

PSR - Survey Research Unit: PSR Polls among Palestinian Refugees

18 July 2003

Press Release

RESULTS OF PSR REFUGEES' POLLS IN THE WEST BANK/GAZA STRIP, JORDAN AND LEBANON ON REFUGEES' PREFERENCES AND BEHAVIOR IN A PALESTINIAN-ISRAELI PERMANENT REFUGEE AGREEMENT

January-June 2003

Table of Contents:

- 1) [Introduction](#)
- 2) [Objectives of the surveys](#)
- 3) [Main Findings](#)
 - [Selected Information on refugees](#)
 - [Selected Views](#)
 - [Expected Behavior](#)
- 4) [Driving forces](#)

I. Introduction:

PSR conducted three major surveys among Palestinian refugees in three areas: the West Bank and the Gaza Strip (WBGS), Jordan and Lebanon. Based on several previous surveys showing that the overwhelming majority of the refugees (more than 95%) insist on maintaining the "right of return" as a sacred right that can never be given up, PSR surveys sought to find out how refugees would behave once they have obtained that right and how they would react under various likely conditions and circumstances of the permanent settlement. The three surveys have been funded by the Japanese government (through the United Nations Development Program), the (German) Konrad Adenauer Foundation, and the (Canadian) International Development Research Center. One survey among non-refugees in the WBGS has also been conducted to examine the views of non-refugees on some of the same issues raised in the refugees' surveys. The WBGS refugee survey was conducted by PSR in January 2003, and the WBGS non-refugee survey in April 2003. The Jordan survey was conducted in May 2003 by the Center for Strategic Studies at Jordan University with full PSR supervision. The Lebanon survey was conducted in June 2003 by Statistics Lebanon Company.

Sample size for the three refugees' surveys was 4506 distributed at the three areas almost equally, averaging 1500 interviews with refugee families in each area. A random sample was selected taking into consideration refugee distribution (inside-outside refugee camps) in each area. Rejection rate was less than 1% and the margin of error was 3%.

For further information on the surveys and the findings, contact Dr. Khalil Shikaki or Ayoub Mustafa at PSR at 972 2 296 4933 or fax 0972 2 296 4934, or by email: pcpsr@pcpsr.org.

(2) Objectives of the surveys:

The surveys had two main objectives:

1. To help the process of peace negotiations, the surveys sought to find out refugees' preferences in the permanent agreement with Israel. For this purpose,

the refugees were asked about their attitude toward various political solutions and about their likely behavior under a specific solution that was discussed at the Taba Israeli-Palestinian negotiations in January 2001. To insure maximum benefits, the questionnaire was prepared in consultation with official Palestinian institutions in charge of negotiations and refugee affairs in the PLO and the Palestinian Authority.

2. To help the planning and absorption process by making estimates of the number and socio-economic and demographic profile of refugees who may prefer to live in the Palestinian state. To insure maximum benefits, the questionnaire was prepared in consultation with official Palestinian institutions responsible for planning in the Palestinian Authority.

PSR consulted also with researchers and NGOs dealing with refugee issues to benefit from their experience and insights. While we are grateful for the advice we have received, PSR is responsible for all aspects of this work: the preparation of questions, the selection of the sample, the conduct of the fieldwork, and the analysis of the results.

(3) Main Findings

Three kinds of data have been collected: information about the refugees and their socio-economic conditions in the three areas examined, views and attitudes of refugees regarding peace settlement issues, and expected refugees' behavior under a specific peace solution and under various conditions and circumstances of a refugee settlement.

1. Selected Information on refugees

- The surveys show that the overwhelming majority of the refugees are registered with UNRWA, the UN agency that cares for the Palestinian refugees. The WBGS came first with 98% registration followed by Lebanon (94%) and Jordan (91%).
- Average family size in the WBGS sample was 7.55 (individuals per family), followed by Jordan with 6.16, and Lebanon with 4.59. With regard to age groups, WBGS had the largest percentage of young people, less than 18 years old, with 48% followed by Jordan with 37% and Lebanon with 35%. Lebanon had the highest percentage for the old, more than 52 years old, with 17%, followed by Jordan with 12% and WBGS with 9%.
- With regard to education, Lebanon had the lowest illiteracy rate. Lebanon also had the highest rate of those with elementary and preparatory education (62%). Jordan had the highest rate secondary education (16%). WBGS had the highest illiteracy rate with 35% followed by Jordan (24%) and Lebanon (11%).
- With regard to income, Jordan had the highest percentage of income in the middle brackets (45%) followed by Lebanon (42%) and the WBGS (27%). For those with low income level, Lebanon came first (36%) followed by WBGS (32%) and Jordan (17%). The WBGS had the largest percentage of those in the high income brackets (41%) followed by Jordan (38%) and Lebanon (22%). Of course these income levels are relative and reflect arbitrary distribution selected for analytical purposes only.
- Refugees in Lebanon had the largest percentage of relatives living in Israel (39%) followed by Jordan's (24%) and Palestine (21%). With regard to relatives who immigrated to foreign countries, Lebanon came on top here as well with 64% followed by Jordan and WBGS (24% each). As for those with relatives in the WBGS, Jordan came first (56%) followed by Lebanon (21%).

