

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 (79)

**With rising confidence that parliamentary elections will indeed take place soon, and given clear anxieties about the possibility that the siege and blockade over the Gaza Strip could then be tightened, the split consolidated, and that economic conditions could worsen, and given concerns about the potential reaction from the international community and Israel, public attitudes seem to shift a little in favor of Fatah and away from Hamas**

14-19 March 2021

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 14-19 March 2021. The period before the conduct of the poll witnessed several developments including the announcement of a presidential decree to hold parliamentary elections on 22 May and presidential elections on 31 July 2021. It also witnessed a significant rise in number of coronavirus deaths and infections. The coronavirus vaccine was not made available in large numbers by the PA government during the period before the conduct of the poll. A limited vaccination process did however start using a small quantity that was made available to the PA. The process however was marred by accusations of favoritism and lack of transparency. The ICC issued a statement affirming jurisdiction over the occupied Palestinian territories. Joe Biden assumed his position as the new US president during this period. Israel announced the holding of new parliamentary elections to take place on 23 March. This press release addresses these issues and covers other matters such as the general conditions in the Palestinian territories, the peace process and the future possible directions for Palestinians in the absence of a viable peace process. 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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### Main Findings:

The focus of our poll for the first quarter of 2021 has been placed on the expected election process. Findings show that the overwhelming majority is still in favor of holding these elections and that the public is much more optimistic that these elections will indeed take place soon. This realization seems to have impacted attitudes and voting intentions, which are now probably more serious and calculated. The poll sought to explore public priorities and expectations in these elections. In particular, we sought to examine the likely consequences of the election results, particularly if Hamas wins and forms a government. The poll sought also to understand

the implications of the emergence of rivals to Fatah, from within its own ranks, to the movement's performance in the elections.

Findings show that the top priorities in these elections for the voters are four: the unification of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, improving economic conditions, combating corruption, and the removal of the siege and blockade over the Gaza Strip. The largest percentage believes that a Hamas electoral victory would most likely have a negative impact on all these priorities except combating corruption where no negative impact is expected. These expectations might have affected voting intentions as the findings indicate a rise in the vote for Fatah and a decline in the willingness to vote for Hamas compared to our findings three months ago.

Fatah does have its own problems, particularly in the Gaza Strip, because of the probable competition over the likely Fatah's votes from two independent electoral lists of Mohammad Dahlan and Naser al Qidwah. More seriously, if Marwan Barghouti decides to have his own electoral list, Fatah's vote would split into two equivalent shares. As for other third parties outside Fatah and Hamas, such as those of the left, Salam Fayyad's, Hasan Khraishah's, and others, it is probably too early to reach definitive conclusions at this stage regarding the likelihood that most of these lists would pass the 1.5% electoral threshold. The findings do show that al Mubadarah, led by Mustafa Barghouti, and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine would probably succeed in passing that threshold. For the presidency, the findings indicate a limited increase in public demand for Abbas' resignation despite the fact that he is doing better than he did three months ago in a competition with Hamas' leader Ismael Haniyyeh. The findings make it clear however that the public prefers to see Marwan Barghouti as the next president of the PA as he is preferred over all other potential candidates including Fatah's Abbas and Hamas' Haniyyeh.

In other domestic issues, public attitudes seem stable compared to three months ago. This applies to the perceptions of safety and security as well as corruption within the PA. There is however a limited rise in optimism regarding reconciliation and in the perception that people can criticize the PA without fear. Slightly less than what we found three months ago, a large segment of the public, almost half, is still reluctant or unwilling to be vaccinated.

On the peace process, findings show that support for the two-state solution remains unchanged. Similarly, public preference for armed struggle vs. negotiations remains almost unchanged. But findings do show that a majority is opposed to a return to an unconditional bi-lateral Palestinian-Israeli negotiation despite the optimism generated by the election of the new Biden Administration. On the other hand, despite its recent decision to assert jurisdiction over the occupied Palestinian territories, the public is not optimistic about the ability of the International Criminal Court, to restrict Israeli behavior in the occupied territories. In fact, a large majority thinks that no Israeli official will ever be prosecuted by the court.

