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PRESS RELEASE

**The Palestinian Political Pulse
April 2006, #4**



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The Palestinian Political Pulse

The three-month period since the January 2006 PLC elections has been marked by an increasingly clear divide in Palestinian society along factional lines. More particularly, now more than ever, opinions on a wide variety of issues vary depending on whether respondents trust Hamas, trust Fateh or do not trust any faction. In order to exemplify this division, the analysis in this press release is highlighting the diverging opinions according to factional trust.

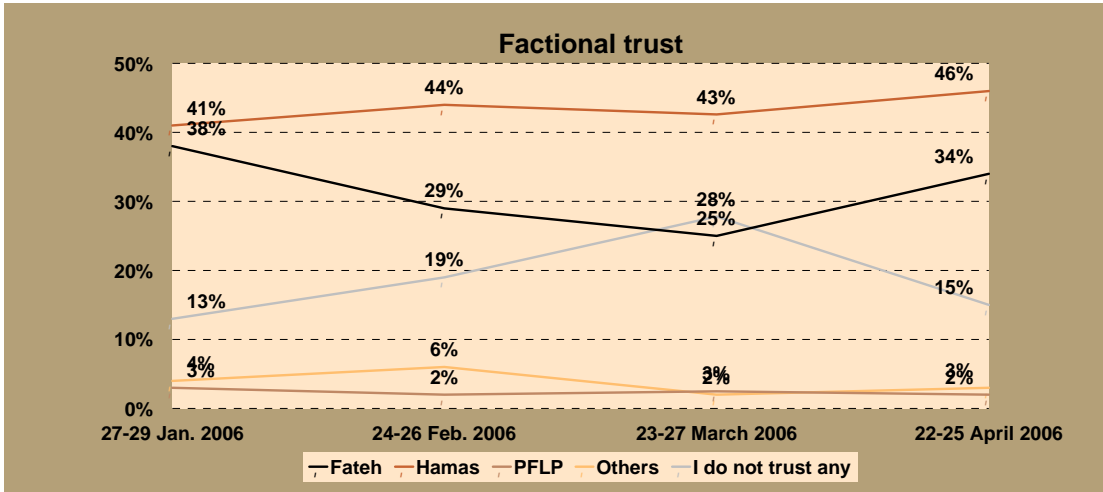
During the period 22-25 April, 2006, Near East Consulting (NEC) conducted a phone survey of over 1,200 randomly selected Palestinians in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and Jerusalem of which 821 were successfully completed. The survey covered a number of issues that fit into NEC's monthly "Palestinian Political Pulse" with the aim of monitoring Palestinian political perceptions over time. These include: factional trust, feeling of security since the PLC elections, perceived priorities of the Hamas-led government, expectations about the performance of the new PLC, and various questions related to trust in political figures.

It is worth noting that the margin of error is +/- 3.4% with a 95% confidence level.

