

How does the geography of surveillance affect collective action?

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Abstract

How does residing in the proximity of surveillance infrastructure—i.e., checkpoints, the separation barrier, and military installations—affect support for cooperative and confrontational forms of collective action? Cooperative actions involve engagement with outgroups to advance the ingroup cause (e.g., negotiations, joint actions, and peace movements), whereas confrontational actions involve unilateral tactics to weaken the outgroup (e.g., boycott, armed resistance). In the context of West Bank and Jerusalem, we combine geo-coded data on the surveillance infrastructure with a representative survey of the adult population from 49 communities ($N=1,000$). Our multilevel analyses show that surveillance does not affect support for confrontational actions but instead decreases support for cooperative actions. Moreover, we identify a new, community-level mechanism whereby surveillance undermines cooperative actions through weakening inclusive norms that challenge dominant us-versus-them perspectives. These effects are empirically robust to various individual- and community-level controls, as well as to the potential of reverse causality and residential self-selection. Our findings illustrate how cooperative voices and the fabric of social communities become the first casualties of exposure to surveillance. They also speak to the importance of considering structural factors, with broader implications for the socio-psychological study of collective action.

KEYWORDS

built environment, collective action, conflict narratives, perceived norms, repression, surveillance

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The Israeli military's vast surveillance infrastructure in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT) includes more than a hundred permanent checkpoints and military installations, as well as a separation barrier some 700 kilometers long.¹ The system fragments the OPT into numerous, discontinuous territorial entities, effectively inhibiting the movement of residents, dividing families and communities, and destroying livelihoods. Whereas surveillance is justified by Israel as a primary means of preventing acts of terrorism and political extremism (Maoz et al., 2016), evidence that it effectively contains militant views and actions is mixed.

Prior work on the impact of highly intrusive, repressive, and visible systems of control, in Palestine and elsewhere, has largely focused on how it affects violent or militant actions. The findings remain inconclusive: Some suggest that repression decreases militant actions by increasing perceived risk (i.e., a “deterrent” effect: Lyall, 2009; Seliktar, 1984), whereas others show that repression incites militant views and actions by increasing hostility towards the repressive force (i.e., a “backlash effect”: Brym & Araj, 2006; Longo et al., 2014). The question as to how political repression affects a larger spectrum of views and alternative forms of action has received far less attention in past research.

Studies that focus on direct violent repression effectively overlook structural forms of repression (see Longo et al., 2014), such as the human-built, physical surveillance infrastructure that exerts substantial control over the local population by monitoring and limiting their mobility (see Handel, 2010; Rijke & Minca, 2018). And while some previous studies document the profound impact that surveillance in the OPT has on economic activity (Aranki, 2004) and the health (Barber et al., 2016) of the local population, the potential impact on political attitudes is understudied, albeit with few notable exceptions (Gade, 2020; Longo et al., 2014).

We address this gap by leveraging a unique, representative survey of the adult population in the OPT, paired with fine-grained geographical data. We examine how residing in the proximity of the surveillance infrastructure—that is, the spatial system of the built, permanent, and overtly visible surveillance infrastructure (checkpoints, separation barriers, and military installations)—affects support for different forms of collective action among Palestinians.²

Collective action in contexts of political violence and repression

Collective action refers to various tactics undertaken by groups to achieve their political goals (Van Zomeren, 2016). In this article, we focus specifically on individual support for different types of collective action.

In the context of intergroup conflict, collective action is often categorized as violent or non-violent (Chenoweth & Stephan, 2011; Saab et al., 2016). Such a (morally connotated) dichotomy has received considerable criticism: It risks psychologizing structural influences—such as the availability of weapons (Vollhardt et al., 2020)—and it overlooks the fact that groups often employ both types of strategies—simultaneously and at different times—depending on their perceived efficacy and the actions of other parties (Haslam & Reicher, 2012; Saab et al., 2016).

A different approach, rooted in the debate on trade-offs between cooperation and conflict in the social-psychological literature on social change (see Dixon et al., 2012; Wright & Baray, 2012), leads us to differentiate between *cooperative* and *confrontational* collective actions. *Confrontational* actions typically involve unilateral tactics by a group to weaken the outgroup (see Wright & Baray, 2012). They are rooted in a fixed, binary view of intergroup relations (e.g., Palestinians vs. Israelis) and consequently, in the expectation that the balance

¹See “Movement and Access in the West Bank,” UN OCHA oPt, December 2017, <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/west-bank-movement-and-access-west-bank> (accessed May 16, 2022).

²For work on the effects of surveillance, in the strong sense of the term that includes cameras, wiretapping, etc., see Askin (1972), Cunningham (2007), and Theoharis (2016).

of forces can be changed directly through ingroup actions confronting the outgroup (i.e., the sense of internal efficacy; see Wright & Baray, 2012). Confrontational actions can be violent (e.g., military resistance) or nonviolent (e.g., economic or cultural boycott, disruptive protests).

By contrast, the conflict resolution and peace-building literature (see Staub, 2006) emphasizes the importance of cooperation between rival groups to achieve social change. Groups can undertake *cooperative* actions that involve engagement with outgroups to advance ingroup or collective causes. These are typically nonviolent actions, such as diplomatic negotiations, peace and antiwar movements, and joint actions undertaken with outgroup supporters of one's cause (see Hasan-Aslih et al., 2020, 2023). Contrary to confrontational actions, cooperative actions are fostered by nonexclusionary views, such as the perception of the outgroup comprised of different subgroups (e.g., supporters vs. opponents of military occupation, people vs. authority, etc.) rather than as a homogenous entity (Dixon et al., 2020; Subasic et al., 2008). Moreover, such actions are often seen as efficacious to the extent that they increase the legitimacy of a movement in the eyes of third parties—and potentially parts of the opponent group—and hence rely on (and seek to broaden) external support to the movement (i.e., external efficacy; see Hasan-Aslih et al., 2023; Wright, 2009).

This distinction partially overlaps with Wright's (2009) proposal to differentiate between competitive and “conversionary” forms of collective action. According to Wright, competitive collective action intends to change the balance of privilege and power between two groups with fixed boundaries—to strengthen the ingroup and weaken the outgroup—whereas conversionary collective action seeks to strengthen the ingroup by redrawing its boundaries—by “converting” outgroups into supporters of the ingroup cause. The distinction between confrontation and cooperation, however, is broader than Wright's conceptualization and is likely to be all more pertinent in the context of political violence.

In particular, Albzour, Penic, et al. (2019), Albzour et al. (2023) have shown that Palestinian society is deeply divided over the question of supporting confrontational or cooperative actions. Since the signing of the Oslo agreement, the Palestinian Authority (PA) propagated cooperative actions as the privileged road to international recognition of Palestinian statehood and a two-state solution (Tartir, 2017; Tilley, 2012). Various Israeli and Palestinian civil society organizations have also undertaken cooperative actions to promote peace through joint activities and dialogue (Maoz, 2004). Moreover, progressive leftist movements and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) have historically called for a joint struggle towards establishing a single democratic state (Farsakh, 2011).

