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مركز العالم العربي للبحوث والتنمية  
Arab World For Research & Development

**Results of a Specialized Opinion Poll on  
Palestinian Local Elections (October 20, 2012)**

**Publication Date: 29 September 2012**

**Fieldwork: 21-23 September 2012**

**Sample Size: 1,304 Palestinian**

**(Jenin, Tulkarem, Nablus, Ramallah, Bethlehem, Hebron)**

**Margin of error:±2.5 percent**

**Arab World for Research & Development**

**Ramallah – Gaza, Palestine. Tele-fax: 00970-2-2950957/8. E-mail: [awrad@awrad.org](mailto:awrad@awrad.org)**

**Website: [www.awrad.org](http://www.awrad.org)**

## **Introduction**

These are the results and analyses of the latest Arab World for Research & Development (AWRAD) specialized public opinion poll, focusing on the local elections planned for the 20<sup>th</sup> of October 2012. The specialized poll focused on the needs and priorities of voters, the criteria for selecting candidates and lists, the evaluation by voters of local conditions, and the performance of incumbent councils, national policies and leaders. The poll also provides insights on the socio-economic profile of voters, their political affiliations and views of national issues.

The questionnaire was fielded September 21-23, 2012. For this survey, 1,304 Palestinians were interviewed in six major West Bank cities--Jenin, Tulkarem, Nablus, Ramallah, Bethlehem and Hebron. All socioeconomic groups among registered voters were represented in the poll (for more details on the sample, please refer to [www.awrad.org](http://www.awrad.org)). The margin of error in this poll is plus or minus 2.5 percent. The survey was carried out by AWRAD researchers under the supervision of Dr. Nader Said-Foqahaa, President of AWRAD.

## **Support for the elections**

The vast majority of registered voters (85 percent) in the six target cities support the holding of local elections on October 20, 2012, with 9 percent opposing and 6 percent not sure. Support for the holding of the elections ranges between 80 percent in Nablus to 89 percent in Hebron. There is no significant variance in support for the holding of the elections among registered voters based on social or political variables.

Regarding protests which occurred in the West Bank in early September in response to cost of living increases, the majority (85 percent) of registered voters said they would have no impact on the way they vote.

## **Most do not support the present “list” system**

The current Palestinian local election law stipulates a proportional list system, where voters must vote for a full list. Each list receives a number of seats in the council proportional to the numbers of votes received. However, 50 percent of registered voters prefer a system that allows for the election of individual candidates. In contrast, 38 percent prefer the list system. 5 percent have no preference and 7 percent are not sure.

## **High turnout expected**

Among registered voters, 72 percent say that they plan to vote, 18 percent say that they will not vote, and 10 percent are not sure. The expected voter turnout rate varies among the six cities. The highest expected turnout rate is in Ramallah (81 percent), followed by Tulkarem (75 percent), Nablus (72 percent), and Jenin and Bethlehem (71 percent each). The lowest expected turnout rate is in Hebron, where only 62 percent say that they plan to participate.

The intention to vote is slightly higher among male registered voters (75 percent) than female registered voters (69 percent). Eighty-eight (88) percent of those who hold Abbas as the most respected leader intend to vote compared to 55 percent from those who respect Haniyeh the most. The intention to vote is also correlated with political affiliation where 88 percent of Fatah supporters intend to vote, as compared to 54 percent of Hamas supporters and 56 percent among those who declare no affiliation to any group. Refugees are less inclined to declare intention to vote (67 percent) than non-refugees (74 percent). Internet use is also another variable where 76 percent of those who use the internet intend to vote, compared to 67 percent among those who do not use it. Palestinians with higher and medium income will vote at higher rates (75 percent and 73 percent respectively) than Palestinians with lower income (66 percent). The expected turnout for unmarried voters, however, will be higher (84 percent) than for married voters (75 percent). There is no significant correlation between education and age on the one hand, and intention to vote on the other.

