



NEC's monthly bulletin on Palestinian perceptions towards politics and economics

**Special Focus:
Palestinian Internal Crisis**

Bulletin # II-5

May 2007

NEC's Bulletin and the surveys associated with it are conducted independently with the private resources of the NEC company, and are not supported or funded by any local or international organization.

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NEC Monthly Bulletin

May 2007

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I. INTRODUCTION

The third month of the Palestinian Authority's new unity government witnessed an unprecedented escalation of fighting in the Gaza Strip between the main Palestinian political factions Fateh and Hamas. As several ceasefire agreements fell apart in quick succession, more than 60 people were killed. Amidst this internal bloodletting, a recent escalation of Israeli Palestinian violence showed no signs of abating.

At the end of this period, Near East Consulting (NEC) surveyed 801 randomly selected Palestinians in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem for their reactions to these and other developments in the Occupied Territories, as well as their general political and economic circumstances. In light of recent events, the questions addressed themselves particularly to the internal Palestinian crisis. The following Bulletin summarizes and discusses the major findings of this poll.

The poll is part of a running series of General Perception Surveys conducted monthly by the NEC since January 2006. These surveys seek to document and analyze Palestinian perceptions of the political, economic, social, and security-related issues that frame daily life in the West Bank and Gaza. Results from the NEC's General Perception Survey are provided freely to the general public, complementing our on-going research and assessment work in Palestine and the wider region.

This latest survey was conducted by telephone between May 22nd and 24th, 2007, and has a margin of error of +/- 3.4%, with a 95% confidence level. The results of this survey and the other earlier surveys, along with accompanying bulletins, are available online from the NEC's web site. Visit us at www.neareastconsulting.com.

About Near East Consulting (NEC)

NEC is a survey and research firm based in Ramallah, Palestine. Drawing on extensive, inter-disciplinary experience in the Near East region and beyond, we work in a range of fields, including but not limited to such areas as democracy and democratization, food security, health and education, women and children, poverty and the labor market, peace and conflict resolution, arms control and disarmament, electoral processes, Palestinian refugees, demography, legal and judicial systems, and the impact of aid and assistance.



II. SUMMARY

By most of the measures tracked by the NEC's monthly General Perception Survey, the period of April 24th to May 24th was the bleakest month on recent record in the Occupied Territories. Levels of comparative insecurity, depression, and disaffection with all major political parties reached new records, as fierce battles between Fateh and Hamas forces in the Gaza Strip claimed over 60 lives, overriding several ceasefire agreements, and all but extinguishing what hope Palestinians still retained in their three-month old unity government. These events were accompanied by an escalation of Israeli air strikes on Gaza following a resumption of Hamas rocket attacks across the border, as well as continuing Israeli arrest and assassination operations in the West Bank.

As the NEC conducted interviews for this month's poll, Hamas and Fateh concluded another cease fire agreement, but public expectations are slim; three fourths of Palestinians are fearful that the situation is likely to spin completely out of control, and 65% believe that a full-blown civil war is either very likely or likely. Against this backdrop, the public's general feeling of insecurity since the January 2006 elections has reached a new, bleak record. A full 70% of respondents now profess to feel more insecure since that time. And as insecurities have mounted, so has the prevalence of depression; 92% of all Palestinians can currently be classified as either very depressed or depressed, up 22% on the previous month.

The two warring parties have both paid a price for the Gaza fighting. The NEC's April survey showed that a record 41% of all Palestinians had become disenchanted with all major parties and May set another dismal record, with this number rising to 62%. A strong majority of respondents blame both Fateh and Hamas equally for the internecine bloodshed, though apportioning slightly more blame to Hamas, relatively speaking. Rather than cleaving strictly to party loyalties, however, 43% of both Fateh- and Hamas-leaning respondents blame both parties. As in previous months, Fateh leader and PA President Mahmoud Abbas has been gaining slightly on his rival Ismail Hanieh, and now leads him by a full 18% when the two go head-to-head. However only 29% of Palestinians say they trust Abbas most when the options are broadened, with 50% vouching that they now have faith neither in him nor in Hanieh.

Although 66% of Palestinians agree that the rocket attacks on Israel do not provide them with any real benefit, a slim majority nevertheless support them. West Bankers and Gazans did not differ significantly in their responses, suggesting as per previous NEC polls that Israeli military measures seem to have a hardening effect on public sentiment, which at least partly offsets their intended deterrent effect. However, although a slim majority of the Palestinian public accordingly supports lashing out in response to its own ordeals, it also seems to draw limits on whom should be targeted; as kidnapped BBC journalist Alan Johnston nears his 90th day in captivity, 84% of all respondents and 92% of Gazans feel that he should be released without any pre-conditions.

Amidst this turmoil, longer-term political attitudes have continued to deteriorate. At 59%, May's level of support for peace with Israel is the lowest recorded since that the



summer of 2006, continuing a steady if moderate five-month decline from 77% in December 2006. Despite the fact that public trust in Hamas has been severely eroded by the continuation of the internal crisis, public attitudes towards its historical refusal to formally recognize 'Israel's right to exist' have not shifted comparably. Only 59% of respondents presently feel the movement should explicitly scuttle this position, a slight 2% increase in this sentiment since the previous month, but still considerably lower than the 75% recorded in January 2006. Another, more fraught question implicitly posed by this month's poll results is whether the internal crisis has undermined public support for the Palestinian Authority per se. A full 44% of Palestinians would currently prefer to disband the PA altogether.

With reference to the internal crisis, which is the subject of this month's Special Focus, there is evidence that the Palestinian public attributes the violence in Gaza to factors other than strict, inter-factional differences. A slim majority believe that it will not spread to the West Bank, and 56% believe that it is primarily driven by individual rivalries, whether between local gunmen and militia leaders, or political players. Overall, Palestinians are almost evenly split on whether Fateh and Hamas can succeed in ending the internal crisis. Overall, respondents somewhat disagreed with the proposition that Fateh and Hamas have very good reasons for clashing with each other, and somewhat agreed with the statement that there is a possible solution to the internal Palestinian conflict.

Meanwhile, a full 79% of Palestinians believe that foreign governments have a hand in the internal conflict in Gaza, with 49% singling out the US and Israel, and the largest share of Fateh sympathizers agreeing with this. Overall, Iran came a distant second, at 17%. An equally overwhelming 79% of respondents also believe that Israel is the main party benefiting from the internal conflict. Only very small minorities of those who support either of the two main competing parties believe that their own party has benefited, with Fateh supporters appearing to be more skeptical of this than their Hamas counterparts. In the context of widespread Palestinian distrust of foreign influence, 68% of respondents oppose calling for an international presence in the Gaza Strip as a means of containing the internecine violence.

However, a majority of Palestinians do not feel their own government is handling the crisis well. 60% are supportive of the national unity government resigning, although 52% are opposed to Abbas also doing so. 50% instead favor Abbas calling for early elections. By many measures, this option may indeed be the most consensual one. 52% Hamas and 88% Fateh supporters are in favor of this alternative, as are 64% of Palestinians who presently feel altogether alienated from party politics. As for new leadership alternatives, however, the options appear to be slim. 45% of respondents feel that no single figure is capable of ending the internal conflict, with Abbas garnering only 12%. Relatively speaking, imprisoned Fateh politician Marwan Barghouti currently polls the best, at 18%, twice as much as the other likely contender, Mohammed Dahlan. Unlike the latter, Barghouti is comparatively popular among respondents otherwise inclined to trust Hamas, polling very close among them to Hamas' political leader Khaled Mash'al.

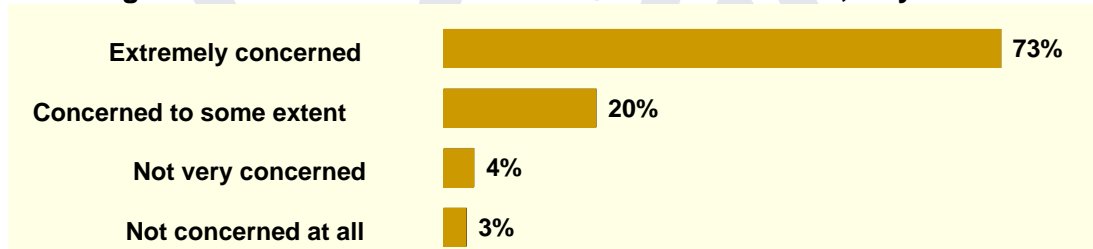


III. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

A. Unprecedented internal violence sparks fears of civil war

A General Perception Survey conducted by the NEC in April 2007 showed a significant erosion of early optimism sparked by the conclusion of a power-sharing agreement between Hamas and Fateh in February 2007, and the subsequent formation of a new Palestinian Authority (PA) unity government. Hopes that these initiatives would end several months of bloody, internecine conflict within the Occupied Territories have since been battered, at no time more so than the past month, during which over 60 people in the Gaza strip were killed in fierce battles between Fateh and Hamas gunmen. Several ceasefire agreements hammered out by the parties, including a demonstrative joint deployment of security forces on Gaza's streets, failed to quell this unprecedented paroxysm of internal violence. These events have been accompanied by an escalation of Israeli air strikes on Gaza following a resumption of Hamas rocket attacks across the border, as well as continuing Israeli arrest and assassination operations in the West Bank, the toll of which approaches that exacted by internal Palestinian fighting. Amidst this bloody turmoil, Palestinian worries about the current situation have continued its rise on the previous month, with a full 73% of respondents now professing to be extremely concerned. As detailed below, this sentiment is significantly more prevalent in hard-hit Gaza than in the West Bank.