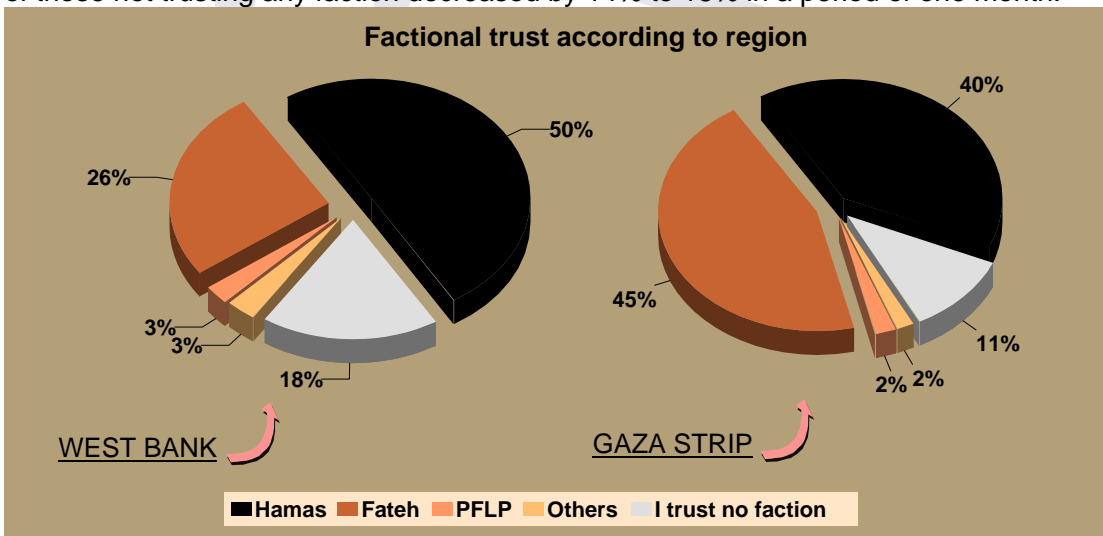
Factional trust

In the survey that NEC conducted immediately after the January PLC elections, the results on factional trust very much reflected Palestinians' voting behavior of a few days earlier. The surveys conducted in the following two months (February & March) showed a rather stable trust in Hamas, a decline in trust in Fateh and a sharp increase in the percentage of disillusioned Palestinians who did not trust any faction. In the latest survey (April), in the midst of a growing financial crisis of the Hamas-led PA government, plans by Hamas to establish a new security force, President Abbas's presidential decree vetoing such plans, Hamas leader Khaled Mashaal's insinuations of Fateh collaborating with Israel against the Hamas-led government, increasing tensions and clashes between Fateh and Hamas supporters, Palestinians seem once more inclined to assert their political preference for either Hamas or Fateh as the percentage of those who do not trust any faction nearly halved in the past month (from 28% to 15%).

As clearly noticeable in the figure below, the dramatic decrease in the percentage of Palestinians not trusting any faction mainly occurred to the benefit of Fateh as the percentage of Palestinians trusting Fateh increased by 9% over the past month (from 25% in March to 34% now). Trust in Hamas also increased in the past months, albeit to a lesser extent (from 43% in March to 46% now).

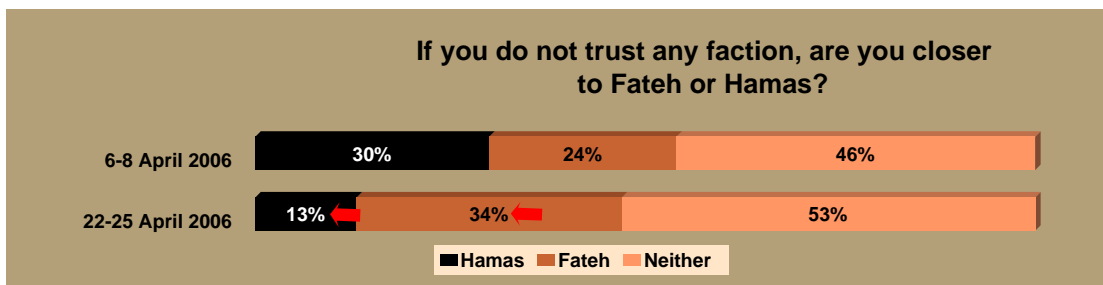


In this survey, factional trust differs significantly depending on the region of residence of the respondents. Since the January PLC elections, trust in Hamas has been stronger in the Gaza Strip than in the West Bank. However, in the latest NEC survey, the factional landscape totally changed as for the first time since the January elections trust in Hamas is not only less strong in the Gaza Strip than in the West Bank, but within the Gaza Strip trust in Hamas is also weaker than trust in Fateh. More concretely, whereas in NEC's March survey, for example, within the Gaza Strip 47% most trusted Hamas, 28% most trusted Fateh and 21% did not trust any Palestinian faction, now, in the Gaza Strip trust in Hamas dropped to 40% (-5%), trust in Fateh increased to 45% (+17%), while the percentage of those not trusting any faction decreased to 11% (-10%). Meanwhile, in the West Bank and in comparison to NEC's survey results of last month, trust in Hamas increased by 10% to 50%, trust in Fateh increased by 3% to 26%, while the percentage of those not trusting any faction decreased by 14% to 18% in a period of one month.



