israeli authorities to understand better the depth of criticism and blame surrounding his role.

perception. Netanyahu appears to be the actor with the lowest sentiment, described with terms such as “criminal”, “responsible”, or “dictator/tyrant”, which underscore strong personal and political condemnation. The Israeli authorities are also described in negative terms, with recurring words such as “oppression”, “disproportionate”, and “colonialists” stressing the attribution of structural responsibility. Hamas is also perceived unfavorably, often denoted by expressions such as “terrorism”, “brutality”, and “unacceptable violence”, although with “positive” sentiment as well, reflecting the emergence in some cases of contextual understanding or partial justification. Overall, the results confirm that none of the main actors are portrayed positively: the language used by respondents paints a picture of widespread condemnation, with Netanyahu receiving the highest level of disapproval, while responsibility for the conflict appears to be shared between Israeli authorities and Hamas.

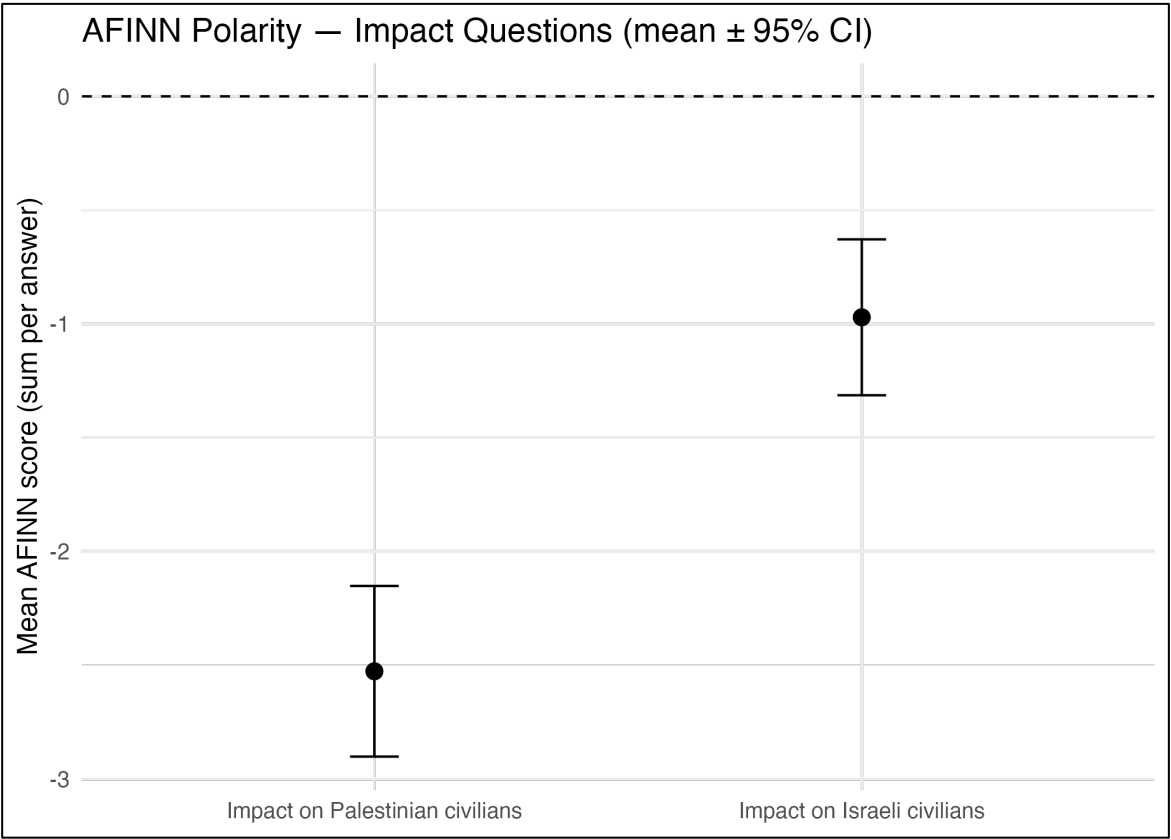


Figure 39 - Representation of AFINN Sentiment Analysis regarding the Impact of the Conflict on Civilians

