

The **Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (PSR)** is an independent nonprofit institution and think tank of policy analysis and academic research. PSR was founded with the goal of advancing scholarship and knowledge on immediate issues of concern to Palestinians in three areas: domestic politics and government, strategic analysis and foreign policy, and public opinion polls and survey research. The center engages in several activities. It conducts academic and policy analysis studies. It organizes socio-political surveys and public opinion polls on current Palestinian political and social attitudes. It sponsors study groups and task forces on issues of critical importance to the Palestinians. Finally, it organizes conferences, public lectures, and briefings on current public policy issues. PSR is dedicated to promoting objective and nonpartisan research and analysis and to encouraging a better understanding of Palestinian domestic and international environment in an atmosphere of free debate and exchange of ideas.

This poll is part of PSR series of regular polls.

This poll has been conducted in cooperation with the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung in Ramallah



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PRESS RELEASE

Palestinian Public Opinion Poll No (57)

As 80% of the public believe that Palestine is no longer the Primary Arab cause, as the public declines to grant confidence to the PLO and its Executive Committee, and as two thirds of the public believe that the PA is not doing all it can to protect Palestinians against settlers' terrorism and view it as a burden on the Palestinian people, popularity of president Abbas and Fatah declines and two thirds demand the president's resignation; indeed a majority supports a return to armed intifada

17-19 September 2015

These are the results of the latest poll conducted by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (PSR) in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip between 17 and 19 September 2015. The period before the poll witnessed the announcement that president Abbas has submitted his resignation from the PLO Executive Committee and called for convening a session for the Palestinian National Council. The session was later postponed by three months. The period also witnessed settlers' terrorism in the village of Duma leading to the death of three members of the Dawabsha family. It witnessed a reconciliation government reshuffle introducing five new ministers; a step that deepened the rift between Hamas and Fatah, particularly given the reports of recent indirect Hamas negotiations with Israel over a long term truce. The period witnessed setting a date in November 2015 for convening Fatah's seventh Congress. Finally, an escalation of tension in Jerusalem and al Haram al Sharif (the Noble Sanctuary) characterized the days of data collection as Palestinians suspected an Israeli intention to change the status quo in the holy places in the city. This press release addresses many of those issues and covers attitudes regarding Palestinian elections, conditions in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, reconciliation, and other internal and international issues. Total size of the sample is 1270 adults interviewed face to face in 127 randomly selected locations. Margin of error is 3%.

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Main Findings:

Findings of the third quarter of 2015 indicate that two thirds of the public demand the resignation of president Abbas and two thirds do not believe his current resignation from the PLO Executive Committee is real. Moreover, findings show that the popularity of Abbas has dropped significantly in the West Bank while improving slightly in the Gaza Strip.

Fatah's popularity has declined in both West Bank and the Gaza Strip. By contrast, the popularity of Ismail Haniyeh increased significantly in the West Bank and declined slightly in the Gaza Strip. The popularity of Hamas dropped significantly in the Gaza Strip and improved in the West Bank. If Abbas does not participate in the next presidential elections, the only viable candidates from Fatah to replace him are Marwan Barghouti followed, but with much less support, by Mohammad Dahlan and Saeb Erikat. Among Hamas candidates, Ismail Haniyeh and Khalid Mishaal are the most popular to replace Abbas and among the independents the most popular is Rami al Hamdallah followed by Salam Fayyad.

Two thirds of the public support Hamas-Israel indirect negotiations over a long term Hudna, or truce, in return for ending the siege over the Gaza Strip. But a majority believes that these negotiations will not succeed. A majority rejects the belief that such negotiations, even if they succeed, would harm the chances for reconciliation.

The public does not view the PLO or its Executive Committee positively and declines to give it a mandate to make important decisions on behalf of the Palestinians. Instead, the public prefers to give such a mandate to the PA even if the decisions in question relate to the permanent settlement with Israel. This however does not mean that the public has considerable trust in the PA; to the contrary, a majority believes that it has become a burden on the Palestinian people and for the first time since we started asking, a majority now demands the dissolution of that authority.

