



# THE FORMATION OF A PALESTINIAN INTERIM UNITY GOVERNMENT

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

**Publication Date: 18 June 2011**

**Fieldwork: June 12-13 2011**

**Sample size: 1500 Palestinians (West Bank and Gaza)**

**Margin of Error: 2.5 percent (plus or minus)**

## **HIGHLIGHTS:**

- **The overall rating of the Palestinian president has improved from 63% to 76%.**
- **82% support a move by the Palestinian leadership to seek UN recognition of a Palestinian state.**
- **71% believe that the reconciliation agreement serves Palestinian interests.**
- **52% think that Salam Fayyad should continue to be the prime minister within the new government.**
- **56% fear that the upcoming government will be controlled by Fatah and Hamas.**
- **The priorities of the new government: Economy and jobs (47%), security (19%), recognition of Palestine at UN (17%).**
- **48% think that Fatah and Hamas will *not* succeed in forming an independent government within the stipulated date in the reconciliation agreement.**
- **34% think that the government should control the security forces, 30% Fatah and Hamas, and 22% think that the president should control them.**
- **48% believe that the legislative and presidential elections should be held within a year, while 40% think that these two elections should be held immediately.**
- **If the Palestinian presidential election were held today: 27% would vote for Abbas; 10-11 percent for each of the following: Haniyeh and Barghouthi, and Fayyad; 4% for Sa'adat; and 34% are either “undecided” or “will not vote.”**
- **If the PLC election were held today: 31% would vote for a list endorsed by Fatah and Abbas; 13% Haniyeh and Hamas; 10% Barghouthi and PNI; 8% for Fayyad and Third Way; and 33% are either “undecided” or “will not vote.”**
- **A large majority of Palestinians (above 70%) support the protesters’ demands to change political regimes in some Arab countries.**
- **83% believe that Palestinian youth movement has contributed to the reconciliation agreement.**

## INTRODUCTION & METHODOLOGY

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These are the results and analyses of the latest Arab World for Research & Development (AWRAD) public opinion poll on the formation of a Palestinian interim unity government. The poll gauged Palestinian opinions on the signed Reconciliation Agreement between Fatah and Hamas (May 4, 2011), the formation and priorities of the Palestinian interim unity government, the performance of Palestinian leadership, the PA plan to seek a UN recognition of a Palestinian state, Palestinian presidential, legislative, and local elections, and the ongoing Arab uprisings. The questionnaire was fielded June 12-13, 2011.

For this survey, 1500 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 [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.

## SURVEY FINDINGS

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### THE RECONCILIATION AGREEMENT

**Agreement serves the best interests of Palestinians:** A large majority of respondents (71 percent) believe that the signed reconciliation agreement between Fatah and Hamas serves Palestinian interests. When comparing respondents from Gaza and the West Bank, a slightly higher percentage of Gazans (75 percent versus 68 percent) believe that the agreement serves Palestinian interests. The difference between Gaza and the West Bank may reflect relatively stronger feelings among Gazans that the agreement will have direct impact on their daily lives after years of closure, isolation and economic hardship.

General optimism about the agreement, however, does not reflect a familiarity with its articles; a simple majority of respondents (53 percent) said that they are “not very familiar” or “not at all familiar” with the details of the agreement. Only 47 percent of respondents expressed their familiarity with it (to varying degrees). Again, Gaza's respondents expressed more familiarity with articles of the agreement than West Bank respondents (50 versus 44 percent).

**Achieving national unity is the most important element of the Agreement:** An open-ended question on the most important aspect of the Agreement shows that "achieving national unity" is perceived by Palestinians as the most important element. Other important elements listed by the respondents were: forming a national unity government, security, ending political arrests, economy/jobs, and new elections.