The comparison between the impact of the war on Palestinian and Israeli civilians is characterized by a significantly lower sentiment for the former. The mean AFINN polarity reaches almost the value of -3 for Palestinians, reflecting language focused on terms such as “devastated”, “genocide”, “suffer”, and “trauma”, which convey a sense of extreme empathy for the suffering and the structural injustice. Responses referring to Israelis also remain negative, but to a lesser extent: expressions such as “fear,” “brainwash”, “hostages”, and “innocent victims” recur, evoking empathy and concern for the condition of those involved, but without the same intensity of condemnation. The asymmetry between the two groups of civilians confirms the image delineated throughout this dissertation that the impact of the conflict – and therefore its subsequent perception – is deeply unbalanced between the two parts.

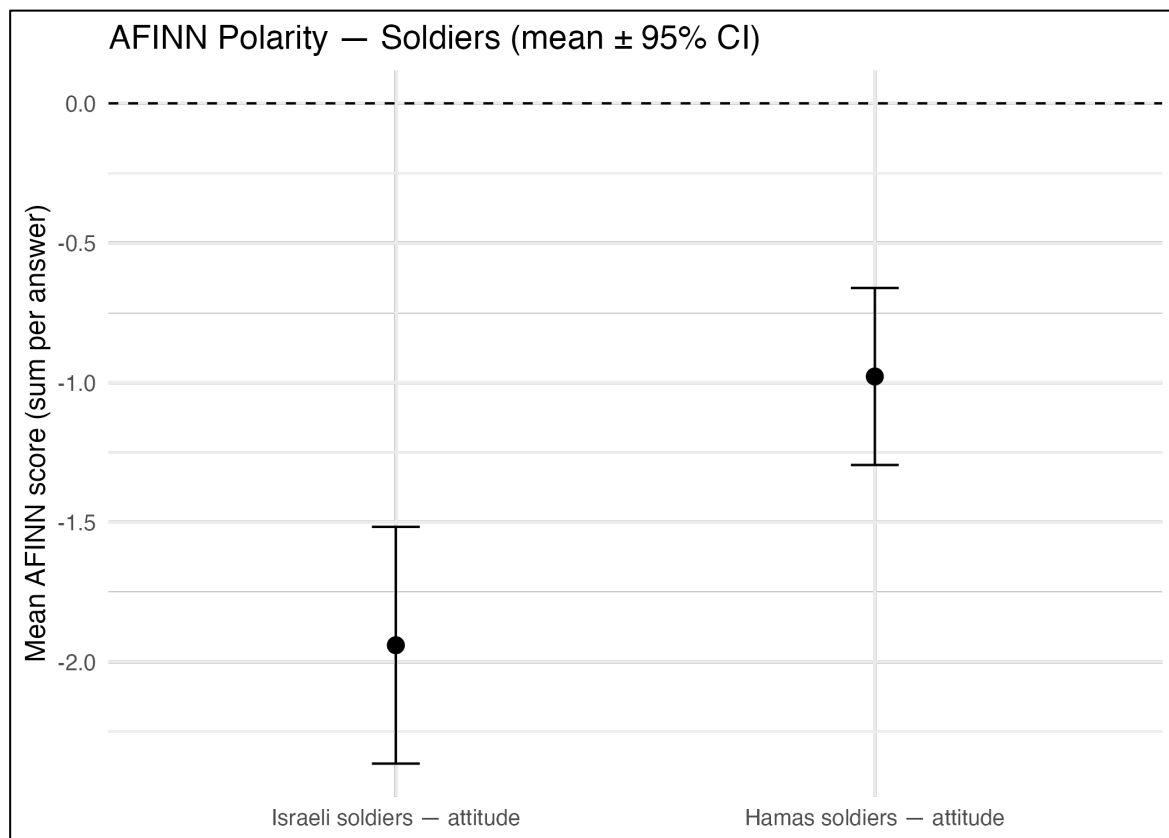


Figure 40 - Representation of AFINN Sentiment Analysis regarding the Attitude of Soldiers within the Conflict