However, with the failure of the peace process, the second intifada, and the expansion of Israeli settlements (see Erakat, 2019), cooperative actions have become increasingly criticized as perpetuating the unequal status quo and demobilizing the collective struggle for liberation and its supporters increasingly marginalized within Palestinian society (Albzour et al., 2023). In parallel—and largely in opposition to cooperative actions and the inclusive political solutions they propagate—more confrontational actions have gained popularity, particularly in the form of local and international movements calling for the boycott of Israel (Albzour et al., 2023). And as the PA collaborates with Israeli forces to repress Palestinian confrontation (violent actions in particular), it further erodes popular support for actions that involve cooperation with the Israeli side (Abrahams, 2020). Hence, understanding the determinants of popular support for cooperative and confrontational actions among Palestinians is of paramount social and political significance.

Surveillance, repression, and collective action

How then does exposure to surveillance affect support for confrontational and cooperative collective action among the affected population? One line of research shows that repression fuels militant views (i.e., there is a “backlash effect”; Opp & Roehl, 1990). This has been

demonstrated by Longo et al. (2014), who utilized a natural experiment based on a 2009 policy for the “easement” of the *Za'atara* checkpoint in the West Bank to analyze the impact of surveillance on political radicalism. Their study compares the attitudes of nearby residents—before and after the easement at *Za'atara*—to the attitudes of Palestinians living close to a similar checkpoint in *Wadi Nar*, which operated unchanged over the same time period. The findings demonstrate that respondents living near *Za'atara* became less supportive of violent actions against Israel, as well as of global acts of terrorism, during the period when the checkpoint opened. In marked contrast, respondents living near the unchanged *Wadi Nar* checkpoint became more supportive of both forms of violent action.

What explains the radicalizing effect of checkpoints? Longo et al. (2014) invoke the individual experience of humiliation, which likely fuels militant action. More generally, the vast surveillance infrastructure serves as a chronic reminder of the occupation, increasing the perception of injustice and threat by a powerful outgroup (Tawil-Souri, 2011). Numerous studies demonstrate that perceptions of outgroup threat tend to sharpen group boundaries and us-versus-them views, fuel hostile attitudes towards outgroups, and decrease peaceful attitudes (e.g., Canetti-Nisim et al., 2008; Stephan et al., 2002). Moreover, some studies suggest that repression can incite militant actions through a sense of having “nothing to lose” (see Saab et al., 2016).

In contrast, other studies suggest that exposure to surveillance, instead of radicalizing, has a “deterrent effect” (Benmelech et al., 2015; Opp & Roehl, 1990). They show that repression can reduce individual proclivities to voice militant attitudes or participate in militant actions by increasing perceived risks and the fear of retribution (Young, 2019). People who are dominated by fear in threatening circumstances tend to prefer defensive and peaceful over aggressive policies and attitudes (Lerner et al., 2003; Skitka et al., 2006).

Beyond their differences, these explanations all tend to focus on the individual, psychological effects of repression as drivers of collective action. However, large-scale military surveillance does not affect individuals alone, but entire communities (Gade, 2020). Placed in civilian residential areas, the surveillance infrastructure profoundly shapes social interaction and communication in local communities (Penić et al., 2023; Völker & Flap, 2001). We therefore propose that its impact on collective action is driven by a social, *community-level* mechanism and expect that exposure to surveillance shapes local norms regarding conflict narratives—perceptions of what can and what cannot be said about the conflict in one's community—and that these perceptions, in turn, affect people's support for different forms of collective action.

Perceived norms and collective action

The present study builds on the premise that the proclivity to support confrontational or cooperative actions depends on the perception of social norms—positions seen as prevalent or desirable in one's community (Tankard & Paluck, 2016). People are motivated to understand and follow the norms of social groups they belong to and care for (Spears, 2021), especially in conditions of uncertainty and moral controversy (Miller & Prentice, 1996).

More specifically, we propose that support for collective action depends on the perceived norms regarding conflict narratives that either fortify or challenge us-versus-them views. Previous studies have shown that the circulation of conflict narratives plays a central role in shaping conflict-related attitudes and mobilizing collective action (Bar-Tal, 2013; Paez & Liu, 2011). Opposing sides tend to circulate narratives about conflict-related experiences, which aggregate to an essentialized us-versus-them master narrative, describing the conflict in a straightforward and compelling manner (Hammack, 2010; Kalyvas, 2003). Examples include narratives of ingroup victimization or narratives of resistance and heroism (Khalili, 2007), which play an essential role in fostering group mobilization and cohesion (Bar-Tal, 2013). In

many conflicts, the us-versus-them narrative tends to be a dominant (master) narrative of the conflict, widely spread and endorsed by many people (Canetti, 2017; Uluğ et al., 2021). We expect that us-versus-them *norms*—the perception that us-versus-them conflict narratives are shareable and supported in one's community—fuel support for the confrontational forms of collective action.

Next to the dominant us-versus-them narrative, there are alternative conflict narratives, which are usually more difficult to share publicly, as they challenge and disrupt the dominant narrative (Elcheroth & Reicher, 2017; Uluğ et al., 2021; Uluğ & Cohrs, 2017). In particular, *nonexclusionary narratives* are often critical of actions by ingroup members and leaders, or include stories that portray rival group more positively and as less monolithic. For example, narratives about help and solidarity across frontlines effectively challenge simplified representations of outgroup hostility (Broz, 2014). A growing number of studies show that having access to more inclusive narratives is related to increased support for cooperative attitudes and policies (Cehajić-Clancy & Bilewicz, 2017; Halperin et al., 2011; Vollhardt & Bilali, 2015). We therefore expect that the perception that such narratives are shareable and supported within one's community—what we refer to hereafter as *nonexclusionary norms*—fuels support for more cooperative forms of collective action.

The debate on the deterrent and backlash effects of repression provides grounds to expect that surveillance can either increase or decrease us-versus-them norms. Whereas threatening circumstances tend to fuel these norms, collective exposure to surveillance could also decrease their perceived normativity, due to fear of retaliation and self-censorship. It follows that the net effect of surveillance on the circulation of us-versus-them narratives remains an open empirical question.

By contrast, we expect that surveillance systematically undermines nonexclusionary norms. While critiques of group action tend to be better accepted when raised from within than from outside the group (Hornsey & Imani, 2004), this pattern is reversed when the group is reminded of conflict with another group (Ariyanto et al., 2010) and when threats become more salient (Adelman & Dasgupta, 2019). What, in other circumstances, may be viewed as constructive criticism is more likely to be stigmatized as ingroup betrayal when a threatening outgroup is perceived to intrude on internal deliberations—the very conditions that characterize repressive and indiscriminate surveillance by an occupying power. Pressure for unity when a group faces a threat from the outside is very common. Not surprisingly, then, mantras of “united we stand” and “don't fraternize with the enemy” are extremely frequent in such circumstances (Hornsey, 2016).

