

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

Public Opinion Poll No (87)

In light of the recent events in Huwara and the northern West Bank, Palestinian public attitudes become more militant as support for armed struggle rises, support for the two-state solution drops, and the vast majority opposes the Aqaba meeting; parallel to that, trust in the PA declines, demand for the resignation of president Abbas rises, and for the first time since the creation of the PA, a majority says that its dissolution or collapse serves the interest of the Palestinian people

8-11 March 2023

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 8 and 11 March 2023. The period before the conduct of the poll witnessed several developments including the continuation of the teachers' strike in public schools, the imposition by the PA of one Shekel added to each telecommunication bill as a donation to an East Jerusalem fund, the holding of student elections at Hebron University in which a Fatah affiliated bloc won against a Hamas affiliated one. In Palestinian-Israeli relations, armed confrontations continued to escalate in the West Bank, the PA announced a suspension of security coordination with Israel, and Israel took punitive measures against the PA including the confiscation and withholding of funds. Settlers attacked the town of Huwara and burned dozens of homes with residents inside as well as shops and cars and killed one civilian in a revenge attack following the killing of two settlers in the town earlier that day. A Palestinian-Israeli meeting took place in Aqaba, in the presence of Egyptian, Jordanian, and American delegations, to discuss means of de-escalation and the ending of unilateral measures. In Israel, tens of thousands demonstrated against the Netanyahu government's plan to change the judicial system. Regionally, an earthquake hit Turkey and Syria bringing vast destruction and the death of tens of thousands.

This press release addresses these issues and covers other matters such as the general conditions in the Palestinian territories, the peace process and future possible directions for Palestinians in the absence of a viable peace process. Total size of the sample is 1200 adults interviewed face to face in 120 randomly selected locations. Margin of error is +/-3%.

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Main Findings:

The findings of the first quarter of 2023 indicate that the internal factional balance of power remains unchanged, with parity between Fatah and Hamas, if new parliamentary elections were to take place today, and a majority vote for Hamas' candidate, Ismail Haniyyeh, over Mahmud Abbas in presidential elections. Satisfaction with president Abbas drops four percentage points and the demand for resignation increases by two points.

Public evaluation of internal conditions points to a greater deterioration in the standing of the PA and a significant loss of trust in it. Findings show a rise in the belief that the PA is now a burden on the Palestinian people and for the first time in our polls, a majority supports the dissolution of the PA and views its collapse as an interest for the Palestinian people. In fact, a majority thinks that the continued existence of the PA serves the interests of Israel and that its dissolution or collapse would strengthen Palestinian armed groups.

The declining status of the PA can also be seen in the vast public support, standing at 70% in the West Bank, for the strike of the West Bank teachers in public schools and the belief of about 80% or more of the public that the current PA government will fail in conducting elections, reunifying the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, or improving economic conditions. Loss of trust in the PA can be seen in the overwhelming opposition to the PA's imposition of a one-Shekel tax on the telecommunication bill to support East Jerusalem. On top of that opposition, about 80% say the money will not really go to East Jerusalemites.

Findings of the current quarter point a significant decline in the support for the two-state solution accompanied by an increase in the percentage of those who think this solution is no longer practical or feasible due to settlement expansion. Furthermore, the public expresses widespread pessimism about the ability of international organizations and the international community, including the US, the EU, and the Arab states, to impose sanctions on the current Israeli government to pressure it to change its settlement policy or its violations of international law.

In light of all that, findings show a rise in the percentage of those who support a return to armed confrontation and intifada. In fact, 70% of West Bankers expect the eruption of a third armed intifada. Moreover, more than 70% declare support for the latest Huwara shooting attack against settlers; two thirds support the formation of armed groups, such as the Jenin Battalion or the Lions' Den; and almost all express the view that the PA security services should not arrest or disarm members of these groups. More than 60% of the West Bankers believe that members of these armed groups will resist with arms any attempt by the PA security services to disarm or arrest them. Public support for armed resistance is further confirmed by overwhelming opposition to the Palestinian participation in the Aqaba meeting. Almost all Palestinians think Israel will not honor its commitments in that meeting. A large majority, standing at 70%, think Israeli counter measures, which are meant to punish those who commit armed attacks or their families, such as home demolition, expulsion, or the imposition of the death penalty, will only lead to an increase in the intensity of such attacks.