The population’s thoughts on the attitude of Israeli soldiers underscore a very harsh condemnation, with recurring terms such as “war criminals”, “inhumane” and “violent”, highlighting the excessive and disproportionate use of force put in place, although sometimes justified by the structural

“brainwash” and the execution of mere “orders”. In contrast, Hamas soldiers are also described negatively, but with different nuances: words such as “terrorists”, “extremists/fanatics”, and “extreme violence” appear, alongside words as “resistance” and “defend” that view their attitude as reaction to oppression, sometimes summarized by expressions such as “not justified, but understood”. The polarity therefore remains negative for both, but the most marked blame is focused on the attitude of the Israeli forces, perceived as responsible for the brutalities occurring in the Palestinian territories.

In summary, the qualitative analysis of the open-ended questions confirms a highly polarized representation of the conflict: Israel and its leaders are described in predominantly negative and delegitimizing terms, while the perception over Palestine needs to be read with a dual lens: the civilian population appears associated with suffering, injustice, and devastation, while Hamas is recognized as a terrorist organization, condemned for the brutality of its actions – although partly justified as rooted in resistance. Reactions to October 7th reflect shock and fear for a possible escalation, as well as the willingness of people to understand the context around the conflict.

7. Critical Interpretation of Results and Comparison to Other Studies

The results obtained from the analysis largely confirm the representation of the Israeli Palestinian conflict as asymmetrical, with extensive support in favor of Palestine, which is predominantly perceived as the victim, and a majoritarian view of Israel as the aggressor and the responsible for the continuation of hostilities. This interpretation is further reinforced by qualitative analysis, in which words associated with Israel refer to concepts such as “apartheid”, “colonialism”, and “genocide”, while those indicating Palestine evoke suffering, injustice, and resistance. The polarization of the discourse is therefore evident, as is the entrenchment of strongly moral narratives that attribute blame and legitimacy in an unbalanced manner.

From a statistical point of view, the associations between demographic variables and perceptions are weak: Cramer's indices remain consistently below 0.30, indicating a limited influence. The only partially relevant exceptions emerge with regard to nationality and political orientation, which are confirmed as the most influential factors in shaping attitudes and assessments within the sample, although even in this case the effects are modest. Clustering analyses, aimed at identifying recurring perceptual profiles, return only partially distinct groups, with weak separations and significant overlaps. This suggests that, beyond some aggregate trends, perceptions remain widespread and share common traits across the variables considered.

Some structural limitations of the research design affect the interpretation of the results. First, the sample composition appears to be highly unbalanced: the clear prevalence of young adults, students, Italian citizens, and highly educated individuals does not allow for inferences to be extended to a broader and more diverse population. Secondly, the sampling method using social media and the snowball technique favored self-selection of the sample, resulting in an over-representation of politically active individuals who were already sensitive to the issue. Furthermore, some questions were ambiguously worded, which may have led to misunderstandings or confusion (e.g. the question about suffering ‘to the same extent’, with answers as “Yes”, “No”, “No, Palestinians suffer more”,

“No, Israelis suffer more”), with possible interpretative distortions. Finally, the length of the questionnaire may have been perceived by some respondents as excessive, as it entailed about 40 questions (including optional ones). This factor likely led to the more than 200 incomplete submissions and may also have introduced a response bias, with certain participants “rushing” through the form in order to complete it more quickly.

Overall, it can be said that the initial hypothesis that demographic factors significantly influence perceptions is only partially confirmed. The results show that these variables are not entirely neutral, but at the same time they are not strong determinants of the representations that emerged. The dominant factor appears to be the sharing of highly polarized collective narratives, probably conveyed by the media and social networks, as well as dominant moral and ethical views, which ultimately prevail over structural differences between individuals.

