

Gro Hasselknippe

**Palestinian Opinions on
Peace and Conflict, Internal Affairs
and Parliament Elections 2006**
Results from Fafo polls
in September and November–December 2005

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Preface

'Palestinian opinions on peace and conflict, internal affairs, and parliament elections 2006' is based on the results from two opinion polls that Fafo conducted in the Palestinian territories in September and November/December respectively.

The first poll measured the pulse in the Gaza Strip after the Israeli pullout, while the second poll collected Palestinian opinions in both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip just one month prior to the parliamentary elections

The fieldwork would not have been possible without the support of the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics. We are thankful for their support in providing sampling frames and population estimates for the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The sample selection for the last poll used mosaic maps of the Gaza Strip provided by the European Space Imaging in addition to the Palestinian sampling frames.

Fafo's Palestinian team, Akram Atallah and Hani el Dada drafted the questionnaires and were in charge of the field operations, including recruitment of experienced interviewers and supervisors. We would like to thank both the fieldworkers that assisted Fafo in these surveys and all the Palestinians who took the time to answer the questionnaires.

Research director Jon Pedersen directed the first survey while Gro Hasselknippe led the second poll. Åge A. Tiltnes provided valuable input to the design, and Kristin Dalen, Roula Haddad, Zhang Huafeng and Linn-Kaja Rogstad assisted with the sampling, data entry and data processing.

The Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs provided the necessary funding for the second poll.

Oslo, March 2006

Mark Taylor

Director

Fafo Institute for Applied International Studies

1 Introduction

Fafo conducted two opinion polls in the Palestinian territories in 2005, one between 31 August and 9 September (results released 13/9/05), and the other between 21 November and 10 December (results released 21/12/05). The first survey covered the Gaza Strip while the second collected information from both territories. Both polls surveyed opinions on the political situation, peace and conflict, and governance. The first poll focused on the Israeli pullout of Gaza while the second poll measured the pullout's effect on people's lives in addition to people's views on the upcoming Palestinian parliament elections.

This report presents the results from the November-December poll, but will include comparisons with the first Fafo poll as well as with other polls, where relevant. Where nothing else is stated, all figures referred to are based on Fafo's latest poll. This poll was financed by a grant from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The analysis is divided into three parts. The first part deals with Palestinian opinions on questions related to peace and conflict. This section includes effects of the Israeli pullout, attitudes regarding Palestinian violence targeting Israel, and opinions on the peace process. The second part discusses internal Palestinian affairs and peoples' view on different actors' performance. Included are also issues such as satisfaction with local services, institutional charity, and important political aspects to be addressed by the Palestinian Authority. The third part looks at people's opinions regarding the parliamentary elections. To conclude, we analyze the election results in view of the poll data.

2 Socio-demographic Characteristics of the Sample

The sample contains 1848 adult Palestinians aged 18 and above. It includes 55 percent women and 45 percent men. The majority, 73 percent, is married, 22 percent are single while four percent are widowed and the rest either separated or divorced. A larger proportion is single in the age group 18-24 and among people with secondary and higher education. Regional differences are minor in this regard.

Just about half the sample has completed secondary or higher education, while ten percent have not completed basic school. There are no significant regional differences regarding level of education.

Table 1 Socio-demographic characteristics of the sample

Background factor		Percent
Region	West Bank	53
	Gaza Strip	47
Age	18-24	22
	25-34	28
	35-44	24
	45-54	13
	55 or above	14
Sex	Male	45
	Female	55
Marital status	Single	22
	Married	73
	Other	5
Education	Not completed any level	11
	Elementary	14
	Intermediate (7-9)	23
	Secondary (10-12)	32
	Higher education (13+)	20
Employment status	Employed	31
	Unemployed	69
Refugee status	Refugee	40
	Non-refugee	60
Household income	Very low	22
	Low	24
	Medium	45
	High	9

Only 31 percent of the respondents (58 percent men and nine percent women) are employed and it is mainly the youngest and the oldest that suffer from unemployment. The employment rate increases with level of education: While only ten percent of those with no education at all are employed, the figure is 22 percent in the group with basic education, 29 percent for respondents with secondary education and 61 percent among those with post-secondary degrees. The largest employment sector is the Palestinian private sector (39 percent), but almost as many work for the Palestinian Authority (PA) (33 percent). Sixteen percent are self-employed, seven percent have work in Israel, while the rest work for NGOs or UNRWA.

Four in ten respondents are refugees: 68 percent in the Gaza Strip and 23 percent in the West Bank.

The analysis of the poll data will to a certain extent build on differences according socio-demographic factors, although in general, people's opinions are not too dependent on these characteristics. One additional factor that will be taken into account is the respondents' political affiliation based on what party they say they would vote for in the elections.

3 Conflict and Peace

Both Fafo polls sought to gather Palestinian opinions regarding issues related to conflict and peace. This section will first go through people's own perceptions of how the Israeli pullout from Gaza in August 2005 has affected their lives. Next, we will examine how people react to the different means used to resist the occupation. Finally, we look at what people believe are the most important issues to address in order to get the peace process back on track.

3.1 Personal economy and security improved for Gaza residents after pullout

In the September poll conducted in Gaza, just days after Israel's withdrawal, 79 percent were of the opinion that the pullout would improve their personal economic situation. Nearly three months later three quarters of respondents in Gaza stated that their personal economic situation had actually improved. Not unexpectedly, the inhabitants of the West Bank felt differently, and there, only 42 percent claimed to have an improved economy. In September 88 percent thought the disengagement would improve the Palestinian economy overall, while three months later this sentiment had dropped to 53 percent in Gaza. The opinion was similar in the West Bank (52 percent). Thus, although people in Gaza in September believed that the disengagement would have a positive economic effect for the whole nation, this had not yet materialized (in the opinion of the public) three months later, even though Gaza residents have experienced an economic improvement at the personal level.

In November-December 86 percent of Gaza's adult population felt more secure than before the pullout while only 35 percent felt safer in the West Bank (53 percent at the national level). Not unexpectedly, the Israeli pullout has had a more positive effect in Gaza than in the West Bank since the Israeli military presence in the West Bank is unchanged with daily military incursions into Palestinian towns and villages¹. In contrast, citizens in the Gaza Strip may now move from north to south without having to stop at Israeli checkpoints. Israeli settlements used to be a source of tension, especially in the southern part of the Strip. The removal of Israeli settlers contributed to a much higher degree of security for the local population. Perceptions of security are related to the situation on the ground, and in the period after the Fafo survey both Gaza and the West Bank were plagued by unrest and violence making the security situation more unstable for the whole population. However, security perception is also related to the behavior of Israeli forces and the fear of incursions, arrests, planes breaking the sound barrier and military attacks. A poll conducted 20-21 January concluded that a majority of the respondents felt that

¹ All Israeli incursions are listed in the Palestinian Center for Human Rights' weekly report.

their families, themselves and their properties were secure under the current local security conditions (48 percent in the West Bank and 69 percent in the Gaza Strip)².

