



المركز الفلسطيني للبحوث السياسية والمسحية

Palestinian Center for POLICY and SURVEY RESEARCH

Poll

Survey Research Unit

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The **Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (PSR)** is an independent nonprofit institution and think tank of policy analysis and academic research. PSR was founded with the goal of advancing scholarship and knowledge on immediate issues of concern to Palestinians in three areas: domestic politics and government, strategic analysis and foreign policy, and public opinion polls and survey research. The center engages in several activities. It conducts academic and policy analysis studies. It organizes socio-political surveys and public opinion polls on current Palestinian political and social attitudes. It sponsors study groups and task forces on issues of critical importance to the Palestinians. Finally, it organizes conferences, public lectures, and briefings on current public policy issues. PSR is dedicated to promoting objective and nonpartisan research and analysis and to encouraging a better understanding of Palestinian domestic and international environment in an atmosphere of free debate and exchange of ideas.

This poll is part of PSR series of regular polls.

*This poll has been conducted in cooperation with the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung in Ramallah*



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#### PRESS RELEASE

#### Public Opinion Poll No (68)

**Abbas' standing improves but the public is worried about possible deterioration in internal conditions in case of his absence and the majority demands compliance with the Basic Law in selecting his successor, as the case was in Arafat's succession. By contrast, the public is dissatisfied with the manner in which the PNC managed its recent meeting and with the ability of the PLO leadership it elected to represent Palestine and its diaspora. An overwhelming majority demands immediate halt to all measures taken by the PA against Gaza. Despite wide support for popular resistance, the majority believes that the March of Return has failed to achieve its goals**

25 June-1 July 2018

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 25 June and 1 July 2018. The period before the conduct of the poll witnessed important developments including the convening of the Palestinian National Council in Ramallah, the launch of the Return March in the Gaza Strip, the relocation of the American embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, rising concerns about economic and humanitarian conditions in the Gaza Strip and the potential impact of a reconciliation failure on these conditions. Weeks before the conduct of the poll, President Abbas entered a hospital in Ramallah for treatment fueling concerns about his health and a potential succession crisis. This press release addresses these issues and covers other matters such as general conditions in the Palestinian territories and the various future directions for Palestinians in the absence of a viable peace process. Total size of the sample is 2150 adults interviewed face to face in 127 randomly selected locations. Margin of error is 2.5%.

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#### **Main Findings:**

In light of the hospitalization of president Abbas, about two-thirds of the public express concern that domestic conditions may deteriorate in the absence of the president as long as no clarity or agreement exists on the succession process that should be followed. The public has a clear preference: it wants a full compliance with the relevant articles in the Basic Law even if this means that Aziz Duwaik from Hamas (being the current Speaker of the Palestinian Legislative Council) would become a temporary president for 60 days. However, a majority would also be happy if Hamas shows flexibility and allows a non-Hamas, non-Fatah speaker to be elected by the parliament thereby allowing a smoother process of succession and the holding of elections after 60 days.

Findings for the second quarter of 2018 also show that Abbas' standing has improved somewhat. This might be due to his hospitalization. But it could also mean that the public is showing an appreciation for his strong rejection of Trump's "Deal of the Century." It is worth mentioning that Fatah's popularity improved slightly as well. Yet despite this, more than 60% of the public demand Abbas' resignation and the public stands decisively against Abbas' domestic policies. An overwhelming majority demands the immediate halt to all measures taken by Abbas against the Gaza Strip and opposes the crackdown on demonstrations demanding an ending to these measures. Moreover, a two-third majority opposes Abbas' demand for disarming armed factional battalions in the Gaza Strip. A majority is also opposed to Abbas' demand that Hamas hand over the entire responsibility over the Gaza Strip to the reconciliation government, including ministries, the security sector, and the "arms."

The public expresses disappointment over some of the outcomes of the most recent meeting of the Palestinian National Council (PNC) which was held two months ago in Ramallah and indeed, an overwhelming majority indicates that it did not follow the proceedings of the meeting. Despite the fact that the largest percentage believes that the PNC represents the Palestinians, this percentage is less than half of the public. Perhaps one reason for this is the perception that the PNC's proceedings and decisions are irrelevant to policy making. Indeed, about 70% believe that president Abbas and his government will not implement the PNC decisions. Moreover, about two thirds of the public are dissatisfied with the way members of the Executive Committee of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) were elected by the Council and 70% expressed dissatisfaction with ability of these members to represent Palestinians at home and in the diaspora. Yet, despite all of this, a majority still views the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people.