Linking it back to a critical security studies perspective, these findings take on further significance. The strong prevalence of moralized narratives – in which Palestine is framed by most through categories of victimhood and resistance and Israel through those of aggression and domination – demonstrates how perceptions of security are never neutral but socially constructed through discourses that distribute legitimacy and blame. The weakness of statistical associations with demographic factors suggests that such discourses, widely reproduced by the media and social networks, can exert a homogenizing effect that transcends individual and national contexts. In this sense, the apparent consensus in support of Palestine reflects not only the objective power asymmetries on the ground in favor of Israel, but also the internalization of security narratives that portray one actor as the embodiment of resistance to oppression and the other as a systemic threat. This is in line with the CSS' criticism of traditional approaches to security, insofar as it reveals how the language of security shapes the collective imagination and legitimizes political positions regardless of material or demographic determinants (Browning & McDonald, 2011). The survey results therefore highlight the centrality of discourse and identity construction over structural

variables, demonstrating that conflict is perceived primarily through normative frameworks of justice and injustice rather than through pragmatic or geopolitical assessments. At the same time, the limitations of the sample highlight how this reproduction of polarized narratives is particularly strong in sociopolitical contexts – such as that of educated and politically engaged young Europeans, where sensitivity to human rights issues and anticolonialist discourses is more pronounced.

Comparison with Other Studies

Before delving into the comparison, it should be stated clearly that the studies taken into consideration do not refer to the same period of time and present different populations, therefore some characteristics are not always comparable. However, the comparison remains useful for assessing how perceptions of the conflict are articulated in different national contexts and for verifying whether demographic factors emerge with a similar weight to that found in the present study.

Political orientation remains the most significant predictor everywhere. In the United States, for example, a survey conducted by the Pew Research Center in March 2024 shows that 58% of adults consider Israel's reasons to be “valid”, although with an important divide over its’ conduct of the war, compared to 22% who attribute validity to Hamas, with clear differences between Republicans (largely favorable to Israel) and Democrats (more inclined to sympathize with the Palestinians) (Pew Research Center, 2024). Similarly, the research conducted by Gallup over the same period finds that when asked about Middles East sympathies, about 80% Republicans say they are close to Israel with 7% siding with Palestinians, while 43% of Democrats sympathize with Palestine and 35% with Israel (Gallup, 2024). Similar divisions emerge in the United Kingdom, where YouGov data from July 2025 indicate dedicated support for Palestine among Labour and Green voters and more cautious positions among Conservatives (YouGov UK, 2025). In Germany, a recently conducted Forsa poll shows that within the over 70% of voters that would like a tougher stance against Israel, 94% of Left Party and 88% of Green Party voters support a stricter line against Israel, while 37% of the right-extremist Alternative for Germany (AfD) voters question the application of pressure (Anadolu Agency, 2025).

Lastly, a French report conducted by Odoxa in May 2025, reiterates the political division of perception as it shows that voters of La France Insoumise (far-leftist party) declare to be 88% in favor of the official recognition of the Palestinian state, while supporters of the Rassemblement National (extreme right party) add up to only 41%, with a clear majority against it (Public Sénat, 2025).

Age appears particularly relevant in surveys with more balanced samples. For example, in the United States, the Pew Research Center in March 2024 reported that opinions about the war and its protagonists vary considerably depending on age, where adults under 30 are more likely than older Americans to believe that Hamas has valid reasons for fighting Israel (34% vs 17%) , and contrarily, older Americans tend to state that Israel has acceptable motives for fighting Hamas (the category 65+ reports 78% agreement, while “valid” in under 30 accounts for only 38%). According to the study conducted by The Harris Poll, when asked which side they support more, 60% of US Generation Z favors Hamas over Israel, while among those who supported Israel there were 25–34-year-olds with 65%, 35–44-year-olds with 70%, 45–54-year-olds with 74%, 55–64-year-olds with 84%, and those over 65 with 89%. In Great Britain, YouGov (2025) finds that 8% of 18–24-year-olds believe that Israel’s attack on Gaza since 2023 is justified, a percentage that increases significantly among those over 65 with a record of 34%.