- 97% of those interviewed in Jordan and 15% of those interviewed in the WBGS carries the Jordanian passport. In Lebanon, 74% had Lebanese travel documents for Palestinian refugees, and in Palestine 42% carried Palestinian passports while 6% carried Egyptian travel documents or passports.
- 63% of refugees in Lebanon own a house in the refugee camps while those owning land in Lebanon did not exceed 1%. In Jordan, 48% own a house outside the camps and 11% own land in the country. In the WBGS, 47% own a house inside the camps and 48% own a house outside the camps while 17% own land. The highest percentage of private car ownership was found in Lebanon (31%) followed by Jordan (25%) and WBGS (15%).

2. Selected Views

A proposed solution of the refugee issue was presented to respondents who were then asked how they would view it and how they would behave if given the right to choose among the options made available by the solution. The following is the full text of the solution presented:

"We will now read you a proposed solution to the refugee problem that was published in Palestinian papers in the light of the Taba negotiations in January 2000. We will then ask you few questions:

"The establishment of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip and Israeli recognition of UN resolution 194 or the right of return. But the two sides would agree on the return of a small number of refugees to Israel in accordance with a timetable that extends for several years. Each refugee family will be able to choose one of the following options:

- 1. Return to Israel in accordance with an annual quota and become an Israeli citizen*
 - 2. Stay in the Palestinian state that will be established in the West Bank and Gaza Strip and receive a fair compensation for the property taken over by Israel and for other losses and suffering*
 - 3. Receive Palestinian citizenship and return to designated areas inside Israel that would be swapped later on with Palestinian areas as part of a territorial exchange and receive compensation*
 - 4. Receive fair compensation for the property, losses, and suffering and stay in the host country receiving its citizenship or Palestinian citizenship*
 - 5. Receive fair compensation for the property, losses, and suffering and immigrate to a European country or the US, Australia, or Canada and obtain citizenship of that country or Palestinian citizenship.*
- A majority of refugees in the three areas expressed the belief that Israel would reject the proposed solution to the refugee problem. But a majority of 55% in Jordan, 63% in Palestine, and 67% in Lebanon believed the PLO would accept the solution. However, the respondents were split in their evaluation of the likely response of the majority of the refugees with WBGS refugees split right in the middle, Jordan's refugees tilting toward acceptance, and Lebanon's toward rejection. When asked how they themselves feel about the proposal, the respondents in Palestine and Lebanon were divided into two equal groups, rejecting or accepting it, while in Jordan it was accepted by 50% and rejected by 37% with the rest expressing no opinion. When asked how they would react to a Palestinian-Israeli agreement embracing the proposal, the overwhelming majority tended to approve such agreement even if most felt they would do so for the lack of better alternative. A small percentage (15%, 9%, and 8% in WBGS, Lebanon,

and Jordan respectively) said that it would not only oppose such solution but would also resist it.

- While a majority of Lebanon's refugees believe that the WBGS is unable to absorb refugees from other countries, the percentage drops to 27% in the WBGS and 26% in Lebanon.
- When asked if they would like to play a role in building the Palestinian state, the percentage of those wishing to do so was very high among refugees in WBGS (84%) going down to 61% in Lebanon and 52% in Jordan.
- While a two-third majority of refugees in WBGS supported the reference in the roadmap to "an agreed, fair, and realistic" solution to the refugee problem, the level of support dropped to 46% among refugees in Jordan and 45% in Lebanon.
- A second possible political settlement was proposed to respondents. In this settlement, the issue of refugees would remain unresolved and postponed while all other issues would be permanently settled. A majority of refugees in WBGS supported such settlement, but the majority of refugees in Lebanon and Jordan did not support it. However, the level of support for this "permanent-minus" settlement increased when refugees were told that refugees would be provided housing projects while waiting for a resolution of their problem. When asked whether they would like to move to the Palestinian state under such settlement and wait there for a permanent resolution of the refugee issue, two-thirds of refugees in Lebanon and Jordan preferred to stay in Lebanon. But 25% of Jordan's refugees and 31% of Lebanon's refugees expressed willingness to move temporarily to the Palestinian state and wait there for a solution.
- Refugees were asked about the side they would choose to represent them in negotiations over the refugee problem. The overwhelming majority of refugees in Lebanon and WBGS chose the PLO (86% and 73% in Lebanon and WBGS respectively). But in Jordan, only 40% chose the PLO while 28% selected the government of Jordan and 16% did not expressed an opinion. However, the confidence in the PLO drops when it comes to the management of the compensation process. The largest percentage (42%) in WBGS favored a joint team from the PLO, the UN, and representatives of refugees. But in Lebanon, the largest percentage (45%) favored the PLO, and in Jordan, the joint team received 28%, the PLO 22%, and the Jordanian government 23%. It should be mentioned that the questions regarding compensation were asked only to those whose choice for the exercise of the right of return involved compensation.
- No significant differences were found between the attitudes of refugees and non-refugees in WBGS.