3.2 Support for a calm with Israel but military operations against the occupier are seen as legitimate

Despite the fact that Gaza again became the venue for the launching of rockets against Israel towards the end of 2005, a large majority of the surveyed population supported the calm (*thadiala*) with Israel. The calm or ceasefire was agreed upon by the PA and Israel in Sharm el Sheik in February 2005, and had during the year contributed to fewer military attacks and suicide bombings than previous years due to the adherence to the *thadiala* by Islamic Jihad, Hamas and Fatah's military faction Al Aqsa Martyr's Brigade³. At the very end of the year, however, these same factions declared that they would not necessarily support a continuation of the ceasefire. Qassam rockets were fired almost daily from the Gaza Strip into Israel during the last days of December. These actions stand in stark contrast to the people's support for keeping the calm with Israel. Among those who had an opinion, as many as 83 percent meant it was in the Palestinian interest to prolong the ceasefire deal⁴. This opinion was stronger in Gaza (90 percent) than in the West Bank (79 percent). These are high figures compared to other polls. A poll conducted 15 October to 8 November 2005 showed 60 percent support for a continuation of the calm, while 33 percent opposed it (Palestinian Center for Public Opinion). However, results from the same polling institute from a survey conducted 9-15 January 2006 showed that 65 percent were in favor of a continued ceasefire agreement while 29 percent disapproved of it⁵. In spite of high demand for calm, only 26 percent supported use of force by the Palestinian security services against those factions that break the agreement. This underlines people's respect for what they perceive as resistance against an oppressor. As we shall see, although they prefer calm for the time being, attacks on Israelis do not, in many people's view, give the authorities the right to punish those many Palestinians consider freedom fighters.

Regardless of the majority's support for the ceasefire with Israel, 69 percent agree that attacks against Israeli targets are legitimate responses to the current political situation (Table 2). Ten percent more of the population in Gaza than in the West Bank strongly agree to this statement, but when combining the two answer categories 'strongly agree' and 'agree' the difference between the two regions becomes insignificant. Factors such as sex and age do not matter much either. However, people's support for military operations against Israel

2 Palestinian Public Opinion Poll No. 18, January 20-21, 2006, Center for Opinion Polls and Survey Studies, An-Najah National University, Nablus.

3 Palestinians killed 41 Israeli civilians in 2005, including ten that were killed in January before the ceasefire was agreed upon. Sixty-eight were killed in 2004, 129 in 2003, 272 in 2002 and 151 in 2001. No Israeli civilians were killed in January 2006. B'Tselem, The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories.

4 If the 'Don't know' responses are included, 79 percent were in favor of the ceasefire agreement, 17 percent against it and 3 percent answered 'Don't know'. One percent refused to answer.

5 'Don't know' responses are included in these results.

Table 2 Degree of support for the statement, "Today, the resumption of military operations against Israeli targets is a legitimate response to the current political situation" (percent)

		Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total
Total		20	49	27	4	100
Region	West Bank	16	54	26	4	100
	Gaza Strip	26	41	29	4	100
Age	18-24	21	47	28	3	100
	25-34	17	56	22	4	100
	35-44	23	45	26	6	100
	45-54	18	43	33	6	100
	55 or above	18	51	30	2	100
Sex	Male	21	47	27	5	100
	Female	18	52	27	4	100
Party affiliation	Fatah	15	49	30	6	100
	Hamas	30	50	17	2	100

differs across party affiliation. Four out of five persons who say they will vote for Hamas in the Legislative elections support military operations compared to 64 percent of Fatah voters.

3.3 Population split regarding suicide bombings and continuation of *Intifada* but majority supports cessation of attacks from the Gaza Strip

Half of the population agrees with the statement: 'Suicide attacks against Israeli civilians are necessary to force Israel to make political concessions' (Table 3). The support for suicide attacks is slightly stronger in Gaza (56 percent) than in the West Bank (47 percent). However, for Gaza this is a reduction from 61 percent in September. Only eight percent of men in the West Bank strongly agree to the statement compared to 23 percent in Gaza. There is stronger support for suicide bombs among Hamas voters (71 percent) than Fatah sympathizers (44 percent). Hamas has claimed responsibility for the bulk of all suicide attacks since the outbreak of the *Intifada* up until the ceasefire agreement, and this partly explains why its followers support suicide attacks to end the occupation to a larger degree than Fatah voters⁶.

According to 43 percent of the respondents the *Intifada* (uprising) must continue. Thus, the majority wants it to stop. Respondents in Gaza have not changed their minds since the last poll, and only 37 percent support a continuation of the uprising. Those most inclined to support it are West Bankers, in particular men, well-educated persons and Hamas voters.

⁶ For a list of all suicide attacks committed by Hamas from the start of the Intifada and until March 2004, see *Hamas terrorist attacks*, Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 22/3/2004.

Regional differences in this matter must be interpreted in the light of the positive sentiment in Gaza resulting from the Israeli disengagement. The pullout has given people a hope that five years of struggle, which resulted in increased poverty, finally can end. They welcome normality without everyday interference from Israeli forces and eased restrictions on crossings into Israel and the West Bank. In contrast, West Bank residents still suffer from Israeli military presence, and are therefore less inclined to give up the struggle.

There is, however, no discrepancy between the two areas about whether Palestinian factions' should halt military operations from the Gaza Strip or not, as a large majority both places think these actions must be brought to a halt. People in Gaza just agree stronger to the statement than in the West Bank. This should give both Hamas and Fatah an incentive to control their respective military wings.

In September 2005 Hamas stepped up the number of military parades in celebration of Israel's disengagement from Gaza. According to Hamas' spokesperson Sami Abu Zuhri, the marches were a message to the Israeli military that Palestinian resistance groups would keep their arms and continue to fight the occupation (Aljazeera net 22/9/05). Nevertheless, an agreement was reached on 21 September between all military factions and President Abbas that military parades should end as of 24 September (State Information Service 22/9/05). At previous occasions armed processions had resulted in both self-inflicted injuries and injuries to innocent spectators. It was, therefore, in the Authority's interest to halt such events to prevent further accidents. Hamas gave in to this demand and explained its decision by stating that, "Hamas' focus was confrontation with the Israeli occupation, not parades

Table 3 Support for political statements by region (percent)

	West Bank	Gaza	Total
Suicide bombings necessary to force Israel to make concessions			
Strongly agree	14	20	16
Agree	33	36	34
Disagree	41	29	37
Strongly disagree	12	14	13
Intifada should continue			
Strongly agree	11	10	10
Agree	36	27	33
Disagree	36	38	37
Strongly disagree	17	25	20
Palestinian factions must stop military operations from Gaza			
Strongly agree	15	33	22
Agree	57	43	52
Disagree	22	17	20
Strongly disagree	5	6	5
Support military parades carried out by Palestinian factions in Gaza			
Yes	19	16	18
No	81	84	82

in the streets” (Aljazeera net 22/9/05). The day before the deadline, an explosion killed 20 Palestinians during a Hamas parade in the Jabalya refugee camp. The blast took place aboard a truck carrying Qassam rockets in the midst of the gathering. This is the background for people’s low support for military displays. When asked whether they support military parades carried out by Palestinian factions in Gaza, only 18 percent answer yes.

Considering these results regarding views on peace and conflict, the conditions for a new period of calm with Israel were evidently present. However, the resumption of attacks from the Gaza Strip into Israel suggests that violent acts take place in spite of the majority’s will. The fact that they may occur without intervention from the authorities and without large-scale protests from the public indicates the absence of both law and order, and a functioning civil society. On the other hand, lack of reactions may be explained by many people’s view of armed attacks against Israeli targets as legitimate while under occupation.