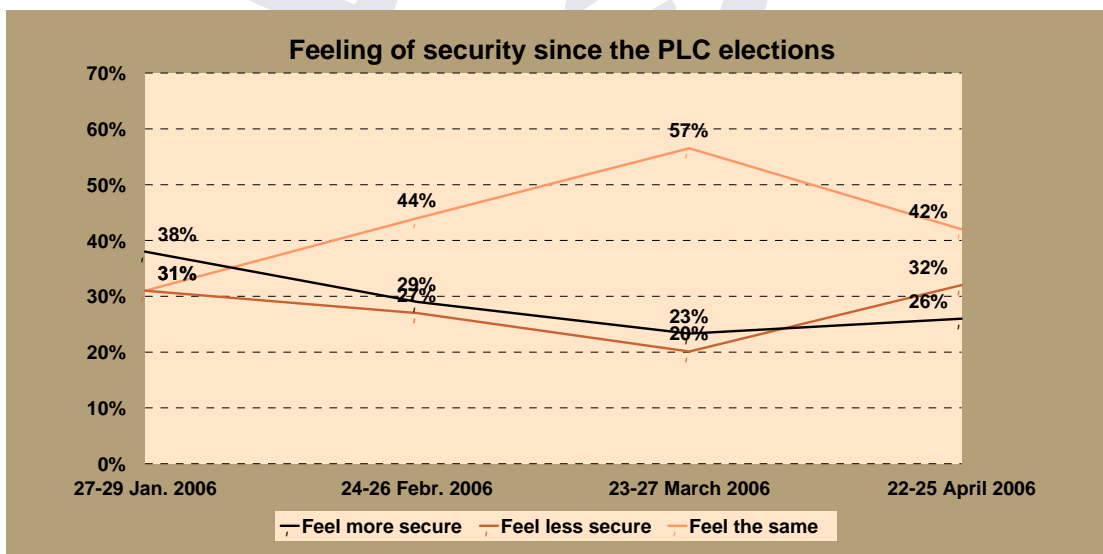


For the second month in a row, NEC included a question in the survey that is only designed for the section of the population who admit that they do not trust any faction. When those who do not trust any faction are asked whether they feel closer to Hamas or Fateh, 53% continue to insist that they do not feel close to either of the two main factions. However, of the remainder, in this survey, a larger percentage feels closer to Fateh (34%) than to Hamas (13%). This is a reversal of the results to the same question asked in NEC's March survey. As the results below indicate, at that time, 30% of those who do not trust any faction felt closer to Hamas compared to 24% of those who felt closer to Fateh.



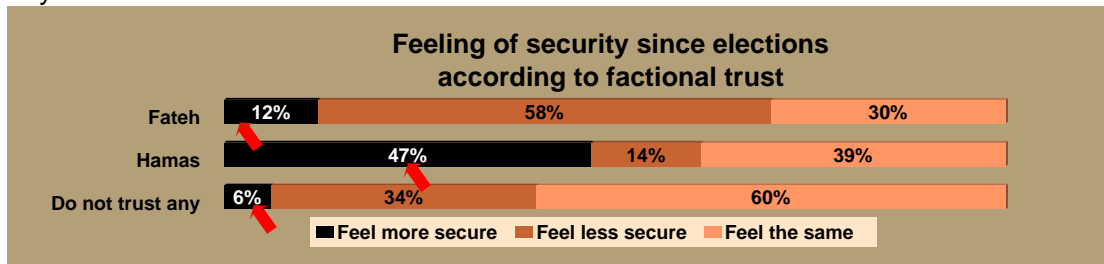
The increasingly open tensions between Fateh and Hamas and the failure of the Hamas-led PA government to pay the salaries of the government employees seem to affect people's feeling of security since the January PLC elections.

As illustrated in the figure below, the percentage of Palestinians who stated that since the PLC elections they feel the same in terms of security that had been steadily increasing in the first two months after the elections, in the past month drastically plunged from 57% in March to 42% now. At the same time, since last month, the percentage of Palestinians feeling less secure since the PLC elections increased by 12% (from 20% in March to 32% now).