### **(1) Legislative and presidential elections:**

- 76% demand the holding of general legislative and presidential elections and 61% expect parliamentary elections to take place soon. Three months ago, only 32% expected the holding of Palestinian elections soon. If Israel refuses to allow elections to take place in the occupied City of East Jerusalem, 65% believe elections should nonetheless take place and that East Jerusalemites should be allowed to vote in places in the Jerusalem district just outside the city limits; 27% oppose that and demand the cancelation of elections if Israel does not allow East Jerusalemites to vote in their city. Three months ago, only 56% supported, and 39% opposed, the holding general elections if Israel does not allow them in East Jerusalem.
- But only 42% believe the elections will be free and fair and 48% think they will not be free and fair. Moreover, 69% believe that if Hamas wins the elections, Fatah will not accept the results and 60% say that if Fatah wins the elections, Hamas will not accept that outcome.

#### *Legislative Elections:*

- In an open-ended question, we asked the public to name the party or faction it nominates to lead the next PA government: 38% (40% in the West Bank and 34% in the Gaza Strip) nominated Fatah; 22% (15% in the West Bank and 33% in the Gaza Strip) nominated

Hamas, 5% nominated an independent list, 2% nominated the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), 4% nominated other groups, and 29% did not nominate any party of faction. When asked about its expectations for the winner, 45% expected Fatah to win, 23% Hamas, 18% third or newly created parties.

- The poll sought to assess the role played by three prominent individuals associated with Fatah on the likely consequences for the movement if the three decide to run with their own independent lists:
  - ✓ If Marwan Barghouti forms his own independent list, 28% of the public say they will vote for his list while 22% say they will vote for the official Fatah list formed by president Abbas.
  - ✓ If Mohammad Dahlan forms his own independent list, 10% of the public say they will vote for his list while 29% say they will vote for the official Fatah list.
  - ✓ If Naser al Qidwah forms his own independent list, 7% of the public say they will vote for his list while 30% say they will vote for the official Fatah list. If Marwan Barghouti gives his support to al Qidwah's list, support for it would rise to 11% and support for Fatah's would drop to 28%.
- A majority of 57% say they support and 38% say they oppose the formation of a joint Fatah-Hamas list to compete in the upcoming parliamentary elections.
- We asked the public which electoral list it will vote for in the upcoming elections. We sought to ascertain how respondents will vote in four different scenarios: (1) when the electoral lists are identical to those of 2006 elections, (2) when a joint Fatah-Hamas list is formed and Marwan Barghouti forms his own list, (3) when no joint list is created but Marwan Barghouti forms his own independent list, and (4) when no joint list is created and a Naser al Qidwah's list replaces that of Marwan Barghouti's. Here are the findings among those who say they intend to vote:
  - ✓ 2006 lists: if new legislative elections were held today with the participation of all factions, 75% say they would participate in such elections. Of those who would participate, 30% say they will vote for Hamas and 43% say they will vote for Fatah, 8% will vote for all other third parties combined, and 18% are undecided. Three months ago, vote for Hamas stood at 34% and Fatah at 38%. Vote for Hamas in the Gaza Strip stands today at 36% (compared to 43% three months ago) and for Fatah at 32% (compared to 29% three months ago). In the West Bank, vote for Hamas stands at 25% (compared to 26% three months ago) and Fatah at 53% (compared to 45% three months ago).
  - ✓ Joint Fatah-Hamas list and a list for Marwan Barghouti: in this scenario, 78% indicate they will participate in the elections. Of those participating, 44% (41% in the West Bank and 48% in the Gaza Strip) say they will vote for the joint list, 28% (38% in the West Bank and 15% in the Gaza Strip) will vote for Marwan Barghouti's list, 8% (2% in the West Bank and 15% in the Gaza Strip) will vote for Mohammad Dahlan's list, 6% will vote for leftist and other lists, and 14% are undecided.
  - ✓ Independent Marwan Barghouti's list and no joint list: in this scenario, 79% say they will participate in the elections. Of those who plan to participate, 27% (20% in the West Bank and 36% in the Gaza Strip) say they will vote for Hamas, 24% (27% in the West Bank and 19% in the Gaza Strip) intend to vote for Fatah, and 20% (29% in the West Bank and 9% in the Gaza Strip) intend to vote for the Marwan Barghouti's list, 7% intend to vote for Dahlan's, 5% for the National Initiative list (al Mobadarah) led by Mustafa Barghouti, 2% for the PFLP, 1% for Watan led by Hasan Khraisheh, and 1% for a list formed by Salam Fayyad, and 15% say they have not decided yet.