Hypotheses and analytic approach

To summarize, this study examines the impact of the Israeli surveillance infrastructure on support for both confrontational and cooperative forms of collective action among Palestinians in the OPT. The model and hypotheses tested are summarized in Figure 1.

Our first set of theoretical expectations directly builds on previous findings on deterrent and backlash effects of repression to study the effect on confrontational collective action. We hypothesize that spatial proximity to the surveillance infrastructure can either decrease (H1a) or increase (H1b) support for confrontational actions, by decreasing (H1.1a) or increasing (H1.1b) us-versus-them norms in local communities. The more these types of dominant conflict narratives are perceived as shareable in local communities, the stronger their members will support confrontational actions (H1.2).

Our second set of expectations focuses on collective action that relies on cooperation with outgroups. We expect the spatial proximity to the surveillance infrastructure decreases support for cooperative actions (H2). As argued above, surveillance closes spaces for critical

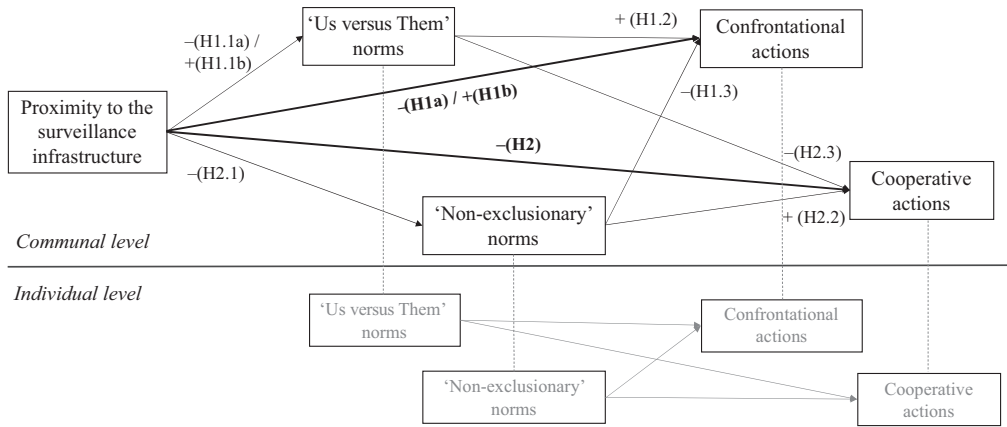


FIGURE 1 Summary of hypotheses.

discussion, with the result that nonexclusionary conflict narratives are likely to be perceived as less plausible and their sharing as less socially legitimate. We therefore hypothesize that the closer a community lives to the surveillance infrastructure, the lower the nonexclusionary norms (H2.1) that foster support for cooperative actions (H2.2).

In all models, we examine the impact of the two types of norms simultaneously, further testing whether us-versus-them norms tend to decrease cooperative actions (H2.3), and whether the nonexclusionary norms tend to decrease confrontational actions (H1.3).

Central to our theoretical argument is the notion that support for collective action is affected by the geography of surveillance and cannot be reduced to individual characteristics. Hence, to rule out that the impact of surveillance is driven by composition effects, we control for a series of well-identified individual-level determinants of collective action, such as personal experiences of humiliation and victimization (Canetti-Nisim et al., 2009; Longo et al., 2014) and common psychological motivators of collective action (i.e., perceived efficacy and group identification [Van Zomeren et al., 2008] and having nothing to lose [Saab et al., 2016]). Finally, because the correlational design of the study calls for caution with causal claims, we perform a set of additional analyses to rule out plausible alternative causal interpretations, such as potential reverse causality and residential self-selection.

METHOD

Data and measures

We rely on a unique combination of measures for the spatial distribution of the Israeli surveillance infrastructure in the OPT with original survey data on political attitudes. This section introduces our data and measures. Further details on data sources and construction of our measures are provided in the online supporting information.

Individual-level measures

Individual-level data come from a large-scale survey (see Appendix S1 in the online supporting information), conducted through standardized face-to-face interviews in the West Bank and Jerusalem in November and December 2017 (Albzour et al., 2019). The survey is representative

of the population of adult Palestinian residents ($N=1,000$) and employs a geographically stratified probability sample. At the time of the survey, the territory of the West Bank and Jerusalem consisted of 480 communities (corresponding to municipalities). We randomly selected 49 communities (with 20 respondents per community³) using stratified probability sampling, with communities belonging to Jerusalem (East Jerusalem, J1) and those close to settlements or refugee camps oversampled to increase the precision of estimates in communities with more heterogeneous experiences or higher exposure to the surveillance infrastructure. The sample is diverse in terms of gender (508 men and 492 women), age (ranging from 18 to 96 years at the time of survey), and education (421 respondents below and 572 respondents with secondary-level education or higher).

Outcome measures: Support for cooperative and confrontational collective action

Assessing support for different forms of collective action, respondents were asked to rate the following actions on a 1 (*Strongly oppose*) to 4 (*Strongly support*) scale: “Negotiations with Israel,” “Peaceful resistance”; “Joint struggle and collaboration with the Israeli peace movements”; “Palestinian boycott of Israel (e.g. Economic, academic, cultural and political boycott)”; “Armed resistance against the military power of Israel”; “Armed resistance against settlers”; and “Armed resistance against all the Israeli people (including civilians) and their institutions”.⁴ We computed our measures for *cooperative collective action* (Cronbach's Alpha = .66) as the mean of answers for the first three actions and *confrontational collective action* (Cronbach's Alpha = .82) as the mean of answers for the last four actions.

Indeed, exploratory factor analysis⁵ with principal axis factor extraction and varimax rotation showed a two-factor structure, with the first three items loading on one component (explaining 20.42% of variance, with component loadings ranging from .41 to .77), and the last four items on the second (explaining 31.78% of variance, with component loadings ranging from .44 to .91) (see the online supporting information, [Table S1](#) for more detailed results). Hence, in line with our expectations, these results indicate that support for collective action is structured around the distinction of whether actions tend to be confrontational or cooperative, rather than violent or nonviolent.

To further validate these constructs, we examined how support for confrontational versus cooperative actions relates to different political visions for the future and the types of collective efficacy. We find that support for cooperative actions is linked to support for the two-state solution and inclusive political solutions (such as the establishment of an inclusive democratic state for all religions), whereas people who support confrontational actions tend to oppose these visions for the future (see the online supporting information). Moreover, as expected, we find that support for confrontational actions is linked to internal efficacy (the belief that the group is capable of achieving change by its own efforts), whereas support for cooperative actions with a stronger sense of external efficacy (the belief that the group is capable of mobilizing support of third parties, such as international actors) (see [Table 1](#)).

³One community was selected twice in the sampling procedure and, therefore, included 40 respondents.

⁴The scale further included “International boycott of Israel,” which we excluded from the analyses because it does not refer to the Palestinian action.