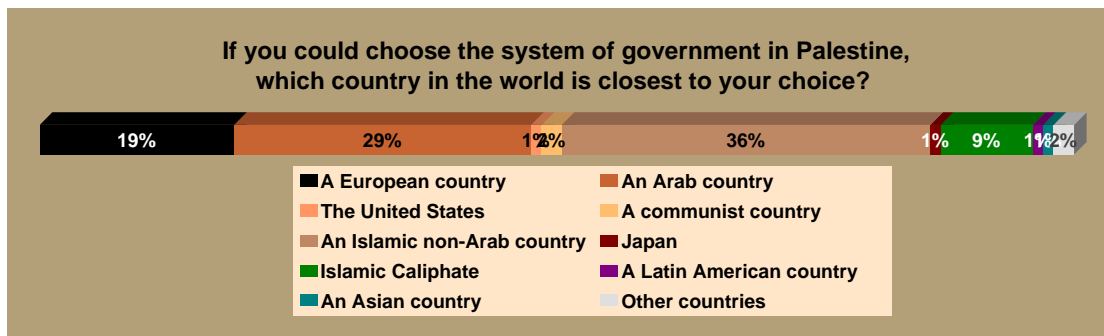


Palestinians' feeling of security varies considerably depending on which faction they trust most. For example, whereas 47% of those who most trust Hamas feel more secure since the PLC elections, only 12% of the ones who most trust Fateh and 6% of those who do not trust any faction feel more secure since the elections. To the opposite, of the respondents most trusting Fateh 58% feel less secure since the elections, while this is the case for 14% of those most trusting Hamas most and 34% of those who do not trust any faction.



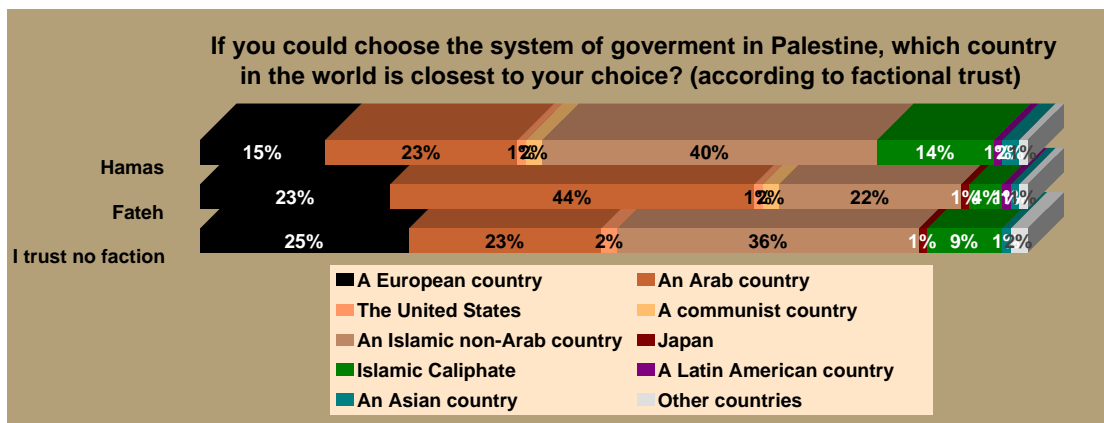
Respondents were also asked to choose from a list of countries which system of government they would prefer in Palestine. Before discussing the results, it should be noted that the option of "Islamic caliphate" was not included in the list of countries. However, it is included in the analysis as quite a number of respondents insisted that this is the system of government they would like to see in Palestine if they were given the opportunity to choose.

As overviewed in the figure below, 36% of the respondents would like to see a system of government emerge in Palestine as in Islamic non-Arab countries, 29% would like a system of government similar to existing systems in Arab countries, while 19% would like a system of government like in one of the European countries. Although respondents were not presented with the choice of an Islamic Caliphate, 9% specified that this is the system of government they hope for in Palestine. A mere 1% would like the system of government in Palestine to emulate the one of the United States, while the percentages of respondents wanting Palestine to have a system of government like in communist countries (2%), Japan (1%), Latin American countries (1%) or Asian countries (1%) are also minimal. Finally, another 2% of the respondents stated that they would like to see a system of government appear in Palestine as the one in other countries (such as Canada, Australia, or Switzerland).





