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PRESS RELEASE

Palestinian Public Opinion Poll No (29)

While the gap between Mahmud Abbas and Ismail Haniyeh widens in favor of the former, and while the overwhelming majority opposes Hamas's military action in Shijaiah in the Gaza Strip, almost two-thirds believe that Abbas's term in office expires in January 2009 rather than January 2010

28-30 August 2008

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 28 and 30 August 2008. This period witnessed a relative consolidation of the ceasefire between Hamas and Israel in the Gaza Strip and the release by Israel of about 200 Palestinian prisoners as a gesture to President Mahmud Abbas. Total size of the sample is 1270 adults interviewed face to face in 127 randomly selected locations. Margin of error is 3%. This press release cover domestic Palestinian issues; issues related to the peace process and Israeli-Palestinian relations will be covered in a separate joint Palestinian-Israeli press release. For further details, contact PSR director, Dr. Khalil Shikaki, or Walid Ladadweh at tel 02-296 4933 or email pcpsr@pcpsr.org.

Main Findings:

Findings of the third quarter of 2008 indicate continued slow decline in Hamas's popularity while Fateh's popularity remains stable as it was during the second quarter. Similarly, findings show a slightly wider gap between the popularity of President Abbas compared to that of Ismail Haniyeh in favor of the former. Positive evaluation of the conditions of Palestinians in the West Bank remains higher than that of conditions in the Gaza Strip. This applies to overall conditions as well as those of democracy and human rights. Findings show also significant opposition to Hamas's military entry into Shijaiah in the Gaza Strip in early August. They also show widespread belief that the term of President Abbas ends in the first month of January 2009, as Hamas claims, and not in the first month of 2010, as the presidency claims.

It was expected that the ceasefire between Hamas and Israel would lead to improvement in Hamas's standing among the public. But the fact that Hamas continues to lose public support might be due to strong opposition to its behavior in dealing with Shijaiah incident which led to several deaths and the escape of several members of the Hillis family to Israel. Moreover, the fact that the Rafah crossing remained closed since the ceasefire and that the other crossings were only partially opened might have weakened Hamas's appeal. On the other hand, findings show an improvement in the perception of security and safety in the West Bank which might have been responsible in part for the improvement in Abbas's standing. Moreover, Israel's release of about 200 Palestinian prisoners at the end of August might have also played in Abbas's favor.

- The Gap between the standing of PA President Mahmud Abbas and Hamas's Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh has increased to 14 percentage points in favor of Abbas. If new presidential elections are held today, and the only two candidates were Abbas and Haniyeh, the former would receive the support of 53% and the latter 39%. This finding represents a slight increase in the popularity of Abbas which stood at 52% last June compared to 40% for Haniyeh. Haniyeh's popularity reached its peak last March, in the aftermath of the breaching of the Rafah border, when it stood at 47% compared to 46% for Abbas. If the competition was between Marwan Barghouti and Haniyeh, the former would receive 61% to Haniyeh's 34%. Level of non-participation in the presidential elections would reach 37% if the competition was between Abbas and Haniyeh and 27% if the competition was between Barghouti and Haniyeh.
- Moreover, the gap between Fateh and Hamas increases from 12 percentage points last June to 14 percentage points in this poll. If new parliamentary elections are to take place today, Hamas would receive 29% (compared to 31% last June) and Fateh would receive 43% (same as in June). Percentage of those who would vote for other factions and parties stands today at 11% and the undecided at 16%.
- Satisfaction with the performance of Abbas increases slightly from 46% last June to 48% in this poll. Level of dissatisfaction reaches 47% today.
- Positive evaluation of the performance of the government of Salam Fayyad remains as it was last June standing at 34% and the negative evaluation at 34%. Similarly, positive evaluation of Haniyeh's government stands today at 34% and negative evaluation at 39%. Last June, positive evaluation of Haniyeh's government stood at 37% and negative evaluation at 35%. Today, 33% say Fayyad's government is the legitimate one while 27% say Haniyeh's government is the legitimate one. Last June, belief in the legitimacy of the Fayyad government reached 31% compared to 29% for Haniyeh's. Last March, Haniyeh's government was perceived as legitimate by 34%.
- Perception of personal and family security and safety increases in the West Bank from 40% last June to 43% in this poll. But the percentage of personal and family security and safety in the Gaza Strip is higher than in the West Bank as it reaches 54% (compared to 49% in Gaza last June).
- By contrast, positive evaluation of the overall conditions of Palestinians in the West Bank is higher than in the Gaza Strip, with only 8% describing conditions on the Gaza Strip as good or very good and 27% describing the same conditions in the West Bank and good or very good. Last June, positive evaluation of conditions in the Gaza Strip stood at 5% compared to 25% in the West Bank.
- Similarly, 34% give a positive evaluation of the status of democracy in the West Bank while only 24% describe the same conditions in the Gaza Strip as good or very good.
- An overwhelming majority (69%) opposes Hamas's armed entry into the Shijaiah neighborhood in the Gaza Strip (an event that led to several deaths and the escape of several members of Hillis family to Israel) while only 20% support it. Support for Hamas's action increases in the Gaza Strip, reaching 35% compared to 12% in the West Bank. The wide gap in support between the two areas might reflect a greater Hamas media influence in Gaza Strip compared to the West Bank. Indeed, our findings show that 21% in the Gaza Strip watch Hamas's satellite TV station, al Aqsa, compared to only 6% in the West Bank.
- 23% believe that Fateh is responsible for the Gaza explosion that led to the death of five Hamas members last June while 43% believe it was not responsible; 33% say they do not know.

- A majority of 63% believes that Abbas term as president ends in January 2009, as Hamas claims (i.e., four years after he was elected), while only 23% believe that his term extends to five years ending in January 2010, as the presidency claims.

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