Religious affiliation proves to be particularly significant in contexts directly involved. In Israel, research by the Pew Research Center (2025b) indicates that in 2025 89% of Israeli Jews have a negative opinion of the United Nations, representing a 20% increase since 2023 and the highest report since 2007. From the March 2024 Pew study on US views of the conflict, it emerged that most American Jews (62%) and 42% of Catholics believe that Israel's response to Hamas's October 7 attack is acceptable, while most American Muslims (68%), on the other hand, describe Israel's methods as unacceptable. Furthermore, when asked about the validity of the reasoning behind the fighting, 77% of American Jews find Hamas’ motives to be not valid and 16% “valid”, while 89% find Israel’s motivations acceptable and only 7% unacceptable. On the other hand, almost half of US Muslims

find Hamas' reasons to be valid (while 22% lay in the category "not valid") and 54% find Israel's as not valid, with 18% validating the motives behind the conflict. Lastly, a poll conducted by the Jerusalem Post, reported that the more religious a Jewish respondent is the more they are likely to oppose Palestinian statehood and incite military actions (The Jerusalem Post, 2025).

Finally, nationality emerges as a moderately relevant variable. My data partially showed that nationality plays a role in shaping the perception, although it was skewed by the overrepresentation of Italians and French. This association is observable also from the study conducted by the Pew Research Center in June 2025 across 24 countries, investigating their views of Israel, and specifically of its leader, Benjamin Netanyahu. In 20 of the 24 countries surveyed, about half or more of adults have an unfavorable opinion of Israel. About three-quarters or more share this view in Australia, Greece, Indonesia, Japan, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, and Türkiye. Surprisingly, in Kenya and Nigeria, about half or more of respondent adults have a favorable opinion of Israel, while in the US the population is divided, as 45% is favorable and 53% is not (Pew Research Center, 2025a). Contrarily to other countries, Americans continue to express some sympathy for Israel, although support for Palestine is growing particularly among young people and Democrats, as presented above (Al Jazeera, 2025).

Overall, the comparison with other studies shows that demographic variables influence perceptions of conflict unevenly and with varying degrees of importance depending on the context. Political orientation is confirmed everywhere as the main discriminating factor, with clear divisions between left-wing and right-wing electorates, although in my data the association is less marked in terms of statistical intensity. Age appears to be a determining factor in the more balanced samples, where a significant generational gap emerges, while in my study this effect is not visible due to the overrepresentation of young people and students, which reduces the possibility of capturing internal differences. Religious affiliation is another explanatory factor, especially in directly involved contexts such as Israel or in US religious communities, while in my sample, it had only marginal effects.

Finally, nationality is confirmed as a relevant variable, although in my data it is partially distorted by the predominance of Italians and French; nevertheless, from a broader perspective, national opinions diverge significantly, with countries such as Netherlands, Spain, Australia and Japan strongly critical of Israel and others, such as Kenya, Nigeria, and the US, more inclined to evaluate it positively.

The comparative analysis further confirms the initial hypothesis that demographic variables, together with collective narratives and identity frameworks, are relevant factors in shaping individual perceptions of the conflict. However, as the conflict evolves over time and individual interpretative frameworks are progressively redefined, the relative weight of these variables seems to diminish. In such a dynamic context, moral considerations and ethical positions emerge as increasingly prominent elements, exerting a stronger influence on attitudes and assessments. It follows that, although sociodemographic elements provide an essential context for understanding the initial orientation of perceptions, they are gradually overshadowed by the moral and ethical dimensions that individuals mobilize to make sense of the conflict and to position themselves in relation to it. This dynamic is in line with the insights of securitization theory explained in the first part of the dissertation, which emphasize that the framing of an issue is not fixed but evolves through discursive practices that often leverage normative appeals to legitimacy, morality, and collective identity (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde, 1998).