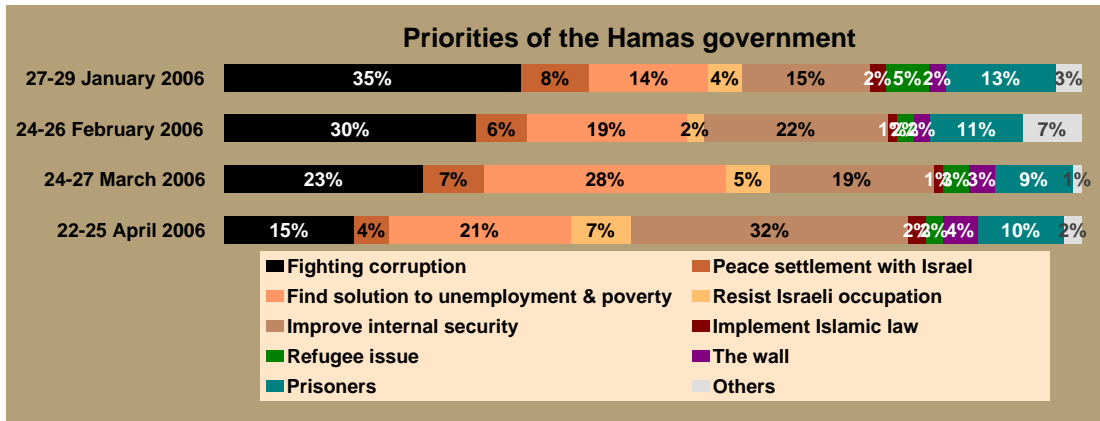
When examining the question of the preferred system of government in Palestine according to factional trust, clear differences in preferences appear. For example, the wish for a Palestinian system of government to emulate the system of government in Islamic non-Arab countries is far more pronounced among Hamas supporters (40%) than among Fateh supporters (22%) or those who do not support any faction (36%). The preferred choice of a system of government in Palestine as in one of the European countries is more favored by Fateh supporters (23%) and those who do not trust any faction (25%) than by Hamas supporters (15%). The results according to factional trust are detailed in the figure below.



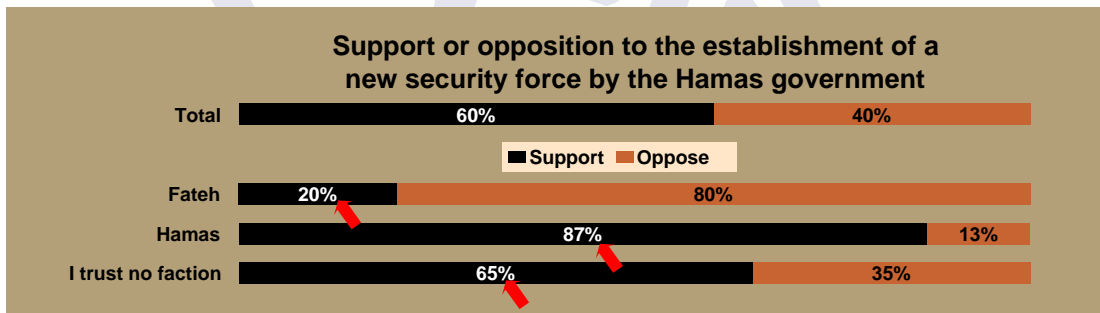
Hamas-led Government

In the past four surveys conducted for the Palestinian Political Pulse, respondents were asked what, in their opinion, the main priorities of Hamas-led government should be. The results in the figure below, clearly point to one main trend: Since the PLC elections the percentage of people believing that "fighting corruption" should be the new government's main priority has been steadily declining (from 35% in January to 30% in February to 23% in March to 15% now). In addition, the percentage of Palestinians convinced that the new government's priority should be to "find a solution to unemployment and poverty" that had doubled between January and March, now declined by 7% in the past month (from 28% in March to 21% now). The results indicate that the wish of people for the Hamas-led government to "find a solution to unemployment and poverty" this month had to make place for a more direct and urgent need of the population, i.e. for the Hamas-led PA to "improve internal security". These results might again be a reflection of the recent surge in tensions between Hamas and Fateh supporters, while at the same time they are totally in line with the findings that Palestinians' sense of security since the PLC elections are on the decline.

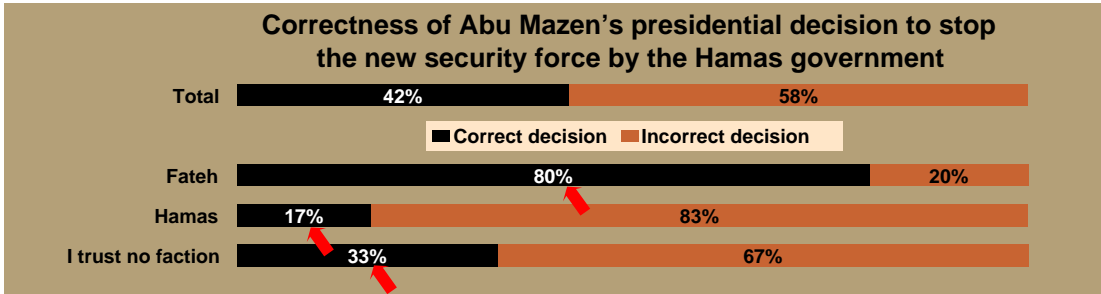
Further worth noting in the results is the continuing low percentage (2%) of respondents who consider the "imposing of religious standards" or the Sharia'a law as a priority of the new Hamas-led government.



