



CEPPS/IRI West Bank-Gaza Quarterly Report: April 1 – June 30, 2005
West Bank-Gaza: Polling and Survey Research
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I. SUMMARY

The call to reform Palestinian governing institutions is not a new one, yet following the death of Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat in November 2004, and the Palestinian Presidential election in early January 2005, there is a sense of urgency and optimism that could carry the Palestinians forward. The political dynamics in the West Bank and Gaza have shifted dramatically and key issues of reform, transparency, elections, and citizen participation that have been debated for years – but sidelined by entrenched political interests – have now surfaced. Coverage of these issues now takes precedence on the front pages of local newspapers, on radio programs, in legislative council sessions, and in private conversations among Palestinians, young and old, male and female, in every town.

During this period of transition, survey research conducted by the International Republican Institute (IRI) and the Development Studies Program (DSP) is of critical importance in order to convey to political leaders and organizations important indications of public opinion. In this quarter, IRI supported DSP in conducting a public opinion poll that surveyed attitudes regarding legislative elections, political affiliation, and prospective candidate and coalition preferences. Issue 48 of the monthly newspaper, *Al Baydar*, was also published during this period.

II. PROGRAM OBJECTIVE

To provide regular and timely polls and surveys gauging public sentiment in the West Bank and Gaza on a range of issues according to strict scientific standards.

III. QUARTERLY ACTIVITIES

In this quarter, DSP conducted Poll #21 between April 21 and 23, 2005, and the results were released in two parts. Part I asked about support for holding PLC elections, political affiliation,

voting patterns, and voter support for various political coalitions. Part II presented the President's Performance Index (PPI), which measured how Palestinians perceive the performance of President Mahmoud Abbas, as compared with his campaign platform. 1,200 Palestinians were surveyed in the West Bank and Gaza. The survey utilized 85 fieldworkers in 75 locations.

According to the poll 73 percent of Palestinians intend to vote in elections for the Legislative Council. The poll indicated that upcoming elections will be competitive with 48 percent stating they will vote for new leadership (complete poll results and analysis released by DSP are attached). The poll also found that 84 percent of respondents supported holding elections for the Palestinian Legislative Council on July 17, as was scheduled at the time of the poll.

At the time of the poll, the draft election law was nearing final approval; the poll revealed widespread support (68 percent) for an election system based on national lists and proportional representation as opposed to a system based on districts. In addition, nearly 80 percent of respondents support a quota designating a percentage of seats for women in the Palestinian Legislative Council, a significant increase from a poll taken last year in which 62 percent indicated support for a quota system.

Participants were also asked to evaluate the performance of President Mahmoud Abbas's first 100 days in office. Thirty-three percent said the President was doing a good job overall. The President received his best approval ratings in the area of security agencies reform with 43 percent approving and in improving the status of women in society with 40 percent approving. 53 percent of respondents believe the main obstacle preventing President Abbas from implementing his election platforms is Israel. Another 18 percent said the main obstacle to platform implementation is the level of corruption in PNA institutions. The poll queried respondents about their priorities for the government: 41 percent stated that their first priority is to end the occupation, and 30 percent maintain that improvement in the overall economic situation is their first priority.

The poll also provided important insights about the political affinity of voters by asking voter intentions if elections were held at time of the poll. When asked which political group would receive their vote, respondents indicated Fateh 41 percent, Hamas 23 percent, 24 percent were undecided, and 5 percent would not vote for any of the lists provided in the poll. The poll asked about the level of support for coalitions that would run candidates on joint electoral lists. The support for a bloc led by Fateh or Hamas does not change, however the change is significant for a Palestinian National Initiative (Al Mubadara) - PFLP bloc.

- A Fateh bloc that also includes Nidal, Fida, PPP, and others (led by Marwan Bargouti and supported by Mahmoud Abbas) will still receive 41%.
- A Hamas bloc with other Islamists (led by Mahmoud Zahar and supported by Khaled Mishal) will receive 23% of the vote.
- Palestinian National Initiative (Al Mubadara) -PFLP bloc (led by Mustafa Bargouti and supported by Haidar Abdel Shafi and Ahmad Saadat) will receive about 7%. If they run separately, they will receive a combined total of 3.5%.

These results can not be used to fully predict the outcome of the election, since nearly 30% are either undecided or they will not vote for any of these blocs. This swing vote might lead to significant changes in the current predictions.

The results from Poll #21 garnered local media coverage in the West Bank and Gaza with the three leading daily newspapers covering of the poll and its analysis. The following articles were published the day after the poll was released:

- Al Hayat, April 29th, 2005, "In an opinion poll that evaluates President's and Government's performance in the first quarter of the year: Abbas acquired the highest grades in the field of reforming the security agencies, 43%, and in the improvement of the situation of women, 40%. 84% support holding PLC elections on its scheduled date and 48% prefer new candidates."
- Al Quds Daily, April 30th, 2005, "In the latest opinion poll conducted by the Development Studies Programme at Birzeit University: 33% for President's Performance, 33% for Government's performance. 84% support holding PLC elections on scheduled date."
- Al Ayyam Daily, April 29th, 2005, "In an opinion poll conducted by the Development Studies Programme at Birzeit University: 33% think that the President has achieved one third of his election platform."

IRI used the results from the poll in discussions and consultations with civil society organizations and potential candidates in order to assist in election-related planning and coalition-building. The data drawn from the poll offers concrete, quantitative reference points that are crucial for formulating electoral platforms and coalitions to compete in upcoming legislative elections.

IV. RESULTS AND INDICATORS

- Result #1: Surveys will be conducted and published on a regular and timely basis
- Indicator: Polling will be conducted on a regular basis and in response to developments on the political front;
IRI supported DSP in conducting a nationwide poll to provide key information about political preferences and opinions in regards to legislative elections and the performance of the President. (Conducted 21-23 April 2005; margin of error +/- 3%; 1200 Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip with 75 locations in the sample)
- Indicator: Poll results will be communicated to local and international leaders and decision makers;
DSP and IRI disseminated poll results and analysis via telephone, fax, email, and their respective websites to key political figures, representatives of civil society institutions, and the media.
- Indicator: Poll results will be reported on in the local and international media;
Results from the poll were covered extensively in both Arabic and English print media at the local and international level. Press clips are available upon request.
- Result #2: An indigenous source for polling and survey research will be sustained and strengthened
- Indicators: DSP will retain its reputation as the premier source of data on public opinion in the Palestinian territories;
DSP strengthened its reputation as the premier source of data on public opinion in the Palestinian territories as indicated by extensive media coverage (clips are available upon request) and requests for local and satellite TV and radio interviews.
- Indicators: DSP polling methodologies will be strengthened through ongoing technical assistance and training;
IRI trainer Kent Patton held consultations with DSP Survey Research Director Dr. Nader Said regarding the development of appropriate polling methodologies for the conduct of ongoing and future polling projects.