Findings show that two thirds of the public believe that protection of Palestinians against settler's terrorism is the responsibility of the PA, not the Israeli army. But two thirds believe that the PA is not doing enough to protect the Palestinian citizens. To protect Palestinian towns and villages targeted by settlers, the largest percentage has selected, from among several options, the deployment of the Palestinian security forces in those areas. The public believes that if the PA formally establishes civil guard units made up of volunteers in such areas, it too would help provide protection. Indeed, half of West Bankers say that if such unarmed units were established, they would volunteer to join them.

Findings indicate a decline in the level of support for the two-state solution. Additionally, two thirds of the public reject a return to unconditional negotiations if such a return does not mean a freeze on settlement construction and a majority rejects the so-called "French proposals." By contrast, support for a return to an armed intifada rises sharply with a clear majority in favor.

Several factors might shed light on the drop in the popularity of Abbas and Fatah, the diminishing legitimacy of the PA and the PLO, the decline in support for the peace process, and the rise in support for armed struggle. Current tensions and confrontations in al Aqsa Mosque, Jerusalem, and the rest of the West Bank might be at the heart of these developments. Additionally, anger at the PA might have recently accumulated due to various factors: the belief that the PA prevents demonstrations against the Israeli occupation waged in solidarity with Jerusalem and al Aqsa Mosque, the belief that the PA is failing to protect Palestinians against settlers' terrorism in the aftermath of the settlers' burning of the Dawabsha family in the village of Duma, the PA manipulation of the rules to hold a quick session for the Palestine National Council including the submission of fake resignations from the PLO Executive Committee, and the recent leak of documents showing cases of financial corruption within the PA. Additionally, the developments indicated in this poll might have also been triggered by anger at the Arab World as the overwhelming majority believes that Arabs no longer care about the fate of the Palestinians, that Palestine is no longer the primary cause of the Arabs, and that Arab countries have in fact entered an alliance with Israel against Iran despite the continued Israeli occupation.

(1) Palestinian Elections:

- 65% of the public want president Abbas to resign while 31% want him to remain in office. However, two thirds believe the president's recent resignation from the PLO Executive Committee is not real while 23% think it is real.
- If president Abbas does not nominate himself in a new elections, 32% prefer to see Marwan Barghouti replacing him, while 19% prefer Ismail Haniyeh, and 8% prefer Ramil al Hamdallah. Khalid Mishal and Mohammad Dahlan follow with 6% each; 5% prefer Mustapha Barghouti, 4% prefer Saeb Erikat, and 3% prefer Salam Fayyad.
- If new presidential elections were held today and only two were nominated, Ismail Haniyeh and Mahmoud Abbas, the former would win 49% (compared to 46% three months ago) and the latter 44% (compared to 47% three months ago). In the Gaza Strip, Abbas and Haniyeh receive an equal number of votes (48% each) and in the West Bank Haniyeh wins with 49% compared to 42% for Abbas.

- Level of satisfaction with the performance of president Abbas drops from 44% three months ago to 38% in this poll. Satisfaction with Abbas stood at 50% in June 2014 in the aftermath of the Shati reconciliation declaration but before the latest Gaza war.
- If presidential elections were between Marwan Barghouti and Haniyeh, the former would receive 55% and the latter would receive 39% of the participants' votes. Three months ago, Barghouti received 58% and Haniyeh 36%. If presidential elections were between three: Mahmud Abbas, Marwan Barghouti and Ismail Haniyeh, Abbas would receive 24%, Barghouti 34% and Haniyeh 36%.
- If new legislative elections were held today with the participation of all factions, 71% say they would participate in such elections. Of those who would participate, 35% say they would vote for Hamas and 35% say they would vote for Fatah, 11% would vote for all other third parties combined, and 19% are undecided. Three months ago, vote for Hamas stood at 35% and Fatah at 39%. In June 2014, just before the Gaza war, vote for Hamas stood at 32% and Fatah 40%. Vote for Hamas in the Gaza Strip stands in this poll at 34% (compared to 39% three months ago) and for Fatah at 37% (compared to 44% three months ago). In the West Bank vote for Hamas stands at 35% (compared to 32% three months ago) and Fatah at 34% (compared to 36% three months ago).
- Even if the West Bank-Gaza Strip split continues throughout this year, 56% oppose and 41% support holding presidential and parliamentary elections in the West Bank only. Similarly, 62% oppose and 36% support holding presidential and parliamentary elections in the Gaza Strip only.
- Even if Fatah succeeds in holding its seventh congress on time before the end of the year, 53% believe the movement will remain weak regardless of whether it will or will not elect a new leadership. 32% believe Fatah will remain or will become stronger after holding its seventh congress