⁵Considering that the rated actions could be classified in different ways—for example, between violent and nonviolent, or confrontational and cooperative—we performed exploratory factor analysis to test the underlying factorial structure.

TABLE 1 Descriptives and correlations.

	Descriptives		Correlations												
	N	M (SD)/%	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)	
(1) Confrontational collective action	965	2.92 (.64)	-.36**	-.08*	.14**	.17**	-.04	.00	.25**	.13**	.20**	.03	-.05	-.03	
(2) Cooperative collective action	985	2.54 (.59)	—	.15**	-.07*	-.03	.11*	.01	-.18**	-.11*	-.20**	-.02	.05	.04	
(3) Nonexclusionary norms	926	2.76 (.48)	—	—	.24**	-.05	.02	.05	-.02	-.07*	-.05	-.02	.02	.05	
(4) Us-versus-them norms	981	3.36 (.47)	—	—	—	-.03	-.01	.10**	.17**	-.01	.00	-.03	.01	.00	
(5) Internal efficacy	990	2.72 (.56)	—	—	—	—	.36**	.02	.04	.09**	.08**	-.02	.00	-.07*	
(6) External efficacy	957	2.56 (.69)	—	—	—	—	—	.15**	-.01	-.04	-.03	-.07*	.06	-.03	
(7) National identification	1000	1.60 (1.16)	—	—	—	—	—	—	.09**	.00	.09**	.04	.01	.00	
(8) Nothing to lose	959	3.03 (.54)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	.08*	.10**	-.04	.04	.03	
(9) Direct victimization	1000	28.20%	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	.29**	.07*	-.32**	.06	
(10) Humiliation	993	21.25%	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	.11**	-.13**	-.08**	
(11) Secondary or higher education	993	57.60%	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	-.03	-.31**	
(12) Female	1000	49.20%	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	-.02	
(13) Age	995	38.62 (15.68)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

Mediator measure: Perceived norms about conflict narratives

Perceived norms were assessed with vignettes. As a part of a larger project on collective memories (see Albzour, Iadadwa, & Penić, 2019), participants read eight short stories that describe diverse experiences of life under occupation, all based on extracts from original witness testimonies, which were transformed into vignettes by condensing, anonymizing, and recontextualizing the description of specific conflict-relevant experiences (see the online supporting information for more information). In line with our conceptualization of us-versus-them and nonexclusionary conflict narratives, we selected six vignettes,⁶ of which three align with the dominant narrative of Palestinian victimhood and resistance and three describe alternative narratives that portray the outgroup more positively (i.e., a narrative of solidarity across group boundaries) or are critical of ingroup actions (i.e., intragroup violence and mistreatment by the authorities) (see the online supporting information for more details). After each vignette, respondents were invited to imagine that one of their neighbors experienced such an event. They were then asked: "How likely is it that he/she [an average neighbor] would talk about this event with other neighbors?" and "If he/she spoke about this event to other neighbors, how likely is that they would express support or empathy for him/her?" on a 1 (*very unlikely*) to 4 (*very likely*) scale. We computed our measures for perceived *us-versus-them* norms (Cronbach's Alpha = .85) and perceived *nonexclusionary* norms (Cronbach's Alpha = .71) as the mean of answers for the first three and second three vignettes respectively.

Confirmatory factor analysis supports the assumption that the six vignettes split on two different factors: The first three load on one factor and the last three on the second factor (Chi-square = 17.46, $df=8$, $p=.03$, RMSEA = .04, CFI = .99). Considering that the two exact same items were repeated after each vignette and are significantly correlated (ranging from $r=.50$ to $r=.73$ across six vignettes), we performed confirmatory factor analysis on their averaged values for each vignette. We additionally performed analyses separately for each of the two items, which yielded the same results as the analyses with their average (see the online supporting information).

Control measures

Direct victimization was operationalized as a dichotomous variable where respondents were coded as directly victimized if they experienced at least one of the following: being shot at, injured, imprisoned (including administrative detention), hit or kicked, or verbally abused by the Israeli forces.

Humiliation was assessed with one dichotomous item asking whether a respondent was humiliated at checkpoints during the last three months.

Nothing to lose was operationalized as a mean of two items: "We are fighting for our cause because we have nothing to lose any more" and "Even if we don't achieve change, it is still worth collectively resisting the occupation," rated on a 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*) scale ($r=.38$).

Internal efficacy was operationalized with the item "Palestinians as a group are capable of ending the occupation" rated on a 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*) scale.

External efficacy was operationalized as the mean of two items: "We are able to mobilize support for our cause among fellow Arabs" and "We are able to mobilize support for our cause among the rest of the world," rated on a 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*) scale ($r=.76$).

⁶We excluded two vignettes with narratives that are only about *intragroup* relations (i.e., intragroup solidarity and betrayal)

National identification was assessed with the following items: “National identity: (1) is important to define who I am, (2) is a source of pride to me, (3) is something I share with people who are likely to support me, and (4) is a source of common opinion among people who share this characteristic with me.” Respondents were asked to select the statements with which they agree. The composite score was computed as the number of statements (0–4) with which respondents agree.

Further controls include sociodemographic factors of gender, age, and the level of education (secondary or higher).

Descriptive statistics and correlations between the individual-level measures are shown in [Table 1](#). On average, respondents lend stronger support to more confrontational than cooperative collective actions ($t = 11.63$, $df = 962$, $p < .001$). Moreover, descriptive analyses confirm the assumption that, overall, nonexclusionary conflict narratives are less normative: The average perceived normativity of these narratives ($M = 2.76$, $SD = .48$) is significantly lower than the average perceived normativity of us-versus-them narratives ($M = 3.36$, $SD = .47$, $t = 31.39$, $df = 919$, $p < .001$). The latter stands out among the attitudinal variables measured on a 4-point scale, as the only average score clearly beyond the ‘agree’ value of 3 and with the smallest standard deviation of all, which corroborates the assumption that us-versus-them norms are preeminent in the study context.

Community-level indicators

All contextual indicators were computed at the level of communities. Geo-coded information on community location was obtained from the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics.⁷

Geography of surveillance

Community exposure to surveillance infrastructure is operationalized as the spatial proximity to permanent checkpoints, the separation barrier, and permanent military installations. We employed information on the geographic coordinates of permanent checkpoints and the separation barrier in 2017 from *B'Tselem*.⁸ Information on permanent military installations across the entire West Bank is drawn from publicly accessible records—an original data compilation undertaken for this study (see the online supporting information for details). The resulting measure of *proximity to the surveillance infrastructure* is defined as the overall minimal geographic distance (in km) from the community centroid to the closest checkpoint, military installations, or segment of the separation barrier. Distances are transformed into proximity by subtracting each community's minimal geographic distance from the largest observed value of geographic distances to surveillance infrastructure across all communities (i.e., the West Bank community that is the most remote from any surveillance infrastructure).

Local communication norms

Local communication norms were measured by aggregating individual-level variables for the perceived communication norms. Specifically, the *local us-versus-them norms* are

⁷Data are accessible through the Palestinian SDG Site of the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, <http://sdg-pcbs.opendata.arcgis.com> (accessed May 16, 2022).