Even as many as 61 percent of Hamas’ supporters (45 percent in the West Bank and 67 percent in Gaza) concurred that all military operations against Israel from the Gaza strip should cease, implying that only a minority within Hamas’ own ranks were in favor of such operations. People in Rafah were particularly opposed to continued attacks: only nine percent objected to the statement that attacks should stop. The strongest support for continued attacks (36 percent) came from Deir al Balah in central Gaza (Table 4).

According to Khalil Shikaki, the Director of the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, Palestinian opposition to violence increases when diplomacy proves effective. Public support for violence grows in an environment of greater pain and suffering and decreases when threat perception is reduced (Shikaki: 1). Shikaki, who has carried out numerous polls in the Palestinian territories over the past decade, shows how support for violence is related to progress in the peace process and to internal support for the PA (Shikaki: 5). His studies find that support for violence decreased after the establishment of the PA. The Oslo process affected positively the psychological environment and encouraged moderation. In the years following Oslo, the PA gained legitimacy at the expense of the Islamist factions that rejected the whole peace process. The turning point came with the collapse of the Camp David II negotiations and the outbreak of the second *Intifada* in 2000. From that point on and until Arafat’s death in November 2004 the support for violence grew as a consequence of setbacks in the peace negotiations. The absence of a peace process lead to a unilateral Israeli disengagement policy, a separation wall was built and Israeli forces withdrew from the Gaza Strip. This gave support to those who claimed that violence helps, and it lead to a tougher competition between Hamas and Fatah. The PA became irrelevant in many people’s view. In the post-Arafat period, Shikaki has observed a new trend where people again show less support for violence. With Abbas as President, the

Table 4 Degree of support for a cease of military operations from the Gaza Strip (percent)

	North Gaza	Gaza	Deir Al-Balah	Khan Yunis	Rafah	Total
Strongly agree	23	36	28	37	38	33
Agree	49	44	36	39	53	43
Disagree	18	12	30	20	8	17
Strongly disagree	10	7	6	4	1	6

PA's legitimacy was to a certain extent restored and there was again hope for a revitalization of the peace process.

Fafo's poll falls in under this latest period described by Shikaki, and although there is still a substantial proportion of the population considering violence as a legitimate means of obtaining their rights, a large majority wants to maintain the *thadiala* with Israel and only a minority favors attacks from the Gaza Strip.

3.4 Terror attacks by Al Qaeda perceived as resistance

On 8 November 2006, only two weeks prior to this opinion poll, Al Qaeda claimed responsibility for the simultaneous bombings of three hotels in Amman, Jordan. The poll asked to what degree people supported Al Qaeda bombings in the USA and Europe, Iraq, and Jordan. While 65 percent supported such actions in Western countries, half that many (33 percent) supported bombings in Iraq, and 12 percent did so in Jordan (Table 5). Overall, the support is somewhat stronger in Gaza than in the West Bank, and stronger among those who say they would vote for Hamas than among Fatah loyalists.

Palestinians regard Al Qaeda mainly as a resistance movement. According to a study conducted in five Mashreq countries in the period between March and June 2004 only seven percent of the Palestinians viewed Al Qaeda as a terrorist organization while 70 percent saw them as a resistance movement⁷. In Jordan the views were similar: 11 percent labeled Al Qaeda a terrorist organization and 67 percent perceived them as a resistance group. An opinion poll conducted in Jordan *after* the 8 November attacks showed that the percentage considering Ben Laden's movement as a legitimate resistance group had dropped to 20 percent, while 79 percent described it as terrorist (Hamzeh). In Syria, Lebanon and Egypt, however, 40, 54 and 31 percent respectively believed Al Qaeda were a terrorist organization, while 8, 18 and 41 percent labeled the network a resistance group (Center for Strategic Studies: 74). In Syria as many as 49 percent answered either "don't know" to the question or they refused to answer, indicating that this was a sensitive question many wanted to avoid.

Table 5 Percentage expressing their support to Al Qaeda-operations in three areas, by region and party affiliation

		Bombing in USA/Europe	Bombing in Iraq	Bombing in Jordan
Total		65	32	13
Region	West Bank	57	29	13
	Gaza	79	39	11
Party affiliation	Fatah	62	30	7
	Hamas	79	46	17

⁷ Study conducted by Centre for Strategic Studies, University of Jordan, Jordan, February 2005. The five countries studied were Jordan, Syria, Egypt, Lebanon and the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

The study by the Center for Strategic Studies shows that a majority of Palestinians consider all acts by the USA or Israel within the Palestinian territories or in Iraq as terrorist acts, while other military events targeting Israeli, American or international interests are seen as resistance. While a majority of all five studied nationalities think of Israeli attacks on the Palestinians and the American-led military operations in Iraq as terrorist, they vary in their views on events in other parts of the world. Jordanians and Palestinians hold fairly similar views, while the Syrians, Egyptians and Lebanese are more inclined to label attacks executed by Arab groups within the Arab world as terrorist acts⁸. When asked whether the attacks on the World Trade Center in the United States 9/11 2001 were terrorist acts or not, 22 percent of the Palestinians labeled the attacks as ‘terrorist’. In Jordan 35 percent agreed these were terrorist attacks, while 62 percent in Egypt, 71 percent in Syria and 73 percent in Lebanon did the same (Center for Strategic Studies: 72). By way of comparison, 89 percent of the Palestinians were of the opinion that the US-led operations in Iraq are terrorist events, while only 36 percent would term the bombings of UN and Red Cross headquarters in Iraq terrorist attacks.

The strong support for Al Qaeda’s actions revealed in our survey must be seen in light of the findings from the above-mentioned opinion polls. They show how militant actions can be perceived differently depending on people’s historical and national backgrounds. To a larger extent than other Arabs, Palestinians (and to some extent Jordanians, of which at least half are of Palestinian descent) tend to associate all attacks on the West with the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, and therefore regard such actions as legitimate resistance rather than terrorism.

3.5 Gaza pullout – a right step towards a revival of the peace process

Palestinian public opinion is not an impediment to progress in the peace process; to the contrary, over time the Palestinian public has become more moderate. Palestinian willingness to compromise is greater than it has been at any time since the start of the peace process. This increased willingness to compromise provides policymakers with greater room to manoeuvre. (Shikaki: 1)

Shikaki’s statement is built on an analysis of a collection of public opinions since the early beginning of the Oslo peace process. Despite varied support for violence during this period, he argues that the willingness to compromise has been on a steady increase.

Fafo’s poll didn’t enquire whether people wanted resumption of peace negotiations. However, nearly half the population agrees to the statement that the Israeli pullout from Gaza has moved the peace process back on track, while 42 percent disagree and 11 percent disagree strongly. Gaza citizens hold a more positive view compared to the West Bank population.

An issue that probably contributed to increased optimism, particularly in Gaza, was

⁸ Attacks mentioned were assaults on housing compounds in Saudi Arabia, hotels in Morocco, and Jewish synagogues in Turkey (Center for Strategic Studies: 72).

the Rafah border agreement reached between Israel and the Palestinian Authority on 15 November 2005 during the American Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's visit to the Palestinian territories. Israel agreed to re-open the Rafah border terminal between the Gaza Strip and Egypt under Egyptian and Palestinian control and EU supervision. Israel's sole control would be through camera surveillance. In addition to giving the Palestinians border control for the first time since 1967, the agreement set up a timetable for improving the transport of cargo and persons between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, easing travel restrictions within the West Bank, establishing a Palestinian port, and looking into the possibilities of constructing an airport (Rice).

