



Results of an Opinion Poll The West Bank & Gaza Strip

The Peace Process & Internal Politics

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Fieldwork: 19-20 January 2011

Sample size: 1200 Palestinians (West Bank and Gaza)

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Executive Summary

This was the second in a series of surveys tracking Palestinian public opinion on the peace process and internal Palestinian politics. The questionnaire was fielded between 19-20 January 2011, prior to the publication of the Palestine Papers and the events taking place in Egypt. The first survey in this series was conducted in October 2010.

For this survey, one thousand two hundred Palestinians were interviewed in the West Bank and Gaza. All socioeconomic groups were represented in the poll (for more details on the sample, please refer to the www.awrad.org). The margin of error in this poll is plus or minus 3 percent. The poll was carried out by the Arab World for Research and Development (AWRAD) by competent expert researchers under the supervision of Dr. Nader Said-Foqahaa, President of AWRAD.

Section One: The Peace Process

Negotiations

The poll mirrors October 2010 findings that the majority of Palestinian respondents (75 percent) believe that negotiations should resume only after a full freeze of settlement construction. Only 6 percent are willing to negotiate under a partial freeze. An additional 6 percent supports the resumption of negotiations without any conditions.

The role of the United Nations

A majority of 73 percent believe that the PA should directly petition the UN Security Council to declare a Palestinian state. Similarly, on the issue of settlements, 83 percent support a move by the PA to petition the Security Council for a resolution freezing settlement construction. Palestinians believe that the United States is the most influential entity on Israeli policies. When asked about the country that is most likely to affect Israeli policy towards settlements and final status issues, a majority of 58 percent said that an American recognition of an independent Palestinian state would have the most impact on Israeli policies. The second most important position was that of the EU (23 percent), followed by Russia (15 percent) and the Arab League (13 percent). Iran's recognition was deemed as most important by about 8 percent. Only small percentages of respondents feel that the recognition of countries such as Brazil and Argentina would be important in changing Israeli policies.

Obstacles

When asked to identify the single greatest obstacle confronting the peace process, the largest group (31 percent) of respondents, giving open-ended responses, cited the Israeli occupation. In contrast, 22 percent said internal Palestinian division was the biggest obstacle, while another 12 percent listed Israeli settlements. Five percent said progress was prevented by the lack of an Israeli negotiating partner and 3 percent named the United States.

Most respondents (59 percent) did not think the outcome of the American mid-term Congressional elections would affect the peace process. Twenty percent, however, said the outcome would be harmful, while 13 percent indicated they thought it would help, and 8 percent did not know.

Violence

About 71 percent of the Palestinian respondents in the West Bank and Gaza prefer non-violent means to resolve the ongoing conflict and end the occupation. Of those, 34 percent believe negotiations are the best means to end the occupation. Twenty-one percent believe a popular non-violent uprising is the best means. Seventeen percent believe that an international conference that imposes a settlement of the dispute is the best means. In contrast, 22 percent of respondents believe that violence is the best means to end the occupation. The remaining 8 percent have no definitive answer on the issue. No significant changes could be detected since October 2010 in this regard among Palestinian respondents.

Section Two: Evaluation of Government & Leaders

Consistent with the October 2010 poll, about 63 percent of the respondents believe that Palestinian society is heading in the wrong direction. Thirty-one percent said Palestine is moving in the right direction.

Evaluation of President Abbas

President Abbas's approval declined sharply (14 percent) from October 2010 to January 2011 (29 percent, down from 43 percent). The current poll shows respondents are divided in their evaluation of the overall performance of President Abbas, where 29 percent give him a "good" evaluation, 34 percent a "neutral" evaluation and 35 percent a "poor" evaluation. Since October 2010, Abbas's approval among West Bank respondents has declined by 11 percent and by 18 percent among Gazans. Lower approval numbers corresponded to a rise in disapproval—3 percent in the West Bank and 15 percent in Gaza.

A plurality of Palestinians (42 percent) do not feel Abbas has done his job well enough to be re-elected as President. This sentiment was particularly pronounced in Gaza, where 53 said his performance does not warrant reelection, compared with 36 percent in the West Bank.

Evaluation of Prime Minister Fayyad

Positive evaluation of the overall performance of Fayyad declined from 44 percent during October 2010 to 36 percent now, an 8- point decline. Fayyad, however, receives a better overall evaluation than either Abbas or Haniyeh. West Bank respondents view his performance more favorably than Gaza respondents, where 38 percent see it as good compared with 26 percent in Gaza. The negative evaluation of Fayyad’s performance increased by 10 points in Gaza, but remained static in the West Bank.

About 39 percent of the respondents believe that Fayyad has done his job well enough to be reappointed as Prime Minister. This represents a 6 point decline from October 2010 (45 percent).

Evaluation of Prime Minister Haniyeh

Compared with AWRAD’s October poll, the popularity of Haniyeh’s performance increased by 5 points, from 18 percent to 23 percent. The major increase in his positive evaluation was detected in Gaza from 23 percent in October to 31 percent now (8 points increase). No significant change was detected in the West Bank. Nevertheless, of the main Palestinian leaders tested in the poll, Haniyeh receives the lowest evaluation for his performance. Only 23 percent give him a positive evaluation, while 34 percent disapprove of his overall performance and 31 percent are neutral. At 19 percent, his approval is lowest in the West Bank. Gaza respondents were more polarized concerning his evaluation, where 31 percent evaluate his overall performance as “good” and 39 percent evaluate it as “poor.”