(2) Domestic Conditions:

- 50% believe that the latest reconciliation government reshuffle will not make the government more able to deliver services to the public but 42% believe that it will indeed become more able to do that.
- Positive evaluation of conditions in the Gaza Strip stands at 12% and positive evaluation of conditions in the West Bank stands at 31%.
- Perception of safety and security in the Gaza Strip stands at 40%. In the West Bank perception of safety and security stands at 49%.
- Findings show that the percentage of Gazans who say they seek immigration to other countries stands at 52%; in the West Bank, the percentage stands at 24%.
- Al Jazeera viewership is the highest, standing at 22%; Al Arabiyya stands at 9%. Viewership of PA's Palestine TV stands at 20% and Hamas' al Aqsa TV at 15%. Maan-Mix viewership stands at 18%.
- Perception of corruption in PA institutions stands at 79%.
- 23% say there is press freedom in the West Bank and 19% say the same about the status of the press in the Gaza Strip.
- 31% of the Palestinian public say people in the West Bank can criticize the PA authority in the West Bank without fear. 29% say people in the Gaza Strip can criticize the authorities in Gaza without fear.

(3) The reconciliation government and its role in Gaza:

- Optimism about the success of reconciliation and the end of the split stands today at 40% and pessimism at 56%. Three months ago optimism stood at 38% and pessimism at 59%.
- Fifteen months after its establishment, satisfaction with the performance of the reconciliation government stands at 34%; dissatisfaction stands at 60%. Three months ago, satisfaction stood at 35%. It is worth mentioning that right after its establishment, 61% had confidence in the reconciliation government.
- 51% (56% in the Gaza Strip) want to place the reconciliation government in charge of the Rafah crossing, but 34% (28% in the Gaza Strip) prefer to keep it under Hamas' control. The same applies to the crossings with Israel with 54% (59% in the Gaza Strip) wishing to place them under the control of the reconciliation government.
- 48% want the reconciliation government to be in charge of the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip and 30% want it placed in the hands of Hamas.
- Belief that Hamas was responsible for hindering the functioning of the reconciliation government does not exceed 22% while 35% believe that the PA and president Abbas were to blame for that and 12% blame the head of the reconciliation government.

- 74% believe that the reconciliation government should be responsible for paying the salary of the Gazan civil public sector that used to work for the previous Hamas government. A similar percentage (71%) believes that the reconciliation government is also responsible for paying the salary of the Gaza police and security personnel who used to work for the previous Hamas government.
- 61% want the reconciliation government, not Hamas, to be in charge of the Gaza police force and security personnel who used to work for the previous Hamas government; 33% believe Hamas should be the one in charge.
- 75% support the unification of the police forces in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, including those who used to work for the previous Hamas government, under the full command and control of the reconciliation government. But 23% prefer to maintain the current status quo in the Gaza Strip, i.e., continued Hamas control of the police in the Gaza Strip.
- A majority of 53% believes that the PA has become a burden on the Palestinian people and only 40% believe it is an accomplishment. Three months ago, 48% said the PA was a burden and 46% said it was an accomplishment.
- Only 28% agree that a successful Hamas-Israel negotiations for a long term hudna, or truce, would have a negative impact on the chances for reconciliation. By contrast, 34% believe such a success would have a positive impact on reconciliation and 32% believe it would have no impact.
- Only 23% agree that the convening of the PLO National Council would have a negative impact on reconciliation. By contrast, 33% believe it would have a positive impact and 36% believe it would have no impact.
- 52% believe that recent reconciliation government reshuffle will have a negative impact on reconciliation while 32% believe it will have a positive impact.

(4) Hamas, *Hudna* negotiations, and the Gaza War:

- 65% support indirect negotiations between Hamas and Israel to reach a long term *hudna*, or truce, in the Gaza Strip in return for lifting the siege and 32% oppose such negotiations.
- 41% believe that the chances for success in the Hamas-Israel negotiations are high or medium while 56% believe the chances are slim or non-existent.
- Belief that Hamas has won the Gaza War stands at 59%; 26% believe the two sides were losers. In the Gaza Strip, only 42% say Hamas came out a winner while in the West Bank 69% believe Hamas came out a winner. A year ago, 69% of the public in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip said Hamas came out a winner.
- Percentage of satisfaction with war achievements compared to the human and material losses sustained by the Gaza Strip stands at 38% and dissatisfaction at 60%.
- Despite that, a majority of 67% supports the launching of rockets from the Gaza Strip at Israel if the siege and blockade are not ended.