Seventy percent of Palestinians thought that the border agreement would improve their personal economy. Not surprisingly, 20 percentage points more people in Gaza than in the West Bank shared such optimism. Apart from regional differences and the fact that persons without any education are more optimistic about the (future) consequences of the agreement, other factors do not have any impact on people's opinions.

In the period after the survey, the Rafah border agreement has not proceeded as planned. Due to the suicide attack in Netanya 5 December 2005, Israel closed the borders again, postponed the safe passage between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and permitted fewer trucks in and out of Gaza than was agreed upon. Therefore, the optimism people felt immediately after the agreement is possibly already gone. The unrest that characterized Gaza in the latter part of December 2005 and first part of January 2006 may at least partly be understood as a result of this broken deal.

3.6 Further Israeli withdrawal of forces most important to resume negotiations

The second *Intifada* has not coincided with an active peace process. Israel's unilateral decision to withdraw its forces and settlers out of the Gaza Strip initially met opposition from Palestinians since it was not a part of a negotiated deal. Later the two parties reached an agreement to establish a period of calm, Israel has released some prisoners and has reopened the Rafah border. However, a resumption of the peace process is not on the agenda.

The Fafu poll asked what people think are the most important issues to address in order to get the peace process back on track. Among five alternatives, a majority answers further withdrawal of Israeli forces and the release of prisoners (Table 6). **The issue of withdrawal** is directly linked to the occupation. The population perceives the continued presence of occupation soldiers in the Palestinian territories as provocative. The view that further withdrawal is essential for a revival of peace negotiations is as strong in Gaza as in the West Bank. This reflects the common understanding of all Palestinians that the occupation must end. Release of prisoners, on the other hand, is the second most important issue for negotiations. The key Palestinian concern and complaint with regard to this is that Israel is making random arrests and keeping people in administrative detention. We shall return to the issue of prisoners in the next section.

In the eyes of the Palestinian population, evacuation of settlements is the third most important issue. Quite naturally this topic has a higher priority for West Bankers than Gaza

residents. Settlements, which are illegal under international law⁹, are scattered all over the West Bank, built on Palestinian land. The structures of the buildings and the special roads reserved for settlers are dominating the landscape, leaving the Palestinian land fragmented¹⁰. Settlements, like checkpoints, are visible physical hindrances for the Palestinian people and daily reminders of the occupier's power.

Removal of checkpoints ranks fourth in importance, and is also related to the larger issue of military withdrawal. While 34 percent think that further withdrawal is most important to resume negotiations, 12 percent (16 percent in the West Bank) believe that the removal of checkpoints is critical to get the peace process back on track. Israeli-controlled roadblocks are daily barriers for all Palestinians living in the West Bank. Passing checkpoints is sometimes impossible and always time consuming. They delay people on their way to work or studies, and they prevent people from maintaining social relations with friends and relatives in other villages or towns. At times checkpoints also hinder access to medical care. There are numerous stories about ambulances or private cars with seriously ill people or women in labor that have not been allowed to pass checkpoints. Furthermore, the Palestinians feel humiliated by the Israeli forces right to search them, decide *who* can pass, and *when* they may pass.

Table 6 The most important issues to address to get the peace process back on track (percent)

	West Bank	Gaza Strip	Total
Further withdrawal from the West Bank	30	40	34
Release of prisoners	29	42	33
Evacuation of settlements	21	8	16
Removal of checkpoints	16	4	12
Ease border crossings	4	5	4
Other	0	1	0
Total	100	100	100

⁹ Fourth Geneva Convention, article 49 (6).

¹⁰ For a description of the development of Israeli settlements in the OPT, see "Israel and the Occupied Territories: The issue of settlements must be addressed according to law", Amnesty International, AI Index: MDE 15/085/2003 8/9/2003.

4 Palestinian Affairs

4.1 Low confidence in PA's institutions, although President is popular

Regarding people's view of the ruling elite, the survey found somewhat mixed results. Although a majority was satisfied with the performance of both the president and the Palestinian Authority (PA), institutions like the government and the parliament have very little legitimacy with the people. More than two thirds of the adult population thought that President Abbas was doing a good job, and 58 percent were satisfied with the PA's overall performance. Satisfaction with the two institutions is lower in the Gaza Strip than the West Bank. In Gaza, twice as many respondents as in the West Bank are *very* unsatisfied with the authorities (34 as compared with 17 percent).

Half of the population is of the opinion that the PA performs better than one year ago (West Bank 54 percent, Gaza 43 percent). Gaza's isolation from the governing elite and harsher living conditions, can explain why Gaza citizens are less satisfied with the PA than the West Bank population.

Notwithstanding relatively high ratings for the President and the PA, people have little trust in other central institutions such as the government and parliament. Only four percent had a great deal of confidence in the government while 23 percent had quite a lot of

Table 7 Degree of confidence in government and parliament by region, sex, household income and refugee status (percent)

	A great deal		Quite a lot		Not very much		None at all	
	Gov.	Parl.	Gov.	Parl.	Gov.	Parl.	Gov.	Parl.
Total	4	6	23	24	48	43	25	27
Region								
West Bank	4	8	25	25	49	44	21	24
Gaza	2	4	19	22	45	41	34	33
Sex								
Male	4	7	22	21	47	41	27	30
Female	3	5	25	27	49	45	23	23
Household income								
Very low	2	6	24	24	40	37	33	32
Low	4	8	26	23	47	45	23	23
Medium	3	6	23	24	52	45	22	25
High	5	7	17	22	49	42	29	30
Refugee status								
Refugee	3	5	21	21	47	40	29	33
Non-refugee	4	7	25	26	49	45	22	22

confidence in this institution (Table 7). Comparable figures for the parliament are six and 24 percent, respectively, leaving more than two thirds of the constituency with little or no confidence at all in the two bodies. West Bankers and people from low-income households have somewhat higher trust in the government and parliament than other groups.

As compared with September, people's confidence in the government, or rather lack thereof, has remained stable: in September, four percent of people in Gaza had a great deal of confidence and 20 percent had quite a lot of confidence, while comparable figures from the last poll were two and 19 percent respectively. We find the same stability in the proportion of people with a great deal of confidence in the parliament, resting at four percent. The proportion of those with quite a lot of confidence in this institution has increased with two percentage points in Gaza.

4.2 PA has not delivered on its promise to fight corruption and to maintain internal security

The Palestinian authorities have received considerable criticism for not dealing with corruption problems within the ruling elite. People's discontent with this fact is reflected in the data. Overall, the respondents were of the opinion that the PA had done a poor job fighting corruption. Only six percent think the authorities have been successful, while 31 percent think they have been quite successful. Twenty-eight percent are of the opinion that the PA has been very unsuccessful. One in five believe that someone will be prosecuted for corruption allegations, while 43 percent think this might happen. People in Gaza are more skeptical than in the West Bank. These findings stand in contrast to the results from September when 72 percent considered that PA was serious in its plans to fight corruption. As we shall see later when discussing the election campaign and election results, the latter most likely suggests that Hamas' election campaign attacking the PA on this particular issue had born fruit already seven weeks before the elections and moved people (the electorate) into expressing their dissatisfaction with the authorities on corruption.

