

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 (69)

As Fatah and Hamas lose popular support and more than 60% demand the resignation of president Abbas, and as half of the public views the PA as a burden on the Palestinian people, two-thirds reject a Palestinian-Jordanian confederation, three-quarters view conditions today as worse than those prevailing before the Oslo agreement, and 90% view the Trump Administration as biased in favor of Israel; and despite the ending of US aid to UNRWA and the PA, 60% oppose resumption of contacts with the Administration and a majority expects US efforts to fail in shutting down UNRWA

5-8 September 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 5-8 September 2018. The period before the conduct of the poll witnessed several developments including the convening of the PLO Central Council, the launch of an indirect Hamas-Israel negotiations for a long term quiet or *tahdia*, the resumption of Egyptian efforts to reconcile Fatah and Hamas and reunify the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, the US decision to stop all financial contributions to UNRWA and to suspend most aid to the PA, the Israeli adoption of a controversial nation-state law, and a leaked statement that President Abbas has reported that the Trump peace team had sought his views on the idea of Palestinian-Jordanian confederation. Moreover, this month of September coincides with the 25th anniversary of the Oslo agreement. This press release addresses all these issues and covers other matters such as parliamentary and presidential elections, general conditions in the Palestinian territories, the peace process and the future possible directions for Palestinians in the absence of a viable process. Total size of the sample is 1270 adults interviewed face to face in 127 randomly selected locations. Margin of error is +/-3%.

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Main Findings:

The poll examines internal Palestinian conditions and those related to Israeli-Palestinian relations and Palestinian-American relations. Findings of the third quarter indicate a decline in the popularity of both Fatah and Hamas compared to our findings three months ago. The decline might be attributed to the tense power struggle between the two movements that was in clear display during the past two months in the aftermath of the failed reconciliation efforts and a pointless quarrel over who has the right to negotiate a long term quiet, *tahdia*, or cessation of violence in the Gaza Strip, Hamas or the PA and what comes first, reconciliation or *tahdia*. Findings show that more than 60% of the public want president Abbas to resign and that the public disagrees with some of the most important domestic policies of the Palestinian president. An overwhelming majority

opposes his decision to cut the salaries of PA employees in the Gaza Strip; two-thirds oppose his demand to disarm armed groups in the Strip; and a majority is opposed to his demand that Hamas hand over full control over the Gaza Strip to the reconciliation government. Moreover, a majority opposes Abbas' position that *tahdia* between Hamas and Israel is the business of the PA and the PLO rather than that of Hamas. Indeed, a majority of the public supports Hamas' efforts to reach an agreement with Israel on a long term Tahdia even in the absence of reconciliation. A larger percentage places the blame for the worsening conditions in the Gaza Strip on the president and the reconciliation government rather than on Hamas. Indeed, about half of the public believes that the PA has become a burden on the Palestinian people rather than an asset.

The public shows support for the convening of the PLO Central Council's session in Ramallah last month and criticizes those factions that boycotted the meeting. Large majorities support the decisions taken by the Central Council regarding the suspension of Palestinian recognition of Israel, ending security coordination with the Israeli security services, and stopping all measures taken against PA employees in the Gaza Strip. Nonetheless, the majority has no confidence that the Palestinian leadership will implement any of these decisions.

