



UN Initiative, Peace Process, Elections and Evaluation of Leaders

Results of an Opinion Poll among Palestinians in the West Bank & Gaza Strip

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Fieldwork: 2-3 October 2011

Sample size: 1200 Palestinians (West Bank and Gaza)

Margin of Error: 3 percent (plus or minus)

INTRODUCTION & METHODOLOGY

These are the results and analyses of the latest Arab World for Research & Development (AWRAD) public opinion poll, focusing on the Palestinian UN General Assembly bid for statehood. The poll gauged Palestinian opinions on the effectiveness of the initiative, its potential impact on the peace process, the role of international and local actors, and the implications on foreign assistance. The poll also took a closer look at how Palestinians view the peace process, negotiations and use of violence. In addition, the poll questioned Palestinians on their views on a number of internal issues and priorities including elections. The questionnaire was fielded October 2-4, 2011, eight days after the speech delivered by President M. Abbas before the UN General Assembly.

For this survey, 1200 Palestinians were interviewed in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. All socioeconomic groups were represented in the poll (for more details on the sample, please refer to www.awrad.org). The margin of error in this poll is plus or minus three percent. The survey was carried out by AWRAD researchers under the supervision of Dr. Nader Said-Foqahaa, President of AWRAD.

SURVEY FINDINGS

One: The UN Initiative

Majority Support for the Initiative

Approximately 65 percent of Palestinian respondents said they supported the leadership's bid for UN statehood. The level support did not increase since AWRAD's June 2011 poll, when 64 percent voiced support for the initiative. Sixteen percent said they opposed the effort, with 19 percent remaining neutral.

Advancement of Palestinian Cause is Uncertain

Palestinians were asked if the UN initiative advanced the Palestinian cause; 37 percent believed that it did. Forty-four percent, however, did not see it changing the situation. In contrast, 17 percent believed that the UN initiative was a setback for the Palestinian cause.

Nevertheless, the majority of respondents believe that the Palestinian leadership should continue to pursue recognition through the UN Security Council with just 12 percent preferring the granting of official observer status from the UN General Assembly. Thirteen percent said that the leadership should abandon the UN initiative and return to negotiations immediately.

With respect to negotiations, the majority (58 percent) believe that the UN initiative will lead to a stronger Palestinian position. Of the remainder, one third of the respondents did not believe that the UN initiative would strengthen the Palestinian negotiating position with four percent believing that the Palestinian negotiating position would actually be weakened as a result of the UN effort.

President Abbas's UN Speech

The majority of Palestinians said they listened to the President's speech before the UN General Assembly (40 percent in full and 39 percent in part). Twenty-one percent did not listen to the speech; the percentage in Gaza (29 percent) not listening more than in the West Bank (16 percent).

As to the performance of President Abbas at the UN, 71 percent perceived it positively (excellent at 40 percent and good at 31 percent). Fifteen percent were neutral on his performance. In contrast, seven percent perceived his performance negatively (five percent weak and two percent as very weak).

Hamas's Position on the Initiative

Only 12 percent viewed the position of Hamas on the UN initiative positively. In contrast, 45 percent viewed it negatively. Thirty-three percent viewed it as neutral. More Gazans (49 percent) than West Bank respondents (42 percent) viewed the position of Hamas negatively.

Views of International and Regional Actors

Amongst respondents, Turkey had the highest positive ratings when it came to assessing the position of various international actors in the context of the UN initiative. Approximately 68 percent said that their opinions of Turkey had improved as a result of the latter's position towards the UN effort. Egypt was the runner up with 51 percent claiming more positive views of their Arab neighbor. Positive evaluation of the Arab League stood at 43 percent; Jordan at 38 percent.

The UN General Assembly did not do as well with only 26 percent stating that their views were more positive. In contrast, one third said their views had become less positive. Thirty-seven percent had no change in their views.

The same trend applied to views of the EU with just 25 percent responding that their views had become more positive, while 31 percent were less positive. Roughly 40 percent said that their views of the EU had not changed.

With respect to the UN Security Council, 20 percent responded that their views of the UN Security Council had become more positive, while 37 percent were less positive. Thirty-eight percent said that their views of the Council had not changed.

The results for the US and Israel were less positive. Only six percent of the respondents viewed the US more positively as a result of its position on the initiative. Sixty-nine percent viewed the US less positively. Twenty-two percent said that their views had not changed. Similarly, two percent said that their views of Israel were more positive. Eighty percent had the opposite view. Sixteen percent reported no change.

Views of National Actors

President Abbas, the PLO, and the PA all received a boost from the UN initiative. Two-thirds of the respondents said that their views of President Abbas had become more positive.

Approximately one-quarter said their views had not changed with eight percent stating theirs had become less positive. Similar trends applied to opinions of the PLO and the PA.

Fateh also gained from the UN initiative with 61 percent reporting that their views of Fateh had become more positive. Twenty-eight percent said their views had stayed the same with nine percent having less positive opinions of the movement.