- ✓ Independent list for Qidwah, no joint list, and no Marwan Barghouti's list: In this scenario, 78% say they will participate and of those 32% (39% in the West Bank and 23% in the Gaza Strip) say they will vote for Fatah, 28% (21% in the West Bank and 36% in the Gaza Strip) say they will vote for Hamas, 6% for Dahlan's, 5% for the National Initiative's, 4% for Qidwah's, 2% for the PFLP, 2% for Salam Fayyad, 1% for Watan led by Hasan Khraisheh, and 21% are undecided.
- The largest percentage (28%) says that the top priority for Palestinian elections should be to restore unity between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip; 23% say it is improving economic conditions; 17% say it is to combat corruption; 12% say it is the removal of the siege and blockade over the Gaza Strip; 11% say it is the strengthening of resistance to occupation, 4% say it is to increase the prospects for peace, and 2% say it is to create a democratic political system. When asked who is the most able to deliver the top priority selected by the respondents, 31% selected Fatah, 22% Hamas, and 9% third parties. 15% say all the competing parties and factions can equally deliver on their priorities while 19% say none can deliver.
- We asked the public to speculate about the likely consequences of a Hamas victory on six issues: (1) the siege over the Gaza Strip, (2) Gaza-West Bank unity, (3) economic conditions, (4) corruption in the PA, (5) Hamas's response to the Quartet conditions, and (6) Israel's response to Hamas' victory. These are the findings:
  - ✓ Siege over Gaza: 49% say the siege will be tightened and 14% say it will be relaxed or removed and the rest said current conditions will remain unchanged.
  - ✓ West Bank-Gaza Strip unity: 36% say the split will be consolidated and 19% say the prospects for unity will increase.
  - ✓ Economic conditions: 45% say economic conditions will worsen and 17% say they will improve.
  - ✓ Corruption: 26% say corruption will decrease and 28% say it will increase
  - ✓ Quartet conditions: 62% say Hamas will not accept the conditions of the Quartet and 26% say it will accept them.
  - ✓ Israel's reaction: a majority of 51% thinks that Israel will not allow Hamas to form a government in the West Bank, 28% think Israel will arrest Hamas' members of the parliament, and only 11% think Israel will allow Hamas to form a government in the West Bank.
- Similarly, we asked the public about the consequences of a Fatah victory for two issues: (1) corruption, and (2) West Bank-Gaza Strip unity. These are the findings:
  - ✓ Corruption: 16% say corruption in the PA will decrease and 36% think it will increase.
  - ✓ Unity: 33% think separation will be consolidated while 22% think unity will be consolidated.

*Presidential elections:*

- In an open-ended question, we asked the public to state the name of the person it wants to be the next president of the PA. The largest percentage (22%) says Marwan Barghouti, 14% Ismail Haniyyeh, 9% Mahmoud Abbas, 7% Dahlan, 3% Khalid Mishal, 2% Mohammad Shtayyeh, 2% Mustafa Barghouti, and 1% Yahya Sinwar. About half of the public did not know or declined to mention a name.
- If Fatah nominates Abbas as its candidate for the presidential elections, a majority of 57% of the public would view him as the wrong choice believing Fatah has better candidates; only 23% of the public think Abbas is the best Fatah candidate. When asked to name a better candidate, 49% named Marwan Barghouti, 12% Mohammad Dahlan, 5% Mohammad Shtayyeh, and 4% Nasir al Qidwah.

