

**Publication Date:**

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**National Opinion Poll**

 **Highlights**

* Optimism for the future has increased from 48 percent to 63 percent in less than two months. Optimism in Gaza hasjumped from 46 percent to 71 percent.
* 78 percent of respondents believe that the current reconciliation efforts will be successful on all levels. 84 percent in Gaza are optimistic about these efforts.
* 49 percent of respondents believe that Fatah and Hamas will benefit the most from reconciliation; 48 percent think that reconciliation will be beneficial for all Palestinians.
* 85 percent of respondents believe that the current reconciliation efforts should be continued even if foreign or US aid is suspended, or Israel employs additional pressure.
* 92 percent support the immediate conduct of presidential and legislative elections.
* 70 percent of Palestinians are optimistic that the 6-month deadline for conducting new elections will be met.
* 76 percent of respondents state that they intend to participate in future elections (89 percent in Gaza and 68 percent in the West Bank).
* Positive evaluations of President Abbas, Hamdallah and the Haniyeh governments have increased.
* 40 percent of respondents do not support any of the political factions, votes that are crucial in determining the results of any future election.
* 50 percent of Palestinians support a resumption of negotiations between the PA and Israel. A further 67 percent support a return to negotiations if the fourth round of prisoners are released and settlement building is frozen for three months.
* 66 percent believe that Israel’s position on contested issues is responsible for the recent breakdown in negotiations.

**Fieldwork Date: 24-26 May 2014**

**Sample size: 1,200 Palestinians in the West Bank & Gaza Strip**

**Margin of error:** + 3 %

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**Introduction:**

These are the results and analysis of the latest Arab World for Research & Development (AWRAD) national public opinion poll, focusing on the new government, reconciliation, negotiations, the peace process, government evaluation and elections.

The questionnaire was fielded May 24-26, 2014in the midst of talks to form the new national unity government with names of potential ministers being leaked and rumored by the various press agencies. The poll was conducted in an atmosphere of general optimism, despite the collapse in April of Palestinian-Israeli negotiations, as progress towards reconciliation appeared more concrete than during any previous attempts.

For this survey, 1200 Palestinian were interviewed (face-to-face) in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. All socioeconomic groups are represented in the poll (for more details on the sample please refer to www.awrad.org). The margin of error in this poll is (±) 3 percent. The survey was carried out by AWRAD researchers under the supervision of Dr. Nader Said-Foqahaa, President of AWRAD.

**Analytical Commentary:**

In advance of the official formation of the new national unity government, rates of optimism for the future have shot up from 48 percent to 63 percent. Higher rates are observed in Gaza with 71 percent of residents expressing optimism for the future, a marked increase of 25 points from March 2014 (46 percent). Similarly, rates of optimism increased by 8 points, from 50 to 58 percent, in the West Bank during the same period. Furthermore, 78 percent of respondents express optimism in the eventual success of reconciliation efforts to form a national unity government and conduct legislative and presidential elections. Once again, optimism is greater in Gaza (84 percent), though also substantial in the West Bank (74 percent). Significantly, 70 percent of Palestinians believe that elections will be held by the agreed-upon 6-month deadline. This environment of optimism has produced an increase in the amount of positive evaluations for all political stakeholders: Fatah, Hamas, the President (Abbas) and the two Prime Ministers (Hamdallah, Haniyeh).

Against the backdrop of increased optimism, it is the opinion of AWRADthat the formation of the unity government constitutes a window of opportunityfor restoring and repairing the political, economic and social implications produced by prolonged one-party rule in the West Bank and Gaza. However, there is the danger of a gap between popular expectations and the realities of what the unity government, guided by President Abbas, can deliver. The high rates of optimism are particularly reflective of the pressing needs of the publicin Gaza, where the organizational, infrastructural, political and social development processes have been severely stunted and contracted as a result of political and economic pressure.

AWRAD believes that the new government bears a significant responsibility in its mandate to attempt to addressthe expectations of the public, but the reality is that neither Abbas nor Fatah have control over many external influences and factors. However, a failure to improve the welfare of Gaza residents, in particular, could adversely impact the popularity and appeal of Abbas and Fatah among the Palestinian public at large, and specifically in Gaza. Therefore, President Abbas and Fatah must emphasize that the management of the current interim period is the responsibility of all political parties, including Hamas.

**Analysis of Results:**

1. **Overall Conditions:**

General Perceptions:

* The results reveal that, for the first time in over a year, a majority of Palestinians (55 percent) believe that the country is heading in the right direction. This is the highest rate since November2012, just afterMahmoud Abbas sought and obtained non-member state status for Palestine at the United Nations.
* Those who believe that Palestine is heading in the right direction increased by 26 pointsfrom March 2014 (29 percent).
* Furthermore, 41 percent of respondents believe that Palestine is heading in the wrong direction, a drop of 22 points from 66 percent in March 2014.
* The belief that Palestine is headed in the right direction is more widespread in Gaza (61 percent) than in the West Bank (51 percent).