In light of the collapse of Palestinian-Israeli peace process, support for alternatives to negotiations varies. About three quarters continue to support PA efforts to internationalize the conflict and join various UN organizations. Moreover, about two thirds support popular non-violent resistance, a large minority supports return to an armed intifada, a similar percentage supports the dissolution of the PA, and a little less than a third supports abandoning the two-state solution and embracing a one state solution for Palestinians and Israelis. These findings indicate a decline in support for an armed intifada and in the demand for dissolving the PA and point to a rise in support for popular resistance. It is worth mentioning that support for armed action and the dissolution of the PA is much higher in the Gaza Strip than in the West Bank while support for popular resistance is high in both areas.

Nonetheless, confidence in the effectiveness of popular resistance is not high. This lack of confidence is demonstrated in public assessment of the effectiveness of the March of Return in the Gaza Strip. Despite popular support for the March in both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, about three quarters of the public (80% in the West Bank and two thirds in the Gaza Strip) believe that the March has failed to achieve its goals or achieved very little. It is worth mentioning that the public is evenly divided in its assessment of the main party behind the March between those who think it is Hamas and those who think it is civil society organizations. Gazans however show no hesitancy on this as they strongly believe that it is indeed Hamas that stands behind the initiation and organization of the March of Return.

### **(1) Abbas succession and presidential and parliamentary elections:**

- A large majority (64%) is worried that internal conditions might deteriorate or destabilize during the post-Abbas succession process due to lack of clarity and absence of agreement on the means of selecting the next PA president; 32% say they are not worried.
- A majority (60%) says that in the case of Abbas' absence, the Speaker of the Palestinian Legislative Council, Aziz al Duwaik from Hamas, must become president for two months in implementation of the Basic Law; 29% say they are opposed to such implementation.

- Similarly, a majority of 62% indicates that it would welcome a Hamas initiative to allow the election of a non-Hamas/non-Fatah Speaker in order to facilitate the post Abbas succession process; 29% say they are opposed to such initiative.
- Almost half (48%) believes that in the post Abbas period, Palestinian factions will succeed in reaching an agreement on a process that would allow for the holding of presidential elections in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in order to elect a successor to Abbas; 41% believe the factions will not succeed.
- 61% of the public want president Abbas to resign while 33% want him to remain in office. Three months ago, 68% said they want Abbas to resign. Demand for Abbas' resignation stands at 54% in the West Bank and 73% in the Gaza Strip. Three months ago, demand for Abbas resignation stood at 62% in the West Bank and 81% in the Gaza Strip.
- If president Abbas does not nominate himself in a new election, 30% prefer to see Marwan Barghouti replacing him, while 23% prefer Ismail Haniyeh. Mohammad Dahlan is preferred by 6% (1% in the West Bank and 14% in the Gaza Strip). Similarly, Rami al Hamdallah is selected by 6%, Mustafa Barghouti and Khalid Mishal by 3% each, and Salam Fayyad by 2%.
- Level of satisfaction with the performance of president Abbas stands at 37% and dissatisfaction at 59%. Level of satisfaction with Abbas stands at 43% in the West Bank and 28% in the Gaza Strip. Three months ago, satisfaction with Abbas stood at 33% (40% in the West Bank and 20% in the Gaza Strip).
- If new presidential elections were held today and only two were nominated, Ismail Haniyeh and Mahmoud Abbas, the former would receive 46% and the latter 47% of the vote (compared to 52% for Haniyeh and 41% for Abbas three months ago). In the Gaza Strip, Abbas receives 40% of the vote (compared to 35% three months ago) and Haniyeh receives 53% (compared to 62% three months ago). In the West Bank, Abbas receives 52% (compared to 45% three months ago) and Haniyeh 41% (compared to 45% three months ago). If the competition was between Marwan Barghouti and Ismail Haniyeh, Barghouti receives 58% and Haniyeh 37%.
- If new legislative elections were held today with the participation of all factions, 68% say they would participate in such elections. Of those who would participate, 32% say they would vote for Hamas and 39% say they would vote for Fatah, 9% would vote for all other third parties combined, and 20% are undecided. Three months ago, vote for Hamas stood at 31% and Fatah at 36%. Vote for Hamas in the Gaza Strip stands today at 38% (compared to 32% three months ago) and for Fatah at 34% (compared to 32% three months ago). In the West Bank, vote for Hamas stands at 28% (compared to 30% three months ago) and Fatah at 43% (compared to 38% three months ago).

