

Palestinian public in favour of extending peace negotiations

Palestinian Public Opinion Poll No (51), 20-22 March 2014

While a majority would reject the Framework document if it includes recognition of Israel as the state of the Jewish people, most Palestinians support extending negotiations and postponing joining international organizations to the end of the year in return for an Israeli release of new Palestinian prisoners; a majority also believes that Abbas will accept the Framework document and will extend negotiation to the end of 2014.

Main Findings

Findings of the first quarter of 2014 show Palestinian flexibility regarding the extension of negotiations with Israel if Israel agrees in return to release more Palestinian prisoners or freeze settlement construction in some settlements. Similarly, more than two thirds of the public support postponing joining more international organizations in return for an Israeli release of more prisoners. Findings also show that the public believes that Abbas will accept the Framework document when presented by John Kerry and that Abbas will also agree to extend negotiations to the end of 2014. Similarly, the largest percentage believes that Netanyahu too will accept the Framework document. But a majority of Palestinians indicates that it would reject the Framework document if it includes a request to recognize Israel as the state of the Jewish people even if the document states that the 1967 lines are the basis of negotiations and that East Jerusalem is the capital of Palestine.

In domestic matters, findings indicate a limited increase in Fatah's popularity while at the same time indicating a significant decrease in the level of satisfaction with the performance of Abbas. Surprisingly, the percentage of those voting for Abbas in presidential elections did not decrease; in fact it increased slightly. Findings also show an almost equal split among the public regarding the idea of appointing a vice president and if one is appointed, Marwan Barghouti emerges as the most acceptable. The public is also split on its position regarding instances of strikes in the public sector, which recently increased significantly, with a little over half looking at the strikes negatively and a little less than half viewing them positively.

Peace Process

- A majority of 56% believes that president Abbas will accept the Framework document that will be presented by John Kerry while 32% believe he will reject it; similarly, the largest percentage (47%) believes that Netanyahu too will accept the Framework document while 41% believe that he will reject it.
- A majority of 62% rejects and 32% accept the framework document if it includes a request to recognize Israel as the state for the Jewish people.
- An overwhelming majority (76%) believes that president Abbas will agree to extend negotiations with Israel to the end of the year and only 14% believe he will not agree to that.
- Yet, a majority of 55% of the public is opposed to extending negotiations to the end of the year; 42% support such an extension. Support for extending negotiations increases to 51% if Israel agreed to freeze settlement construction in some settlements; support increases sharply to 65% if Israel agrees to release more Palestinian prisoners.
- An overwhelming majority (75%) believes that president Abbas will go to international organizations after the end of the current round of negotiations while 17% believe that he will not do that.
- 60% support joining more international organizations even if this leads to the imposition of financial sanctions on the PA; 34% oppose this step. But more than two-thirds (68%) agree to postpone joining more international organizations in return for release of more Palestinian prisoners by Israel; 28% disagree with that.
- 56% believe that a majority of the Palestinians will vote in favor of a peace agreement reached between Abbas and Israel in the current negotiations and 34% believe a majority of Palestinians will vote against it.
- An overwhelming majority of 77% opposes and 21% support continued presence of settlers under Palestinian sovereignty in a Palestinian state after reaching a peace agreement.
- A majority of 51% supports the two-state solution but 57% believe that such a solution is no longer practical due to settlement expansion and 74% believe that the chances for the establishment of a Palestinian state alongside Israel in the next five years are slim or non-existent; only 24% believe the chances are high or medium. Yet, the overwhelming majority (72%) is opposed to a one-state solution and only 26% support such a solution in which Arabs and Jews enjoy equality.