In exploring attitudes regarding the peace process, we examined issues like public perception of the two-state and the one-state solutions, a Palestinian-Jordanian confederation, and attitudes toward the Oslo agreement. Findings show that a majority is opposed to the concept of two-state solution when that solution is presented without any description or details. But a majority supports that solution when it is defined as the creation of a Palestinian state along side the state of Israel on the basis of 1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital. Only a quarter prefers a one-state solution, one in which Palestinians and Israeli Jews enjoy equality in all issues, over a two-state solution. Findings show that two-thirds of the public are opposed to the idea of a Palestinian-Jordanian confederation that, according to Abbas, was proposed by the US peace team. Furthermore, a larger majority of three quarters is opposed to a trilateral confederation between Palestine, Jordan and Israel. The great opposition to the Palestinian-Jordanian confederation is probably due to lack of trust in the US team and due to a Palestinian suspicion that the idea aims at preempting the goal of establishing a Palestinian state. Previous PSR findings during the past decade show support for such an idea exceeding 40%. On the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the Oslo agreement, two thirds of the public indicate that the agreement had damaged Palestinian national interests; indeed, almost three quarters of the public believe that the situation today is worse than the pre-Oslo conditions. This of course does not mean that the public wants the return to Israeli occupation; rather, it seems that public is comparing conditions before and after Oslo in several other dimensions such as the multiplication of the size of settlement enterprise, the current split between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and conflict between Fatah and Hamas, the ending of the first intifada by Oslo and the absence today of any similar popular movement to end the Israeli occupation, that on-going security coordination with Israel despite the diminished chances for peace, and public belief that the Palestinian political system is becoming more and more authoritarian and lacking any accountability.

Finally, in light of the deterioration in relations between the Palestinian leadership and the Trump Administration, the US termination of most of its aid to the PA, and the US cancelation of its contributions to UNRWA, we asked the public about re-engagement with the US, the views on the "Deal of the Century," and the chances that the US would succeed in ending UNRWA's work. Findings show that a majority of Palestinians is opposed to the resumption of dialogue with the US or a return to negotiations with Israel. In fact, 90% expressed the belief that the US is biased in favor of Israel. Half of the public want the Palestinian leadership to reject the US "Deal of the Century" out of hand even before seeing it because it will certainly be bad for Palestinians while only a small minority of 14% thinks that the leadership should accept the plan because it will certainly be better than the status quo. A majority believes that the Trump Administration will fail in its efforts to end the work of UNRWA but half is worried that if the US does succeed the outcome could contribute to ending the refugee issue.

(1) Presidential and parliamentary elections:

- 62% of the public want president Abbas to resign while 32% want him to remain in office. Three months ago, 61% said they want Abbas to resign. Demand for Abbas' resignation stands at 52% in the West Bank and 78% in the Gaza Strip. Three months ago, demand for Abbas resignation stood at 54% in the West Bank and 73% in the Gaza Strip.

- If president Abbas does not nominate himself in a new election, 33% prefer to see Marwan Barghouti replacing him, while 20% prefer Ismail Haniyeh. Mohammad Dahlan is preferred by 6% (1% in the West Bank and 16% in the Gaza Strip). Rami al Hamdallah and Mustafa Barghouti are selected by 4% each, Khalid Mishal by 3%, and Salam Fayyad and Saeb Eriqat by 2% each.
- Level of satisfaction with the performance of president Abbas stands at 35% and dissatisfaction at 61%. Level of satisfaction with Abbas stands at 42% in the West Bank and 23% in the Gaza Strip. Three months ago, satisfaction with Abbas stood at 37% (43% in the West Bank and 28% in the Gaza Strip).
- If new presidential elections were held today and only two were nominated, Mahmoud Abbas and Ismail Haniyeh, the former would receive 47% and the latter 45% of the vote (compared to 47% for Abbas and 46% for Haniyeh three months ago). In the Gaza Strip, Abbas receives 41% of the vote (compared to 40% three months ago) and Haniyeh receives 56% (compared to 62% three months ago). In the West Bank, Abbas receives 51% (compared to 52% three months ago) and Haniyeh 41% (compared to 41% 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, 27% say they would vote for Hamas and 36% say they would vote for Fatah, 10% would vote for all other third parties combined, and 28% are undecided. Three months ago, vote for Hamas stood at 32% and Fatah at 39%. Vote for Hamas in the Gaza Strip stands today at 34% (compared to 38% three months ago) and for Fatah at 32% (compared to 34% three months ago). In the West Bank, vote for Hamas stands at 21% (compared to 28% three months ago) and Fatah at 38% (compared to 43% three months ago).