**Majority see to trust the intentions of Fatah and Hamas:** Respondents were also asked about their opinion regarding the “genuine interest” of the two parties in forming a “strong and independent government.” A majority of respondents (56 percent versus 17 percent) think that Fatah and Hamas are genuinely trying to create a strong independent government. Similarly, when asked about the seriousness of the two main Palestinian factions in bringing the reconciliation agreement to a successful conclusion and achieving Palestinian unity, more

than half of the respondents believe that both parties are serious. However, there is a significant difference (11 points) between the factions; 67 percent believe that Fatah is either “very serious” or “somewhat serious” about achieving unity, in comparison with only 56 percent who believe in Hamas’s seriousness towards the agreement. This might be explained partially by the widespread perception that Fatah was the party that took the initiative to make Palestinian unity possible, including the President’s televised speech showing his eagerness to meet with Hamas leaders in Gaza and the relatively more welcoming way the PA in the West Bank dealt with the youth movements, who rallied under the slogan “the people want to end the division.” In this context, the vast majority of Palestinians (83 percent) believe that the Palestinian youth movement contributed to the reconciliation agreement.

**Respondents are divided on the ability of the two groups to form a government on time:** When linking the formation of an “independent government” by a specific date (16<sup>th</sup> of June 2011) as stipulated in the reconciliation agreement, the respondents were divided: 48 percent are confident that the two parties will succeed in forming an independent government by the 16<sup>th</sup> of June, while another 48 percent are not confident that such formation will take place.

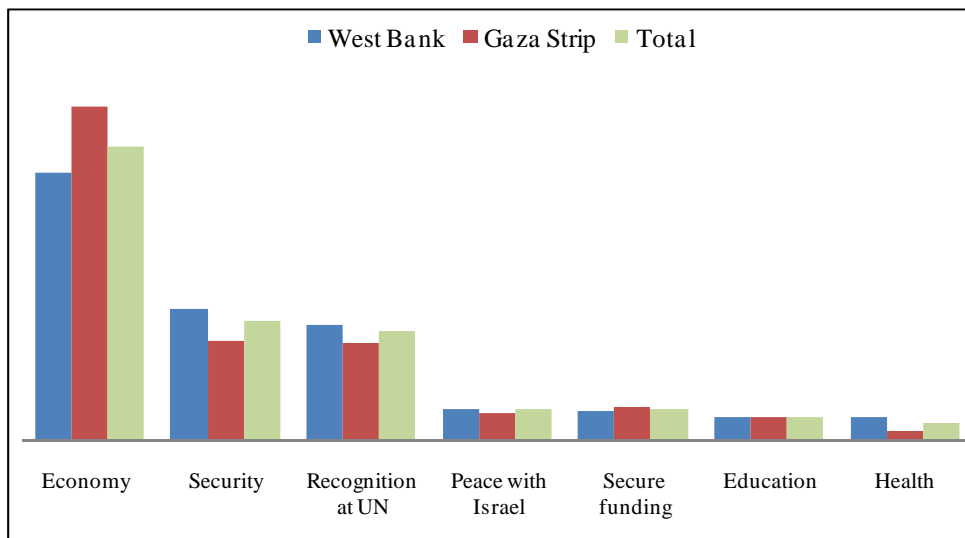
## THE INERIM UNITY GOVERNMENT: VIEWS AND PRIORITIES

Since this poll has focused attention on the interim unity government, the results for this set of questions will be presented in three sections:

### 1. Priorities of the Government: Economy and Jobs

Respondents have been given several options and asked which one of them should be addressed first by the interim unity government. The largest percentage of respondents (47 percent) have selected “economy and jobs” as the first issue that needs to be addressed by the incoming unity government. The second most important priority was “security” at 19 percent. The third most important priority was obtaining “recognition for Palestine at U.N” with 17 percent, followed by “peace with Israel” and the “preservation of international funding” (each receiving 5 percent). Social services received lower scores compared with the issues listed above, where “education” came at number six (4 percent), and “health care” at number seven (3 percent).