- We asked, in a closed-ended question, about potential Abbas' successors: If president Abbas does not nominate himself in a new presidential election, 40% prefer to see Marwan Barghouti replacing him, while 20% prefer Ismail Haniyeh. Mohammad Dahlan is preferred by 7% (1% in the West Bank and 16% in the Gaza Strip), Khalid Mishal and Mustafa Barghouti by 5% each, and Salam Fayyad by 2%.
- 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 46% of the votes (compared to 50% for Haniyeh and 43% for Abbas three months ago). In the Gaza Strip, Abbas receives 41% of the votes (compared to 32% three months ago) and Haniyeh receives 56% (compared to 64% three months ago). In the West Bank, Abbas receives 52% (compared to 52% three months ago) and Haniyeh 38% (compared to 38% three months ago). If the competition was between Marwan Barghouti and Ismail Haniyeh, Barghouti receives 63% and Haniyeh 33%. If the competition is between prime minister Mohammad Shtayyeh and Haniyeh, the former receives 48% and the latter 44%. Three months ago, Shtayyeh received the support of 47% and Haniyeh 47%.
- Level of satisfaction with the performance of president Abbas stands at 32% and dissatisfaction at 65%. Level of satisfaction with Abbas stands at 35% in the West Bank and 26% in the Gaza Strip. These figures are similar to those obtained three months ago. 68% of the public want president Abbas to resign while 26% want him to remain in office. Three months ago, 66% said they want Abbas to resign. Demand for Abbas' resignation stands at 64% in the West Bank and 74% in the Gaza Strip.

## **(2) The Coronavirus vaccine and PA performance during the COVID-19 pandemic:**

- A majority of 55% (65% in the Gaza Strip and 49% in the West Bank) says that it is willing to take the vaccine when available or has already received it; 43% (35% in the Gaza Strip and 49% in the West Bank) say they and their families are not willing to take the vaccine when it becomes available.
- 62% believe that the vaccination process in the West Bank has so far been lacking in transparency and justice while 33% believe the process has been transparent and just.
- 55% (36% in the Gaza Strip and 67% in the West Bank) are dissatisfied with the efforts made by the PA to obtain the vaccine and 43% (63% in the Gaza Strip and 30% in the West Bank) are satisfied.
- Half of the public (50%) are dissatisfied with the measures taken by the PA to contain the spread of the coronavirus while 47% are satisfied. Dissatisfaction in the West Bank stands at 61% and in the Gaza Strip at 34%.
- The majority is satisfied with the performance of the various actors involved in the management of the Coronavirus crisis: 60% express satisfaction with the performance of the security services deployed in their areas and 56% are satisfied with the performance of the ministry of health. Satisfaction with the performance of the prime minister stands at 45%.

## **(3) Domestic conditions and satisfaction with the Shtayyeh government:**

- Positive evaluation of conditions in the Gaza Strip stands at 6% and positive evaluation of conditions in the West Bank stands at 19%.
- Nonetheless, perception of safety and security in the Gaza Strip stands at 68% and in the West Bank at 64%.
- 30% of the public say they want to emigrate due to political, security, and economic conditions. The percentage in the Gaza Strip stands at 40% and in the West Bank at 23%.



Three months ago, 24% of West Bankers expressed a desire to emigrate and only 25% of Gazans expressed the same desire.

- Perception of corruption in PA institutions stands at 84%. When asked about institutions controlled by Hamas in the Gaza Strip, 70% indicated that there is corruption in these institutions.
- 43% of West Bankers think people in the West Bank can criticize the PA without fear while 53% think they cannot. In the Gaza Strip, 40% think people in the Strip can criticize Hamas' authorities without fear and 58% think they cannot.
- The public is divided over its assessment of the PA: a slight majority of 51% views it as a burden on the Palestinian people while 44% view it as an asset for the Palestinian people. Three months ago, 41% viewed the PA as a burden.
- 58% oppose and 37% support making payments to the families of martyrs and prisoners based on need assessment and number of family members rather than on the act committed by the martyr or the number of years in jail.
- 34% are optimistic and 61% are pessimistic about the success of reconciliation. Three months ago, optimism stood at 29%.
- About two years since the formation of the Shtayyeh government, findings indicate persistent pessimism. Responding to a question about expectations regarding the ability of the Shtayyeh government to make progress in reconciliation and reunification, 61% expect failure; only 32% expect success. These results reflect a little increase in public expectations compared to three months ago when only 28% expected success. But when asked about the ability of the government to organize legislative or legislative and presidential elections in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, half of the public expects success and 44% expects failure. Three months ago, 61% expected failure in holding elections. In another question about the ability of the new government to improve economic conditions, a majority of 60% expects failure and 32% expects success.
- We asked the public about its viewership habits in the last three months. Findings indicate that Palestine TV viewership has become the highest standing at 19%, followed by Al Jazeera TV, at 16%, followed by Maan, Al Aqsa TV, and Palestine Today TV at 11% each, Al Arabiya at 5%, al Manar at 3% and finally al Mayadeen at 1%.