(2) Domestic conditions:

- Positive evaluation of conditions in the Gaza Strip stands at 5% and positive evaluation of conditions in the West Bank stands at 19%. And, now that most US aid to the PA has been cut by the US Administration, an overwhelming majority of 77% is worried that the cut in aid could lead to increased unemployment and poverty and a deterioration in daily living conditions while 20% are not worried.
- In a close-ended question, we asked respondents to identify the party or side responsible for the worsening conditions in the Gaza Strip: Hamas, the PA and Abbas, Egypt, or others. The largest percentage (43%) blames the PA, president Abbas, and the reconciliation government; 24% blame Hamas, 8% blame Egypt, and 17% blame others. Responses of West Bankers differ from those of Gazans: 60% of Gazans, compared to 32% of West Bankers, blame the PA, Abbas and the reconciliation government; and 27% of Gazans, compared to 22% of West Bankers, blame Hamas.
- Perception of safety and security in the Gaza Strip stands at 45%. In the West Bank perception of safety and security stands at 48%. Three months ago, perception of safety and security in the Gaza Strip stood at 51% and in the West Bank at 52%.
- One third of the public says it wants to emigrate due to political, security, and economic conditions. The percentage rises in the Gaza Strip to half and declines in the West Bank to 22%.
- Only 35% of the Palestinian public say people in the West Bank can criticize the PA without fear; 59% of the public say that people cannot criticize the PA without fear.
- Perception of corruption in PA institutions stands at 77%.
- In light of repeated reports on finding and destroying narcotics plantations in West Bank areas, we asked the public about the implications of these reports: 57% said that it indicates a recent rise in planting narcotics while 36% believe that it means that the PA security services are becoming more able and more effective in fighting narcotics.

- Half of the public (50%) views the PA as a burden on the Palestinian people while 44% view it as an asset for the Palestinian people.
- 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 (at 14%), Al Aqsa TV and Palestine TV (13% each), Filasteen al Youm/Palestine Today (at 12%), Al Arabiya (at 5%) and al Mayadeen and al Quds TV (4% each).

(3) Reconciliation and the reconciliation government:

- 22% are satisfied and 67% are dissatisfied with the performance of the reconciliation government. Three months ago, satisfaction stood at 30%.
- 28% optimistic and 65% are pessimistic about the success of reconciliation. Three months ago, optimism stood at 30%.
- The public is opposed to Abbas' position that Hamas must fully hand over control over the Gaza Strip to the reconciliation government, including the ministries, the security sector, and the "arms:" only 31% agrees with Abbas' demand but a majority of 62% disagrees. Three months ago, 40% said they agreed with Abbas.
- 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, two-thirds (66%) said that they prefer to keep the armed battalions in place and only 28% said that they oppose the continued existence of the armed battalions in the Gaza Strip. It is worth noting that on this matter, there are no differences between the attitudes of the West Bankers and Gazans.
- Moreover, an overwhelming majority (81%) 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 16% 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 84% in the West Bank and 76% in the Gaza Strip.

4) Israel-Hamas long-term *tahdia*, or truce, negotiations

- A majority of 55% supports and 38% oppose a Hamas-Israel long-term *tahdia*, or cessation of violence, even in the absence of reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas. The agreement would entail the opening of the border crossing with Egypt and access to a seaport and an airport in a neighboring area in return for a Hamas enforcement of a long-term ceasefire as well as ending the Return Marches and the incendiary kites. Support for this long-term cessation of violence is higher in the Gaza Strip (63%) than in the West Bank (50%).
- The public is divided in its assessment of the probable consequences of such long-term agreement in the absence of reconciliation: 46% believe that it could transform the current split into a permanent separation leading to the establishment of an independent political entity in the Gaza Strip, while 44% believe no such separation would come out of that long-term agreement.
- Nonetheless, if permanent separation occurs, 40% believe that Hamas will be seen as more responsible for such development than any other Palestinian faction because it negotiated with Israel and agreed to a long-term cessation of violence without the participation of the PA and the Palestinian leadership. A similar percentage (38%) believes that the PA leadership will be seen as more responsible for that development because it imposed sanctions on the Gaza Strip and did not offer the needed concessions to facilitate reconciliation.