Prime Minister Fayyad also gained a more positive evaluation from 49 percent of the respondents. About 37 percent said that their views had not changed. Eleven percent had less positive opinions.

Receiving the least positive opinions were Hamas and its leader Ismael Haniyeh. Forty-three percent said that their views of Hamas had become less positive. Thirty-eight percent had no change in the views, while 15 percent said that their views had become more positive. A similar trend applied to Haniyeh.

International Funding

The majority of respondents believed that Israel (71 percent) and the US (67 percent) were serious about their threats to suspend tax remittances/financial aid to the PA due to the leadership's UN bid. Twenty-seven percent did not believe that the US was serious, and 24 percent did not believe that Israel was serious.

Respondents, however, were divided about the capacity of Palestinians to survive a decrease in international funding, with 29 percent stating that Palestinians were capable and 26 percent that they might be capable. In contrast, 42 percent did not believe that Palestinians could survive a decrease in foreign assistance.

Nevertheless, the majority expressed willingness to make personal sacrifices in order to reduce dependency on foreign aid. Thirty-five percent said "yes" they were willing with 28 percent willing to "a certain extent." One-third said they unwilling to sacrifice. Of note, the willingness to make personal sacrifices (i.e. a decrease in income) was higher in Gaza than in the West Bank (72 versus 58 percent).

Two: Peace Process and negotiations

Majority of Palestinians Continue to Support a Two-State Solution

Sixty-one percent of the respondents continued to voice support for a two-state solution (Israel side-by-side with Palestine in the West Bank and Gaza including east Jerusalem). The level of support for a two-state solution was consistent with polling results going back two years, indicating that Palestinians did not view the UN bid to be in conflict with other ongoing efforts to end the struggle. Thirty-five percent said they opposed such a solution.

Palestinians feel closer to Establishing a State

Half of the respondents felt that Palestinians were now closer to achieving their goal of establishing a state than 20 years ago. This is compared with only 27 percent who felt the same way two years ago – an increase of 23 points (see AWRAD's December 2009 poll). However, 42 percent felt that Palestinians were now farther from establishing a state as compared with 20

years ago. This is a decrease from 51 percent in the December 2011 poll who shared a similar view.

Conditional Return to Negotiations

While the majority of respondents support negotiations (64 percent), 58 percent support a conditional return to the negotiating table (i.e., a halt to Israeli settlement expansion). Only five percent said they supported an unconditional return. Thirty percent oppose negotiations at this time.

Non-Violent Means to End the Occupation

To end the occupation, 60 percent of Palestinians prefer the use of non-violent means. When asked to choose from five means, 21 percent selected direct negotiations as their top choice; 21 percent chose an international conference that imposed a settlement; and 17 percent a non-violent uprising. Seventeen percent opted for armed/militant confrontation as their first choice, and 21 percent a combination of non-violent and militant means.

The Role of the American Government

Only eight percent of the respondents believed that the American government was a neutral party in negotiations between Palestinians and Israelis. Another 12 percent believed that it was neutral to some extent. In contrast, 78 percent said it was not neutral.

As to the perceived influence of the American President, Barack Obama, a majority (55 percent) did not view him as capable of assisting in the establishment of a Palestinian state. Forty-three percent believed that he was either capable or capable to some extent.

Three: Internal Issues and Priorities

Forming a Unity Government and Economy are Top Priorities

Overall, 43 percent of the respondents said the formation of a national unity government was their top priority for the leadership. The formation of a unity government was the number one choice amongst Gaza respondents (51 percent), but only garnered support of 38 percent of Palestinians in the West Bank, where formation of a unity government was the number two priority.

The second most important priority for Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza (32 percent) was improving the Palestinian economy and creating jobs. Of note, in the West Bank 40 percent ranked this as their first choice, compared with only 19 percent of Gaza respondents for whom a unity government was viewed as more important.

The third priority was the conduct of elections, with 15 percent selecting this as their first choice. Elections were also more important in Gaza (19 percent selected it as the top priority) than in the West Bank (14 percent).

Building the institutions of the PA came in fourth place, selected by seven percent of the respondents.

Abbas's Approval Rating Continues to Rise

The majority of Palestinians (84 percent) gave President Abbas a positive rating. This is a 10-point increase from AWRAD's June 2011 poll and a 19-point increase since early 2011. For the first time in several years, the majority of Palestinians viewed the President's performance as "good." Additionally, his negative ratings have decreased this year from 35 percent in January to 14 percent in the present poll.

PM Haniyeh's Rating Continues to Decline

The overall positive rating of Ismael Haniyeh went from 63 percent in June 2011 down to 58 percent. Of particular note, the percentage of respondents describing his performance as "good" dropped by 10 points, from 30 percent in June to 20 percent in September. His negative evaluations increased from 30 percent in June to 35 percent in the present poll.

S. Fayyad Retains Support as PM

The overall positive rating of PM Salam Fayyad remained stable since AWRAD's last poll in June at 77 percent. His negative rating remained at 20 percent.