## **(2) Domestic conditions:**

- Only 35% of the Palestinian public say people in the West Bank can criticize the PA without fear; 60% of the public say that people cannot criticize the PA without fear.
- Positive evaluation of conditions in the Gaza Strip stands at 4% and positive evaluation of conditions in the West Bank stands at 17%. In an open-ended question, we asked respondents to identify the party or side responsible for the worsening of conditions in the Gaza Strip: the largest percentage (34%) blames Israel; 26% blame the PA and president Abbas and 20% blame Hamas. As we found in the previous poll, responses of West Bankers differ from those of Gazans: 38% of West Bankers compared to only 28% of Gazans blame Israel; 19% of West Bankers compared to 36% of Gazans blame the PA and Abbas, and 17% of West Bankers compared to 24% of Gazans blame Hamas.
- Perception of safety and security in the Gaza Strip stands at 51%. In the West Bank perception of safety and security stands at 52%. Three months ago, perception of safety and security in the Gaza Strip stood at 54% and in the West Bank at 53%.

- We asked the public about its viewership habits in the last two months. Findings indicate that Al Jazeera TV viewership remains the highest, standing at 18%, followed by Maan TV and Palestine TV (15% each), Al Aqsa TV and Filasteen al Youm/Palestine Today (12% each), Al Arabiya and al Quds TV (5% each), and al Mayadeen (4%).
- Perception of corruption in PA institutions stands at 80%.
- Half of the public (49%) views the PA as a burden on the Palestinian people while 45% view it as an asset for the Palestinian people.

### **(3) Reconciliation and the reconciliation government:**

- Now that it has taken control of the border crossings and the headquarters of the ministries and other public agencies, 30% are satisfied and 60% are dissatisfied with the performance of the reconciliation government. Three months ago, satisfaction stood at 26%.
- 30%, compared to 26% three months ago, are optimistic and 65% are pessimistic about the success of reconciliation. These are the same percentages we obtained three months ago.
- A majority (71%) supports the unification of all PA institutions throughout the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, including the police force, under the control of the reconciliation government while 23% prefer to keep control over the police force in the Gaza Strip as it is now.
- But the public is divided over the future of the police officers currently serving in the Gaza Strip: 32% want to keep all of them in place, 30% want to replace some of them by new ones while keeping the others, and 27% prefer to replace all of them with new recruits.
- The public is also divided in its attitude regarding the demand made by Abbas requesting Hamas to fully hand over control over the Gaza Strip to the reconciliation government, including the ministries, the security sector, and the “arms:” a large minority of 40% agrees with Abbas’ demand but a majority of 53% disagrees.
- When the question of “arms” was further clarified by asking the public if it supports or opposes the continued existence of armed factional battalions in the Gaza Strip alongside the official PA security sector forces, almost two-thirds (65%) said that they prefer to keep the armed battalions in place and only 26% said that they oppose the continued existence of the armed battalions in the Gaza Strip.
- Moreover, an overwhelming majority (79%) demands that the PA immediately lift all the measures taken against the Gaza Strip, such as public sector’s salary deductions and the reduction in access to electricity; only 17% say that such measures should be removed only after Hamas fully hands over control over the Strip to the reconciliation government. It is worth mentioning that the demand for the immediate lifting of PA measures stands at 83% in the West Bank but only 72% in the Gaza Strip.
- The overwhelming majority (81%) opposes the action taken by the PA security services to quell the demonstrations in the West Bank that demand lifting the measures taken by the PA against the Gaza Strip and only 15% support the crackdown on such demonstrations. Similarly, 81% oppose the measures taken by the Hamas police in the Gaza Strip against similar demonstrations while 13% support them.
- Finally, we asked the public about the narrative it believes to be accurate regarding the responsibility of Fatah and Hamas over the Gaza explosion that targeted prime minister Hamdallah convoy several months ago: 26% say they believe in the accuracy of Hamas’ narrative (that the PA intelligence Department had a role in the explosion) and 16% believe in the accuracy of Fatah’s narrative regarding Hamas’ role in that explosion. But the largest

percentage (45%) indicates that neither narrative is accurate. It is worth mentioning that those who see Hamas' narrative or that of the PA as accurate are much higher in the Gaza Strip, with 38% believing in Hamas' and 27% believing in the PA's. The percentage of Gazans who believe that neither side is accurate declines to only 28%.