On the background of the settlers' attack on Huwara and given the current right wing government in Israel, two thirds of the public expect an increase in these attacks. In light of the call by the Israeli finance minister to wipe out Huwara, a large minority, approaching almost half of the public, expect Israel to commit massacres and force a large-scale mass expulsion. Three quarters of the public view the Huwara settlers' attack as an expression of the behavior of the Israeli government and army rather than the behavior of the most extreme settlers.

(1) Armed escalation, security coordination, the Aqaba meeting, and a third intifada:

- A vast majority of 73% is against and only 21% are in favor of the Palestinian attendance of the Aqaba meeting which took place last month in order to stop the escalation of the armed conflict in the West Bank.
- 84% think Israel will not honor its commitments in the Aqaba meeting; only 12% think Israel will implement its commitments.
- 64% say that now, after the Aqaba meeting, they are less optimistic regarding possible improvement in Palestinian-Israeli relations, such as the prospects for the implementation of confidence building measures or the slowing down of settlement expansion next year;

only 8% say they are more optimistic and 24% say they are neither more nor less optimistic.

- 68% of the public (71% in the Gaza Strip and 66% in the West Bank) say they are in favor of forming armed groups such as the “Lions’ Den,” which do not take orders from the PA and are not part of the PA security services; 25% are against that.
- Nonetheless, 52% are worried that the formation of such armed groups could lead to armed clashes with the PA security services; 44% are not worried.
- 83% say they are against the surrender of the armed groups’ members and their arms to the PA in order to receive protection against Israeli assassination; 12% say they are for it.
- The vast majority (87%) says the PA does not have the right to arrest member of these armed groups in order to prevent them from carrying out attacks against Israel or to provide them with protection; only 8% say they favor it.
- A majority of 58% expects these armed groups to expand and spread to other areas in the West Bank; 15% expect Israel to succeed in arresting or killing their members; and 14% expect the PA to succeed in containing or coopting these groups.
- A majority of 61% (69% in the West Bank and 48% in the Gaza Strip) expect security conditions in the West Bank to continue to escalate leading to the eruption of a third armed intifada; 36% say they do not expect a third intifada.
- If security conditions escalate further or if a third intifada were to erupt, a majority of 62% does not expect the PA security services to join forces with the Palestinian armed groups; 33% say they expect them to do so.
- A majority of 56% says they do not expect the PA to deploy its security forces in the Jenin refugee camp or the old city of Nablus and other areas in which armed groups have recently been formed in order to enforce law and order and ensure “one authority-one gun” by disarming these groups and arresting their member in return for concessions that Israel might provide; 37% say they expect the PA to do so.
- If the PA attempted to disarm the newly created armed groups, a majority of 59% thinks that members of these groups will use their arms to resist the PA security services; 8% think they will surrender; and 23% think they will resist the PA but non-violently.
- A majority of 63% says it supports the ending of security coordination with Israel that was announced recently by the PA while 32% say they are opposed to it. But the overwhelming majority (79%) thinks the PA did not actually suspend security coordination with Israel; only 13% think it did.
- The vast majority (77%) thinks Israel will not stop its army incursions into PA territories in order to encourage the PA to return to security coordination; 18% think Israel will do so. 61% think the PA will not return to security coordination if Israel continued its daily incursions while 32% think the PA will resume security coordination even if the Israeli army incursions continue.
- 70% (73% in the West Bank and 66% in the Gaza Strip) believe the Israel measures aimed at punishing Palestinian attackers and their families, such as demolishing their homes, or expelling them, or imposing the death penalty, will lead to greater armed attacks; 8% think these measures will lead to lesser attacks; and 20% think they will have no impact on armed attacks.

(2) Whose interest is served by the continued existence or the collapse of the PA?

- The largest percentage (41%) says Israeli punitive measures against the PA aim at weakening it; 27% think Israel aims at forcing a PA collapse; and 27% think Israel does not want to weaken the PA or bring it to collapse.