5) Decisions of the Palestinian Central Council of the PLO

- A majority of 54% disagrees with the decision of various factions to boycott the latest meeting of the PLO's Central Council in Ramallah and believe it was a wrong decision while 30% think it was the right decision. A similar percentage (53%) believes that the boycott has damaged the legitimacy of the Central Council while a third believes it has not done that.
- Two thirds (66%) support and 26% oppose the Central Council's decision to suspend Palestinian recognition of the state of Israel until Israel recognizes the state of Palestine. But a majority of 52% believes that the Palestinian leadership will not implement that decision and 35% believe it will implement it.
- Similarly, 68% support and 25% oppose the Central Council's decision to stop security coordination with Israel; but more than two-thirds (69%) believe that the Palestinian leadership will not implement that decision and only 21% believe it will.
- Moreover, 76% support and 18% oppose the Central Council's decision to immediately stop all measures taken against PA employees in the Gaza Strip; but 50% of the public believe that the Palestinian leadership will not implement that decision and only 37% believe it will.

6) Palestinian-Jordanian confederation

- We asked the public about the idea of a Jordanian-Palestinian confederation in the context of the statement made by president Abbas regarding an offer made by the US peace team and in light of Abbas' statement that he favors a trilateral confederation that includes Palestine, Jordan, and Israel. About two-thirds rejected and 29% accepted a Palestinian-Jordanian confederation.
- When asked about the trilateral confederation, Palestine, Jordan, and Israel, 75% rejected it and 18% accepted it.

7) 25 years after Oslo

- Twenty-five years after the signing of the Oslo agreement, we asked the public to tell us, based on personal experience, or based on what it had heard or read, if conditions today are better or worse than conditions before Oslo. Almost three quarter (73%) said conditions today are worse than those prevailing before Oslo; 13% said conditions today are better; and 10% said conditions today are the same as those before Oslo.
- We also asked the public about the most important reason for the failure of the Oslo agreement. More than one third (36%) said that Israel's refusal to end its occupation and stop settlement construction was the main reason for the failure; 35% said that the lack of pressure on Israel from the international community was the main reason for the failure; and 27% said that it was the fault of the Palestinians themselves. In particular, the Palestinian contribution to the failure was divided as follows: 11% said the PA did not build strong public institutions that fights corruption and enforce the rule of law; 9% said that Fatah sought an exclusive control over that excluded the other factions; 6% said that Hamas and Islamic Jihad violated the agreement and carried out armed attacks against the Israelis; and 2% put the blame on the second intifada and the bombing attacks that targeted the Israelis.
- We asked the public to assess the impact of Oslo on Palestinian national interests: two thirds (65%) said it damaged the national interest, 16% said it served the national interest, and 16% said it neither damaged nor served the national interest.

8) The peace process

- Support for the concept of the two-state solution stands at 47% and opposition at 50%. No description or details were provided for the concept. Three months ago, 43% supported this concept.