**(4) The meeting of the Palestine National Council (PNC):**

- The overwhelming majority (83%) says that it either did not follow the proceedings or the decisions of the PNC meeting during its most recent session in Ramallah (55%) or followed only little (28%); only 13% say that they did follow all or most of them.
- Yet, 46% agree that the PNC represents them or represents the Palestinian people at home and in the diaspora and 35% say that it does not represent them or the Palestinian people. About a fifth (19%) expressed no opinion on the matter.
- However, when asked about the PLO, a majority (58%) agreed that the current organization, with its existing institutions and current leadership, remains the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people; only 30% disagree with that. It is worth mentioning that our findings in June 2006, exactly 12 years ago, a larger majority of 69% viewed the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people.
- Almost two thirds (65%) are dissatisfied with the manner in which the PNC selected, without allowing nomination and direct personal elections, the members of the PLO Executive Committee; only 23% are satisfied with the PNC selection process.
- Similarly, a large majority of 71% does not believe that the newly elected members are capable of representing the homeland and the diaspora given their average age and the fact that most came from the West Bank; only 20% say they are satisfied that the new members have that ability.
- Moreover a large majority (69%) says that it has no confidence in the commitment of president Abbas and the PA government to implement the PNC decision; only 20% indicate that has such confidence.

**(5) The March of Return, the relocation of the US embassy, and future directions in the absence of the peace process:**

- 38% of the public in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip say that civil society organizations are behind the initiation and organization of the March of Return in the Gaza Strip. A similar percentage (37%) says that Hamas is responsible for the March, and 14% say that factions other than Hamas are responsible for its initiation and organization. It is worth mentioning that among Gazans, 61% believe that Hamas stands behind the marches.
- A slim majority (51%) of Gazans supports the participation of family members and friends in the March of Return and 54% of West Bankers indicate their support for this form of resistance. Nonetheless, only a small minority (21%) believes the marches have achieved their goals or most of their goals and 74% believe they have not achieved their goals or achieved a little.
- A majority (55%) believes that the relocation of the US embassy to Jerusalem serves to weaken Palestinian position that East Jerusalem should be the capital of the Palestinian state; 16% think the relocation of the embassy strengthens Palestinian position and 25% believes the relocation has no impact.
- 73% of East Jerusalem residents, who carry Blue Israeli IDs, indicate that they do not intend to participate, or have not considered participation, in the Israeli municipal elections in the city but 22% indicate that they are indeed intending to vote or considering voting.



- A large minority of 39% thinks that negotiation is the most effective means of establishing a Palestinian state next to the state of Israel while a third (34%) believes that armed resistance is the most effective means and 21% think non-violent resistance is the most effective. Three months ago, 35% indicated that armed resistance is the answer and only 31% sided with negotiation.
- 58% believe that Israel's long-term aspiration is to expand the state of Israel to stretch from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea and to expel the Palestinian population, and 21% think that Israel aims at annexing the occupied territories and deny the Palestinian citizens their rights. By contrast, only 19% think that Israel's long-term aspiration is to insure its security and then withdraw from all or parts of the occupied territories.
- In light of the suspension of peace negotiations, Palestinians support various alternative directions: 75% support joining more international organizations; 67% support popular non-violence resistance; 43% support a return to an armed intifada; 42% support dissolving the PA; and 30% support abandoning the two-state solution and demanding the establishment of one state for Palestinians and Israelis.

**(6) Most vital Palestinian goals and the main problems confronting Palestinians today:**

- 43% 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, 29% believe the first most vital goal should be to obtain the right of return of refugees to their 1948 towns and villages, 14% believe that it should be to build a pious or moral individual and a religious society, one that applies all Islamic teachings, and 13% believe that the first and most vital goal should be to establish a democratic political system that respects freedoms and rights of Palestinians.
- The most serious problem confronting Palestinian society today in the eyes of 27% of the public is the continuation of occupation and settlement activities while 25% say it is poverty and unemployment; 22% say it is the siege of the Gaza Strip and the closure of its crossings; 21% say it is the spread of corruption in public institutions; and 2% say it is the absence of national unity.