A second major concern of ordinary people in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, and perhaps especially in the Gaza Strip after the Israeli pullout, is the deteriorating security situation with rampant violence and threats, regularly reported in the local and foreign press. A majority (69 percent) believes that the PA is serious in its commitment to improve the internal security situation (West Bank 74 percent, Gaza 62 percent). Compared to our September poll this is a significant decline of 17 percentage points from 79 percent for Gaza, and must be seen in light of the increased lawlessness in the streets since Israel's withdrawal. This heightened insecurity has been a profound disappointment to many people, standing in stark contrast to the immediate optimism following the pullout. Although many are of the opinion that the PA is doing its job regarding security, only some four in ten respondents express confidence in the security services (West Bank 41 percent, Gaza 35 percent and stable since September). The youngest Palestinians (aged 18-24 years) have higher confidence in the security apparatus than others. There is no or insignificant variation on opinions on this issue across other socio-demographic factors.

In spite of a rather high score on commitment to improve the internal security, but in

line with low trust in the security services, only about a quarter of the population believe the government and the parliament perform well in their attempts to put an end to illegal street activities while an additional 30 percent think the performance is fair (Table 8). Political factions and security services are seen as somewhat more capable of reducing street crime than the executive and legislative powers, but according to our respondents it is the clans (*hamulabs*) that are best suited to deal with this problem. A high 67 percent say the clans perform well or fair in this respect. This finding indicates that the traditional way of settling conflicts functions better in the Palestinian society than the relatively recently established institutions within the PA. The clans have longstanding practices in dealing with family feuds. So successful are they that tribal sheikhs and notables often are brought in and used by the authorities to reconcile adversaries and mend conflicts before cases reach the formal, modern justice system ¹¹.

Table 8 Assessment of different institutions' performance with regard to their attempts to put an end to illegal activities in the Palestinian streets (percent)

	Good	Fair	Poor	Total
Government	25	30	45	100
Parliament	23	30	46	100
Security services	30	34	36	100
Political factions	28	35	37	100
Hamulah (clans)	31	36	34	100

The PA's loss of legitimacy can be explained by all factors mentioned above. Its failure to deliver good governance, combat corruption, secure law and order and obtain results in the peace process has contributed to weaken the legitimacy of PA institutions. Even the Israeli pullout of Gaza was attributed Palestinian armed resistance and not the peace process and negotiating skills of the PA¹².

4.3 Overall low confidence in the judiciary, political parties and other organizations

Forty-three percent have either a great deal or quite a lot of confidence in the judiciary (Table 9). The trust is 12 percentage points stronger in the West Bank than in the Gaza Strip. This quite low level of confidence in the legal system might be connected with the strong position of the *hamulabs*, as explained above. In many criminal cases, it is the clans that actually agree on the appropriate reactions and punishments while the judiciary applies

11 The traditional conflict-solving process in the Arab world is called sulha. For more insight into how sulha works, see Restorative Justice: - The Middle East, Zoughbi Zoughbi, Palestinian Conflict Resolution Centre.

12 The September poll showed that 61 percent believed the Palestinian struggle caused the withdrawal. Twenty-three percent said the withdrawal was a result of a too high Israeli cost of keeping Gaza, while 12 percent attributed the pullout to international pressure.

what the representatives of the two parties have concluded. The judiciary has therefore, in many peoples' view, less power than the families in crimes and wrongdoings that involves private parties.

A second important factor that may explain low trust in the judiciary is the restriction of movement within the Palestinian Territories that hinders its ability to function, its capacity. Users have serious difficulties reaching courts. Many Palestinian judges and administrators live outside the cities where courts are located, and disruptions in their freedom of movement have therefore prevented them from arriving at their place of work. Since the Palestinian judicial system requires judges to work in teams (three justices, a prosecutor and a clerk), trials cannot be considered legal unless the whole team, as well as a defence lawyer, is present. The Israeli siege has made it impossible for courts to operate, and many court hearings have therefore been automatically adjourned (Balsam).

People's confidence in political parties decreased from 43 percent in September to 36 percent in December. A split in Fatah must take some of the blame for this drop. Slightly more popular are local political leaders who as a group gain the trust of 43 percent of the population. The confidence in local leaders is slightly higher in the West Bank (49 percent) than in Gaza, where it plummeted from 48 to 31 percent in the three months between the polls.

United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) is the organization in which most people have confidence (67 percent). Only eight percent have no confidence at all in this UN body that provides basic health and education services to Palestinian refugees. During the second Intifada, the Agency has faced a magnitude of problems with Israel related to the transportation of goods to the camps and heavy damages to refugee camps and the Agency's facilities. UNRWA's protests to Israel have been visible to the Palestinians and well perceived. Moreover, UNRWA is the largest charity provider in the territories, and as many as 70 percent of the refugees receive either food rations or financial support from it.

Table 9 Degree of confidence in different institutions (percent)

	A great deal	Quite a lot	Not very much	None at all	Total
UNRWA	27	40	25	8	100
Palestinian press	18	42	27	13	100
Palestinian NGOs	8	35	41	16	100
Banks/financial institutions	8	35	30	27	100
Local leaders	9	33	38	20	100
Judiciary	9	34	33	25	100
Private sector	6	36	37	21	100
Security services	8	31	40	21	100
Political parties	5	31	41	23	100
Parliament	6	24	43	27	100
Foreign companies and NGO's	6	25	32	37	100
Government	4	23	48	25	100
Western media (CNN, BBC)	5	14	30	51	100

After UNRWA, people trust the Palestinian press the most. While 68 percent have confidence in the local media in Gaza, 55 percent say the same in the West Bank.

People's confidence in foreign companies and NGOs is as low as their confidence in the government and parliament. Although foreign institutions contribute to the Palestinian economy either as an employer, a charity provider or through institutional support, only about one third of the population has confidence in them. Large companies may be perceived as only business oriented. While more action-oriented NGOs may have been well perceived in earlier years, peoples' trust might have dwindled because these organizations' efforts have not led to substantial improvement in Palestinians' living conditions. We should note, however, that low confidence in foreign institutions does not necessarily imply that people are not grateful for receiving their support. Instead it should be interpreted to signify that, in spite of extensive foreign presence and support, the main problem of occupation dominates people's attitudes.

On the whole, western mass media, like the CNN and BBC, is not much appreciated in the Palestinian society. Only 19 percent have some kind of confidence in these news channels. When asked about what TV news sources people trust the most, 74 percent indicated Al Jazeera, while 11 percent trust Palestinian TV the most and eight percent prefer other Arabic news channels. Only one percent trusts BBC more than other channels while less than a half percent prefer CNN above the others.

Low trust in news channels other than Arabic ones is associated with a general perception of how the West regards the Muslim world. The different coverage by the two biggest Western news channels and Al Jazeera of important crisis situations like the Iraq war, September 11, the Intifada, the UN pressure on Syria to mention a few, has contributed to the dislike of Western media. This is because people in general feel that Western media gives a biased view on the different events and conflicts¹³. Cited as evidence of bias include: examples of the CNN reporters that for a long time during the second Intifada did not use the word 'occupation' in its coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; foreign news channel that have met criticism for not reporting equally on Israeli and Palestinian civil casualties under the uprising, and that have often used the term 'neighborhood' instead of 'Jewish settlement' (Mc Master); western media will use the term 'terrorist' in the description of Palestinians who carry out violent attacks against Israeli targets, while many Palestinians would see that person as a martyr and/or a resistance fighter; Palestinian media refers to the Israeli Defense Forces as Israeli occupation soldiers, while the English translation of the Israeli term (just used) is widely used in Western media and among international organizations.