Presidential and Legislative Elections

- If new presidential elections are held today and only two were nominated, Abbas would receive the vote of 53% and Haniyeh 41% of the vote of those participating. The rate of participation in such elections would reach 60%. Three months ago, Abbas received the support of 52% and Haniyeh 42%. In this poll, in the Gaza Strip, Abbas receives 47% and Haniyeh 52% and in the West Bank Abbas receives 57% and Haniyeh 34%.
- If presidential elections were between Marwan Barghouti and Haniyeh, the former would receive 60% and the latter would receive 34% of the participants' votes. The rate of participation in this case would reach 68%. In our December 2013 poll Barghouti received 61% of the vote and Haniyeh 34%.
- If presidential elections were between three: Mahmud Abbas, Marwan Barghouti and Ismail Haniyeh, Barghouti would receive the largest percentage (36%) followed by Abbas (30%), and Haniyeh (29%). The rate of participation in this case would reach 74%. In our previous poll last December, Barghouti received 40%, Haniyeh 31%, and Abbas 26%.
- 45% support and 44% oppose the appointment of a vice president to Abbas. Among those who support appointing a vice president, Marwan Barghouti is the favorite, selected by 32% in an open question, followed by Rami al Hamdallah who was selected by 13%, Ismail Haniyeh by 8%, Saeb Erekat by 7%, Mohammad Dahlan by 7%, Mustapha Barghouti by 6%, and Azzam al Ahmad by 3%.
- If new legislative elections are held today with the participation of all factions, 70% say they would participate in such elections. Of those who would participate, 28% say they would vote for Hamas and 43% say they would vote for Fatah, 12% would vote for all other third parties combined, and 17% are undecided. Vote for Hamas in the Gaza Strip stands in this poll at 37% and in the West Bank at 23%. Vote for Fatah in the Gaza Strip stands in this poll at 38% and in the West Bank at 45%. These results indicate an increase in the vote for Hamas in the Gaza Strip which stood at 33% last December. Fatah, on the other hand, increased its popularity in the West Bank by four percentage points and lost one percentage point in the Gaza Strip during the same period.

Domestic Conditions

- Positive evaluation of conditions in the Gaza Strip stabilizes at 15% in this poll compared to 16% three months ago. 62% say conditions in the Gaza Strip are bad or very bad.

- Positive evaluation of conditions in the West Bank remains unchanged compared to three months ago standing today at 30%. But the percentage of those who believe conditions in the West Bank are bad or very bad increased from 36% to 42% during the same period.
- Perception of corruption in PA institutions in the West Bank stands at 80% in this poll. Perception of corruption in the public institutions of Hamas' Gaza government stands at 64%.
- 19% say there is, and 41% say there is to some extent, press freedom in the West Bank. By contrast, 18% say there is, and 33% say there is to some extent, press freedom in the Gaza Strip.
- 31% of the Palestinian public say people in the West Bank can criticize the authority in the West Bank without fear. By contrast, 22% of the public say people in the Gaza Strip can criticize the authorities in Gaza without fear.
- Perception of safety and security in the West Bank stands at 51% and in the Gaza Strip at 56%. Three months ago these percentages stood at 55% in the West Bank and 62% in the Gaza Strip.
- Findings show that the percentage of Gazans who say they seek immigration to other countries stands at 44%; in the West Bank, the percentage stands at 22%. Last December these percentages stood at 45% and 27% respectively.
- Positive evaluation of the performance of the Haniyeh government stands at 37%. Positive evaluation of the government of Rami al Hamdallah in the West Bank stands at 41%.
- Percentage of satisfaction with the performance of President Abbas drops from 53% three months ago to 46% in this poll.
- We asked the public about its views regarding the recent increase in the cases of public sector strikes: a majority of 51% said it sees these strikes as unacceptable while 48% saw them as acceptable.
- We also asked the public about the increase in the cases of the so-called honor killing: an overwhelming majority of 78% supported and 20% opposed the imposition of stiffer sentences against the killers.
- We asked the public about the increased talk about the spread of drug abuse among the youth in their communities: a majority of 54% indicated that it detected an increase in this practice among the youth while only 7% said it detected a decrease. The belief that drug abuse is on the rise increases in the West Bank (58%) while decreasing to 47% in the Gaza Strip.

- We asked the public about the personal accusations made by President Abbas against Mohammad Dahlan and about Dahlan's denial: a majority of 26% said it believed Abbas' accusations to be true; 7% said it believed Dahlan's denial; and 57% believed none of them.
- We asked West Bank and Gaza publics about their expectation regarding economic conditions in their respective areas in the next few years: 19% of the West Bankers expected better conditions and 52% expected worse conditions. In the Gaza Strip, 28% expected better conditions and 34% expected worse conditions.