Figure 1: Level of concern about the current situation, May 2007...



....compared to April 2007

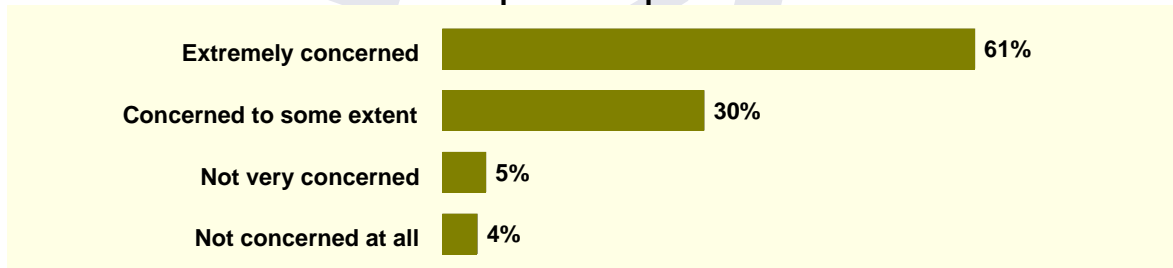


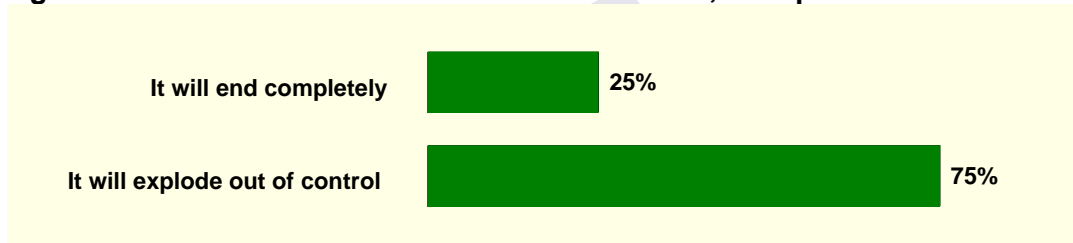
Table 1: Level of concern about the current situation, by region of residence

		Very concerned	Concerned	Not concerned	Not concerned at all
Region	West Bank	66%	23%	6%	5%
	Gaza Strip	83%	14%	2%	1%



As the NEC conducted interviews for this month's poll, political leaders from Hamas and Fateh concluded another cease fire agreement. Though internal violence in Gaza has since subsided, overtaken by intensifying Israeli air strikes, the durability of this agreement has yet to stand the test of time. Several previous agreements conspicuously failed to be heeded by Hamas' and Fateh's street cadres, leading to speculation that the logic of revenge killings and tit-for-tat retaliations has gathered inexorable momentum, with the leaderships of the respective parties losing effective control of their own loyalists. The general population harbors similar fears, but the extent of these suggest that many believe the differences between the two parties are deep-rooted. Three fourths of the Palestinian population is skeptical that the ceasefire agreement augurs the beginning of the end of the crisis between Fateh and Hamas, being instead fearful that the situation is likely to spin completely out of control.

Figure 2: Will crisis between Fateh and Hamas end, or explode out of control?



Concomitantly, a full 65% of respondents believe that a full-blown civil war in the Occupied Territories is either very likely or likely. As detailed in the Table below, these fears do not differ significantly overall between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, though somewhat fewer West Bankers, which have not so far seen the violence manifest itself in their part of the Occupied Palestinian Territory, feel that a civil war is very likely. The other notable observation is that respondents who profess not to trust any of the two main, warring factions, are significantly more inclined to feel that a civil war is going to break out. Among the main parties, Hamas adherents are most optimistic relatively speaking that such a war can be averted.

Figure 3: The likelihood of a civil war

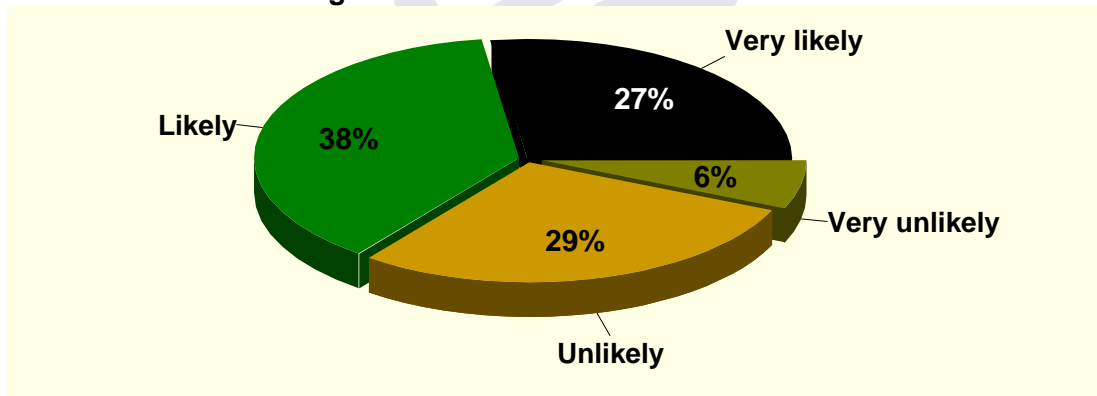




Table 2: The likelihood of a civil war, by region of residence and factional trust

		Very likely	Likely	Unlikely	Very unlikely`
Region	West Bank	25%	40%	31%	5%
	Gaza Strip	30%	34%	26%	9%
	Hamas	19%	33%	36%	12%
Faction	Fateh	22%	40%	34%	4%
	PFLP	44%	44%	6%	6%
	None	31%	37%	25%	7%

B. Levels of insecurity and depression reach new records

Against this backdrop, it is not surprising that the public’s general feeling of insecurity since the last elections has reached a new, bleak record for the period. As of May 2007, a full 70% of respondents profess to feel more insecure since Hamas came to power in 2006. As observed in previous polls, those respondents who trust Hamas more are two- to three times as likely as other sub groups to feel otherwise, but even this segment of the party’s faithful are now a small minority within their own ranks; 54% of Hamas supporters now say they feel less secure. Not surprisingly, respondents inclined towards Fateh, who lost power during the elections, are most likely to feel less secure.

Figure 4: Feeling of insecurity since the elections in January 2006

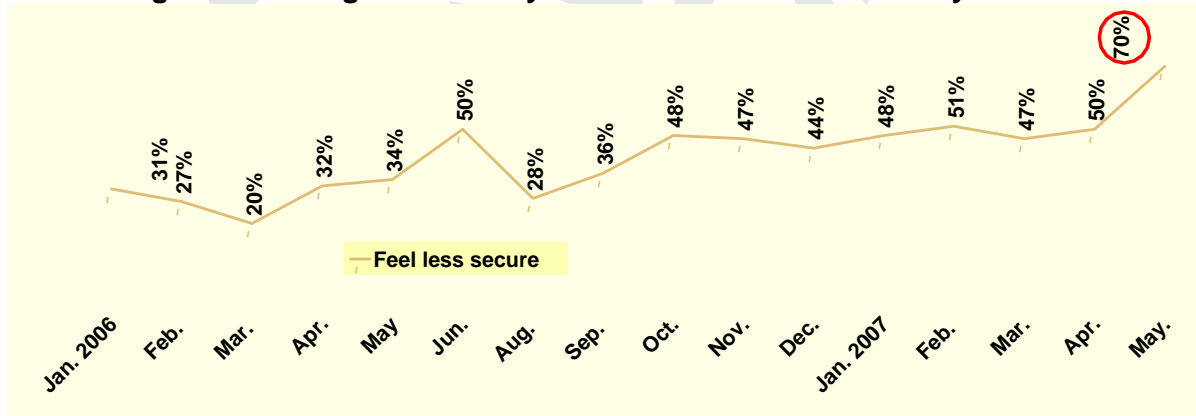


Table 3: Feeling of security since the elections in January 2006, by region of residence and factional trust

		I feel more secure	I feel less secure	My feeling of security remained the same
Region	West Bank	7%	66%	27%
	Gaza Strip	6%	75%	19%
	Hamas	18%	54%	28%
Faction	Fateh	5%	81%	14%
	PFLP	6%	72%	22%
	None	3%	71%	26%



As insecurities have mounted, so has the prevalence of depression. Assessed on the basis of a composite series of questions, this indicator has also reached a new record for NEC's entire survey period; a full 92% of all Palestinians can be classified as either very depressed or depressed according to this month's poll, up 22% on the previous month. It should be noted as always, that this is not to be equated with a strict diagnosis of clinically defined depression or post-traumatic stress disorder, though it can also be noted that more in-depth psychosocial surveys conducted in the Occupied Territories regularly cite a very high overall prevalence of such problems in the general population. Notably, results this month did not vary significantly between the West Bank and Gaza, nor between poor respondents, and those living below the poverty line, as detailed below.