**Graph 1: Perception of the Direction Palestinian Society (March 2012 – May 2014)**

* Similarly, for the first time in 2 years, a majority of Palestinians (63 percent) areoptimistic about the future. This is a 15-point increase in the rateof optimism observed in March 2014 (48 percent).Additionally, in the past 2 months pessimism rates have dropped by 14 percent, from 49 percent in March 2014 to 35 percent in May 2014.
* Optimism is greatest in the West Bank, with 71 percent stating that they are optimistic compared to 58 percent of those in Gaza.

**Graph 2: Outlook Regarding the Future among Palestinians (March 2012 – May 2014)**

Income, Security and Corruption:

* When asked about their family's economic condition, 48 percent of respondents say they are worse off than a year previous. 35 percent of respondents believe their family’s welfare has not changed, and 16 percent say their economic situation has improved.
* Families who say that their economic situation has deteriorated are moredominant in Gaza (58 percent) than in theWest Bank (43 percent).
* 36 percent of respondents state that internal security in their region has worsened in the past year, a number not affected by territorial disaggregation.34 percent of respondents believe internal security has stayed the same and 30 percent say it has improved.
* 44 percent of respondents perceive that corruption in both governments has increased. 29 percent of respondents believe that it has stayed the same, and a final 24 percent believe that it has decreased.
1. **Negotiations and the Peace Process:**

Current Negotiations:

* Palestinians are largely divided on the impact of the current standstill in negotiations on the Palestinian situation. 36 percent believe the standstill will have a negative impact, while 35 percent believe it will have no impact, and a final 29 percent believe it will have a positive impact.
* Respondents in Gaza (34 percent) are slightly more likely to believe a positive impact will be produced from the standstill than those in the West Bank (26 percent). In contrast, West Bank respondents (38 percent) are more likely to believe no impact will occur than those in Gaza (30 percent).
* 50 percent of respondents support a resumption of negotiations between the PA and Israel. 44 percent oppose such a development, while 6 percent are uncertain. Territorial disaggregation does not affect results.
* Support for a resumption of negotiations rises if Israel meets Abbas’ conditions of a 3-month settlement freeze and the release of the fourth round of prisoners. 67 percent would support resumption if these conditions were met, while 29 percent would oppose.
* The majority (66 percent) of the Palestinian public believe Israel’s position on contested issues was responsible for the breakdown of negotiations. In contrast, 13 percent believe the Palestinians’ position was responsible, and 3 percent cite the inability of the U.S. to manage the process. Significantly, 18 percent select other reasons as bearing responsibility.

Role of the U.S.:

* Respondents are divided when assessing the impact of the breakdown of negotiations on U.S.-Palestinian relations. 36 percent believe relations will be harmed, while 31 percent believe it will make no difference, and a final 30 percent do not believe relations will suffer.
* Palestinians in the West Bank (39 percent) are more likely to believe relations with the U.S. will suffer than those in Gaza (30 percent).In contrast, those in Gaza (37 percent) are more likely to believe the breakdown will have no impact than those in the West Bank (27 percent).
* 55 percent believe that the U.S. is important to negotiations and an eventual resolution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, while 36 percent believe the opposite.
* Palestinians in the West Bank (59 percent) are more likely to believe the role of the U.S. is significant than those in Gaza (49 percent).

Obstacles to a Solution:

* When asked about the most significant impediment to reaching a solution, a plurality of Palestinianscited Jerusalem (36 percent). Other significant obstacles include: refugees (28 percent) and settlements (22 percent). Respondents consider future borders (8 percent), demilitarization (4 percent), water (1 percent) and the Jordan Valley (1 percent) to be less significant.
* Gaza respondents almost exclusively select Jerusalem (46 percent) and refugees (33 percent) as the most significant obstacles. Other issues do not register above 10 percent. The relative indifference of Gaza respondents to the future of settlements is likely due to there no longer being Israeli settlements in the Gaza Strip.
* Respondents in the West Bank are more divided on issues. For example, 30 percent consider Jerusalem the most significant obstacle, followed by 29 percent who select settlements and 26 percent who select refugees.

The Peace Process:

* 55 percent of Palestinians continue to support the principle of a two-state solution with a Palestinian state living peacefully side-by-side with Israel, while 42 percent oppose.Support is slightly higher in the West Bank (58 percent) than in Gaza (52 percent).
* The majority of Palestinians (56 percent) believe they are further from establishing a Palestinian state 20 years beyond the Oslo Accords. In contrast, 38 percent believe they are closer.Respondents in Gaza (42 percent) are slightly more likely than those in the West Bank (36 percent) to believe Palestinians are closer to a state.
* The majority (57 percent) of Palestinians report they have less hope in the peace process than a year ago, while 39 percent have more hope.Respondents in Gaza (44 percent) are slightly more hopeful than their counterparts in the West Bank (36 percent).