⁸Data are available from <http://www.btselem.org/statistics> (accessed May 16, 2022).

operationalized as the design-weighted average level of perceived *us-versus-them norms* in the community. Likewise, the *local nonexclusionary norms* are operationalized as the design-weighted average level of perceived *nonexclusionary norms* in the community. The two measures were design-weighted to correct for unequal selection probabilities created by the sampling design (see Albzour et al., 2019).

Communal-level control variables

We introduce an additional control for community exposure to violence since the year 2000, based on the number of fatalities within a 5-km radius from the community centroid, drawing on comprehensive data on violence in the West Bank and Jerusalem collected by *B'Tselem*. We further control for the proportion of the community's population living in *Area C* (the area falling into Israeli civil and military control, which also includes all the Israeli settlements; Gregory, 2004), whether the community is a refugee camp, and whether it belongs to East Jerusalem. Finally, we control for the community's population size (the number of inhabitants per 1,000), considering that norms and attitudes may be different in larger (urban) communities (see, e.g., Kenny & Luca, 2021).

Correlations between community-level indicators are shown in [Table S2](#) in the online supporting information.

RESULTS

The analysis proceeds in three stages. First, we explore the geography of surveillance by descriptive analyses of the spatial distribution of military infrastructures in the OPT. Second, we test the study hypotheses concerning the effects of exposure to surveillance infrastructure on support for collective action in a series of multilevel analyses. Third, we conduct robustness checks to address alternative causal explanations for the observed results.

The geography of surveillance in the OPT

The proximity of the Israeli surveillance infrastructure to Palestinian residential areas—villages, towns, or cities in the West Bank and East Jerusalem—is striking. On average, they are no further than 2.5km away from any permanent element of the surveillance infrastructure, albeit with a large standard deviation of 2.0km. As the standard deviation suggests, the degree to which Palestinians encounter surveillance in their daily lives varies significantly with where they reside.

A detailed geography of surveillance is provided in [Figure 2](#). The heat map depicts the shortest distance to any element of the surveillance infrastructure in the West Bank. The map also identifies sites sampled in our survey, as well as the location of the separation barrier. From [Figure 2](#), it is evident that exposure to surveillance for many communities in the OPT and East Jerusalem, in particular, is high, given that they are in the direct vicinity of at least one element of the permanent surveillance infrastructure. We find that, on average, Palestinian communities have more than five checkpoints and at least one military installation within a 10km radius. Yet, the map also corroborates our observation that Palestinian communities display significant variation in exposure to the surveillance infrastructure, an observation that extends to the subset of communities sampled in the survey.

The graph in [Figure 3](#) depicts the density of surveyed sites by their proximity to the surveillance infrastructure. Most sites are very close—no more than a few kilometers away—but

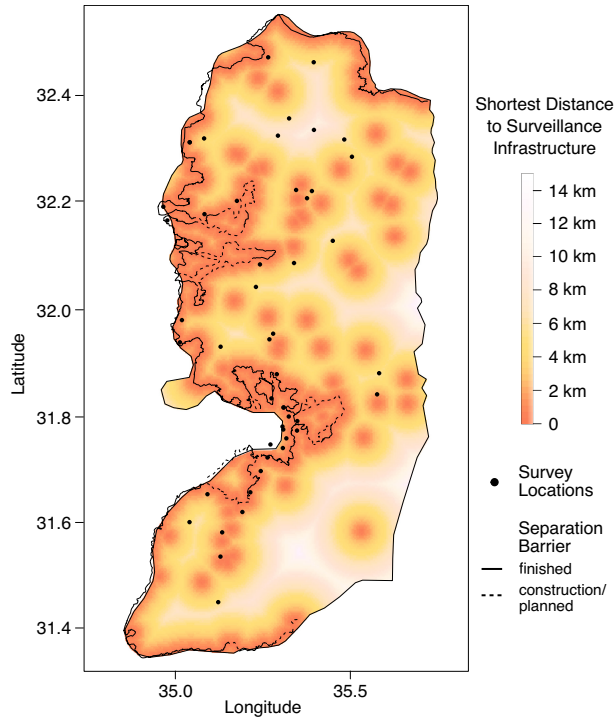


FIGURE 2 Proximity to surveillance infrastructure: Military installations, permanent checkpoints, and separation barrier.

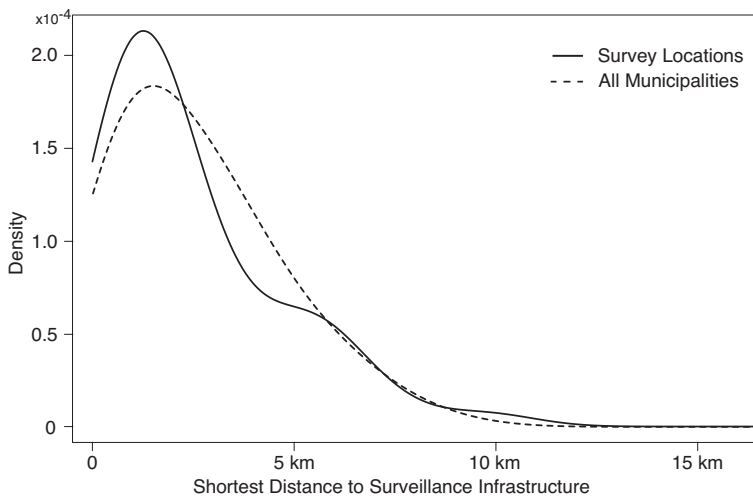


FIGURE 3 Distribution of proximity to the surveillance infrastructure: Survey locations and OPT communities.

several also lie further away from either the separation barrier, a permanent checkpoint, or a military installation. A comparison between the proximity of the surveyed sites (solid line) with that of all communities in the West Bank (dashed line) shows that the distribution in the sample closely follows the larger distribution in the larger population.

Multilevel analyses

We conducted multilevel analyses with maximum likelihood robust (MLR) estimations using Mplus 8. There are substantial communal-level variations for all measures of collective action as well as for both mediator measures, with the following intraclass correlations: support for cooperative collective action (.09), support for confrontational collective action (.13), perceived us-versus-them norms (.14), and perceived nonexclusionary norms (.19).

We proceed in two steps: First, we test the impact of exposure to surveillance on support for different types of collective action and perceived norms about conflict narratives; second, we test whether local norms mediate the impact of surveillance on collective action.