- When asked to define Israel's interest regarding the PA, its continued existence or its collapse, the majority (57%) says the survival of the PA is in Israel's interest while 39% think Israel's interest lies in the collapse of the PA.
- When asked to define the interest of the Palestinian people regarding the PA, its continued existence or its collapse or dissolution, a majority of 52% says the Palestinian people's interest lies in the collapse or dissolution of the PA while 42% define the continued existence of the PA as a Palestinian interest.
- In the event that the PA becomes weak or collapses, such a development is seen by 57% of the public as leading to the strengthening of the armed groups in the West Bank while 12% think it will weaken them; 27% think it will neither weaken nor strengthen the armed groups.
- If it becomes pretty clear that Israel aims at weakening the PA or even forcing its collapse, 67% of the public thinks the major Arab countries, such as Egypt or Saudi Arabia, will abandon the PA; 28% think they will stand with the PA.

(3) The shooting in Huwara, the settler's terror, and the absence of PA police:

- A large majority of 71% say they support the shooting of two settlers in Huwara while 21% express opposition to this and similar armed attacks.
- Three quarters (75%) believe the settlers' terror attack on Huwara after the killing of the two settlers is an expression of the policy of the Israeli government and army while 20% think it is an expression of the behavior of the extreme settlers only.
- Two thirds (67%) expect increased settlers' attacks under the current right wing Israeli government, but 16% say there will be less attacks, and 14% think the frequency of settlers' attacks will remain unchanged.
- When asked why the PA police and other security services were unable to protect the residents of Huwara and other towns located in area B of the West Bank, despite the fact that the PA has jurisdiction over law enforcement in such areas, the public was divided into four groups. One group of 32% thinks the PA leadership and government prefer to maintain security coordination with Israel over protecting its own people. A second group, of 27%, thinks the PA police and national security forces do not wish to engage the Israeli army in an armed confrontation. A third group, of 24%, thinks the PA police does not have a jurisdiction over the settlers and cannot arrest them. A fourth group, of 11%, thinks the settlers' attacks occur during the night when the PA police is not present in the targeted areas.
- When asked what should the PA do to protect the residents of Huwara and other towns located in area B of the West Bank, the largest percentage (39%) says it should form civil guards units made up of volunteers from these towns; 27% say it should build police stations or place permanent police units in these areas; 13% say it should complain to the UN and the International Criminal Court; and 9% say it should issue statements of condemnation.
- In light of the call by Smotrich, the Israeli minister of finance, to wipe out the town of Huwara, a large minority of 44% expects the Israeli government to commit massacres and force a mass expulsion of Palestinians if and when Palestinian armed attacks expand; but a majority of 53% says it does not expect that.

(4) Legislative and presidential elections:

- 68% say they support the holding of presidential and legislative elections in the Palestinian territories in the near future while 28% say they do not support that. Demand for elections stands at 76% in the Gaza Strip and 63% in the West Bank. However, a majority of 69% believes no legislative, or legislative and presidential, elections will take place soon.

- If new presidential elections were held today and only two were nominated, Mahmoud Abbas and Ismail Haniyeh, only 46% would participate and from among those, Abbas would receive 36% and Haniyeh 52% of the votes (compared to 54% for Haniyeh and 36% for Abbas three months ago). In the Gaza Strip, Abbas receives 35% of the votes and Haniyeh receives 61%. In the West Bank, Abbas receives 37% and Haniyeh 43%. If the competition was between Marwan Barghouti and Ismail Haniyeh, participation would increase to 62% and from among those, Barghouti receives 58% and Haniyeh 37%. If the competition is between Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh and Haniyyeh, participation rate would decrease to 43% and from among those, the former receives 29% and the latter 60%.
- If Abbas does not run for elections, the public prefers Marwan Barghouti to succeed him as the largest percentage (35%) selected him in a closed-ended question, followed by Ismail Haniyyeh (18%), Khalid Mish'al (5%), Mohammad Dahlan and Mohammad Shtayyeh (4% each), Yahya al Sinwar (3%), and Hussein al Sheikh (2%); 26% said they do not know or have not decided.
- Level of satisfaction with the performance of president Abbas stands at 19% and dissatisfaction at 77%. Level of satisfaction with Abbas stands at 17% in the West Bank and 22% in the Gaza Strip. Satisfaction with the performance of Abbas three months ago stood at 23% and dissatisfaction at 73%. Moreover, a vast majority of 77% of the public wants president Abbas to resign while only 18% want him to remain in office. Three months ago, 75% said they want Abbas to resign. Demand for Abbas' resignation stands today at 76% in the West Bank and 78% in the Gaza Strip.
- If new legislative elections were held today with the participation of all factions that participated in the 2006 elections, 67% say they would participate. Of those who would participate, 33% say they will vote for Hamas and 35% say they will vote for Fatah, 9% will vote for all third parties combined, and 22% are undecided. Three months ago, vote for Hamas stood at 34% and Fatah at 34%. Vote for Hamas in the Gaza Strip stands today at 45% (compared to 43% three months ago) and for Fatah at 32% (compared to 30% three months ago). In the West Bank, vote for Hamas stands at 23% (compared to 26% three months ago) and Fatah at 38% (compared to 38% three months ago).
- 26% say Hamas is most deserving of representing and leading the Palestinian people while 24% think Fatah under president Abbas is the most deserving of representing and leading the Palestinians; 44% think neither side deserves such a role. Three months ago, 28% selected Hamas, 25% Fatah under Abbas, and 40% said neither side deserves such a role.
- A majority of 53% thinks that the recent student election results of Hebron University, in which the student bloc affiliated with Fatah won sixty percent of the vote against the Islamic bloc, which received forty percent of the vote, does not necessarily reflect the balance of power between Fatah and Hamas in the larger Palestinian society in the West Bank or in the Hebron district; 19% think it reflects the balance of power in the Palestinian society in the West Bank; and 15% think it reflects the balance of power in the Hebron district.