**Which Of The Following Issues Should The Unity Government Address First?**



While the economy and jobs was the first priority in all regions, a higher percentage of Gaza respondents have selected the “economy and jobs” as the first priority to be addressed by the unity government—53 percent, compared with 43 percent in the West Bank; a difference that seems to reflect the well-documented economic gap between the two regions.

In the same context, the relatively high percentage of respondents who have chosen “security” as the second priority may be influenced by perceptions of increased street crime. The slightly higher percentage of West Bank’s respondents who have chosen “security” as a second priority (21 versus 16) may express insecurity stemming from more frequent interactions with Israeli soldiers and settlers.

The priorities were confirmed in an open-ended question, as respondents were asked to list their own priorities without using a closed list. They chose economy/jobs as their first priority. Again, the second priority was security. The third was national unity and the fourth was healthcare.

Finally, it is worth noting out that the low percentage the “peace with Israel” issue received from respondents in both regions does not necessarily mean that this issue is not important for Palestinians anymore. As the results regarding the peace process with Israel show, it to a large degree probably reflects the frustration that most Palestinians feel towards the peace process.

## **2. High Hopes from the Interim Government**

A majority of respondents believe that if a new government is formed by Fatah and Hamas, the following political and civil rights and freedoms will improve in the West Bank and Gaza:

- Freedom of speech (67 percent)
- Personal security (65 percent)
- Human rights (63 percent)
- Political arrests (62 percent)
- The role of the PLC (62 percent)
- Freedom of press (60 percent)
- Regular elections (60 percent)
- The role of independents (57 percent)
- The role of other political parties (52 percent)

All these percentages probably reflect the strong negative impact the Fatah-Hamas conflict has had since 2007 on the perception of political rights and civil liberties in the PNA territories and Hamas-controlled Gaza. Gazans have higher expectations regarding all of the above-mentioned issues (ranging from 4 to 16 points). This illustrates that the internal conflict had a disproportionately negative impact on freedoms in Gaza compared with the West Bank. It also indicates the relatively higher level of longing of Gazans for a change in the internal status quo.

## **3. Legitimacy and Power of the Interim Government**

**Fears from Fatah-Hamas control of government:** Respondents were also asked whether the unity government will have “sufficient power and independence to make

decisions or will it be controlled by the two parties Fatah and Hamas?” A majority (56 percent) believed that the two parties will control it. In contrast, a third of the respondents believed that the government will have sufficient power and independence. About 10 percent said that they do not know.

**Accountability to the people:** In the same context, respondents were asked to answer the question “to whom should the unity government be accountable?” The majority of respondents (60 percent) believe that the unity government should be accountable to either the people directly (Palestinian electorate) or to their legislative bodies (PLO’s PNC and PLC). The largest group of respondents (33 percent) believes that the government should be accountable to the Palestinian public. In addition, 13 percent believe that it should be accountable to the parliament (PLC). Furthermore, 14 percent chose the Palestinian National Council (PNC) as the reference of accountability for the new government. In contrast, 20 percent believe that the government should be accountable to Fatah and Hamas together, Fatah (5 percent), or Hamas (3 percent) separately. Another 12 percent believe that it should be accountable to the President of the PA.