4.4 Release of prisoners from Israeli jails most important issue

Release of prisoners is one of the key negotiation issues between the Israeli and Palestinian sides. For the Palestinian public this is *the* most important political problem that has to be addressed (Table 10). The high priority given to this issue must be seen in light of the

¹³ Even American journalists have criticized Western media for reporting one-sided in conflicts, giving the viewers a too pretty picture of war (Day, *Guardian Unlimited*).

scope of random arrests and bad conditions in Israeli jails for Palestinian inmates. With the outbreak of the Al-Aqsa (second) *Intifada* on 28 September 2000, Israel started to carry out massive and random arrests that netted around 35,000 Palestinian citizens of whom 8,000 people are held today by the Israeli security forces in more than 22 Israeli prisons, detention centers and military camps (Palestinian Prisoner Society Reports, 2003 and B'Tselem). Many of the prisoners are subject to violence and torture; some get trials while others are held in administrative detention, i.e. without trial¹⁴. According to the Palestinian Prisoner Society the imprisoned are denied proper medical care, in violation of international conventions. They have reported 950 cases of serious health problems of people who are still imprisoned by the Israeli forces and suffer from a lack of medical care or attention (Palestinian Prisoner Society Reports, 2005).

The second most important issue to be addressed is job creation opportunities that can lift households out of poverty. Earlier Fafo studies have shown that employment creation is the most useful type of assistance to people who can work. Work enables people to care for themselves to a much larger degree than other forms of assistance, in particular food aid. Financial aid is not widespread, and seldom sufficient, and does not secure a decent living standard. Wages are the single most important factor for a household's survival (Sletten and Pedersen).

The third most important issue to address, very much related to the latter issue, is the economic situation. To improve the economy is difficult while the PA is dependent on foreign financial assistance, and has very few financial sources under its own control due to Israeli restrictions. The taxation system (VAT) is controlled by Israel, and money is transferred from Israel irregularly. There has been a radical reduction in the economic activity during the last few years as movement of goods and laborers is hindered by the Israeli occupation, i.e. roadblocks and border controls. The GNP per capita was 35 percent lower in 2003 compared to 1999 (World Bank: 10). Improvement of the national economy relies on good governance and transparency. People need greater assurances that financial resources are spent according to political plans and to the best interest of society. The perceived mismanagement of revenues for the elected few has led to the discrediting of political leaders.

Resumption of the peace process is seen as the fourth most important issue to address. Although Palestinians seek an end to the occupation, Israel's disengagement from Gaza somehow changed their priorities. Israel's unilateral policy gave the Palestinians the biggest triumph since the beginning of the peace process. Therefore, resumption of negotiations are viewed less critical than economic growth and job-creation, and as a consequence: improved living standards.

Negotiations have higher priority for West Bankers, who still face Israeli soldiers every day, than for the people of Gaza, who appear to feel that their lives have changed for the better as a result of the withdrawal. The relationship between the Israeli state and the Palestinian Authority has a direct impact on the Palestinian economy. After extensive periods of calm, the Israelis are more inclined to ease restrictions on Palestinian work permits to

¹⁴ Since February 2005, the Prisons Service has refused to provide B'Tselem with figures on detainees and prisoners. However, according to figures provided by the IDF to Hamoked: Center for the Defence of the Individual, the IDF is holding, as of 3 January, 2006, 741 Palestinians in Administrative Detention (B'Tselem, http://www.btselem.org/english/Administrative_Detention/Statistics.asp)

Israel, but borders close and permits are withdrawn in response to violent attacks on Israel. To conclude, although Palestinian opinion in December gave a higher priority to the economic situation than to the resumption of peace negotiations, the two matters are closely linked: A stronger Palestinian economy rests on free movement of both goods and people, something which only Israel is able to facilitate, and only will provide under prolonged periods of negotiated calm.

Other issues like public health care, education, infrastructure, human rights, political violence and street crime were of less urgency compared to the above-mentioned issues.

Table 10 Most and second most important issues to be addressed

	Most important	Second most important
Release of prisoners	40	21
Job creation opportunities	19	22
The economic situation	16	17
Resumption of peace negotiations	11	10
Street crime	5	8
Political violence	2	4
Infrastructure	2	3
Equal rights	2	6
Public education	2	6
Public health services	1	4

4.5 Variable satisfaction with public services

People's satisfaction with public services varies by type of service. In general, people expressed highest satisfaction with the electricity and water supply. Both services were perceived as slightly better in the West Bank than in the Gaza Strip. Public primary schools also enjoy a high degree of satisfaction among Palestinians, somewhat more so in Gaza than the West Bank.

People were less satisfied with garbage collection, and as many as nine percent in the West Bank reported that garbage is not collected where they live. Regardless of better access to garbage collection in Gaza, the overall satisfaction with it was roughly the same in the two regions.

The health sector, as the educational sector, has many providers, but when asked to assess public primary health care, 48 percent in the West Bank were satisfied compared to 73 percent in Gaza. Hospital care seems to be in a worse state as only 53 percent of the population expressed satisfaction with it overall, as compared with 64 percent being very or somewhat satisfied with public primary health services. The situation is most serious for the population in the West Bank where as many as 16 percent reported that public hospitals are non-existent. Non-existence also refers to the fact that people cannot always reach a hospital because of the closures. Access to public secondary health care is a well-known problem for Palestinians. The situation improved in Gaza in 2000 when the European

Gaza Hospital with 232 beds opened. This hospital was a joint initiative between UNRWA and the European Union but is now integrated into the Palestinian Authority's Ministry of Health. It is situated in Khan Younis in the south and serves the nearby population of about 400,000 (*About European Gaza Hospital*).

Three quarters of the population are either very or somewhat satisfied with the primary schools. However, there is two percent of the population that lacks easy access to public primary schools. UNRWA runs schools for the refugee population in camps, but the refugees are also free to choose public schools. The majority of those who lack public school facilities come from Jenin and Ramallah/Al Beereh. In Jenin ten percent non-refugees lack public schools while that is the case for 16% percent refugees in Ramallah/Al Beereh.

Together with hospitals, sewage and sanitation services received the poorest rating. Only 51 percent were very or somewhat satisfied, while 22 percent said they were very unsatisfied and 28 percent reported they did not benefit from sewage and sanitation services at all. This situation is particularly bad in the West Bank where 39 percent lack sewage and sanitation services, contrasted with only five percent in Gaza. Infrastructure is generally better in the Gaza Strip than in the West Bank due to Gaza's densely populated areas and to UNRWAs efforts in the camps. In contrast, the West Bank contains many smaller villages that still lack basic services. Development needs in these areas have not gained as much (international) attention as those in Gaza due to the harsher living conditions there overall.

Table 11 Satisfaction with local services (percent)

	Very satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Somewhat unsatisfied	Very unsatisfied	Total
Electricity supply	35	42	12	11	100
Water supply	34	37	16	12	100
Sewage and sanitation	24	37	16	22	100
Garbage collection	26	37	18	19	100
Primary schools	29	46	17	9	100
Primary health care	19	45	22	15	100
Hospitals	15	38	23	25	100

Does it matter who runs the community?

To a certain degree, satisfaction with local services varies according to the political party that manages the municipality. Two thirds of the surveyed population reside in a Fatah-run municipality, 18 percent in municipalities run by Hamas, six percent live in *hamulah*-run communities, and the rest in municipalities administered by a coalition or other factions. There is no universal pattern, but the survey responses indicate that sewage and sanitation services and primary health care services seem to be better managed in Fatah-run communities relative to those run by Hamas. Conversely, garbage collection is best in areas with Hamas in charge. The education services are quite well perceived independent of the party governing the municipality.