(5) Domestic conditions, the “assassination” of Yasir Arafat, independence of the Judiciary, and those responsible for the drowning of Palestinian emigrants:

- Positive evaluation of conditions in the Gaza Strip stands at 9% and positive evaluation of conditions in the West Bank stands at 19%.
- Nonetheless, perception of safety and security in the Gaza Strip stands at 73% and in the West Bank at 46%. Three months ago, the perception of safety and security in the West Bank stood at 64% and at 77% in the Gaza Strip.

- Perception of corruption in PA institutions stands at 82%. When asked about institutions controlled by Hamas in the Gaza Strip, 71% indicated that there is corruption in these institutions. Three months ago, 81% said there is corruption in PA institutions and 69% said there is corruption in public institutions controlled by Hamas.
- 46% of West Bankers think people in the West Bank can criticize the PA without fear while 51% think they cannot. In the Gaza Strip, 48% think people in the Strip can criticize Hamas' authorities without fear and 51% think they cannot.
- In its assessment of the PA, a majority of the Palestinians (63%) views it as a burden on the Palestinian people while 33% view it as an asset for the Palestinian people. Three months ago, 59% viewed the PA as a burden and 36% viewed it as an asset.
- 22% are optimistic and 75% are pessimistic about the success of reconciliation. Three months ago, optimism stood at 26%.
- After more than three years since the formation of the Shtayyeh government, findings indicate persistent pessimism. Responding to a question about expectations regarding the ability of the Shtayyeh government to make progress in reconciliation and reunification, 81% expect failure; only 14% expect success. When asked about the ability of the government to organize legislative or legislative and presidential elections in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, 16% of the public expect success and 79% expect failure. In another question about the ability of the new government to improve economic conditions, a majority of 81% expects failure and 16% expects success.
- 24% of the public say they want to emigrate due to political, security, and economic conditions. The percentage in the Gaza Strip stands at 32% and in the West Bank at 19%. Three months ago, 20% of West Bankers expressed a desire to emigrate and 30% of Gazans expressed the same desire.
- A vast majority of 71% says it opposes the imposition of tax of one Shekel on each telecommunication bill to support an East Jerusalem fund and 28% say are in favor. A large majority of 79% thinks the collected funds will not go to the benefit of East Jerusalemites while only 12% think the money will go to the residents of East Jerusalem.
- A majority of 56% says it supports the strike of the public school teachers in the West Bank while 42% say they are against it. Support for the strike in the West Bank rises to 65% and declines to 44% in the Gaza Strip.
- In light of the devastating earthquake in Turkey and Syria last month, a majority of 52% thinks that the chances that a similar one might hit Palestine during this or next year are slim to nonexistent while 36% think they are high or medium. When asked about their impressions about the PA's capacity to deal with such earthquake if it were to happen in Palestine, the vast majority (81%) thinks it is slight or nonexistent while 18% think it is high or medium.
- We asked the public about its TV viewership habits in the last three months. Findings indicate that al Jazeera TV has the highest viewership, standing at 28%, followed by al Aqsa TV (14%), Palestine TV (11%), Palestine Today TV (9%), Maan TV (6%), al Arabiya (3%), and al Mayadeen (2%).