(5) The Palestinian National Council (PNC):

- A majority of 52% believes the PLO will remain weak even if the Palestine National Council (PNC) elects a new leadership while 36% believe the PLO will remain strong, or will become stronger, after the convening of the PNC.
- Under current conditions of West Bank-Gaza Strip split, the absence of the Palestinian Legislative Council, and the failure to hold new elections, we asked the public to identify the Palestinian actor that has the legitimate authority and mandate to make decisions regarding eight major issues. In all eight issues, the largest percentage selected the Palestinian Authority and its reconciliation government rather than the PLO and its Executive Committee. For example:
 - ✓ 52% selected the PA to make decisions regarding the holding of presidential and parliamentary elections while only 20% selected the PLO.
 - ✓ Similarly, 50% selected the PA to make decisions regarding cessation of security or civil coordination with Israel while only 19% selected the PLO.
 - ✓ 48% selected the PA to make decisions regarding the appointment of a PA deputy president while 22% selected the PLO.
 - ✓ Even with regard to return to negotiations with Israel, 45% selected the PA and only 25% selected the PLO.

- ✓ Similarly, 43% selected the PA to make decisions regarding accepting or rejecting a UN Security Council resolution that outlines the terms for permanent peace with Israel. Only 27% selected the PLO to make that decision.
- ✓ Answers were similar to other issues such as decisions to dissolve the PA or to find a temporary replacement to PA president in case of his resignation.
- ✓ The only issue in which the public divided responsibility more equally was regarding the replacement of the chairman of the PLO Executive Committee in case of his resignation. In this case, 37% said the PA should make the decision while 36% said the PLO should make that decision.
- ✓ In all issues, a small minority ranging between 10% and 14%, depending on the issue, selected Hamas as the actor with the mandate to decide while 5% to 9% selected Fatah.

(6) Settlers' terrorism and the absence of security for Palestinians:

- A majority of 67% say the PA does not do all it can to protect Palestinians against settlers' terrorism while 31% say it does.
- A majority of 68% believes that the PA should be responsible for protecting Palestinians against settlers' terrorism while 18% believe that Palestinian citizens should protect themselves. 11% believe it is the responsibility of the Israeli army to protect Palestinians against settlers' terrorism.
- The largest percentage (43%) believes that deployment of Palestinian security forces in villages and towns targeted by settlers' violence is the best means of delivering security for Palestinians while 28% believe that a return to an armed intifada is the most effective means to deliver security. 27% believe that towns and villages should form their own unarmed local defense committees.
- If the PA officially forms unarmed civil guard units made up of volunteers to protect areas targeted by settlers' violence, such a step would contribute to Palestinian security in those areas according to 60% of the public. 39% believe such a step would not do that.
- If such civil guard units are established by the PA, 48% of respondents in the West Bank say they would volunteer to join them while 49% said they would not.

(7) Peace Process and Israel's long term aspirations:

- A majority of 60% rejects and 37% accept a French proposal that would request the UN Security Council to issue a resolution affirming the establishment of a Palestinian state on the borders of 1967 with territorial swaps, making Jerusalem a joint capital for Palestine and Israel, setting a timetable for ending Israeli occupation, and holding an international peace conference.
- A majority of 66% rejects and 32% accept return to unconditional negotiations with Israel if that means no cessation of settlement activities.
- An overwhelming majority of 88% demands that the PA take Israel to the International Criminal Court for building settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories.
- Only 48% support and 51% oppose the two-state solution. Three months ago, 51% supported and 48% opposed this solution.
- Palestinian views on the most effective means of establishing a Palestinian state alongside the state of Israel vary: 42% think that armed action is the most effective, 29% think negotiations is the most effective, and 24% think popular non-violent resistance is the most effective. Three months ago, only 36% said armed action was the most effective and 32% said negotiations was the most effective.
- A majority of 65% believes that the two-state solution is no longer practical due to settlement expansion while 32% say it is still practical. Three months ago, only 55% said the two-state solution was no longer practical.
- Despite this, only 30% support, and 69% oppose, a one-state solution in which Arabs and Jews enjoy equal rights. Three months ago, 34% supported the one-state solution.
- 78% believe that the chances for establishing a Palestinian state next to the state of Israel in the next five years are slim to non-existent and 21% believe the chances are high or medium.
- The percentage of those who are worried that they would be hurt by Israel or that their land would be confiscated or homes demolished stands at 81%. 19% are not worried.