Approaches to Independence:

* The majority (50 percent) of respondents support the approach of the PLO and President Abbas as a means for achieving independence. 18 percent support the approach of Hamas and KhaledMeshal, 14 percent support an alternative approach and 17 percent are unsure.
* Respondents in the West Bank (52 percent) are slightly more likely to prefer the approach of the PLO and Abbas than those in Gaza (48 percent).
* Respondents in Gaza (24 percent) are more likely to prefer the approach of Haniyeh than those in the West Bank (15 percent).
* Respondents in Gaza (17 percent) are more likely to prefer an alternative approach. Respondents in the West Bank (22 percent) are more likely to be uncertain.
* 67 percent of respondents oppose the dismantling of the PA if negotiations fail and avenues at the U.N. prove unsuccessful, compared to 28 percent who support.
* Support for dissolution of the PA is greater in the West Bank (30 percent) than in Gaza (24 percent).
1. **Reconciliation:**

Meeting Agreement Goals:

* A large majority (78 percent) of respondents are optimistic about the success of current reconciliation efforts. Higher rates of optimism are observed in Gaza (84 percent), than in the West Bank (74 percent).
* A large majority (70 percent) of respondents are optimistic about political factions meeting the 6-month deadline for conducting presidential and legislative elections as part of the reconciliation deal.There are higher rates of optimism in Gaza, where 78 percent of respondents are optimistic, compared to 65 percent of respondents in the West Bank.
* 37 percent of respondents believe that both Fatah and Hamas have the most to benefit from the formation of the new unity government. 48 percent of respondents state that all Palestinians will benefit. 6 percent of respondents believe that Fatah individually has the most to benefit from the agreement, and another 6 percent say the same about Hamas.

Firmness on Reconciliation:

* A large majority of respondents (85 percent) believe that Palestinian factions should continue with efforts to form a unity government and achieve reconciliation even if the U.S. or other foreign donors decide to suspend aid. 11 percent state that factions should not continue their efforts if aid is suspended.
* Furthermore, a large majority (84 percent) of respondents believe that Palestinian political factions should continue with their efforts to form a national government even if Israel refuses to return to negotiations as a result.

Unity Government:

* 54 percent of respondents stated that the number one priority of the unity government should be preparation for presidential and legislative elections. There is a noticeable geographic difference, as 69 percent of Gaza respondents state that elections is the number one priority, while only 45 percent of West Bank respondents share that view.
* 52 percent of respondents support President Abbas' *decision* that the unity government to be formed would recognize Israel, renounce violence and honor all previous international agreement. 43 percent oppose such a decision, while 5 percent of respondents are unsure.
* In terms of integration of security forces, agencies and police officers, 80 percent of the respondents support the integration of PA forces into the security force in Gaza and vice versa. 15 percent of respondents oppose such a decision.
* Furthermore, 77 percent of respondents support Hamas joining the PLO, while 18 percent oppose such move.
1. **Government Performance:**

Increase in Positive Evaluations of President Abbas, Hamdallah and Haniyeh:

* The Hamdallah government appears to have reaped the greatest benefits in public perception as a result of the reconciliation efforts. 42 percent of respondents positively evaluate the performance of this government, a sentiment consistent among respondents from the West Bank and Gaza. There is a clear increase in positive evaluations of the government that was replaced yesterday (June 2, 2014). However, this is most likely related to the public knowledge that Hamdallah has been selected as the Prime Minister for the unity government. 32 percent of respondents evaluate the performance of the Hamdallah government as average, while 13 percent negatively evaluate it, and a final 13 percent are unsure.
* The poll also asked respondents to evaluate the performance of the government led by Ismael Haniyeh. 27 percent of respondents positively evaluate the Haniyeh government a 7 point increase from March (20 percent), while 36 percent consider its performance to be fair, a 3 percent increase (33 percent). 26 percent evaluate the performance of the Haniyeh government as negative, a 9 point decrease since March (35 percent). The increase in positive evaluation is in large part due to reconciliation effort and the transfer of power from the Haniyeh government to the unity Government.
* Presently, 45 percent of respondents evaluate the overall performance of President Abbas positively, a 7 point increase from March (38 percent). Positive impressions are consistent among respondents in the West Bank (46 percent) and Gaza (44 percent). 34 percent of respondents evaluate President Abbas’ overall performance as average and 18 percent evaluate it as negative.
* When it comes to approving or disapproving of the President’s performance, 58 percent approve, a number that has remained unchanged since February 2013. In contrast, 31 percent presently disapprove of the President’s performance.