3. Expected Behavior:

After reading the proposed solution to the refugee problem (full text above), respondents were asked to choose the option or options they preferred or reject all options and describe, in their own words, what would constitute an acceptable solution.

The following represents the answers of the refugees in the three areas:

Refugees' First Choice (for the exercise of the right of the right of return)				
	WBGS%	Jordan%	Lebanon%	Total (% of total population in the three areas)
1. Return to Israel and	12	5	23	10

become (or not become) an Israeli citizen				
2. Stay in the Palestinian state that will be established in the West Bank and Gaza Strip and receive a fair compensation for the property taken over by Israel and for other losses and suffering	38	27	19	31
3. Receive Palestinian citizenship and return to designated areas inside Israel that would be swapped later on with Palestinian areas as part of a territorial exchange and receive any deserved compensation	37	10	21	23
4. Receive fair compensation for the property, losses, and suffering and stay in host country receiving its citizenship or Palestinian citizenship	-	33	11	17
5. Receive fair compensation for the property, losses, and suffering and immigrate to a European country or the US, Australia, or Canada and obtain citizenship of that country or Palestinian citizenship	1	2	9	2
6. Refuse all options	9	16	17	13
7. No opinion	2	8	0	5

Based on the percentages listed above, the number of refugees wishing to move from Lebanon and Jordan to the Palestinian state in an exercise of the right of return would be 784, 049. The number of those wishing to exercise the same right of by returning to Israel from the three areas under examination would be 373,673. The numbers in these two categories of the exercise of return would vary however depending on several considerations related to the conditions and circumstances of return and residency. For example, the surveys found that 45% of Lebanon's refugees, 52% of Jordan's, and 47% of WBGS would change their choice and exercise the right of return in the swapped areas of the Palestinian state if their homes and villages were demolished. The overwhelming majority of the refugees wishing to exercise the right of return in Israel refuse to become Israeli citizenship and prefer to stay refugees or select other options if carrying Israeli citizenship is mandatory.

Those who opted for an option entailing compensation were asked to make their own estimates of what they thought would be paid to each refugee family and what they thought would be a fair compensation. The estimates for a fair compensation were much higher than the estimates of what would actually be paid. For example, 66% in WBGS believed that what would be paid would be \$ 100,000 or less, while 65% believed that a fair compensation should be between \$100,000 and \$ 500,000.

The surveys also showed that more than one third of refugees in Lebanon and Jordan (from among those who would accept to have their compensation in the form of land or houses) would accept land and houses located in evacuated settlements. But this percentage rises to 48% among the refugees in WBGS.

With regard to immigration to third countries, an option selected by a small minority, the most popular third country in Lebanon was a European one while the US was the most popular among refugees in Jordan and the least popular in WBGS.

(4) Driving forces

When formulating the questions for the surveys, we sought to understand the motivation and driving forces behind the attitudes and behavior of the refugees. PSR researchers had four hypotheses regarding these drivers:

- *Hypothesis one*: in selecting places of residence and absorption, in the exercise of the right of return, refugees would be motivated by the degree of their attachment to, and perception of, Palestinian national identity.
- *Hypothesis two*: refugees in host countries in particular will also be motivated by their perception of the nature of the relationship they have with those countries and the extent of the civil and political equality they enjoy in them.
- *Hypothesis three*: refugees will also be motivated by family considerations; i.e., depending on where relative lived: in Israel, the Palestinian state, or third countries.
- *Hypothesis four*: selection of choices would also be dependent on socio-economic considerations in their current place of residence (what area, inside or outside refugee camps, etc.) and on the extent of refugee ownership in those areas of residence.

Findings clearly show the significance of national identity leading the majority to choose to exercise the right of return in the Palestinian state. The findings also show that the perception of relative equality enjoyed by refugees in Jordan (compared to those in Lebanon) increased the percentage of those selecting Jordan as the place where they would permanently reside while only a small minority opted to stay in Lebanon. In Lebanon, in particular, the results showed the significance of family links leading to the highest percentages of demand on immigration to third countries as well as the demand to live in Israel as these are the areas in which Lebanon's refugees have relatives more than other refugee groups in Jordan and WBGS. Finally, the findings show that the percentage of those who opted to stay in host countries increases among refugees living outside refugee camps and that those wishing to go the Palestinian state increases among those with lower and middle levels of income compared to those who a higher level of income. Moreover, those who own homes and land in their place of residence tend to want to stay in that place.