- Furthermore, an overwhelming majority of 85% believes that Israel's long term aspiration is to annex the lands occupied in 1967 and expel their population or deny them their rights. 15% believe that Israel's long term aspiration is to insure its security and withdraw from all or most of the territories occupied in 1967.
- When asked about the long term aspiration of the PA and the PLO, 64% said that it is to recover all or parts of the land occupied in 1967 while 26% said it was to conquer the state of Israel or conquer the state of Israel and kill most of the Jews.
- Findings also show that 45% support the Arab Peace Initiative and 49% oppose it. Similarly, only 40% support a mutual recognition of national identity of Israel as the state for the Jewish people and Palestine as the state for the Palestinian people and 58% oppose it.
- An overwhelming majority believes that al Haram al Sharif is in grave danger: 50% believe that Israel intends to destroy al Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock and replace them with a Jewish temple; 21% believe that it intends to divide the plateau on which the two mosques sit so that Jews would have a synagogue alongside the Muslim holy places; and 10% believe that Israel intends to change the status quo prevailing in the plateau since 1967 by allowing Jews to pray there. Only 12% believe that Israel is interested in maintaining the status quo without change. One half of the public believes that Israel will indeed succeed in implementing its plans for al Haram al Sharif and 48% believe it will not succeed.
- In the absence of a peace negotiation, 83% support joining more international organizations; 63% support a popular non-violent resistance; 51% support the dissolution of the PA; and 57% support a return to an armed intifada. Three months ago, only 46% supported the dissolution of the PA and only 49% supported return to armed intifada.

(8) Israel and the Arab World, Hamas and Iran, and ISIS:

- 80% say the Arab World is too preoccupied with its own concerns, internal conflicts, and the conflict with Iran and that Palestine is no longer the Arab's principal or primary issue or cause. 18% think Palestine remains the Arab's principle cause.
- 58% believe that there is an Arab Sunni alliance with Israel against Iran despite the continued Israeli occupation of Arab land while 31% believe that the Arabs would not ally themselves with Israel until it ends its occupation and allows the creation of a Palestinian state.
- The nuclear agreement with Iran is an accomplishment for the US in the eyes of 26% of the public; an accomplishment for Iran in the eyes of 23%; and an accomplishment for both sides in the eyes of 34%.
- In the context of the recent visit to Saudi Arabia by Hamas leaders, 40% of the public believe that Hamas will improve relations with that country while maintaining good relations with Iran; 27% believe that Hamas will remain close to Iran and its relations with Saudi Arabia will not improve; and 16% believe that Hamas will join the Saudi anti-Iran axis.
- An overwhelming majority of 91% believes that ISIS is a radical group that does not represent true Islam and 6% believe it does represent true Islam. 3% are not sure or do not know. In the Gaza Strip, 9% (compared to 4% in the West Bank) say ISIS represents true Islam.
- 83% support and 13% oppose the war waged by Arab and Western countries against ISIS.

(9) Most vital Palestinian goals and the main problems confronting Palestinians today:

- 48% believe that the *first* most vital Palestinian goal should be to end Israeli occupation in the areas occupied in 1967 and build a Palestinian state in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip with East Jerusalem as its capital. By contrast, 30% believe the first most vital goal should be to obtain the right of return of refugees to their 1948 towns and villages, 13% believe that it should be to build a pious or moral individual and a religious society, one that applies all Islamic teachings, and 9% believe that the first and most vital goal should be to establish a democratic political system that respects freedoms and rights of Palestinians.
- The most serious problem confronting Palestinian society today is the continuation of occupation and settlement activities in the eyes of 28% of the public; 26% say it is poverty and unemployment; 24% say it is the spread of corruption in some public institutions; 16% believe it is the siege of the Gaza Strip and the closure of its crossings; and 5% say it is the split and the absence of national unity.