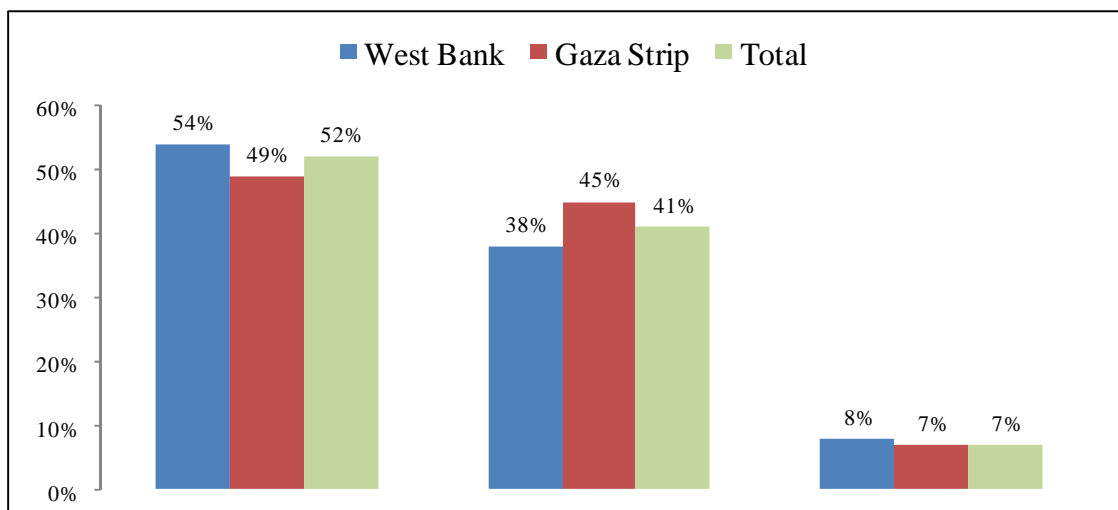
Finally, respondents were asked “who should control the security forces in the West Bank and Gaza?” Palestinians were divided on this sensitive issue. About one third (34 percent) believe that the security forces should be under the control of the “government” option. Another 22 percent believe that they should be under the control of the PA President. In contrast, 30 percent believe that Fatah and Hamas should jointly control the security forces, while only 5 percent chose Fatah alone and 3 percent chose Hamas alone.

Overall, the results reflect respondents’ relatively high level of political awareness and their genuine desire to institutionalize democratic and accountable governance in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

## THE ROLE OF SALAM FAYYAD IN THE INTERIM GOVERNMENT

A majority of 52 percent (54 percent in the West Bank versus 49 percent in Gaza) believe that Salam Fayyad should continue to be the prime minister within the new government. The support for his continuation as a prime minister reaches 54 percent in the West Bank, compared with 49 percent in Gaza. In contrast, 41 percent believe that Fayyad should not continue as a prime minister, more in Gaza (45 percent) than in the West Bank (38 percent). About 8 percent did not know.