Separate multilevel models: Impact of the geography of surveillance

The tested model is shown in [Equations 1 and 2](#). We tested the model separately for each of the four outcomes (i.e., two types of actions and two types of norms, denoted with Y in [Equation 1](#)), which were regressed to the communal level exposure to surveillance (denoted with W_{SurvProx} in [Equation 2](#)). In all models, we controlled for the individual-level predictors described earlier (denoted with X_{Control} in [Equation 1](#)), with variances of all individual-level predictors (except for sociodemographics) estimated on two levels to control for composition effects. Additionally, we performed analyses without individual-level controls. Results are summarized in [Table 2](#) (Model 1 without and Model 2 with individual-level controls).

$$\text{(Level 1): } Y_{ij} = \beta_{0j} + \beta_{1-k} X_{\text{Control}ij} + r_{ij}. \quad (1)$$

$$\text{(Level 2): } \beta_{0j} = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01} W_{\text{SurvProx}j} + u_{0j}. \quad (2)$$

In line with our main hypothesis (H2), we find that community-level exposure to surveillance infrastructure predicts less support for cooperative collective action, that is, the closer the surveillance infrastructure is to a community, the less its inhabitants support cooperative collective action. The impact is statistically significant, explaining 26.2% of the context-level variance. By contrast, we find that the impact of communal exposure to surveillance on support for confrontational collective action is not statistically significant. And contrary to both competing hypotheses derived from the deterrence versus backlash debate (H1a and H1b), exposure to surveillance displays no impact on confrontational actions, that is, it neither decreases nor increases support in a statistically significant manner.

Next, we tested the impact of exposure to surveillance on the two theoretical mediators, that is, the perceived norms regarding the two types of conflict narratives (see [Table 2](#)). In line with Hypothesis 2.1, we find that communal-level exposure to surveillance significantly decreases the perceived normativity of nonexclusionary conflict narratives. Moreover, in line with the deterrent effect of surveillance (H1.1a), we find a negative impact on the perceived norms of dominant us-versus-them narratives. In sum, the closer people live to the built environment of surveillance, the less normative they perceive both types of conflict narratives.

Regarding the individual-level predictors, in line with previous studies (Longo et al., 2014), we find a statistically significant positive impact of humiliation on support for confrontational collective action. And consistent with Saab et al. (2016), we find that the more respondents report having nothing to lose, the more they support confrontational, and the less they support cooperative collective action. Interestingly, the perceived norms seem to be less affected by the individual-level determinants: None of the individual-level indicators are significantly related to perceived nonexclusionary norms, whereas only the sense of having nothing to lose is related to stronger perceived us-versus-them norms.

TABLE 2 Multilevel model: Effect of proximity to the surveillance infrastructure on support for collective action and perceived norms, without individual-level controls (Model 1) and with individual-level controls (Model 2).

	Collective action		Perceived norms	
	Confrontational	Cooperative	Nonexclusionary	Us versus them
<i>Model 1</i>				
<i>Individual-level</i>				
Surveillance proximity	.01 (.14)	-.51*** (.11)	-.40*** (.11)	-.47*** (.11)
Individual R^2	–	–	–	–
Communal R^2	.00 (.00)	.26* (.11)	.16 ^x (.09)	.22* (.11)
BIC	1844.75	1741.74	1196.47	1230.31
N parameters	4	4	4	4
N	965	985	926	981
<i>Model 2</i>				
<i>Individual-level</i>				
Female	-.02 (.03)	.03 (.03)	-.02 (.03)	-.01 (.03)
Age	.02 (.03)	.04 (.03)	.05 (.04)	.01 (.04)
Secondary or higher education	.03 (.04)	.02 (.04)	.04 (.04)	-.01 (.04)
Direct victimization	.06 (.04)	-.02 (.04)	-.07 (.04)	.00 (.04)
Humiliation	.11** (.04)	-.09 (.05)	.03 (.05)	.01 (.03)
Nothing to lose	.23*** (.04)	-.18*** (.05)	.00 (.05)	.16** (.05)
Internal efficacy	.15*** (.04)	.00 (.04)	.00 (.05)	-.02 (.04)
External efficacy	-.07 (.04)	.10* (.05)	.02 (.05)	.00 (.04)
National identification	-.04 (.04)	.02 (.03)	.02 (.04)	.07 (.03)
<i>Community-level</i>				
Surveillance proximity	-.04 (.14)	-.52*** (.12)	-.40*** (.11)	-.48*** (.11)
Individual R^2	.10*** (.02)	.05** (.02)	.01 (.01)	.03* (.02)
Communal R^2	.00 (.01)	.27* (.12)	.16 ^x (.09)	.23* (.11)
BIC	12,207.85	12,152.71	11,672.61	11,681.28
N parameters	31	31	31	31
N	988	988	988	988

Note: Standardized coefficients and standard errors in brackets.

^x $p = .08$.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

We performed additional analyses without individual-level control variables (i.e., without $\beta_{1-k} X_{\text{Control}ij}$ in Equation 1), to test whether this changes the effect of surveillance. We find the same pattern of results as reported above (see Table 2, Model 1).

Multilevel mediation analyses: The role of community norms

In a second step, we examine whether the impact of surveillance on support for collective action can be explained (i.e., is mediated) by community norms. We employ multilevel mediation analysis, which extends the classic mediation model to clustered data—in our case, with individual respondents clustered into local communities (Preacher et al., 2010). The tested model

is shown in Equations 3–8. We extend the baseline model (shown in Equations 1 and 2), by adding community norms as community-level indicators and test their mediating role at the community-level (denoted with $W_{UsThemNorm}$ and $W_{NonExclNorm}$ in Equation 4). We simultaneously control for the impact of the perceived norms at the individual level to disentangle contextual effects (denoted with $X_{UsThemNorm}$ and $X_{NonExclNorm}$ in Equation 3). To test the mediation at the community level (see Figure 1), we further estimate the impact of surveillance on the community norms (Equations 5 and 6). The indirect effect (IE in Equations 7 and 8) is computed as a product of the coefficient of the surveillance indicator predicting community norms (denoted with λ_{21} and λ_{31} in Equations 5 and 6) and the coefficient of the community norms indicator predicting support for collective action (denoted with γ_{02} and γ_{03} in Equation 4).

$$\text{(Level 1): } Y_{ij} = \beta_{0j} + \beta_1 X_{UsThemNormij} + \beta_2 X_{NonExclNormij} + \beta_{3-k} X_{Controlij} + r_{ij}. \tag{3}$$

$$\text{(Level 2): } \beta_{0j} = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01} W_{SurvProxj} + \gamma_{02} W_{UsThemNormj} + \gamma_{03} W_{NonExclNormj} + u_{0j}. \tag{4}$$

$$\text{(Level 2): } W_{UsThemNormj} = \lambda_{20} + \lambda_{21} W_{SurvProxj} + u_{2j}. \tag{5}$$

$$\text{(Level 2): } W_{NonExclNormj} = \lambda_{30} + \lambda_{31} W_{SurvProxj} + u_{3j}. \tag{6}$$

$$\text{(Level 2): } IE_{UsThemNorm} = \lambda_{21} * \gamma_{02}. \tag{7}$$

$$\text{(Level 2): } IE_{NonExclNorm} = \lambda_{31} * \gamma_{03}. \tag{8}$$

In line with our hypotheses, we find that local norms mediate the impact of surveillance on support for collective action (see Figures 4 and 5).