Figure 5: Depression level among the Palestinian public

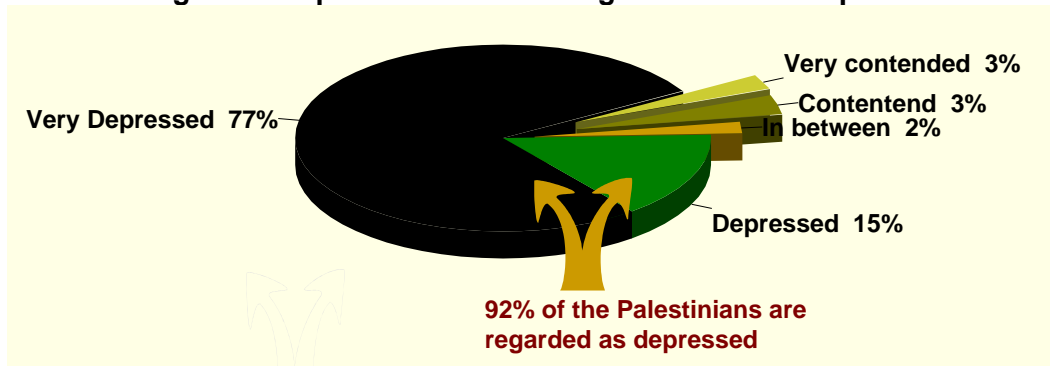


Table 4: Depression level among the Palestinian public, by region of residence and poverty level

		Very depressed	Depressed	In between	Contented	Very Contented
Region	West Bank	75%	16%	2%	4%	3%
	Gaza Strip	81%	13%	2%	2%	2%
Poverty line	Below	80%	14%	1%	3%	3%
	Above	73%	16%	3%	5%	3%

As expected, the internal crisis in the Occupied Territories was the main issue that made Palestinians feel depressed in May, cited as such by slightly more than half of all respondents. Absence of security was the second most commonly cited reason, at 25%, and could be due both to the internal crisis, as well as Israeli army operations and other, longstanding military administrative practices, though it can also be noted that the problem of the Israeli occupation as such took backstage in May, being cited as a main issue by only 1-2% of respondents from any category. By and large, West Bankers and Gaza respondents gave very similar answers to this question, as detailed below.



Figure 6: Main issue that makes respondents feel depressed

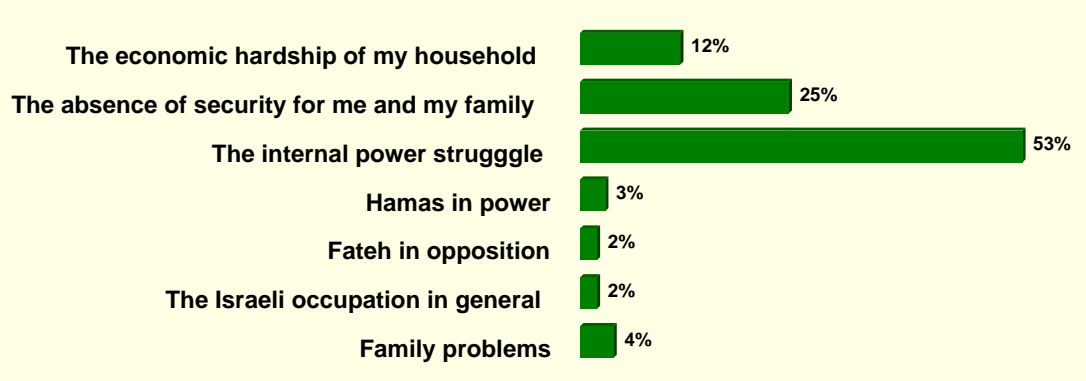


Table 5: Main issue that makes respondents feel depressed, by region of residence and poverty level

		Economic hardship	absence of security	internal power struggle	Hamas in power	Fateh in opposition	Israeli occupation	Family problems
Region	West Bank	16%	23%	50%	2%	1%	2%	6%
	Gaza Strip	5%	28%	58%	4%	3%	1%	0%
Poverty line	Below	14%	24%	51%	3%	3%	2%	4%
	Above	10%	26%	56%	2%	1%	2%	4%

It is particularly noteworthy that economic hardships were only cited as a main reason by 12% of all respondents, and that respondents living below the poverty line were largely as concerned as their better-off counterparts about the internal power struggle and the absence of security. Certainly this is not because economic hardships have abated. A full 71% of Gazans and 57% of West Bankers currently live below the poverty line, despite the fact that 59% of such poor respondents are employed. The figures testify to the continuation of the economic crisis that has beset the West Bank and Gaza since the imposition of Israeli closures during the Oslo period, and the outbreak of the Intifada. As such, the figures also further underscore the depth of the anxieties provoked by the internal political crisis.

Table 6: Poverty level according to region of residence

		Hardship cases	Below poverty	Above poverty
Region	West Bank	27%	30%	43%
	Gaza Strip	38%	33%	30%

Table 7: Labor force according to poverty level

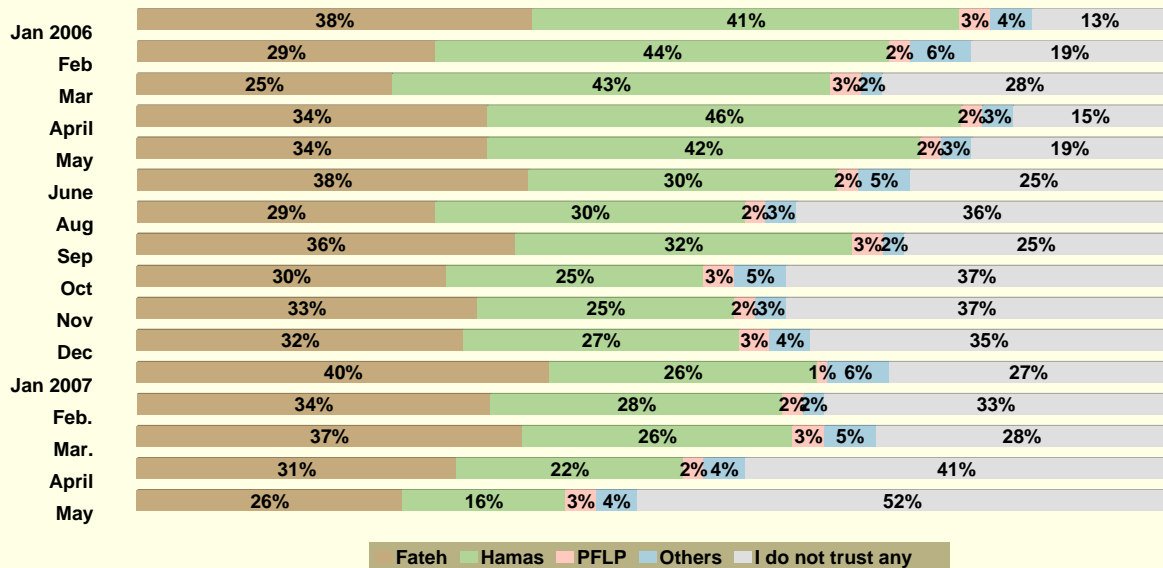
		Employed	Partially employed	Not employed
Poverty level	Below poverty line	59%	20%	22%
	Above poverty line	88%	5%	7%



C. Trust in main political parties sinks to new low

The April 2007 survey recorded record levels of popular disaffection with the two major political parties in the Occupied Territories. In the wake of the recent bout of bloody infighting, May has yet again set another dismal record, with a full 62% of all respondents professing not to trust any political party. As in previous months, Hamas has lost slightly more in trust relative to Fateh, though trust in the latter party has also been dented, and now equals its previous low, registered in March 2006, just following its loss to Hamas in the general elections. It can be noted that as in previous months, none of the other small parties, including PFLP, have picked up any significant standing among these disaffected respondents.

Figure 7: Factional trust: January 2006 - May 2007



As these findings would suggest, a strong majority of respondents blame both Fateh and Hamas equally for the bloodshed in the Gaza Strip, while apportioning slightly more blame to Hamas, relatively speaking. What is particularly interesting to observe, however, drawing on Table 8 below, is that rather than cleaving strictly to party loyalties, 43% of both Fateh- and Hamas-leaning respondents also equally blame the party they trust. Small number of respondents also blame the party they are more likely to support, with Fateh supporters being slightly more likely to do so. The net result is that a majority of party supporters on both sides of the divide feel that their own leadership and cadres are at least partly to blame for the internal crisis. Inter alia, this would suggest that there is party-based support for measures that seek to build mutual confidence, and as such scope for compromise and accommodation. This and other related, matters, are treated at further length in this report's Special Focus section.