Reconciliation

- Given the existing status quo between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and Hamas and Fatah, percentage of optimism about the chances for reunification of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip remains low, standing at 15%. The belief that unity is impossible and that two separate entities will emerge stands at 39%. 42% believe that unity will be restored but only after a long time. These findings are similar to those we obtained in our last poll in December.
- For the first time since the split between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, a majority of 52% see a necessity for holding separate elections in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip if the current disunity continued for a long time; 45% believe it to be unnecessary.
- The largest percentage (41%) believes that the PA, with its two parts in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, has become a burden on the Palestinian people and 25% believe that it is an accomplishment for the Palestinian people. Furthermore, 15% believe that the PA in the West Bank is an accomplishment while the PA in the Gaza Strip is a burden. By contrast, a similar percentage (13%) believes that the PA in the Gaza Strip is an accomplishment while the PA in the West Bank is a burden.
- 24% believe that the Haniyeh government in the Gaza Strip is the legitimate Palestinian government while 30% believe that the Abbas-Hamdallah government in the West Bank is the legitimate one; 9% believe that the two governments are legitimate. 31% believe that both governments are illegitimate. These findings indicate a rise of four points in the percentage of those who believe that the two governments are illegitimate compared to December findings.
- The percentage of those who believe Hamas' way is the best way to end occupation and build a Palestinian state stands at 39% while the percentage of those who believe that Abbas' way is the best way stands at 36%. The current findings are identical to those of December 2013.

Most vital Palestinian goals and the main problems confronting Palestinians today

- 42% 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, 34% 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 it should be to build a pious or moral individual and a religious society, one that applies all Islamic teachings, and 9% believe that the first and most vital goal should be to establish a democratic political system that respects freedoms and rights of Palestinians. Three months ago, 42% said ending occupation and building a state was most vital goal and 33% said the most vital goal was the right of return.
- The most serious problem confronting Palestinian society today is the spread of poverty and unemployment in the eyes of 27% of the public while 25% say it is the continuation of occupation and settlement activities; 21% believe the most serious problem is the absence of national unity due to the West Bank-Gaza Strip split, 15% believe the most serious problem is corruption in some public institutions, and 10% believe it is the siege and the closure of the Gaza border crossings.

Electricity Crisis

- 70% of West Bankers and 30% of Gazans believe that residents in their communities pay all their electricity bills. While a third of the West Bankers believes that failure to pay electricity bills is justified, almost two-thirds of Gazans say the same.
- Around half of the West Bankers and a quarter of Gazans believe that the electricity company in their area should deny electricity to those who fail to pay. Yet, when the question involves other options, 56% of the West Bankers and 75% of Gazans believe that the PA should pay the debt of the electricity companies. In this question, support for denying electricity to those who do not pay drops to 32% in the West Bank and 20% in the Gaza Strip. Only 4% believe the electricity companies should raise prices in order to address the problem of debt and non-payment.
- In order to strengthen the capacity of the electricity companies to fight electricity theft, 82% of the West Bankers and 59% of Gazans support imposing fines and jail sentences against those who steal electricity. Also, 75% of West Bankers and 56% of Gazans support sending

police escorts with electricity workers to help them cut off electricity from the homes of electricity thieves. 76% of West Bankers and 45% of Gazans support forming special courts to try electricity thieves. Finally, 29% of West Bankers and 22% of Gazans support cutting off electricity on whole neighborhoods in which electricity theft is widespread.

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 20-22 March 2014. The period before the poll witnessed continued Palestinian-Israeli negotiations but with significant instances of sharp disagreements over the contents of the American proposed Framework document. It also witnessed the release by Israel of another group of Palestinian prisoners. Several deadly confrontations between Palestinians and the Israeli army led a growing number of Palestinian martyrs. Talks continued regarding the appointment of a vice president and conflict and acrimony between Abbas and Mohammad Dahlan were evident to the public to see. This press release covers the peace process, public evaluation of the general West Bank and Gaza conditions, elections, reconciliation, public evaluation of the performance of the governments of Ismail Haniyeh and Rami al Hamdallah, public satisfaction with the performance of President Mahmud Abbas, the internal balance of power between Fatah and Hamas, and others. 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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