**Do You Think that Salam Fayyad Should Continue to be the Prime Minister within the New Government?**

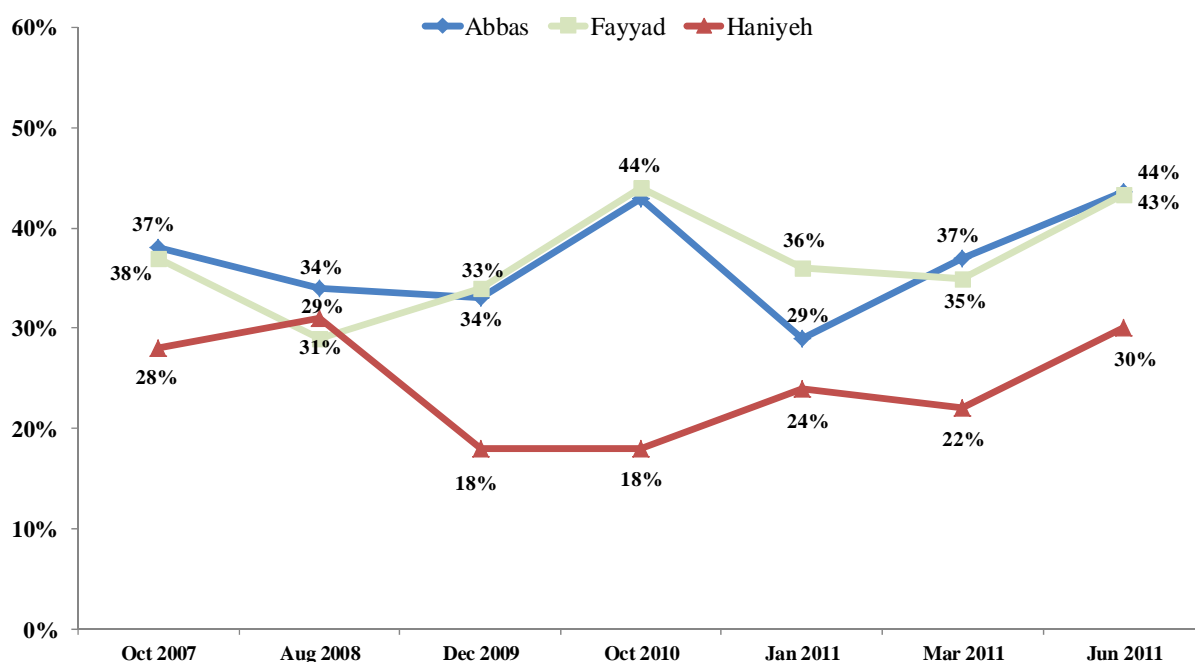


**Fayyad surpasses all other candidates in an open-ended question:** An open-ended question on who should be the next prime minister confirmed that Fayyad is seen as the best choice for the position, with over one third (33.5 percent) mentioned his name. Another 18 percent said that the prime minister should be an independent person. Haniyeh was mentioned by 12.4 percent, followed by Mustafa Barghouthi at (8.1 percent). Others mentioned were: Marwan Barghouthi (4.8 percent), Munib Masri (2 percent), Ahmad Sa'adat (1.5 percent), Mohamad Dahlan (1.3 percent), Khaled Meshal (1.3 percent), Jamal Khudari and Mazen Sonokrot (about 1 percent each). About 7 percent listed other persons who received less than 1 percent, while about 9 percent would not answer the question.

## THE PERFORMANCE OF PALESTINIAN LEADERS

Respondents were asked to rate the performance of three main Palestinian political leaders in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. In general, the positive evaluation of all leaders had improved during the last three months. This is mostly due to the signing of the Reconciliation Agreement.

**Percentage evaluating the performance of Abbas, Haniyeh, and Fayyad as “Good”**



**President Abbas’s positive evaluation improves the most:** President Abbas gained the most in the aftermath of the signing of the agreement, where 44 percent gave him a good evaluation, compared with 30 percent in the last AWRAD poll of January 2011, a significant 14 percent increase in rating. Overall, 76 percent view the performance of President Abbas as good or fair. This is compared with 63 percent six months ago. In contrast, the percentage of negative evaluation for the performance of President Abbas declined from 35 percent in January to 22 percent now. The positive evaluation of Abbas is higher in the West Bank (where 48 percent gave him good) compared with Gaza (where 37 percent gave him good). Overall, 78 percent in the West Bank gave him good or fair, while 72 percent in Gaza did the same.

**Prime Minister Fayyad's positive evaluation improves over time:** Prime Minister Fayyad also gained some positive evaluation, where 43 percent gave him a good evaluation in this poll, compared with 38 percent in the January 2011 poll, a 5 percent increase. The results of the polls over time, however, show much larger gains in his positive evaluation. Compared with the poll of August 2008, Fayyad's good evaluation went from 29 percent to 43 percent (a 14% increase). Overall, 76 percent view the performance of Fayyad as good or fair. This is compared with 70 percent six months ago and 60 percent during August 2008, an increase of 16% in almost three years. In contrast, the percentage of negative evaluation for the performance of Fayyad declined from 34 percent in August 2008, to 25 percent in January 2011, to 21 percent now.

**Prime Minister Haniyeh regains his original evaluation:** Prime Minister Haniyeh also gained some positive evaluation, bringing him back to his rates during 2008. About 30 percent gave him a good evaluation, compared with 24 percent during January 2011. Compared with August 2008, Haniyeh's good evaluation stayed the same. Overall, 63 percent view the performance of Haniyeh as good or fair. This is compared with 54 percent six months ago, an increase of 9 percent. In contrast, the percentage of negative evaluation for the performance of Haniyeh declined from 39 percent in August 2008, to 34 percent in January 2011, to 30 percent now.