Figure 8: Factions blamed for the recent clashes in the Gaza Strip

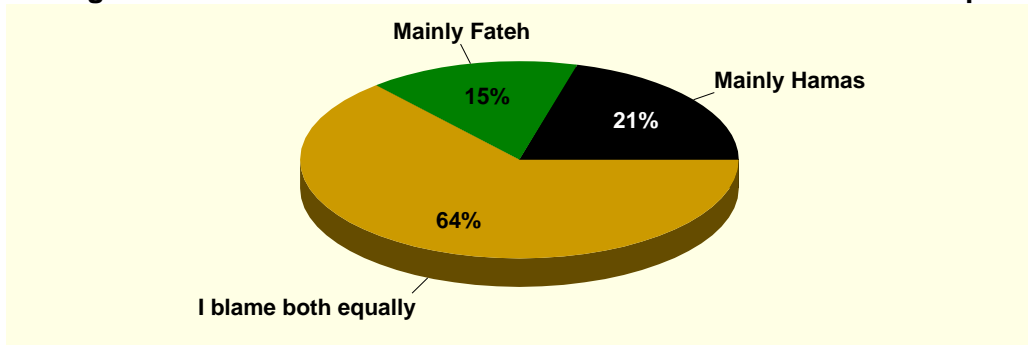
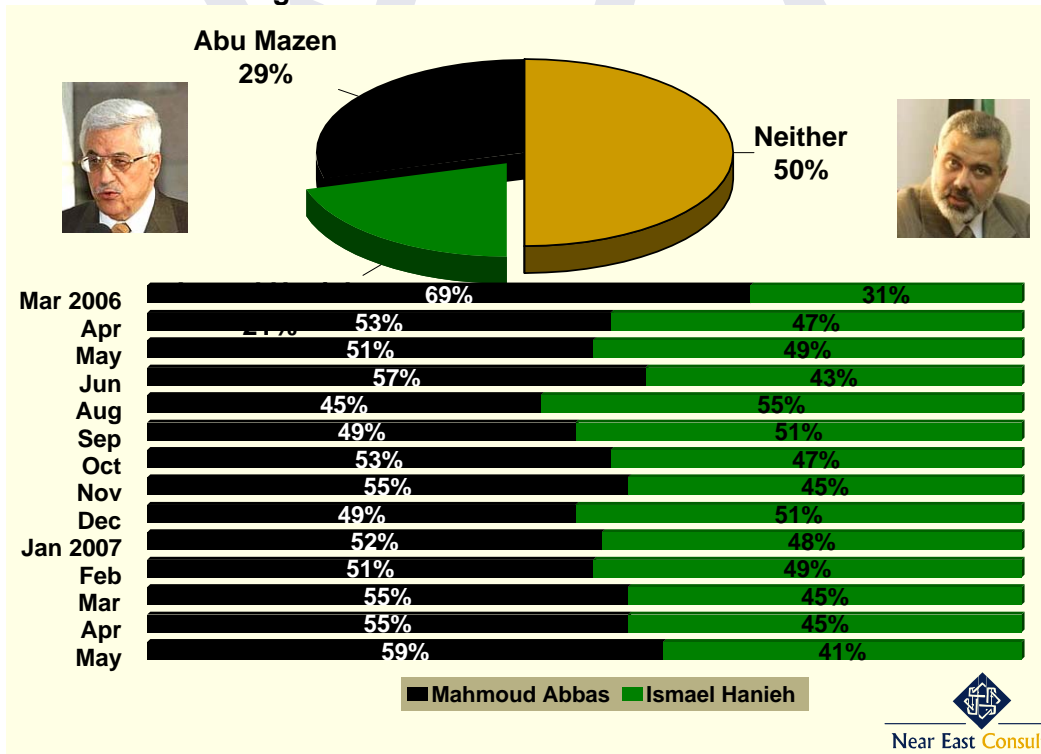


Table 8: Factions blamed for the recent clashes in the Gaza Strip, by factional trust

		Mainly Hamas	Mainly Fateh	I blame both equally
Factional trust	Hamas	8%	49%	43%
	Fateh	47%	10%	43%
	PFLP	29%	6%	65%
	None	13%	10%	77%

As the above findings would further suggest, both Mahmoud Abbas, aka Abu Mazen, and his counterpart Ismail Hanieh, would be well served to heed public sentiments at this juncture in their political careers.

Figure 9: Leader Palestinians trust most





Since the 2006 elections, the NEC’s General Perception Survey’s have regularly polled respondents for which of these two figures they trust the most. Since the beginning of this year, Abu Mazen has been gaining slightly on his rival, and as of May leads him by a full 18% when the two go head-to-head. This lead is evident across all sub groups, including poor respondents and Gaza residents, even though Hanieh is closer to parity among these groups. In this respect, Hanieh has lost disproportionately as a result of the past few months’ internal violence. When respondents are given the option of answering ‘neither’ to this question, however, it becomes clear that Abu Mazen’s gain has been entirely relative; as of May, only 29% of Palestinians say they trust him most, with 50% professing that they now have faith neither in him nor in his rival. Just whom, if anyone, Palestinians would trust to end the crisis is another question addressed in this month’s Special Focus section.

Table 9: Leader Palestinians trust most, by region of residence and poverty level

		Abu Mazen	Ismael Hanieh
Region	West Bank	63%	37%
	Gaza Strip	52%	48%
Poverty level	Below poverty	55%	45%
	Above poverty	68%	32%

D. Support for rocketing, but strong opposition to Johnston kidnapping

Following the killing of nine Palestinians over a 24-hour period in late April, Hamas’ military wing ended a longstanding unilateral ceasefire with Israel, and resumed its own rocket attacks across Gaza’s border; previously, such attacks had been carried out primarily by fighters loyal to Islamic Jihad. In the midst of its battles with Fateh loyalists, Hamas’ military wing also launched another demonstrative wave of rockets, as a way, commentators speculated, to re-unite Palestinian armed groups in the context of a wider battle against occupying forces. Israeli air strikes on the Strip, which were undertaken also prior to Hamas’ rocket offensive, has since taken a heavy toll, approaching that exacted by internal Palestinian fighting. These strikes have been accompanied, inter alia, by the arrest of over 30 senior Hamas officials in the West Bank. Israel’s politically embattled Prime Minister Ehud Olmert has vouched that his government will press forward with this offensive; on May 21 one Israeli civilian was killed by a Gaza rocket. For his part, Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas has condemned the rocket attacks as ‘absurd,’ and called for their cessation.

The NEC’s General Perception Survey points to some interesting contradictions in public attitudes towards these attacks. Although 66% of Palestinians agree that the rocket attacks do not provide them with any real benefit, a slim majority nevertheless support them. This support is particularly high among respondents inclined towards Hamas’, whereas a strong majority of Fateh supporters oppose the attacks. Notably, however, West Bankers and Gazans did not differ significantly in their responses, despite and indeed perhaps because of the fact that latter group has disproportionately born the brunt of Israeli air strikes. One explanation is that the rockets are seen as a way of ‘getting back’ at Israel for its continued siege of Gaza - as well as the West Bank,



particularly against the backdrop of intensifying air strikes and assassinations. As previous NEC polls have indicated, Israeli military measures accordingly seem to have a hardening effect on public sentiment, which at least partly offsets their intended deterrent effect.

Figure 10: Support for the rocket attacks on Israel and the value of such attacks

Support or oppose firing rockets into Israel by Palestinian factions **Does firing rockets into Israel provide any real benefit to the Palestinians?**

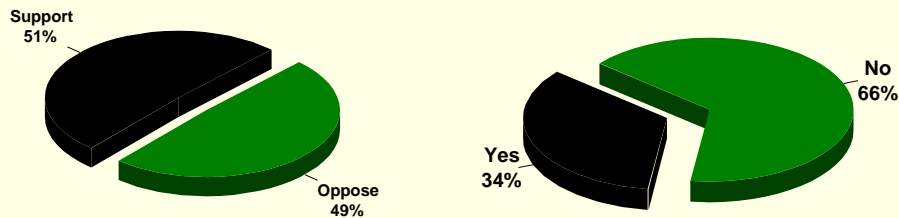


Table 10: Support for the rocket attacks on Israel and the value of such attacks, by region of residence and factional trust

		Support or oppose firing rockets into Israel?		Does firing rockets into Israel provide any real benefit to the Palestinians?	
		Support	Oppose	Yes	No
Region	West Bank	51%	49%	33%	67%
	Gaza Strip	50%	50%	35%	65%
Faction	Hamas	76%	24%	61%	39%
	Fateh	36%	64%	19%	81%
	PFLP	56%	44%	33%	67%
	None	49%	51%	32%	68%

Though a slim majority of the Palestinian public accordingly supports perceived retaliations against Israel, if only as a way of lashing out in response to its own ordeals, it also seems to draw limits around whom should be the target of such a backlash. The case of kidnapped BBC journalist Alan Johnston, who was at the time of his abduction earlier this spring the only Western news correspondent to reside in the Gaza Strip, has attracted considerable attention around the world. Days prior to the publication of this month's survey, Johnston's kidnappers released a video showing the journalist to be in good health. At the time Johnston had been held for over 80 days, during which time Palestinian journalists had had held demonstrations in his support, demanding that the Palestinian Authority do more to secure his release. As this month's poll shows, these demonstrations strongly echo prevailing public sentiment; 84% of all respondents feel that Johnston should be released without any pre-conditions. In the Gaza Strip, tellingly, this figure rises to 92%. Respondents inclined towards Hamas were somewhat more likely than others to dissent from this position, though a strong majority of them were still supportive of it; the strongest support was registered among followers of the leftist PFLP.



Figure 11: Attitudes towards releasing Alan Johnston without conditions

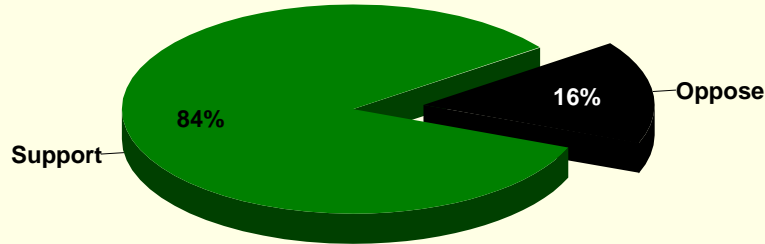
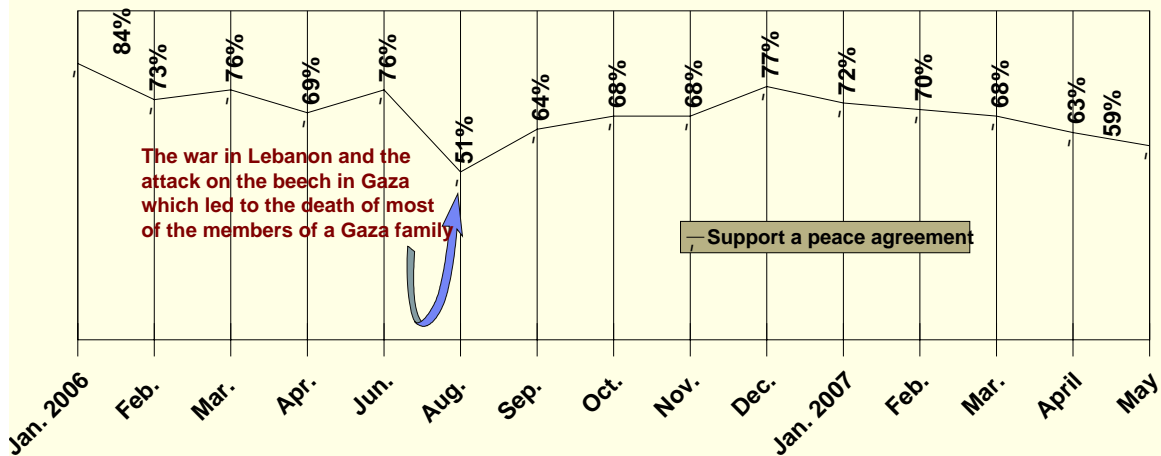