Registered Palestinians who will refrain from voting listed a number of reasons. The most commonly cited reasons were:

1. List-related: The lack of knowledge about the lists, their composition and agenda. Most respondents were unable to differentiate between the composition and agenda of the lists running in their community. According to one of the respondents *“they all look and sound the same.”*
2. Candidate-related: Many of the respondents stipulated that the present list system does not allow for the citizens to get to know the individual candidates. According to another respondent *“the candidates are all lumped together, and in each list there is someone who I think is incompetent; so I will not vote for any list.”*
3. The third most cited reason is related to expectations of fraud and corruption. Many of the respondents who are refraining from voting say that the elections are meaningless as *“they are determined beforehand by the political powers.”* One of the respondents said that *“some groups will do anything to win; so there is no meaning to our participation.”*
4. Many other reasons were cited including: The absence of Hamas from the scene; the perception that local councils are irrelevant to them; lack of personal interest in political issues and participation; frustration with previous elections such as the 2006 PLC elections; the voting system; and the possibility that local elections will reinforce the division between West Bank and Gaza.

### **The social composition of likely voters**

The following represent the weight of each among the poll of likely voters:

- The unmarried comprise 19 percent of the likely voters, and married people comprise 81 percent.
- Refugees comprise 16 percent of the likely voters and non-refugees comprise the rest (84 percent).
- Forty-eight (48) percent of the likely voters use the Internet, while 52 percent do not.

- In addition, middle-income Palestinians comprise the vast majority of likely voters (72 percent), with low-income Palestinians comprising 20 percent and high-income Palestinians comprising 8 percent.

### **The political composition of likely voters:**

- Among **registered voters**, 40 percent say that they support Fatah, while 12 percent say that they are supporters of Hamas. Support for PFLP and the Palestinian National Initiative (Mubadara) is at 4 percent each. All other groups stand at 1 percent or less among registered voters. As much as 34 percent of the respondents say that they do not support any political group.
- Among **likely voters**, Fatah supporters will comprise the largest group (49 percent), but their votes will be split among more than one list in each district. The highest percentage of likely Fatah voters is in Jenin (67 percent of the total), followed by Ramallah (55 percent), Tulkarem (53 percent), Nablus (49 percent), Bethlehem (41 percent) and lastly in Hebron (30 percent of likely voters).
- In general, the Fatah vote will comprise the bulk of the vote for many lists, even within the same city.
- The overall weight of Hamas supporters will be 9 percent. They will play their most important role in influencing the results in Hebron, where they comprise 17 percent of likely voters, followed by Bethlehem (14 percent), Nablus (10 percent), Tulkarem (6 percent), Ramallah (4 percent) and Jenin (3 percent).
- More important will be the role of those who state that they are unaffiliated with any of the listed political parties. This group comprises 27 percent of the overall likely voters, with 35 percent in Hebron, 33 percent in Nablus, 28 percent in Bethlehem, 25 percent in Jenin, 21 percent in Tulkarem and 16 percent in Ramallah.
- PFLP has its most significant presence in Ramallah, supported by 11 percent of likely voters, followed by Bethlehem (6 percent). The party has less than 4 percent in all other cities in the study.
- Mubadara has its largest presence among likely voters in Ramallah (10 percent), followed by Hebron (6 percent) and Tulkarem (5 percent). It has less than 3 percent in all other cities.
- Supporters of all other parties will likely have only a minor influence on the results.

### **Satisfaction with the present local council**

The majority of registered voters are dissatisfied with the performance of incumbent local councils. Fifty-four (54) percent say that they are dissatisfied (33 percent dissatisfied and 21 percent somewhat dissatisfied), while 45 percent say that they are satisfied (15 percent satisfied and 30 percent satisfied to some extent).

The highest levels of dissatisfaction with local councils is in Jenin (78 percent) and Bethlehem (63 percent), followed by Hebron (47 percent), Ramallah (40 percent) and Nablus (39 percent).

### **Preferred profile of a candidate**

Registered voters were questioned about the characteristics that they expect in a candidate. The results reveal the following:

- **Personal reputation and ethics** is the most important criterion in selecting a candidate, with 94 percent stating that that this characteristic is very important to them. This criterion is the most important one in Bethlehem, Nablus and Tulkarem. It is also the second most important in Ramallah and the third most important in Hebron.
- **Being in touch with the needs of the people** is the second most important criterion, overall, with 90 percent stating that is very important to them. This criterion is most important in Nablus, followed by Tulkarem, Bethlehem, Hebron and Jenin.
- **Professional competence** came in at number three (80 percent). Professional competence was the number one criterion of 36 percent of respondents in Ramallah. It was also of high importance in Jenin, followed by Hebron, Nablus, Bethlehem and Tulkarem.
- **Educational attainment** is also very important to 69 percent of the respondents. This criterion was the most important one for 29 percent of the respondents in Hebron. Bethlehem respondents also placed high value on educational attainment, followed by respondents in Ramallah, Jenin and Tulkarem.
- **Access to, and influence on, government** institutions is also perceived as very important by 66 percent of the respondents. The highest interest in this criterion is in Tulkarem.
- **Support for women's rights** is perceived as very important by 46 percent of the respondents.
- **Religiosity** is very important to 43 percent of the respondents, ranking at number seven out of twelve on the overall scale of importance. When respondents were asked to select the most important criterion for voting from the full list however, it jumped to number five. Religiosity is the fourth most important criterion in Hebron, selected as the most important by 15 percent. In contrast, only 4 percent in Tulkarem and Ramallah selected religiosity as the number one criterion.
- **Being independent** from any political party is deemed to be very important by 38 percent of the respondents.
- The above-listed characteristics were followed by less important ones listed here in descending order: gender distribution of a voting list, family ties and party affiliation.

## Voters' Priorities

The overall priorities of voters are economic development, social and infrastructure services, and equity and efficiency in service provision. The following list, based on responses to “very important” priorities, shows that economic development and job creation especially for youth, lower fees, equality and health and educational services are the most important:

<b>Percentage saying that the following are “very important” priorities:</b>	
Encourage economic investment and job creation	87.1%
Lower fees for services	83.1%
Improve health services	81.8%
Improve the opportunities for youth	81.5%
Guarantee equitable access to services regardless of family\party affiliation	80.4%
Improve schools	80.0%
Bring more security and social cohesion to the community	76.8%
Improve the water situation	76.4%
Improve the efficacy of completing paper work	75.5%
Pave and fix the roads	74.9%
Improve the electricity situation	74.8%
Build\improve a/the sewage system	73.8%
Improve services for the elderly and disabled	67.3%
Make efforts to clean up the community	66.9%
Improve the rate of collection of fees/taxes	57.6%
Improve the status of women	55.3%
Build\organize recreational, cultural, sports facilities/activities	54.4%
Build \improve day care\ pre-school	53.2%

The poll findings also reveal regional variations. For example, 37 percent of the respondents in Bethlehem chose economic development as their number one priority. This concern is shared by 30 percent of respondents in Hebron, 28 percent in Ramallah, 24 percent in each of Nablus and Tulkarem and 20 percent in Jenin. Improving health services is viewed as the second most important priority by 25 percent in Hebron, 22 percent in Ramallah, 18 percent in Nablus, 15 percent in Tulkarem and 12 percent in Jenin. Compared to their counterparts in other cities, respondents from Jenin and Hebron place a higher value on improving the water situation and the improvement of schools. Bethlehem respondents share the concern over the water situation. Nablus and Ramallah respondents place higher emphasis on youth opportunities. Paving and fixing the roads are especially important in Tulkarem and Jenin.

## Most respected leader

Five national leaders were listed in the poll and respondents were asked to select the most respected among them. A plurality of registered voters selected Mahmoud Abbas as the most

respected (39 percent), followed by Ismael Haniyeh (14 percent), Mustafa Barghouthi (8 percent), Ahmad Saadat (6 percent) and Salam Fayyad (4 percent), with 29 percent not selecting any of the listed leaders.

The level of respect for the leaders varied between the six cities, where the highest respect rate for Abbas was in Jenin (47 percent), followed by Tulkarem (46 percent) and Ramallah (39 percent). His lowest respect rates were in Bethlehem (34 percent), Hebron and Nablus (35 percent each).

Haniyeh was selected as the most respected by 25 percent of registered voters in Hebron, followed by Bethlehem and Nablus (15 percent each), Ramallah and Tulkarem (9 percent each), and Jenin (7 percent).

Mustafa Barghouthi gained his highest points in Ramallah (11 percent), followed by Bethlehem and Nablus (9 percent each), Tulkarem (8 percent) and Jenin (5 percent).

Salam Fayyad was selected as the most respected by 12 percent in Ramallah, followed by Bethlehem (10 percent), Nablus (7 percent), Jenin (3 percent) and Tulkarem (2 percent).