First, for cooperative collective action, we find a statistically significant indirect effect for local nonexclusionary norms (see Figure 4). The more a community is exposed to surveillance, the less nonexclusionary narratives are perceived as normative within the community. In turn, the lower the perceived nonexclusionary norms in a community, the less its inhabitants support cooperative collective action. By contrast, support for cooperative collective actions is not significantly affected by us-versus-them norms, and the impact of surveillance is not significantly mediated by these norms (see Figure 4).

Second, the mediation analyses help clarify why we did not find an overall effect of surveillance on support for confrontational collective action (see Figure 5): Two opposite indirect effects, for the two types of norms, appear to cancel out each other. In line with the deterrent effect of repression, we find that surveillance tends to decrease support for confrontational collective action by decreasing us-versus-them norms. Simultaneously, surveillance *increases* support for confrontational collective actions by decreasing nonexclusionary norms.

Taken together, our findings show that, by silencing nonexclusionary voices, obtrusive military surveillance undermines support for cooperative collective action but leaves support for confrontational forms of action unchanged. While surveillance hampers the ease of circulation of all types of conflict narratives, our analyses suggest that only its suppression of the already more scarcely available nonexclusionary narratives appear consequential in terms of support for collective action.

Robustness checks

To address plausible alternative explanations for these results, we perform a series of robustness checks (further details are provided in the online supporting information).

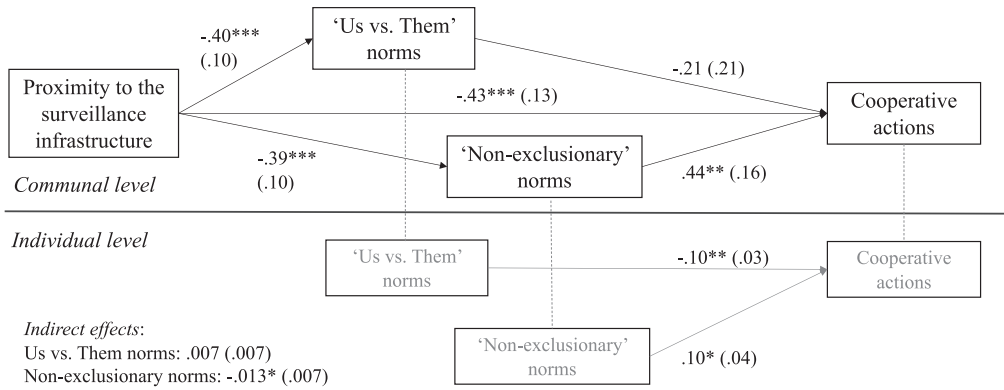


FIGURE 4 Multilevel mediation model: Effect of proximity to the surveillance infrastructure on cooperative actions via local norms about conflict narratives. Model controlling for individual-level variables as shown in Table 2 (Model 2). * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

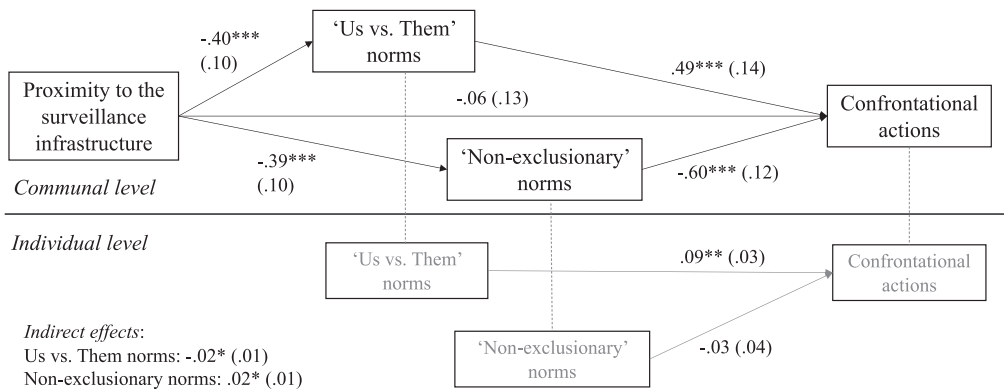


FIGURE 5 Multilevel mediation model: Effect of proximity to the surveillance infrastructure on confrontational actions via local norms about conflict narratives. Model controlling for individual-level variables as shown in Table 2 (Model 2). * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Robustness check 1: Operationalization of surveillance

We operationalize exposure to surveillance as a composite indicator of the minimal distance to three types of surveillance infrastructure: the separation barrier, checkpoints, and military bases. To assess sensitivity of the impact of surveillance, we begin by performing additional multilevel analyses analogous to those shown in Table 2 with separate indicators for proximity to the three types of surveillance infrastructure. The analyses (see Table S3 in the online supporting information) confirm that proximity to either the separation barrier, checkpoints, or military bases also decreases perceived norms and support for cooperative collective action.

Second, and as an alternative measure to proximity, we compute the *density* of surveillance, counting checkpoints and military bases within a specified radius (from 1 to 15 km) from the center of each community. The majority of communities have 0 or 1 checkpoint/military base within a radius smaller than 4 km, but for a radius larger than 5 km it is possible to distinguish community exposure (see Figure S1 in the online supporting information). Accordingly, for surveillance density within a radius of 5 km or larger we find that *density* has the same negative impact on norms and cooperative collective action as *proximity* (see Figure S2).

Robustness check 2: Reverse causality

An alternative explanation of the negative impact of the surveillance infrastructure on support for cooperative collective action is that the observed association is created by reverse causality—that certain communities are more likely to be exposed to surveillance *because* they condone violence more strongly. We perform additional analyses to assess whether the relationship between the *current* geographical distribution of surveillance and Palestinian support for collective action is robust to our controls for Palestinian participation in and support for violence in the period *prior* to the construction of surveillance infrastructure. We focus on the separation barrier because the precise start date of its construction is known (i.e., June 2002) and perform two types of analyses.

First, we control for Palestinian support for violence before the construction of the barrier using data from three public opinion polls conducted by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research between July 2001 and May 2002 (total $N=2,473$). A representative sample of Palestinians living in the West Bank and Jerusalem were questioned about their support for military attacks on Israeli civilians, with information on respondent location at the district level ($n=11$). Using this data, we compute an indicator of popular support for militant actions across districts in Jerusalem and the West Bank. We then perform multilevel analyses of the impact of proximity to the separation barrier on current attitudes, controlling for popular support for militant actions before the construction of the barrier. In all models, the impact of surveillance remains statistically significant (see [Table S4](#) in the online supporting information).

