**Press Release: Shifts in Palestinian Public Opinion**

**West Bank only public opinion poll, and specialized poll for
opinion leaders focusing on the current war on Gaza.**

**Highlights:**

* 51 percent of the Palestinian public supports an immediate ceasefire, while 44 percent opposes.
* Palestinian opinion leaders are also split on the issue of ceasefire (47 percent support and 47 percent oppose).
* 53 percent of the public and 49 percent of opinion leaders reject a return to the 2012 ceasefire agreement.
* 64 percent of the public state that their position, in regards to a ceasefire, is closer to that of Hamas, while 15 percent state their position is closer to that of President Abbas.
* 40 percent of opinion leaders state that their position is at odds with both Hamas and Fatah, while 39 percent state that their position is closer to Hamas and 20 percent state that their position is closer to the President.
* 58 percent of the Palestinian public in the West Bank believe that Palestinians are currently winning the war, and 56 percent of opinion leaders say that no party is winning.
* 55 percent of the public and 52 percent of opinion leaders believe that Palestine will suffer the biggest losses after the war concludes.
* Hamas’s performance in the war garners the highest positive evaluation among the public, and the performance of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) receives the highest positive evaluation among Palestinian opinion leaders.
* In terms of news coverage of the current Gaza crisis, the Al- Aqsa TV channel is the most viewed among the Palestinian public, while Palestine Today is most viewed among opinion leaders.
* 36 percent of opinion leaders and 22 percent of the public obtain their news through electronic news websites and Facebook

Kamal Nasser St. # 43, Masayef, Ramallah – Palestine. Phone/Fax number: 02-2950957; e-mail: award@awrad.org; website: www.awrad.org.

1. **Introduction and Methodology**

These are the results and analysis of the latest Arab World for Research & Development (AWRAD) *West Bank only public opinion poll*, and the specialized poll for opinion leaders focusing on the current war on Gaza.

The questionnaire was fielded February 19-21 of July 2014, in the midst of the Israeli ground invasion of Gaza and following the Shujaiyya Massacre.[[1]](#footnote-1)

For this survey, 300 Palestinians were interviewed (face-to-face) in the West Bank, while, for obvious reasons, the questionnaire could not be fielded in Gaza. All socioeconomic groups are represented in the poll (for more details on the sample please refer to www.awrad.org). The margin of error for this poll is (±) 5 percent. The survey was carried out by AWRAD researchers under the supervision of Dr. Nader Said-Foqahaa, President of AWRAD.

Regarding the specialized online poll, AWRAD defines this category as those Palestinians who have influence on Palestinian public opinion, or what some call public opinion leaders. Most broadly, they are people who work across a variety of different sectors, yet all have relative influence over Palestinian public opinion. The sample contains multiple Palestinian Legislative Council members, civil society leaders, academics, press personnel, political party leaders and activists. For this survey, 150 Palestinian opinion leaders were surveyed in the same period as the public opinion poll (19-21 July 2014).

1. **Analysis of Results**

**1. Ceasefire: A simple majority of respondents support a ceasefire, and refuse to return to the 2012 agreements.**

* In terms of public opinion, there is a split in regards to a ceasefire. 51 percent support an immediate ceasefire followed by a more comprehensive agreement, while 44 percent oppose such a measure and 5 percent of respondents are unsure. Among Palestinian opinion leaders, 47 percent oppose an immediate ceasefire followed by an agreement, while 47 percent state that they support such an approach, and 6 percent are uncertain.
* Regarding a full de-escalation agreement, 39 percent of the public support an agreement similar to the 2012 ceasefire, while 53 percent of the public oppose and 8 percent are unsure. Among opinion leaders, 44 percent are in favor of entering into an agreement reminiscent of 2012, while 49 percent oppose such a development.
* Furthermore, 64 percent of the public state that their position in regards to a ceasefire is closer to Hamas, and 15 percent state that their position is closer to that of President Mahmoud Abbas. In the opinion leaders’ poll, 40 percent state that their position is at odds with both the Hamas position and the Fatah position. A further 39 percent state that their position is closer to that of Hamas, and 20 percent state that their position is closer to that of President Abbas.