Hamulah-run communities have predominantly satisfied inhabitants, but often being

smaller, rural communities a larger proportion of people lack basic services here in comparison with localities administered by the two political parties.

Sewage systems, hospital care and garbage collection are most in need of upgrading

There are certain notable differences between the two regions with regard to people's perceptions of needed improvements. For Gaza residents the upgrading of the sewage and sanitation system is the top priority. Improvement of the garbage collection system and primary education comes second and third. For people in the West Bank, the hospital services and

Table 12 Satisfaction with local services by faction running the municipality (percent)

	Satisfied	Unsatisfied	Non existent	Total
Sewage and sanitation	44	28	28	100
Fatah	48	27	24	100
Hamas	34	23	43	100
Hamula	46	14	39	100
Coalition	30	28	42	100
Other	58	26	16	100
Garbage collection	59	35	6	100
Fatah	57	36	6	100
Hamas	69	30	2	100
Hamula	57	21	22	100
Coalition	56	44	-	100
Other	53	40	7	100
Primary health care	61	35	4	100
Fatah	64	32	4	100
Hamas	56	41	3	100
Hamula	61	28	11	100
Coalition	41	48	11	100
Other	60	38	-	100
Hospital care	47	43	11	100
Fatah	51	39	10	100
Hamas	47	37	17	100
Hamula	40	55	5	100
Coalition	23	64	13	100
Other	39	53	8	100
Primary education	73	25	2	100
Fatah	73	25	2	100
Hamas	75	25	-	100
Hamula	71	12	17	100
Coalition	79	20	1	100
Other	78	22	-	100

the sewage and sanitation system come first, followed by better water supply. Health care and education top the list of the second most important service to be addressed.

Table 13 Perception of local services in most need for improvement by region (percent)

	First priority			Second priority		
	Total	West Bank	Gaza Strip	Total	West Bank	Gaza Strip
Electricity	11	11	11	7	7	9
Water	13	16	9	10	9	13
Sewage	21	20	22	14	16	11
Garbage	13	10	19	13	9	19
Education	16	15	18	16	16	17
Primary health	7	7	6	18	21	14
Hospital care	17	20	12	17	20	11
Other	2	1	5	3	2	6
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

4.6 UNRWA main charity provider

The main charity provider in the Palestinian areas is UNRWA, which serves the refugee population (Table 14). The second largest provider is the PA while the third is Islamic charity institutions. Assistance is mainly given in the form of food, job creation programs and money. Other support can be the health insurance coverage that all trade union members receive from the PA¹⁵. In total, 43 percent receive some kind of institutional support, 30 percent in the West Bank and 69 percent in the Gaza Strip. One third of all Palestinians receive assistance from UNRWA, 23 percent get support from the Palestinian Authority while seven percent benefit from an Islamic charity. Islamic charity organizations collect *zakat* and distribute it to needy people, mainly families of martyrs. The proportion receiving aid from Islamic organizations is lower than anticipated, given, for instance, Hamas' reputation as large charity provider. Of all aid, food support to refugees dominates. Only ten percent of households have received money support and eight percent have benefited from a job creation program.

Table 14 Institutional support to households by type of support received (percent)*

	Food	Money	Job creation program	Other support	No support
Islamic charity organisation	5	2	0	0	93
Palestinian Authority	6	6	5	13	77
UNRWA	32	4	3	1	66
Any organisation	38	10	8	14	53

* Since households may receive more than one type of support, the percentages do not add up to 100.

¹⁵ This kind of assistance from the PA was only reported in the Gaza Strip, although trade union members in the West Bank also benefit from this service.

Institutional charity is meant to target the poorest segments of society. Normally, female-headed households, which lack healthy working-age members, are the most vulnerable, and a larger proportion of widowed respondents receive some kind of support compared to single or married persons.

Food aid is given to nearly all refugees, but a larger proportion of the lowest-income households receive such support compared to other income groups. Likewise, most of the money support targets households with the lowest income (Table 15). The distribution of households with members benefiting from job creation programs is more evenly spread across income groups. This is because household income increases considerably once someone is employed. Job-creation projects, however, are of a temporary nature and do not, of course, secure an exit from poverty in the same way as more permanent employment does. Still it is the best kind of assistance an impoverished household can receive provided it has employable members.

Table 15 Percent of households receiving institutional support by type of support and household income level

	Food	Money	Job creation program	Other support	Any support
Very low income	53	21	9	21	64
Low income	46	11	11	20	55
Medium	31	6	7	10	39
Higher than medium	18	4	5	3	24
Relatively high income	12	4	4	-	20

5 Elections

5.1 Optimism, anti-corruption demands, and a desire for a national coalition government

The poll showed that an overwhelming majority (93 percent) supported holding the national elections as planned 25 January 2006. As many as 76 percent thought that the outcome of the elections would change things for the better and only six percent were of the opposite opinion, believing conditions would deteriorate. People in Gaza were more optimistic about the effects of the election results than inhabitants of the West Bank. In the two territories taken together, four out of five persons intended to vote.

Good moral standing and the reputation of the candidate were the most important factor for people when they decide whom to vote for. This factor came out as much more significant than political and personal affiliations and should be interpreted against a backdrop of years of allegations of widespread corruption, fraud and mismanagement in the ruling elite. The second most important factor is religion. The importance people put on morals and religion worked to the advantage of Hamas in its election campaign. As a party that had never held power at the national level, Hamas' reputation was not tainted with corruption, as were many of Fatah's top leaders.

In the September poll in Gaza, 33 percent said they would vote for Fatah, 20 percent for Hamas and 35 percent were still undecided. Three months later we saw a strengthened Fatah with 38 percent of the votes, and a weakened support for Hamas at 17 percent. The proportion of undecided voters had declined to 21 percent. In January, polls showed increased support for Hamas, but still with a lead for Fatah. A close race between these two rival parties was expected, and the question was whether there was room for Hamas in a new government and whether Hamas was willing to take on such a responsibility. The voters had a clear opinion on that issue; an overwhelming 94 percent was in favor of including Hamas in a national coalition government,.

When asked what block is most qualified to achieve certain political gains, a majority

Table 16 Political blocks most qualified to achieve ... (percent)

	Fatah with Nedal and Fida	Hamas with other Islamic factions	Mubadara with PFLP	Independent candidates
Progress in peace process	73	20	2	5
Relase prisoners	67	28	2	3
Security, law and order	67	25	3	4
Reform in the PA	63	28	4	5
Improve living conditions	61	29	4	6
National unity	65	26	4	5

was of the opinion that Fatah in coalition with Nedal and Fida are most capable. As many as 73 percent thought this block is most qualified to achieve progress in the peace process. Furthermore, 67 percent believed the Fatah-dominated block is best suited to accomplish a release of prisoners from Israeli jails as well as to obtain security and re-establish law and order within the Palestinian territories.

Nearly half of the population believed that Fatah's jailed West Bank leader, Marwan Barghouthi, was the most suitable to head the Fatah block in the elections, while 13 percent were of the opinion that the Gaza-based Mohammed Dahlan was the better Fatah leader. The current Prime Minister Ahmed Qureia received the support of only four percent.