## ELECTIONS

Respondents were asked about the timing of the elections and who they would vote for if the elections took place now. The following summarize their answers.

**Election as Urgent:** The great majority of respondents (84 percent; 80 in West Bank and 88 in Gaza) believe that the firm timetable as stipulated in the reconciliation agreement should be adhered to for holding new PLC elections. The great majority of respondents (88 percent) also believe that PLC and Presidential elections should be held immediately (40 percent) or within one year as per the reconciliation agreement (48 percent).

**Abbas is the most popular candidate:** Respondents were given a list of candidates for President and asked who they would vote for if the presidential election took place today:

- Mahmoud Abbas (27 percent)
- Musatafa Barghouthi, Salam Fayyad and Ismael Haniyeh (10-11 percent)
- Ahmad Saadat (4 percent)
- Khalid Meshal (3 percent)
- Jibril Rojoub (1.0 percent)
- Zahira Kamal (0.5 percent)
- Others (6.0 percent)
- 17 percent are undecided
- 11 percent will not vote

**Fatah continues to receive the most support in a PLC ballot test:** Respondents were also asked "If PLC elections took place today and the lists endorsed by the following were running, which one would vote for?" The following is a summary of the results:



- Fatah (36 percent), divided among a list led by Abbas (27 percent) and a list led by Marwan Barghouti (9 percent)
- Hamas (10 percent), representing a significant decline in the popularity of the movement over time, particularly if we compare these results with the nearly 50 percent support they received immediately after the 2006 elections
- Palestinian National Initiative–Mubadara (8 percent)
- Third Way (7 percent)
- PFLP (3-4 percent)
- All other listed groups at 1 percent or less each
- Unidentified others (2 percent)
- 16 percent are undecided
- 12 percent will not vote

**The largest group of municipal election voters is undecided or won't vote:** Respondents were asked “if local elections were held today and the following were running, for which list you would vote?” The following is a summary of their answers:

- A list endorsed by Mahmoud Abbas (31 percent)
- A list endorsed by Ismael Haniyah (13 percent)
- A list endorsed by Mustafa Barghouti and Salam Fayyad together (15 percent)
- A list endorsed by Ahmad Saadat, Bassam Salhi, Zahira Kamal, and Ahmad Majdalani (5 percent)
- Unidentified others (4 percent)
- About 19 percent were undecided
- 13 percent will not vote

## **SUPPORT FOR ARAB UPRISINGS**

Fifty-six percent of respondents believe that the changes taking place in the Arab world positively affect the Palestinian situation, 15 percent believe that that effect is negative, and 25 percent believe that that effect is “neutral.” Also when asked whether they support/oppose the ongoing uprising in some Arab countries, more than 70 percent of them stated that they support these uprisings (75 percent support the Libyan uprising, 74 the Yemeni, and 71 the Syrian uprising).

## **THE PEACE PROCESS**

There is conditional support for resuming negotiations with Israel. Responses in previous polls in regard to frustration with the peace process with Israel seem to be supported by responses in the current poll regarding the Palestinian-Israeli conflict: About 46 percent support a conditional return (23 percent if settlement construction is halted, 7 percent if negotiation is held under international auspices, and 16 percent if negotiation is held on the basis of the 1967 borders). Taken together, however, this represents a large majority (73 percent) support for returning to negotiations in some form. Only 27 percent of respondents support an unconditional return to the negotiations between the Palestinians and Israelis. In contrast, 24 percent reject Palestinian-Israeli negotiations under the current conditions.

In the same context, a majority of respondents (64 percent) support a move by the Palestinian leadership to seek UN recognition of a Palestinian state.

When asked whether the new government should continue to abide the PLO's recognition of Israel, the respondents were split equally; 43 percent said yes, 43 percent said no, while about 14 percent said they did not know. Similarly, 46 percent of respondents support the notion that Hamas should recognize previous agreements signed by the PLO. In contrast, 38 percent oppose that.