8. Conclusion

This dissertation approached the Israeli Palestinian conflict aligning a Critical Security Studies theoretical framework with a comparative empirical analysis on the perception of public opinion. From a theoretical perspective, the work lays on the assumption that security, threat and legitimacy are not objective principles, but rather outcomes of discursive practices and power dynamics: securitization processes, recognition policies and drivers of perception (as media, education, religion and culture) contribute to the construction of the “Other” and to the normalization of a state of exception. The first part of the thesis tried to trace the historical context, structural asymmetries and the construction of narratives, showing how competing accounts establish antagonistic identities. Furthermore, it determined how public perception is not merely a consequence but an integral part of the dispute: what the actors and the general public believe to be true becomes politically effective, influencing judgments on responsibility, victimization, use of force, and possible solutions.

The second part developed an original empirical study, based on a multilingual questionnaire, diffused online via a snowball sampling, which collected a total of about 630 responses, 427 of which were complete and valid, allowing for the construction of a solid dataset. The survey investigated on a variety of variables as sociodemographic characteristics, sources of information and stated knowledge on the conflict, as well as feelings toward actors, outcomes, and potential future solutions. The analysis, conducted through RStudio, combined descriptive statistics, tests of association as contingency tables with Chi-square, p-value via Monte Carlo, Cramer's V index, cluster analysis on Gower's distance with the PAM algorithm, and a sentiment analysis based on open-ended responses. This design enabled a multi-level interpretation while maintaining methodological transparency and ethical standards.

Results cautiously suggest that sociodemographic variables are not neutral, although making a relatively small impact: the Cramer's V indices are systemically below 0.30, indicating weak associations. Within this analysis, nationality and political orientation emerged as the most influential

variable in determining responsibility, conflict solutions and legitimacy, albeit remaining limited. The initial hypothesis, according to which demographic characteristics strongly influence perceptions, is thus only partially validated. This weakness of bivariate links, besides being possibly accounted to the non-probabilistic nature of the sample and the data collected, is consistent with the CSS idea of a discursive field capable of homogenizing moral compasses beyond individual differences, especially when media coverage and symbolic repertoires set up binary frames of “victim/oppressed” and “aggressor/dominant”.

The cluster analysis also depicted distinguishable but not strongly separated perceptual profiles, as demographic profiling renders some differences only in respect of nationality or political orientation, while age, gender, educational, and occupation do not substantially discriminate. Overall, the picture reflects attitudes that stem more from shared moral and perceptual patterns, fueled by narrative frameworks and exposure to information, rather than from structural characteristics of the respondents.

The qualitative analysis on the other hand, despite not allowing for an association between variables, portrayed a clear image of duality of perception between within the framework of the conflict: each side’s authorities are regarded badly, although Israel is criticized more heavily for its conduct; a similar approach applies to the soldiers involved, whereas Hamas fighters come off slightly better than Israeli militaries. Lastly, the words used in respect to Palestinian civilians confirm the sentiment of sadness and preoccupation for the on-going humanitarian situation.

The work presents limitations and mistakes that need to be addressed with transparency. First of all, the sample design is non-probabilistic and based on social media reach: this introduces self-selection, overrepresentation of leftist young adults and students, a strong female component and, above all, a prevalence of Italian citizens with a significant French presence, to the detriment of a more balanced distribution in terms of demographic background. These imbalances affect highly the stability of the estimates and limit the generalization of the results.

Secondly, some items may have suffered from interpretative ambiguity and overly similar response options, with potential measurement effects; the length of the questionnaire and the complexity of the topic may also have encouraged rapid responses or responses “saturated” with social desirability. Furthermore, longitudinal or cross-country designs should also be introduced, together with more balanced mixed instruments (quantitative and qualitative), in order to better clarify the actual role of socio-demographic variables. On an analytical level, the choice to favor bivariate associations and exploratory clustering maximized readability but overshadowed more subtle conditional relationships and mediated pathways.

In conclusion, the value of this work lies in having brought together a critical theoretical framework and empirical evidence. This thesis shows that, in today’s world dynamics, social differences have an impact but are not decisive, and that the influential factor remains the competition for legitimate narratives: this is where recognition, responsibility, and the possibility of securitizing the conflict come into play. Strengthening representativeness, measurement accuracy, and time frames would lead to better measure the link between what we think and say about security and what, by addressing it, we make politically real.

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