Table 11: Attitudes towards releasing Alan Johnston without conditions, by region of residence and factional trust

		Support	Oppose
Region	West Bank	79%	21%
	Gaza Strip	92%	8%
	Hamas	77%	23%
Faction	Fateh	84%	16%
	PFLP	94%	6%
	None	86%	14%

E. Decline in support for peace process, near split on disbanding PA

Figure 12: Level of support for the peace process: January 2006 - May 2007



In the recent past, Palestinian support for a peace settlement has been sensitive to escalations in the conflict, with the lowest figure having been recorded in 2006 following a particularly bloody mid-summer period. At 59%, May's figure is the lowest recorded since that time, continuing a steady if moderate five month decline, which has seen support for a peace settlement fall significantly from its two-year high of 83% in January



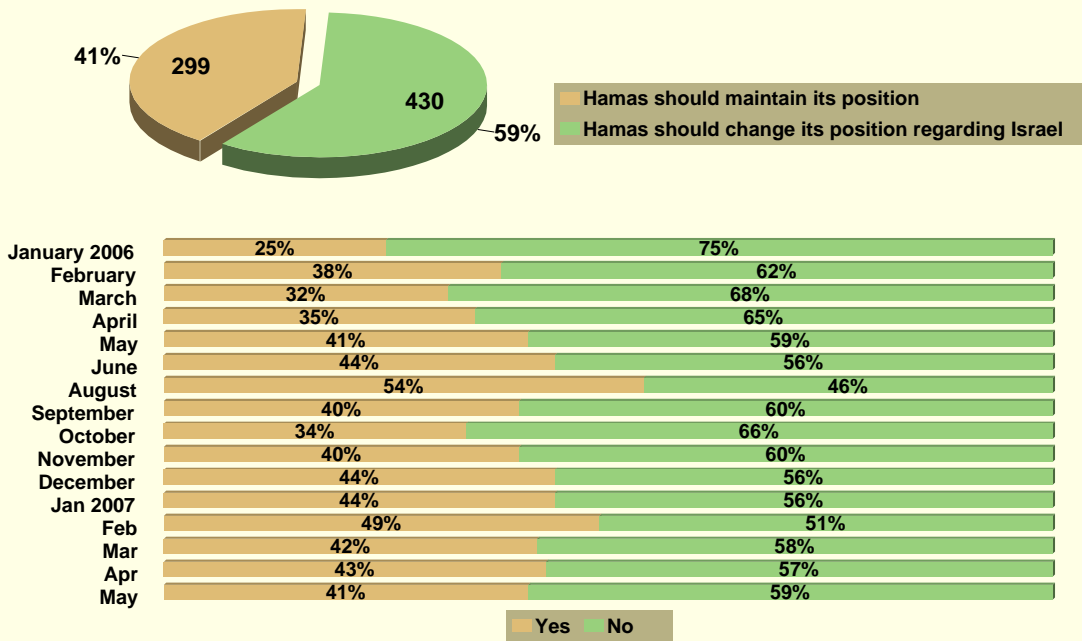
2006, and 77% at the end of that year. It can be noted however that is still only among Hamas supporters that one finds an outright majority opposed to a peace agreement.

Table 12: Level of support for the peace process, by factional trust

		Support a peace settlement with Israel	Oppose a peace settlement with Israel
Factional trust	Hamas	37%	63%
	Fateh	71%	29%
	None	59%	41%

Despite the fact that public trust in Hamas has been severely eroded by the continuation of the internal Palestinian crisis, public attitudes towards some of the movement's historically most contentious positions, particularly Hamas' refusal to formally recognize 'Israel's right to exist, have not shifted comparably, notwithstanding that this issue has ostensibly underpinned Fateh's differences with Hamas, as well as the Western donor community sanctions on the PA. To some extent, Hamas's leaders may have diverted domestic concerns about this issue by stating over course of the Intifada that the movement would implicitly recognize Israel as a partner in a long-term cease fire, should it agree to basic PLO negotiating positions. The Hamas government installed in 2006 has reiterated this position. Despite their declining faith in the Islamist movement, only 59% of respondents answered yes when asked this month whether the movement should change its older position on the elimination of Israel, evincing only a slight 2% increase in this figure since the previous month. Furthermore, this figure is considerably lower than the 75% who answered yes in January 2006, on the verge of Hamas' electoral victory, mirroring a similar decline in public support for a peace settlement.

Figure 13: Should Hamas maintain a position on the elimination of Israel: Jan 2006 - May 2007





Another, more fraught question implicitly posed by this month’s poll results is whether the internal Palestinian crisis and the manner in which it has demonstrated the dysfunctional nature of quasi-autonomous Palestinian governance, has undermined public support for the institution of the Palestinian Authority per se? As shown below, though a majority of Palestinians would still maintain the PA, a full 44% of respondents would currently prefer to disband it altogether.

Figure 14: Palestinian support for a return to the pre-Oslo situation

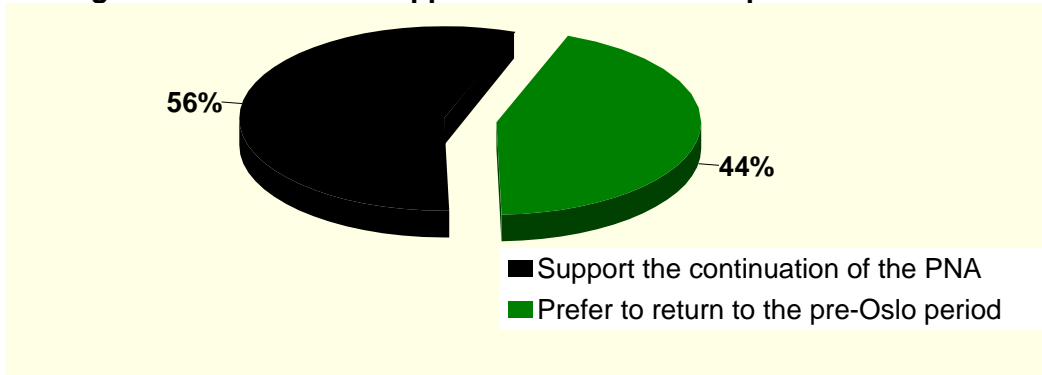


Table 13: Palestinian support for a return to the pre-Oslo situation, by region of residence and factional trust

		Support the continuation of the PNA	Oppose the continuation of the PNA
Region	West Bank	55%	45%
	Gaza Strip	57%	43%
	Hamas	46%	54%
Factional trust	Fateh	74%	26%
	PFLP	65%	35%
	None	50%	50%

As the NEC has not previously posed this specific question in its polls, it is difficult to speculate on the degree to which the prolongation of the internal crisis has contributed to public dissatisfaction with the PA. Certainly, though, this seems to be a distinct possibility. In order to establish the significance of public feelings on this matter, General Perception Surveys will continue to re-pose the question in future monthly polls.



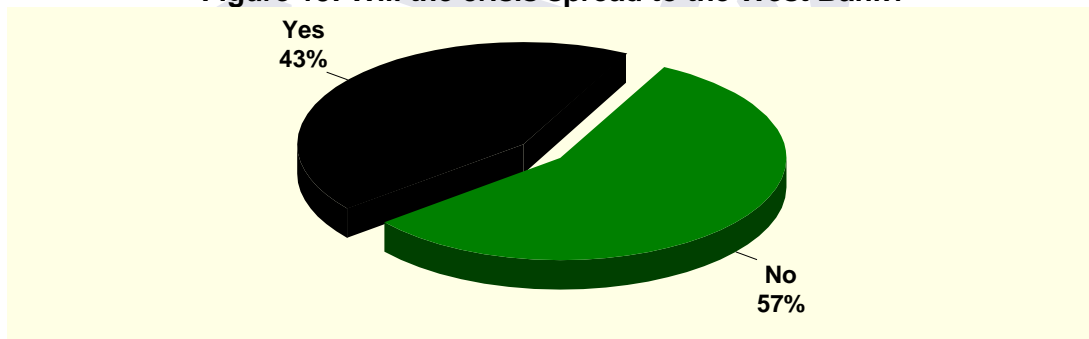
IV. SPECIAL FOCUS: PALESTINIAN INTERNAL CRISIS

As part of its General Perception Survey, the NEC regularly asks respondents to answer a number of questions focused on a topical subject area. In the light of the internecine violence that has dominated the months of April and May, this month's report addresses itself in specific detail to this internal Palestinian crisis. In so doing it seeks to understand how Palestinians understand the crisis and the factors contributing to it, what could be done to resolve the crisis - including support for possible early parliamentary and presidential elections - and what individuals or organizations Palestinians would trust to bring the situation under control.