Second, we control for Palestinian participation in violence before the construction of the barrier. We use data from *B'Tselem* to derive an indicator of the number of attacks on Israeli military and civilians from January 2000 to May 2002 within a specified radius (ranging from 1 to 15km) from the center of each community for *all* communities in the OPT ($n=560$). Examining whether past violence is related to the community's current distance to the separation barrier, we find no significant correlation with indicators of violence within a 5km radius ([Figure S3](#) in the online supporting information). As noted, the vast majority of Palestinian communities (almost 70%) are located less than 5km from the separation barrier, with a median distance of 3.1 km. When considering violence within a radius larger than 5 km, the indicator is only weakly correlated with a community's distance to the separation barrier. Overall, this suggests that for most Palestinian communities, there is no statistically significant link between past participation in violence and their *subsequent* exposure to surveillance. In a final step, we control for indicators of community-level participation in violence prior to the construction of the barrier using multilevel analysis. For violence within a 5 km radius, the impact of proximity to the barrier remains statistically significant for nonexclusionary norms and support for cooperative collective action. Past violence affects some current attitudes, that is, it is related to decreased support for cooperative collective action and lower nonexclusionary norms ([Figure S5](#) in the online supporting information).

Overall, these results allow us to rule out reverse causality as an alternative explanation for our findings.

Robustness check 3: Residential self-selection

In a third check, we assess whether results are biased due to residential self-selection, that is, that individuals with certain kinds of attitudes (e.g., more supportive of cooperative action) tend to move out from more heavily surveilled communities. We conduct the same analyses as shown in [Table 2](#) on a subsample of respondents who never moved from the community in which they were born ($N=769$). As on the full sample, we find that surveillance proximity decreases support for cooperative collective action and communication norms ([Table S5](#) in the online supporting information).

Robustness check 4: Alternative communal-level mechanisms

Finally, we assess the robustness of our findings to alternative community-level characteristics: exposure to violence, the proportion of the community's population living in more heavily surveilled Area C, the population size, whether the community is a refugee camp, and whether it belongs to Jerusalem.

Details of our analyses are provided in [Table S6](#) in the online supporting information and may be summarized as follows: The impact of exposure to the surveillance infrastructure on support for cooperative collective actions is robust to all controls. The impact of exposure to surveillance on the communication norms remains statistically significant when controlling for exposure to violence, population size, the proportion of population that belongs to *Area C*, as well as whether the community is a refugee camp. When controlling for whether the community belongs to Jerusalem, the impact of surveillance becomes nonsignificant for nonexclusionary norms ($p = .074$).

Overall, these additional analyses suggest that the hypothesized contextual paths are robust to various controls, with the exception of the difference between the West Bank and Jerusalem for nonexclusionary norms. As previous analyses have shown (see [Figure 2](#)), surveillance is more pronounced in Jerusalem relative to the West Bank. The separation barrier and heavily militarized checkpoints (the so-called “terminals,” Mansbach, 2009), isolate Jerusalem from the rest of the West Bank, affecting communication norms and support for collective action of the city's Palestinian community as a whole.

DISCUSSION

The Israeli surveillance infrastructure extends beyond the contentious barrier that separates Israel from the West Bank. Israeli military forces are present even in areas nominally under Palestinian control, and their presence, including military installations and permanent checkpoints, is highly visible. The data used in this study provide a unique perspective on Israeli surveillance and its effect on communities throughout the OPT. Most of the communities studied live in close proximity to checkpoints, military installations, or the separation barrier, but there was also substantial variation in community exposure. Combining representative survey data with geographically coded data on the surveillance infrastructure in the West Bank and Jerusalem, we examine how variation in exposure to surveillance affects collective action across Palestinian communities.

Our analyses yield three key findings. First, we find that exposure to Israeli surveillance affects support for collective action among local inhabitants: the greater the proximity to the surveillance infrastructure, the lower the support for cooperative forms of collective action that imply building alliances with Israeli Jews—such as negotiation, peaceful resistance, or collaboration with Israeli peace movements. The impact remains significant when controlling for personal experiences of humiliation and victimization, national identification, and perceptions of internal and external efficacy (Ayanian et al., 2021; Van Zomeren et al., 2008). What this suggests is that the impact of surveillance is broader than typically assumed in studies that focus on direct exposure to surveillance-related humiliation and abuse. In particular, it is not necessary to personally experience humiliation (as suggested by Longo et al., 2014) to be affected by surveillance. The sole fact of living in a highly surveilled *community* suffices to make support for cooperative actions less likely.

A second key finding points to a new, community-level mechanism underlying this relationship: Surveillance alters local norms regarding conflict narratives. The more a community is exposed to surveillance, the less its members tend to see inclusive narratives as normative. In turn, the more the local normative climate is perceived as hostile to the expression of nonexclusionary narratives, the less support there will be for cooperative forms of collective action.

A third key finding is that proximity to the surveillance infrastructure does not appear to affect confrontational forms of collective action, such as violent resistance and boycott. Previous studies have largely focused on the impact of repression on militant views and actions, a mechanism for which we find no empirical support. Our findings suggest instead that silencing *nonexclusionary* voices in the proximity of surveillance infrastructures is much more likely, resulting in an erosion of collective support for more cooperative actions.

In sum, our findings indicate that military surveillance changes the *balance* of support for different forms of collective action, specifically undermining more cooperative forms through a process of pushing (already rarer and more fragile) nonexclusionary intergroup narratives below a threshold of social relevance. These findings contribute to a contextual social psychological perspective on collective action (Pettigrew, 2018; Reicher, 2004): They suggest that support for collective action is affected by structural conditions and communication structures. Whether people will tend to support cooperative or confrontational actions not only depends on their personal experience and psychological motivations—the predominant focus of previous studies (see Van Zomeren et al., 2008)—but also on the broader environment in which they are embedded. In particular, it may be difficult to advocate for “cooperative” actions as *truly cooperative* (i.e., between equal partners working for a common goal), when living in the shadow of occupation and territorial dispossession (see Albzour et al., 2023).

We acknowledge several limitations of our study. First, our findings are based on correlational analyses, calling for caution in interpreting causal claims. However, they prove robust to various individual- and communal-level controls, thereby supporting the proposed causal interpretation as more plausible than a range of alternative explanations. Most notably, we perform extensive additional analyses to address potential reverse causality, that is, that past Palestinian violence would explain their current exposure to surveillance and political attitudes. Second, our measure of confrontational actions predominantly assesses support for armed resistance (alongside collective boycott). New studies should investigate the effects of the built environment of surveillance on a broader range of confrontational actions, such as nonviolent actions of civil disobedience and disruption (see Berglund, 2023).

In sum, our study has implications for examining how the built environment—the surveillance infrastructure in this case—shapes political attitudes writ large (see Nathan & Sands, 2023). It suggests that cooperative voices and the fabric of social communities easily become the first casualties of a system of visible and indiscriminate surveillance, especially when enforced by a powerful and threatening outgroup (Adelman & Dasgupta, 2019; Ariyanto et al., 2010). Policies that seek to stem violence and enhance security might, in effect, undermine pluralism, thereby permitting more aggressive and unilateral forms of action to dominate the discourse. These findings hence suggest that we are only starting to discover the full social costs of invasive systems of surveillance, constructed in the name of security in the OPT and elsewhere.

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Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of this article.

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