**2. Evaluation of stakeholders: Hamas receives the highest positive evaluation.**

* 93 percent of the public negatively assesses the role of the United States in the current conflict. 4 percent are neutral and a final 1 percent positively assesses its role. Among Palestinian opinion leaders, 99 percent negatively assess the role of the United States.
* The Egyptian government receives a similar evaluation, 93 percent of the Palestinian public negatively evaluate the role of Egypt in the current conflict. 1 percent positively evaluates the role of Egypt, with a final 3 percent remaining neutral. Among the Palestinian opinion leaders, a smaller majority, 64 percent, negatively assess the role of Egypt, while 31 percent are neutral, and a final 6 percent positively assessing its role.
* 82 percent of the general public negatively evaluate the role of the United Nations in the current conflict. 11 percent are neutral and the final 2 percent positively assess the role of the international body. Results are largely similar among Palestinian opinion leaders.
* 77 percent of respondents negatively evaluate the role of the Arab League, while 11 percent are neutral and 2 percent positive. In regards to opinion leaders, 80 percent negatively evaluate the role of the Arab League, with 18 percent neutral and 2 percent positive.
* When assessing the role of the Palestinian Authority, 56 percent of the Palestinian public offers negative evaluations. 25 percent are neutral, while 16 percent positively evaluate the role of the PA in the conflict. Similar to the public, 53 percent of opinion leaders negatively appraise the role of the PA, while 35 percent are neutral and a final 12 percent offer positive evaluations.
* 45 percent of the public negatively evaluates the role of Fatah, while 32 percent as neutral and 22 percent positively evaluate the role. Similarly, 33 percent of opinion leders negatively assess the role of Fatah, with 40 percent neutral and the final 14 percent positively assessing the role.
* While the evaluations of international actors and the PA are largely negative, Palestinian opinion begins to shift in evaluation of Hamas, PIJ and the PFLP.
* 43 percent of the public positively evaluates the role of the PFLP, while 39 percent are neutral and 12 percent are negative. In contrast, 23 percent of opinion leaders positively evaluate the role of the PFLP, with 39 percent neutral and 24 percent negative.
* Positive evaluations of PIJ have risen distinctly. 77 percent of the public positively evaluate the role of the group while 14 percent evaluated are neutral, and a final 7 percent are negative. PIJ received the most positive evaluation among opinion leaders (66 percent). In addition, 21 percent evaluated its performance during the war as (neutral), while 8 percent as negative.
* Hamas receives the highest positive evaluation among the Palestinian public in the West Bank. 85 percent of the public positively evaluate its role in the conflict, while 9 percent provide neutral evaluations, with a final 6 percent negative. Among opinion leaders, positive evaluations drops to 48 percent, while 36 percent are neutral and 14 percent negatively evaluating the role.

**3. Evaluation of Leaders: Negative evaluations of President Abbas, and split on Meshaal**

* When evaluating the approach of President Abbas to addressing the War on Gaza, 59 percent of the public negatively evaluates his role. 24 percent are neutral and the final 13 percent positively evaluate the President. The opinion leaders’ poll revealed similar results, as 60 percent of the respondents negatively evaluated his role, with 21 percent neutral and 17 percent positive. We need to remind the readers that the poll was carried out before the speech delivered by the President on the eve of Tuesday (22 July), a speech which we believe might have contributed to his positive evaluation.
* In regards to the performance of Khaled Meshaal, 10 percent of the public negatively evaluates his role, while 21 percent as neutral and a strong majority (66 percent) views his role positively. Responses among Palestinian opinion leaders on this issue are at odds with the general public. 34 percent of respondents negatively evaluate the role of Meshaal, while 39 percent as neutral, and 26 percent positively evaluate his role.

**4. Palestine victorious, yet more severely damaged.**

* 58 percent of the public state that up to the present point in the conflict, Palestine is the victor. 34 percent believe that none of the sides can claim victory, and a final 7 percent believe Israel is victorious. There is disagreement between opinion leaders and the general public on this matter. 56 percent of Palestinian opinion leaders believe that no side is victorious, while 29 percent say that Palestine is victorious and the final 8 percent believe Israel is.
* When asked about consequences, 55 percent believe that Palestine will have the most to lose the most from this current war. 26 percent believe both sides will suffer losses and 18 percent Israel will suffer greater losses. The elite poll revealed consistent results.