- Yet, when we asked the public to choose between the two-state solution, the one-state solution, or any other third solution, 53% said they prefer the two-state solution, 24% said they prefer the one-state solution, and 14% preferred some other solution. It should be noted however that in this question we have defined the two-state solution to mean “a Palestinian state alongside Israel based on the 1967 borders and East Jerusalem as its capital.” The one-state solution was defined as “a state that includes Israel, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in which Palestinians and Israeli Jews enjoy equal rights in all matters.”
- A majority of 56% believes that the two-state solution is no longer practical or feasible due to the expansion of Israeli settlements while 41% believe that the solution remains practical. Moreover, 72% believe that the chances for the creation of a Palestinian state alongside the state of Israel in the next five years are slim or nonexistence while 26% believe the chances to be medium or high.
- The most preferred way out of the current status quo is “reaching a peace agreement with Israel” according to 40% of the public while 30% prefer waging “an armed struggle against the Israeli occupation” and 12% prefer “waging a non-violent resistance.” A small minority of 14% prefer to keep the status quo.
- 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 (33%) believes that armed resistance is the most effective means and 21% think non-violent resistance is the most effective.
- An overwhelming majority of 78% say they are worried that in their daily life they would be hurt by Israelis or that their land would be confiscated or homes demolished; 22% say they are worried.
- Three quarter (74%) say that the newly issued Israeli “nation state” law poses a threat to the rights and interests of Israeli Arabs and 84% believe that the passing of this law will lead to an increase in settlement construction in the West Bank and East Jerusalem.
- 80% believe that the Arab World is preoccupied with its problems and internal conflicts and that Palestine is not its primary cause; 19% believe that Palestine remains the primary cause of the Arab World. Moreover, 69% believe that an alliance already exists between Sunni Arabs and Israel against Iran despite the continued Israeli occupation; 22% disagrees with this assessment.
- 57% 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 23% think that Israel aims at annexing the occupied territories and deny the Palestinian citizens their rights. By contrast, only 18% 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: 76% support joining more international organizations; 65% support popular non-violence resistance; 46% support a return to an armed intifada; 42% support dissolving the PA; and 29% support abandoning the two-state solution and demanding the establishment of one state for Palestinians and Israelis.
- On the occasion of the International Day of Peace we asked the public about its expectations regarding the impact of a Palestinian-Israeli peace, when reached, on their living conditions. The largest percentage (45%) said it will improve its living conditions; 17% said it will worsen their living conditions; and 34% said peace will have no impact on their living conditions.

9) American-Palestinian relations, the “Deal of the Century,” and the future of UNRAWA

- A majority of 62% is opposed and 27% is not opposed to a resumption of dialogue between the Palestinian leadership and the Trump Administration. Official contacts between the PA and the US government were suspended by the PA after the US recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. Moreover, 58% want the PA to reject US efforts to make it negotiate with Israel; 37% support the resumption of negotiations with Israel.

- Half of the public believes that the Palestinian leadership should reject out of hand the US “deal of the century” if the US presents its plan because it must be bad for the Palestinians; 31% want the PA to examine the substance of the plan before accepting or rejecting it; and 14% believe the leadership should accept the plan out of hand because it will certainly be better than the status quo.
- 90% of the public believe that if negotiations with Israel resumed under sponsorship of the Trump Administration, the US will be biased in favor of Israel and 6% think the US will be an honest broker.
- In light of US cut of most aid to the PA, we asked the public if it would be better if the PA changed its policy to insure continued US aid: 62% said they want the PA to maintain its current policies and 31% said they want the PA to change its current policies to please the Americans.
- When we asked the public about its expectations from the PA leadership regarding US pressure, 49% said the PA will indeed change its policy and 43% said it does not expect the PA to change its policy.
- We also asked the public about the US cancellation of its aid to UNRWA and what might happen if the US succeeds in shutting down this UN agency: 49% said that if UNRWA is closed down, the refugees’ cause will suffer and 46% said such a development will not end the refugee cause.
- When asked about the chances for a US success in shutting down UNRWA, 55% said the US will not succeed and 37% said it will succeed.
- When asked to speculate about the reasons that the US had the nerve to relocate its embassy to Jerusalem and to wage a campaign against UNRWA, 48% of the public said it was the weakness of and divisions in the Arab World, 28% said it was the result of the weakness of and divisions among the Palestinians, and 23% said it was due to the personality of Trump himself.

(10) 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, 32% 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 poverty and unemployment while 25% say it is the continuation of occupation and settlement activities; 22% say it is the spread of corruption in public institutions; 20% say it is the siege of the Gaza Strip and the closure of its crossings; and 3% say it is the absence of national unity.