A. **Strong belief that non-factional dynamics responsible for crisis**

Speculations that internal clashes in the Gaza Strip are in significant part driven by a militarization of local politics in the Strip and the dynamic of violence that has taken hold there since Israel's so-called disengagement, are underscored by the fact that the conflict between Hamas and Fateh has yet to manifest itself violently in the West Bank. As shown below, a slight majority of respondents believe that this pattern will continue to hold, being optimistic that the violence will not engulf also the West Bank.

Figure 15: Will the crisis spread to the West Bank?



In this month's poll there is also other evidence that the Palestinian public attributes the violence in Gaza to factors other than strict, inter-factional differences. As shown below, a slim majority of respondents believe that the conflict in the Strip is primarily an expression of individual rivalries, whether between local gunmen and militia leaders, or political players. The degree to which these sentiments reflect the reality on the ground is of course difficult to ascertain. However, it can be noted that Gaza respondents are in fact more likely than West Bankers to hold this view. It can also be observed that majorities of those respondents who trust either of the two warring parties are almost equally likely to second this belief.



Figure 16: Is the conflict in Gaza between factions or individuals?

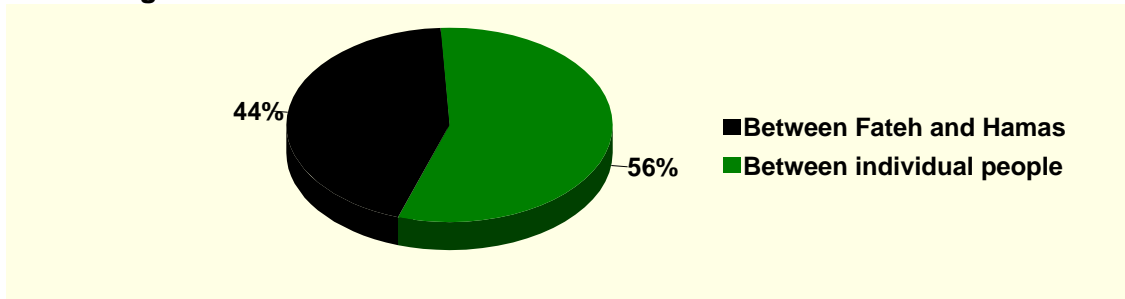


Table 14: Is the conflict in Gaza between factions or individuals, by region of residence and factional trust

		It is between Fateh and Hamas	It is between individuals
Region	West Bank	43%	57%
	Gaza Strip	46%	54%
Factional trust	Hamas	40%	60%
	Fateh	43%	57%

The above responses may go some way towards explaining why Palestinians appear almost evenly split on the question of whether Fateh and Hamas can succeed in containing and ending the internal crisis, despite three quarters of them believing that the conflict is likely to explode out of control, as noted earlier in this report. It is again interesting to note that respondents inclined to trust Hamas are much more likely to be optimistic in, with a full 69% answering yes to the question; a number that is a full 23 percentage points higher than the corresponding figure for Fateh sympathizers.

Figure 17: Can Fateh and Hamas contain and end the internal crisis?

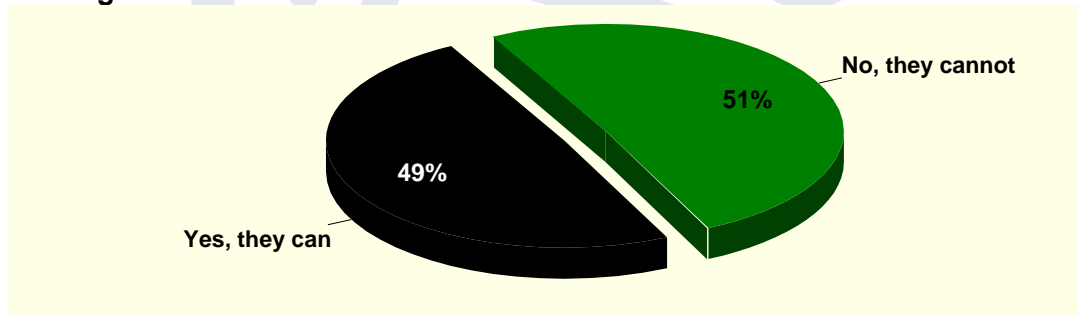


Table 15: Can Fateh and Hamas contain and end the internal crisis, by region of residence and factional trust

		Yes they can	No they cant
Region	West Bank	51%	49%
	Gaza Strip	46%	54%
Factional trust	Hamas	69%	31%
	Fateh	46%	54%
	None	43%	57%



In support of the explanations tendered above, it can be further noted that respondents somewhat disagreed with the proposition that Fateh and Hamas have very good reasons for clashing with each other, and somewhat agreed with the statement that there is a possible solution to the internal Palestinian conflict, as detailed below.

Table 16: Do you agree with the following statements about the internal crisis, by region of residence and factional trust

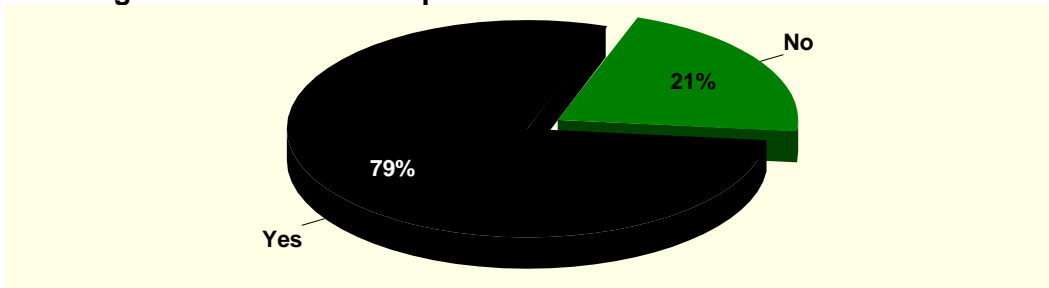
0 =Do not agree at all, 10=Agree completely			
		Fateh and Hamas have very good reasons for clashing with each other	There is a solution to the internal Palestinian conflict
Region	West Bank	3	7
	Gaza Strip	3	6
	Hamas	3	7
Factional trust	Fateh	3	6
	None	3	6

It can be noted that Hamas supporters were again more likely to be optimistic about the possibility of a solution to the crisis. It is notable that this faith in the possibility of conciliation among this subgroup is mirrored in their answers to a range of similar questions, and may, inter alia, suggest that Hamas supporters see the differences between the two main parties as being much less substantial, ideologically and otherwise, than do their Fateh counterparts.

B. Majority believes crisis is encouraged externally, benefits Israel

Since Hamas took power in the January 2006 elections, the development of the internal Palestinian crisis has been attended by pregnant public statements on the part of international interlocutors, most notably US Deputy National Security Advisor Elliot Abrams, who in late 2006 urged Fatah to stage “a hard coup” against Hamas. During the latest bout of bloody infighting, the US has provided additional financial assistance to PA forces loyal to Mahmoud Abbas; Israel and Egypt for their part has allowed new Fateh forces, the Badr Brigade, to enter the Strip during the violence. Meanwhile, US diplomats have continued to accuse Iran of seeking to destabilize the situation by providing financial assistance to the sanctioned Hamas government. In light of this, it is not surprising that, an overwhelming majority of Palestinians believe that foreign governments have a hand in the internal conflict in Gaza, as shown below.

Figure 18: Are external powers involved in the internal conflict?





When asked what countries they believe have a role in agitating the crisis, respondents are also most likely to cite the US and Israel, with Iran coming a distant second, at 17%. Predictably, Fateh supporters are most likely to believe that latter has a hand in the conflict, whereas Hamas supporters are most likely to blame the US and Israel. It can be noted, however, that even among those respondents who incline towards Fateh, the largest share of blame is reserved for the US and Israel.

Figure 19: Country believed to have a role in agitating the crisis

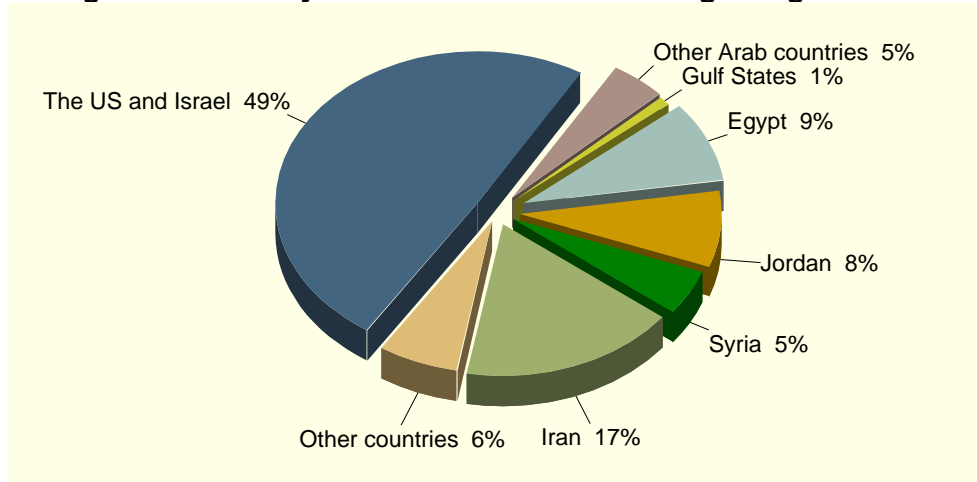
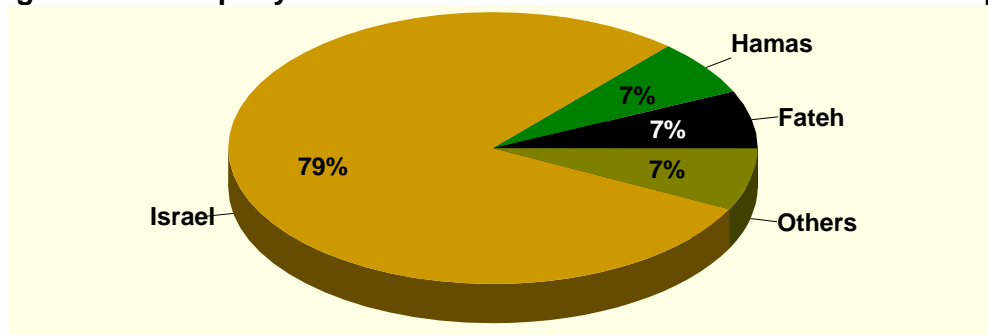