(6) Palestinian-Israeli Relations, the Peace process, and the decision to go to ICJ:

- Support for the concept of the two-state solution stands at 27% and opposition stands at 71%. No description or details were provided for the concept. Three months ago, support for the concept stood at 32%.
- A majority of 74% believes that the two-state solution is no longer practical or feasible due to the expansion of Israeli settlements while 24% believe that the solution remains practical. Moreover, 74% believe that the chances for the creation of a Palestinian state alongside the state of Israel in the next five years are slim or nonexistence while 23%

believe the chances to be medium or high. Three months ago, only 69% said the two-state solution was no longer feasible or practical due to settlement expansion.

- Reflecting on the latest UN speech of president Abbas in which he described the situation on the ground in the West Bank as “apartheid” and that the Palestinian people will demand equal rights in one state for two peoples, 22% say that they are in favor of such one state solution while 75% expressed opposition. Three months ago, support for Abbas’ position on the one-state solution stood at 26%.
- When asked about support for specific policy choices to break the current deadlock, 57% supported joining more international organizations; 49% supported resort to non-violent resistance; 58% supported return to armed confrontations and intifada; 52% supported dissolving the PA; and 28% supported abandoning the two-state solution and embracing a one state solution for Palestinians and Israelis. Three months ago, 55% supported a return to armed confrontations and intifada; 48% supported dissolving the PA; and 27% supported abandoning the two-state solution in favor of a one-state solution.
- When asked about the most effective means of ending the Israeli occupation and building an independent state, the public split into three groups: 54% chose armed struggle (55% in the Gaza Strip and 54% in the West Bank), 18% negotiations, and 23% popular resistance. Three months ago, 51% chose armed struggle and 21% chose negotiations.
- A vast majority of 69% says that international organizations, such as the International Criminal Court or the International Court of Justice, will not be able to constrain Israeli policies that violate international law and that these organizations will be content with expressions of opposition and condemnation. Only 13% think they will be able to constrain these Israeli policies while 12% think they will have a limited impact.
- The overwhelming majority (84%) thinks the Biden Administration will not impose sanctions on Israel to pressure it to change its settlement policy; only 12% think the US will impose such sanctions.
- Similarly, 82% think the European Union and European countries like France, the UK, and Germany will not impose sanctions on Israel in order to pressure it to change its settlement policy; 14% think they will do so.
- Moreover, 83% think the Arab countries that have recently normalized relations with Israel, such as UAE, Bahrain, Morocco, and Sudan, will not impose sanctions on Israel in order to pressure it to change its settlement policy; only 15% think they will do so.
- In light of the anti-government demonstrations in Israel, half of the public (50%) thinks they could lead to the fall of the Netanyahu government while 44% think they do not expect that to happen.

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

- 37% 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, 31% believe the first most vital goal should be to obtain the right of return of refugees to their 1948 towns and villages, 16% believe that the first and most vital goal should be to build a pious or moral individual and a religious society, one that applies all Islamic teachings and 15% believes it should be to establish a democratic political system that respects freedoms and rights of Palestinians.
- In a question about the main problem confronting Palestinian society today, the largest percentage, 26% (12% in the Gaz Strip and 35% in the West Bank), say it is corruption; 21% (26% in the Gaza Strip and 18% in the West Bank) say it is unemployment and poverty; 20% say it is the continuation of the occupation and settlement construction; 16% (26% in the Gaza Strip and 9% in the West Bank) say it is continued siege and blockade of the Gaza Strip; 11% say it is the split between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip; and 4%

say it is the weakness of the judiciary and the absence of liberties, accountability and democracy.

- When asked about the most pressing problem confronting the Palestinians today, the largest percentage (38%) said it is the Israeli occupation, while 24% said it is corruption, 15% said it is the split or division, 13% said it is unemployment, and 5% said it is the internal violence.