Choosing between Hamdallah and Haniyeh:

* When asked to choose between P.M. Rami Hamdallah and P.M. Ismael Haniyeh to be Prime Minister of the unity government, 49 percent of respondents select Hamdallah. It should be mentioned that there was public knowledge that Hamdallah had already been publically designated for this position when the poll was conducted. 19 percent choose Ismael Haniyeh.
* Interestingly, 27 percent of Gaza respondents choose Ismael Haniyeh as their candidate for the unity government, while only 15 percent of West Bank respondents express the same choice. Importantly, 23 percent prefer a third candidate as P.M., and 8 percent are unsure.
1. **Elections:**

Legislative and Executive Elections:

* An absolute majority (92 percent) of Palestinians support the immediate conduct of legislative elections in the West Bank and Gaza. A minimal 6 percent oppose such a development.
* Similarly, 90 percent of Palestinians support the immediate conduct of presidential elections in the West Bank and Gaza. There is a small geographic gap in support of immediate presidential elections. 87 percent of West Bank respondents support the conduct of such elections compared to 96 percent in Gaza.
* If elections were held today, 76 percent of respondents would vote. 13 percent say they would not vote, and a final 13 percent are not certain.

Resolution to Conduct of Elections:

* 81 percent of respondents believe that Fatah is serious or serious to some extent in its desire to hold elections. In contrast, 14 percent believe that Fatah is not serious about its desire to conduct elections.
* 70 percent of respondents believe that Hamas is serious or serious to some extent in wanting to hold elections. 23 percent believe that Hamas is not serious or not serious to some extent in wanting to hold elections.

Future Elections:

* If elections were to occur today, the greatest amount of Palestinians would vote for a Fatah electoral list (41 percent). A Hamas electoral list (13 percent) is the second most popular choice, while all other alternative parties receive minimal support.[[1]](#footnote-2) Significantly, 24 percent of potential voters say they are undecided and a further 13 percent say they would not vote.
* Establishment parties are more popular in Gaza than the West Bank. For example, 46 percent of Gazans would vote for Fatah, compared to 38 percent in the West Bank. Furthermore, 21 percent of Gazans would vote for Hamas, compared to 9 percent in the West Bank.
* In contrast, uncertainty and rejection is greater in the West Bank than Gaza. 29 percent of West Bank respondents are undecided, compared to 17 percent in Gaza. Similarly, 17 percent of respondents in the West Bank say they would not vote, compared to 6 percent in Gaza.

Reelection of Abbas:

* 52 percent of Palestinians believe Abbas will run for reelection is reconciliation efforts are successful, despite his public statements of not wishing to run. 27 percent believe he will not run and a final 21 percent are unsure.
* Gaza respondents (33 percent) are more likely than respondents in the West Bank (23 percent) to believe Abbas will not run again. Uncertainty is greater in the West Bank (24 percent) than Gaza (17 percent).
* 50 percent of Palestinians believe that Abbas should run again, compared to 48 percent who say he should not and 13 percent who are unsure.
* Respondents in Gaza (45 percent) are more likely than those in the West Bank (34 percent) to oppose Abbas running again. Again, uncertainty is greater in the West Bank (16 percent) than in Gaza (7 percent).

Abbas v. Meshaal:

* In a two-way race between Mahmoud Abbas and KhaledMeshaal, Abbas would be victorious. 49 percent say they would vote for Abbas, compared to 18 percent who would vote for Meshaal. Significantly, 20 percent of respondents say they would not vote in such an election, while 14 percent are undecided.
* Gaza voters (53 percent) are more likely to vote for Abbas than those in the West Bank (46 percent). Similarly, Gaza voters (25 percent) are also more likely to vote for Meshaal than those in the West Bank (14 percent).
* The amount of voters who would not participate in such an election is greater in the West Bank (23 percent) than Gaza (15 percent). Similarly, the amount of voters who are uncertain who they would choose is greater in the West Bank (18 percent) than Gaza (7 percent).

Abbas v. Haniyeh:

* A two-way race between Mahmoud Abbas and Ismail Haniyeh reveals almost identical results. 48 percent of voters would choose Abbas, compared to 18 percent who would select Haniyeh. 20 percent would not vote and 14 percent are undecided.
* Gaza voters (53 percent) are more likely to vote for Abbas than those in the West Bank (46 percent). Similarly, Gaza voters (25 percent) are also more likely to vote for Haniyeh than those in the West Bank (14 percent).
* The amount of voters who would not participate in such an election is greater in the West Bank (23 percent) than Gaza (14 percent). Similarly, the amount of voters who are uncertain who they would choose is greater in the West Bank (18 percent) than Gaza (7 percent).
1. All other electoral lists receive 2 percent or less. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)