6 The Hamas Landslide Victory – a Lesson Learned

In the weeks that followed our latest opinion poll, other polls and surveys showed a steadily increasing support for Hamas. As the proportion of ‘don’t know’ votes decreased, the (relative) support for Hamas rose while the (relative) support for Fatah remained quite stable throughout the months of December and January (Figure 1). While results suggested that Hamas would receive the support of the bulk of undecided voters as they stepped down from the fence, no polls showed a lead for Hamas over the ruling party. On election day, 25 January 2006, 44 percent voted for Hamas’ list ‘Change and Reform’ while 41 percent of the votes went to Fatah, resulting in 29 and 28 seats in the Parliament to these two parties respectively, out of 66 seats allocated proportionally on the basis of national lists used at the national level – a close race indeed. In the local elections, where people voted directly for candidates in their respective districts, Hamas took 45 seats and Fatah only 17 out of 66. In total Hamas won 74 seats and Fatah 45 out of 132 seats in the new Parliament.

Hamas’ success can be credited to its discipline in the electoral process where the Islamist party only put forward the number of candidates that could win a seat in each constituency. Fatah, on the other hand, ran a highly unsuccessful nomination process due in part to internal party divisions across generational and other lines. Fatah members were unable to agree amongst themselves what candidates to select, and as many as 78 Fatah members or persons affiliated with Fatah ran in the local elections as independent candidates in addition to the party’s “official” candidates. The consequence of this arrangement was that Fatah support was split across too many candidates, with the result that Hamas won seats even in some districts (e.g. Bethlehem) where Fatah received more votes in the national part of the elections.

In addition to Fatah’s failure to agree on the election lists in the districts, there were other important factors contributing to the Hamas victory. First among them was people’s frustration with corrupt Fatah rulers. The President had filed several cases of corruption against centrally placed politicians. However, at the time of the election, no one had been charged with any wrongdoing and brought before the court. Secondly, after years of Fatah rule, people’s living conditions have not improved. There is a stark contrast between the euphoria that followed the creation of the Palestinian Authority and today’s situation of frustrated and angry Palestinians blaming Fatah politicians for being incapable of obtaining peace with Israel, unable to increase peoples’ living standards and of maintaining law and order in the streets. Hamas took advantage of this situation in its electoral campaign and benefited from people’s low confidence in the government and parliament.

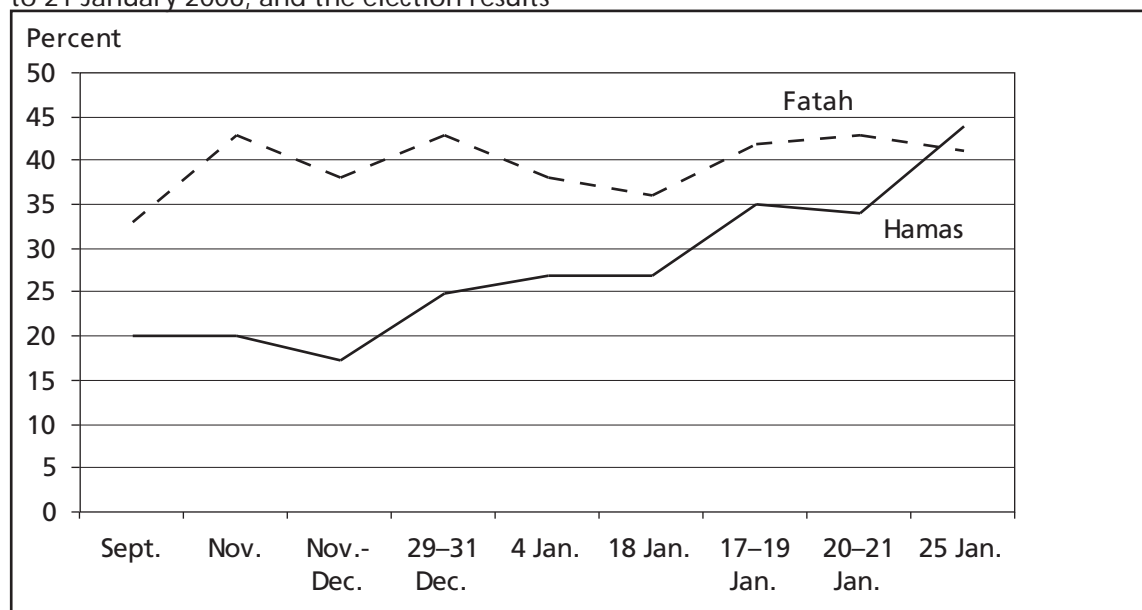
Hamas gained increased support during 2005, the year of municipal elections, and have since proven that they are capable of acting as responsible politicians at the local level. Hamas leaders’ strong stance against corruption, their emphasis on the need for restoring internal security and their image as charity providers for the needy were all factors that had a say in

the election results. People voted for those candidates with a good reputation, unstained with corruption allegations. Religion also played a role. These were the two most important factors for people's choice of candidate according to our poll. People who supported Hamas, voted for 'change and reform', a well-chosen name for the Hamas electoral list.

Regarding a future peace process, it is still too early to foresee what impact a change in government will have. Hamas has traditionally shown less willingness to compromise on Palestinian rights than Fatah. Although categorically opposed to any negotiations with Israel, some Hamas leaders did indicate a willingness to consider future talks with the Jewish state at the end of the electoral campaign. This most likely helped convince many of those in doubt to support Hamas.

The poll showed that Palestinians are ready for a new chapter in a story of negotiations that so far in the eyes of many has contained more disappointments than positive events. The Israeli disengagement from Gaza and the Rafah border agreement resulted in a boost of optimism among the Palestinians, but welfare and security have not improved according to expectations. The two main reasons for the lack of progress were 1) renewed violence between Palestinian armed groups and Israeli forces and 2) internal power struggle within the Palestinian society. Prior to the elections, the population was almost unanimously in favor of a national coalition government in the hope that it would be capable of establishing law and order and rid the streets of violence caused by political factionalism and crime. To date, the two largest political parties have been unable to agree on a platform for a coalition government. Hamas has even opened up for appointing a Prime Minister from outside its ranks to increase the chances of Fatah participation. Fatah has been reluctant and has so far rejected all offers of government participation. Hamas might be capable of restoring the legitimacy of the PA on its own in the short run, but to strengthen the PA institutions and secure the Palestinians a better future, a pragmatic attitude is needed from all sides.

Figure 1 Support for Fatah and Hamas according to pre-election polls from September 2005 to 21 January 2006, and the election results



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Palestinian Opinions on Peace and Conflict, Internal Affairs and Parliament Elections 2006

'Palestinian opinions on peace and conflict, internal affairs, and parliament elections 2006' is based on the results from two opinion polls that Fafo conducted in the Palestinian territories in September and November/December respectively.

The first poll measured the pulse in the Gaza Strip after the Israeli pullout, while the second poll collected Palestinian opinions in both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip just one month prior to the parliamentary elections in January 2006.

The analysis is divided into three parts. The first part deals with Palestinian opinions on questions related to peace and conflict. This section includes effects of the Israeli pullout, attitudes regarding Palestinian violence targeting Israel, and opinions on the peace process. The second part discusses internal Palestinian affairs and peoples' view on different actors' performance. Included are also issues such as satisfaction with local services, institutional charity, and important political aspects to be addressed by the Palestinian Authority. The third part looks at people's preferences regarding the parliamentary elections. Finally, the paper analyzes the election results in view of the poll data.