Table 17: Country believed to have a role in agitating the crisis, by factional trust

		Iran	Syria	Jordan	Egypt	Gulf states	Other Arab countries	USA/Israel	Other countries
Factional trust	Hamas	4%	0%	11%	15%	3%	8%	50%	10%
	Fateh	33%	9%	7%	6%	0%	2%	39%	4%
	PFLP	0%	25%	17%	8%	0%	0%	42%	8%
	None	15%	4%	8%	8%	1%	4%	54%	5%

These responses may also be explained by the observation that an equally overwhelming majority of respondents also believe that Israel is the main party benefiting from the internal conflict in Gaza, as shown below.

Figure 20: What party benefits from the internal conflict in the Gaza Strip?





This assessment is shared by Palestinians across the political spectrum, despite this report's earlier conclusion that the crisis seems to have caused Hamas to lose more trust than Fateh among the general population, relatively speaking. Only very small minorities of those who support either of the two main competing parties disagree, believing instead that their own party has benefited from the crisis. Fateh supporters overall appear to be more split on this question than their Hamas counterparts.

Table 18: What party benefits from the internal conflict in the Gaza Strip, by region of residence and factional trust

		Fateh	Hamas	Israel	Others
Region	West Bank	7%	7%	82%	5%
	Gaza Strip	7%	6%	75%	11%
	Hamas	7%	14%	75%	4%
Factional trust	Fateh	13%	12%	67%	8%
	None	4%	2%	87%	8%

In the context of widespread Palestinian distrust of foreign influence in their internal affairs, it may also be noted that an overwhelming majority of respondents are not in favor of establishing an international presence in the Gaza Strip as a means of containing the internecine violence. While it is not surprising that supporters of Hamas are particularly unsupportive of this idea, it is telling that Gazans themselves are particularly opposed to it. It may be noted in context that the establishment of an EU monitoring team to facilitate Palestinian movement across Gaza's border with Egypt, following Israel's so-called disengagement, has not prevented Israel from continuing to prevent free Palestinian entry and exit, a fact of which most Palestinians are well aware.

Figure 21: Support for an international presence in Gaza to stop the violence from spreading

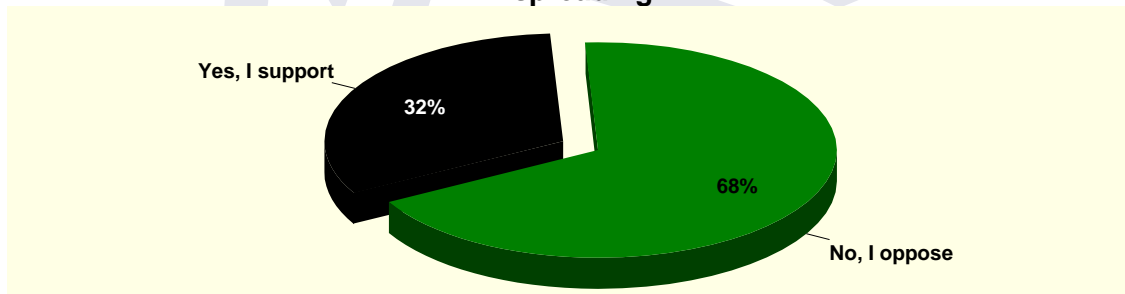


Table 19: Support for an international presence in Gaza to stop the violence from spreading, by region of residence and factional trust

		Yes, I support	No, I oppose
Region	West Bank	34%	66%
	Gaza Strip	29%	71%
	Hamas	26%	74%
Factional trust	Fateh	38%	62%
	None	31%	69%



C. Loss of faith in government, support for early elections

Though a majority of Palestinians are opposed to external involvement in Gaza’s crisis, it is equally clear that most of them do not feel their own government is handling the crisis very well. To the general question of whether the present government is capable of ending the conflict, the median response was slight disagreement; only Hamas supporters diverged from this pattern, yet did not evince more than equanimity. A similar overall answer pattern was recorded when respondents were asked whether the present government is capable of governing the people. Tellingly, that sizeable portion of the population which currently professes not to trust any of the main political parties gave the most negative answers. Overall, the median response to the question of the whether the PA president himself is doing a good job to end the conflict was also slightly negative, though somewhat less so than the popular assessment of the government as a whole.

Table 20: Do you agree with the following statements on the PA’s competency?

		0=Do not agree at all, 10=Agree completely		
		The government is capable of governing the people	The government is capable of ending of the internal conflict	The PA presidency is doing a good job to end the internal conflict
Region	West Bank	3	3	4
	Gaza Strip	3	3	4
Factional trust	Hamas	5	5	3
	Fateh	3	3	4
	None	2	3	3

These findings are placed in further context by responses to the question of whether the national unity government should resign, a mere three months after its formation, and the attendant question of whether Mahmoud Abbas himself should vacate his office? Whereas a significant majority of respondents are supportive of the former option, a somewhat slimmer majority are opposed to the latter. These answers mirror earlier findings in this and previous monthly survey reports, which indicate that Abbas has been less tarnished in the public eye by the internal infighting than his rival Ismail Hanieh.

Figure 22: Has the time come for the national unity government to resign?

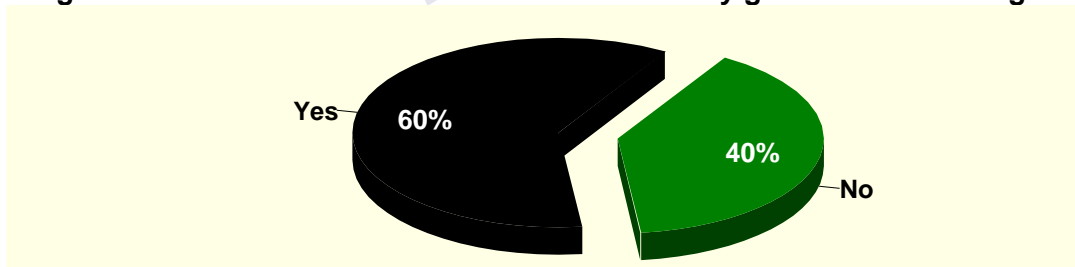
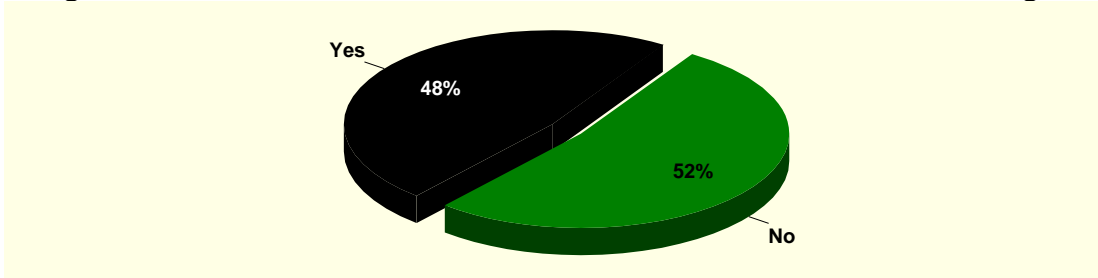




Figure 23: Has the time come for PA President Mahmoud Abbas to resign?



When these responses are parsed by subgroups, it is interesting to note that even among Hamas supporters, a full 42% believe that the national unity government should resign, and that support for this proposition is particularly strong among respondents not inclined to trust any of the two, major political parties. It can also be observed that this latter, and presently very sizeable group of Palestinians are also in favor overall of Abbas' resignation, comparably or even more so than Hamas supporters.

Table 21: Has the time come for the national unity government to resign, by region of residence and factional trust

		Yes	No
Region	West Bank	63%	38%
	Gaza Strip	57%	43%
	Hamas	42%	58%
Factional trust	Fateh	70%	30%
	PFLP	88%	12%
	None	62%	38%

Table 22: Has the time come for PA President Mahmoud Abbas to resign, by region of residence and factional trust

		Yes	No
Region	West Bank	48%	52%
	Gaza Strip	47%	53%
	Hamas	53%	47%
Faction trust	Fateh	32%	68%
	PFLP	69%	31%
	None	52%	48%

When asked what Abbas himself can do to end the internal crisis, respondents were most supportive - given the options provided - of a call for early elections. Notably, however, a significant portion also favored the dissolution of the PA and the imposition of a state of emergency. Surprisingly perhaps, adherents of Fateh, which controls most of the PA's officially recognized security forces, were least keen on this latter option, and most supportive of early elections, believing perhaps that Fateh would be likely to prevail in a new public vote. For such reasons, respondents leaning towards Hamas were perhaps least supportive of elections. Hamas' leadership has already stated that it opposes them, viewing them as a subversion of the 2006 electoral process.