**5. Political affiliations and outlooks: For the first time in years, Hamas is more popular than Fatah.**

* For the first time in years, AWRAD’s regular polling reveals that Hamas' popularity has surpassed Fatah’s. 31 percent of the public state that their political outlook is closer to that of Hamas, while 23 percent say theirs is closer to Fatah. 7 percent believe they are closest to the leftist groups and 6 percent say their political outlook is in line with other Islamic factions. However, the largest group of respondents (33 percent) identify as independents.

**6. News Coverage: Al Aqsa TV channel is the go-to channel for coverage on the war**

* 22 percent of the public state that Al Aqsa TV is their main source of news for following events in Gaza. 19 percent select Palestine TV as their main source, while 15 percent identify Al Jazeera TV, and a final 9 percent use Palestine Today TV. 15 percent of the Palestinian public says they use Facebook as their main source of news and 7 percent use other Palestinian news websites. 4 percent say they use alternative channels or sources to follow the news.
* In regards to Palestinian opinion leaders, 23 percent of the respondents say they use Palestinian news websites as their main source of news, while 14 percent follow on Facebook pages. This indicates opinion leaders are more likely to use modern technology to obtain their news. In regards to TV channels, 15 percent follow Palestine Today, 9 percent follow Al Aqsa TV, while and 8 percent follow Palestine TV and 6 percent follow Al Jazeera. Importantly, 22 percent use alternative TV channels or means not listed in the poll.

In a follow-up interview, Dr. Nader Said, President of AWRAD, stated that we must consider all current events as influencing the results. The most notable include Palestinians living under harsh conditions, the death toll in Gaza rising ever higher, as women and children are killed daily, and all Palestinian factions incapable of achieving a ceasefire that protects and guarantees Palestinian rights. Dr. Said clarified that these results could change relatively abruptly once the attacks on Gaza conclude. However, strong evidence remains to indicate that these directions of public opinion might be lasting and less likely to revert to pre-conflict trends. Dr. Said confirmed that major political changes could occur, with dramatic impacts in political representation and legitimacy. Dr. Said continued to say that there is a likelihood that a major shift in the public’s perception of who is the representative of the Palestinian people and garners the resulting legitimacy as public leaders. Importantly, Dr. Said stated that if President Abbas, Fatah, and the Palestinian Authority, do not present a *clear* position on the current events, simultaneous with a clear approach to confronting Israel, containing convincing next steps, then Fatah and the PA will have to pay for this failure in terms of legitimacy and popular support in the immediate and the middle term. Dr. Said believes that the speech delivered by President Abbas (on the eve of Tuesday, 22 July) after the polling was completed will probably be helpful in retaining some of the lost popularity. Only time will tell if President Abbas’s popularity will recover from this low level.

As to Hamas, Dr. Said warned that the current situation of Hamas and other resistance factions have been buoyed to high rates of approval as a result of popular expectations. However, the public expects military achievements and success to translate into tangible and immediate results in a future agreement, unlike the agreement reached in 2012. These factions are expected to win dividends for the immediate future, specifically those that improve the welfare of Palestinians, particularly those in Gaza. Furthermore, if Hamas is to provide a democratic alternative, along enhanced living conditions, it must also provide the people with a tangible solution for ending the occupation of the West Bank and Jerusalem.

As to some of the counterintuitive results revealed in the poll, the most telling are the majority who yearn for an immediate ceasefire yet also indicate that their position on a potential ceasefire is closer to Hamas. Dr. Said stated that a majority of Palestinians desire an immediate cessation to the slaughter of their kinsfolk in Gaza, yet also want a feeling of victory against Israel. In addition, no Palestinian wants to see Gaza under a closure again. Dr. Said continued, stating that a majority of the public holds President Abbas responsible for brokering a ceasefire, yet simultaneously want to distance themselves from his positions, which may seem defeatist or conciliatory. Furthermore, many stakeholders have been actively attempting to disassociate their positions and themselves with those of the President as the Palestinian and Arab media failed to present and explain the true nature of his positions.

In conclusion, Dr. Said stated that current public perception will change once the war concludes and agreement is reached. However, he stressed that many of the factions will not be able to restore losses in legitimacy and popularity. Finally, Dr. Said stated that the political factions currently operating in Gaza must avoid an escalation of rhetoric and finger-pointing, and refrain from entering a polarizing popularity contest over the newly formed and weak unity government.

1. An Israeli assault on the Shujaiyya neighborhood of Gaza City, which killed roughly 70 Palestinians. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)