The rating for PM Fayyad is linked to how Palestinians view the performance of Palestinian institutions in general with respondents divided on the degree of improvement in Palestinian institutions. One-third of the respondents agree with the statement that "the performance of Palestinian institutions improved significantly over the last two years." Another third agreed with the statement to some extent with 28 percent disagreeing.

On the question of who should be the Prime Minister, Salam Fayyad continues to be the most popular candidate. Out of a list of six candidates, 32 percent said Fayyad was their choice for PM in a national unity government. He was followed by Mustafa Barghouti at 16 percent and Ismael Haniyeh at 13 percent. Munib Masri garnered support from seven percent, followed by Nabil Sha'ath and Jamal Al Khudari at three points each.

Four: Elections

Election and Reconciliation

A majority of respondents (59 percent) held the opinion that elections should take place once Hamas and Fateh have reconciled. One third demands were of the view that elections should take place immediately or within six months. Five percent believe that elections should remain on hold.

The Largest Block are Undecided and/or Will Not Vote

If elections took place today, Fateh would receive 38 percent of the vote. The popularity of the movement is consistent between the West Bank and Gaza.

For the first time, AWRAD's polling showed support for Hamas dropping below 10 percent. Three months immediately after the 2006 elections, Hamas support was in the 50 percent range. Support for the party has dropped in polls over the past several years as Gazans, in particular, have indicated dissatisfaction with the state of affairs in the Strip. In the lead up to the current poll, the popularity of Hamas was negatively influenced by the conflicting, but generally

negative, positions of its leaders towards Abbas' UN initiative.

The third most popular party was the PFLP attracting five percent of popular support, followed by Al Mubadara at three percent. The rest of the groups listed in the poll received less than two percent. Of note, approximately 40 percent of the respondents did not voice support for any of the current list of political groups. They said that they would either not vote (15 percent), or were still undecided (22 percent). Three percent said they would for other potential lists.

Five: Popularity of Leaders

Three lists of leaders were provided to the respondents; the first list was predominately comprised of Fateh leaders, the second of Hamas leaders and the third of independents. Respondents were asked to select from amongst the lists on the basis of trust.

Fateh List

Mahmoud Abbas continued to be the most trusted leader on the Fateh list (38 percent), followed by Marwan Barghouthi (23 percent). Salam Fayyad (independent) came in third place, garnering six percent, followed by Nabil Sha'ath at three percent, and Mohammed Dahlan at two percent. Naser Al Qudwi and Jibril Rojoub received one percent each.

Among Fateh supporters, 66 percent of them trusted Abbas the most and 18 percent trusted Marwan Barghouthi the most, followed by Fayyad at 5 percent and Dahlan at about 4 percent.

Among Hamas supporters, 48 percent said that they do not trust any of the Fateh leaders, while 30 percent said that they trusted Marwan Barghouthi the most. Only 9 percent reported that they trusted Abbas.

Hamas List

Ismael Haniyeh was the most trusted leader on the Hamas list (20 percent), followed by Naser Al-Din AlShaer at nine percent. Khaled Mashaal and Aziz Duwaik received five percent each. Jamal Khudari (independent) came in at number five with three percent, followed by Hasan Yusef and Mahmoud Zahhar. Ahamd Bahar received one percent. Of note, 39 percent of respondents chose "none of the above" and 13 percent said that they "do not know." This is compared with 20 percent and seven percent, respectively, in the case of the Fateh list of leaders.

Among Hamas supporters, 71 percent reported trusting Haniyeh the most, followed by Mashaal at 11 percent and Zahhar at 5 percent. Duwaik and Alshaer received 4 percent each.

Among Fateh supporters, 45 percent reported that they did not trust any of the Hamas leaders. Around 14 percent said that they trusted Haniyeh the most and 13 percent said that they trusted Alshaer the most.

List of Independents

Salam Fayyad was the most trusted non-Fateh, non-Hamas leader with 25 percent selecting him from a list of eight leaders. In second place was Mustafa Barghouthi at 23 percent, followed by

Ahamd Saadat, of the PFLP, at 10 percent. Hanan Ashrawi came in fourth place with six percent of the vote. Bassam Salhi received two percent. All other listed leaders received less than one percent.

Among Fateh supporters, Fayyad received 50 percent trust level, followed by Mustafa Barghouthi at 20 percent and Hanan Ashrawi at 8 percent.

Among Hamas supporters, Mustafa Barghouthi received 30 percent, followed by Ahmad Saadat at 16 percent. Only 4 percent reported that they trusted Fayyad.

Among independents¹, Mustafa Barghouthi received 19 percent trust rate, followed by Fayyad at 9 percent, Saadat at 7 percent and Ashrawi at 4 percent. Most of the independents (40 percent) did not trust any of the independents listed in the poll.

¹ (Independents) refer to those who answered (undecided) or (will not vote) to the question of election preferences.