Figure 24: What should Abu Mazen should do to end the crisis in the Gaza Strip?

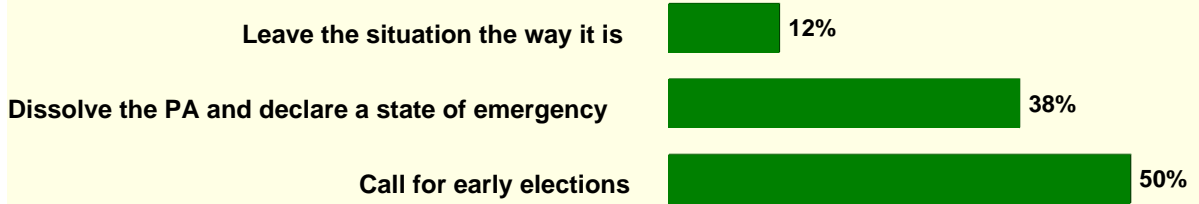


Table 23: What should Abu Mazen should do to end the crisis in the Gaza Strip, by factional trust

		Leave the situation as is	Dissolve the PA and declare and state of emergency	Call for early elections
Factional trust	Hamas	19%	42%	39%
	Fateh	7%	31%	62%
	PFLP	6%	47%	47%
	None	13%	40%	47%

Notably, when asked outright whether they support a declaration of emergency, a majority answered yes, as shown below. Consistent with earlier responses however, a greater majority were in favor of early elections.

Figure 25: Support for declaring a state of emergency in the Gaza Strip

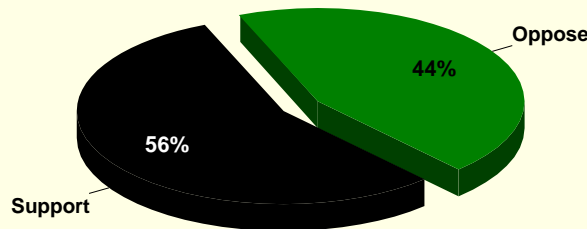
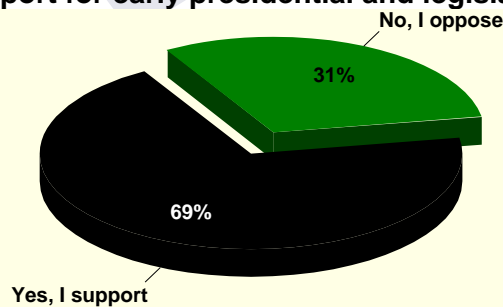


Figure 26: Support for early presidential and legislative elections



If the present sentiments of both their own constituencies and that of the general public sentiment were to guide Abbas and Hanieh, the option of early elections may indeed be



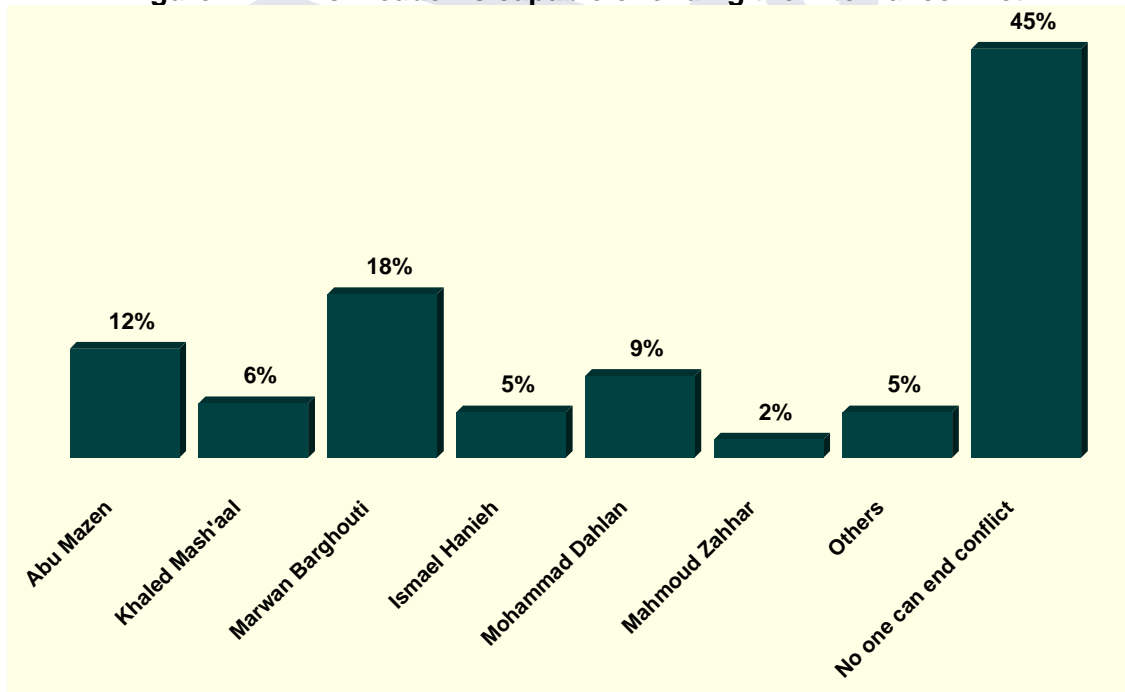
the most consensual one. As detailed below, a majority of Hamas and Fateh supporters are in favor of this alternative, though this majority is significantly stronger among the former group. Furthermore, support for early elections holds strong across both the West Bank and Gaza, and among respondents who presently feel altogether alienated from Palestinian party politics.

Table 24: Level of support for early presidential and legislative elections, by region of residence and factional trust

		Yes I support	No I oppose
Region	West Bank	71%	29%
	Gaza Strip	66%	34%
	Hamas	52%	48%
Factional trust	Fateh	88%	12%
	PFLP	88%	12%
	None	64%	36%

D. Leadership options limited, Marwan Barghouti best alternative

Figure 27: Which leader is capable of ending the internal conflict?



Should Palestinians in the Occupied Territories attempt to turn a new leaf for the Palestinian Authority, however, they appear to have few strong leadership alternatives. 45% of respondents feel that among the options presently available to them, no single figure is capable of ending the internal conflict. Of the two incumbent PA leaders, Abbas and Hanieh, the former is presently regarded as most capable, yet it is telling that the



number of respondents who feel this way is still only a crushingly small 12%. Relatively speaking, imprisoned Fateh politician Marwan Barghouti currently polls the best, at 18%, twice as much as the other likely Fateh contender, Mohammed Dahlan. The fact that Barghouti does remain imprisoned, however, with few signs that the Israeli government is ready to release him, makes him a distant alternative in more ways than one.

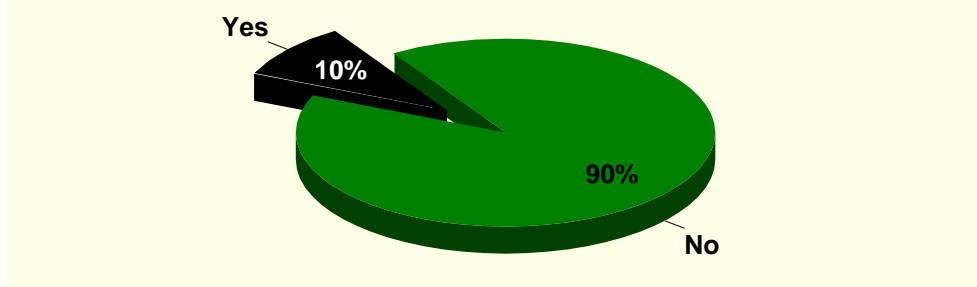
Subject to this very significant caveat, it is nevertheless interesting to observe that Barghouti does seem to enjoy considerable appeal across the political spectrum. Dahlan's base of popularity is overwhelmingly in Gaza, and he enjoys virtually no support among supporters of Hamas, whose leadership is openly hostile to him. Ironically, his strongest political base seems to be not his own Fateh party, but the very marginal PFLP, which currently enjoys the trust of only 3% of all Palestinians. Barghouti, by comparison, leads all other contenders in both the Strip and in the West Bank, is the most option most favored by Fateh adherents, yet is also comparatively popular among respondents otherwise inclined to trust Hamas, polling very close to Hamas' political leader Khaled Mash'al.

Table 25: Which leader is capable of ending the internal conflict, by region of residence, poverty level, and factional trust

		Abu Mazen	Khaled Mash'al	Marwan Barghouti	Ismael Hanieh	Mohammad Dahlan	Mahmoud Zahhar	Others	None
Region	WB	14%	5%	17%	4%	4%	1%	5%	50%
	Gaza	9%	4%	20%	7%	16%	2%	3%	38%
Poverty line	Below	13%	5%	18%	5%	8%	2%	4%	45%
	Above	12%	4%	21%	4%	9%	2%	4%	44%
Faction	Hamas	10%	14%	12%	18%	1%	5%	2%	39%
	Fateh	19%	2%	28%	2%	19%	0%	4%	26%
	PFLP	11%	0%	6%	0%	22%	6%	0%	56%
	None	10%	3%	17%	3%	5%	1%	6%	55%

A final indication of the public's perception of a leadership gap is provided by responses to the question of whether internal fighting such as that presently observed in the Gaza Strip would be likely under the leadership of late PLO leader and first PA President Yaser Arafat? Though discontent with the Oslo Accords that Arafat concluded was markedly high by the time the second Intifadah erupted, it is clear that a vast majority of Palestinians acutely feel the absence of a strong, charismatic leader.

Figure 28: Feelings about the likelihood of internal fighting under Yaser Arafat





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