#### **(4) The Palestinian-Israeli Peace process, Israeli elections, and the implications of the recent ICC decision:**

- Support for the concept of the two-state solution stands at 40% and opposition stands at 57%. No description or details were provided for the concept. Three months ago, support for the concept stood at 40%.
- A majority of 55% believes that the two-state solution is no longer practical or feasible due to the expansion of Israeli settlements while 38% believe that the solution remains practical. Moreover, 77% 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 20% 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 36% of the public while 26% prefer waging "an armed struggle against the Israeli occupation." 10% prefer "waging a non-violent resistance" and 21% prefer to keep the status quo. Three months ago, 38% said that they prefer reaching a peace agreement with Israel and 29% said they prefer waging an armed struggle.
- When asked about the most effective means of ending the Israeli occupation, the public split into three groups: 37% chose armed struggle, 36% negotiations, and 20% popular resistance. Three months ago, 39% chose armed struggle and 35% chose negotiations.

- Under current conditions, a majority of 58% opposes and 28% support an unconditional resumption of Palestinian-Israeli negotiations. But only 51% think the PA should not return to peace negotiations with Israel under the sponsorship of the Quartet, made up of the US, Russia, the EU, and the UN; 43% support such return to negotiations.
- When asked about support for specific policy choices, 66% supported joining more international organizations; 59% supported resort to non-violent resistance; 43% supported return to armed confrontations and intifada; 42% supported dissolving the PA; and 33% supported abandoning the two-state solution and embracing a one state solution for Palestinians and Israelis.
- In the upcoming Israeli elections, scheduled to take place today, 49% expect the Likud (under the leadership of Netanyahu) and its allies among the extreme right and the religious parties to win the elections while 23% expected victory to go to a coalition of right wing, center and leftist parties under the leadership of Saar, Gantz, Lapid, and others; 28% do not know.
- Two thirds (66%) of the public do not expect the decision of the International Criminal Court (ICC) confirming its jurisdiction over the occupied Palestinian territories to lead to restrictions on Israeli behavior in these territories while a quarter (25%) expects it to impose at least some restrictions.
- Similarly, a large majority of 73% believes that there will be no trials at the ICC for any Israeli officials; 21% think one or more Israeli officials might be prosecuted by that court.

**(5) Expectations from the Biden Administration and attitudes regarding resumption of Palestinian-Israeli negotiations under its leadership:**

- Now that Biden has won the US presidential elections, 50% expect, and 41% do not expect, the US to resume financial support to the PA.
- But a slight majority of 51% does not expect Biden's policy toward the Palestinian-Israeli conflict to be more balanced and less biased in favor of Israel; 41% expect it to be more balanced and less biased compared to the previous US administration.
- 48% are opposed, and 44% are supportive, of a return to Palestinian-Israeli negotiations under the US leadership.

**(6) Ten years after the Arab Spring:**

- Ten years after the Arab Spring, 73% say they felt sympathy at the time with the Arab demonstrators while 18% say they did not feel sympathy.
- The public is divided into three groups in its evaluation of what the Arab demonstrators wanted: 33% say they wanted freedom from regime oppression, 28% say they wanted a way out of poverty and unemployment, and 20% say they wanted to combat corruption. Only 5% say they wanted to replace the existing regimes with Islamists and another 5% say they wanted to express opposition to pro-Western policies of their regimes.
- 37% believe the Arab Spring has left a negative impact on Palestinian conditions while 18% think it left a positive impact and 37% say it had neither negative nor positive impact.
- A majority of 56% indicates that it did not feel at the time that there was a need for similar demonstrations in Palestine while 36% say they felt such need at that time.

**(7) 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, 31% believe the first most vital goal should be to obtain the right of return of refugees to their 1948 towns and villages, 14% believes it should be to establish a democratic political system that respects freedoms and

rights of Palestinians, and 11% believe that the first and most vital goal should be to build a pious or moral individual and a religious society, one that applies all Islamic teachings.

- The most serious problem confronting Palestinian society today is poverty and unemployment in the eyes of 30%, the spread of corruption in public institutions in the eyes of 25%, the continuation of occupation and settlement activities in the eyes of 24%, the continued siege of the Gaza Strip and the closure of its crossings in the eyes of 13%, and the lack of national unity in the eyes of 6%.