Positive Overall Evaluation of the Performance of Leaders		
Leader	October 2010	January 2011
Abbas	43%	29%
Fayyad	44%	36%
Haniyeh	18%	23%

Performance on Corruption, Security, and Public Services

Overall, there was no significant shift in Palestinian attitudes toward the performance of the West Bank and Gaza governments since the October 2010 poll. As in October, approval ratings for both the Ramallah and Gaza administrations hovered in the mid-thirty range and neither government received approval ratings above 38 percent. However, approval of PA’s performance on fighting corruption and improving security declined markedly among West Bank respondents from October 2010, and corresponded with a rise in approval among Gazans of Haniyeh’s performance in the same areas. Though the PA government led by Salam Fayyad outperformed the Haniyeh government in the field of service provision, its 36 percent approval

rating in this area nevertheless represents a three percent drop from October 2010. This was mirrored by a similar four percent drop in Haniyeh’s public service approval. It is worth noting that though the PA receives far fewer “poor” ratings among West Bank respondents (19 percent) than Haniyeh receives among Gaza respondents (43 percent), Haniyeh’s “poor” rating among Gazans improved by 11 percent since October 2010.

Haniyeh’s government appears to be more polarizing, as evidenced by both higher positive ratings and negative ratings than the PA in the areas of security, fighting corruption, and delivering public services. For example, in the field of fighting corruption the Haniyeh cabinet in Gaza receives higher positive (40 percent vs. 36 percent) and negative (34 percent vs. 26 percent) approval ratings than the PA government in the West Bank. The trend was also evident in the area of improving security—Haniyeh received 42 percent approval compared to the PA’s 36 percent but also received 32 percent disapproval compared to the PA’s 26 percent.

Positive Evaluation (“Good”) of the Fayyad vs. Haniyeh Governments (by respective West Bank and Gaza respondents)						
	Fayyad Government			Haniyeh Government		
	Oct 2010	Jan 2011	Variance	Oct 2010	Jan 2011	Variance
Fighting Corruption	37%	29%	-8%	27%	40%	+13%
Improving Security	43%	36%	-7%	34%	42%	+8%
Public Services	44%	41%	-3%	18%	27%	+9%

Section Three: Elections

Support and Participation

As in October 2010, the vast majority of Palestinians (79 percent) support the conduct of municipal, legislative and presidential elections as soon as possible. Only 16 percent disagree. Also consistent with the October 2010 poll, 71 percent of respondents said they will participate in the next elections and 24 percent say that they will not.

With respect to the conditions and timeframe for future elections, Palestinians were divided between those who wanted elections immediately (about 43 percent) and those who thought elections should be held after reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas (about 41 percent). Only 5 percent said elections should remain on hold indefinitely. Forty-one percent of respondents said Presidential, PLC and municipal elections should be held at different times, while 33 percent all elections should be held simultaneously and 21 percent said it didn’t matter.

Palestinian Legislative Council Elections

When questioned about party preferences for the PLC, the largest group of respondents indicated support for Fatah candidates. At 35 percent, this popular support nevertheless represents a 7 percent decline from the 42 percent Fatah enjoyed in October 2010. At 34 percent, undecided voters (or seeking other options) remained the second largest group, followed by Hamas with 14 percent. The PFLP receives less than 5 percent, while an independent list led by Fayyad receives almost 4 percent and the Mubadara receive less than 4 percent.

Presidential Elections

As to presidential candidates' popularity, the following results emerge in the absence of Marwan Bargouthi on a list of seven candidates: With 22 percent, Abbas receives the most support, followed by a highly contested second place between Fayyad (13 percent), Haniyeh (13 percent) and Mustafa Bargouthi (11 percent). Mohamad Dahlan received just 4 percent support, on par with support for Khaled Meshal. As in the October 2010 poll, about 15 percent would not choose any of the seven leaders listed and 18 percent are undecided.

Fatah-Hamas Reconciliation

The overwhelming majority (71 percent) of respondents believe reconciliation talks between the two parties are the best means to end the domestic political division. The majority of Palestinians (51 percent) blame Fatah and Hamas equally for the lack of progress in the reconciliation process. About 16 percent place all the blame on Hamas and 8 percent hold Fatah responsible for the lack of progress. Eight percent blame the United States and about 4 percent blame Arab countries other than Egypt.

Section Four: The Tunis-Aftermath

The vast majority of Palestinians (91 percent) have followed events in Tunisia that led to the removal of President Zein Eddine AlAbdine Ben Ali. At 74 percent, a broad majority of Palestinians viewed the so-called Jasmine revolution positively, while 18 percent viewed it as negative. Gazans viewed the Tunisian events more negatively than respondents in the West Bank (24 percent compared to 15 percent). The Largest group of respondents (41 percent) predicted that Egypt will be next in line for change, while 10 percent predicted that the first country to see regime change is Jordan followed by 8 percent for Algeria, 6 percent for Palestine, 4 percent in Yemen, and 3 percent for each of Syria and Morocco.