When people were asked about the Hamas-led government's intention to establish a new security force that would mainly absorb members of the Popular Resistance Committees, in general, 60% of the respondents support the establishment of such a new security force. Support for a new security force varies considerably according to factional trust. While only 20% of Fateh supporters are in favor of establishing a new security force, this is the case for 87% of the Hamas supporters and 65% of those who do not trust any faction.



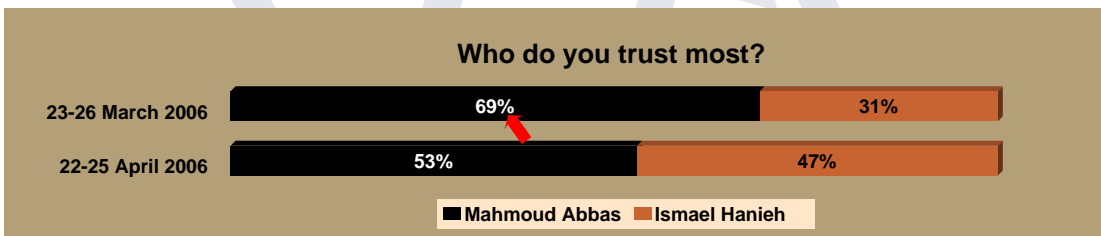
Given the finding that, generally, 40% of Palestinians are against the establishment of a new security force by the Hamas-led government, it is to be expected that a similar percentage of the population will consider President Abbas's decree to stop the establishment of the new security force to be correct. Indeed, as overviewed in the figure below, in general, 42% believe that Mahmoud Abbas made a correct decision when he blocked the establishment of the new security force. The belief in the correctness of Abu Mazen's presidential decision to stop the creation of a new security force by the Hamas government is far stronger among Fateh supporters (80%) than among Hamas supporters (17%) and those who do not trust any existing Palestinian faction (33%).



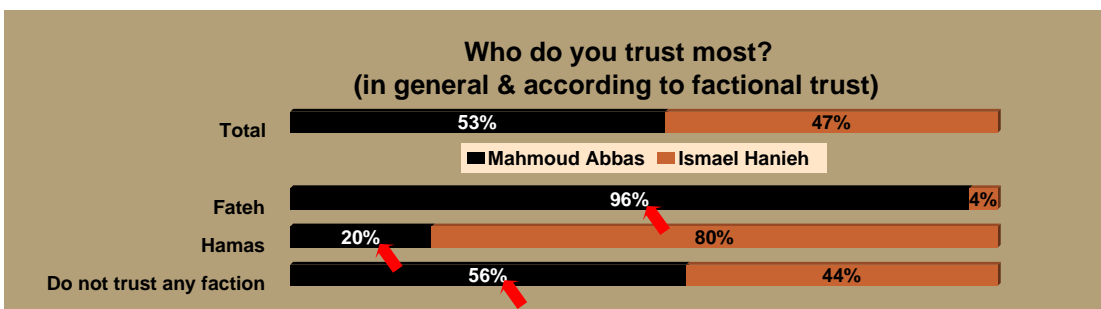
Palestinian leadership

In the survey, Palestinians were also asked a number of questions related to their trust in mainly three of the most prominent leaders or political actors nowadays, mainly President Mahmoud Abbas, Prime Minister Ismael Hanieh, and Hamas leader Khaled Mashaal.

When respondents were queried whether they trust President Mahmoud Abbas more or Prime Minister Ismael Hanieh more, in general, 53% trust Mahmoud Abbas more, while the remaining 47% trust Ismael Hanieh more. In comparison to the results to the same question that was asked in NEC's survey last month, popular trust in Mahmoud Abbas declined by 16% (from 69% to 53%) to the benefit of Ismael Hanieh.

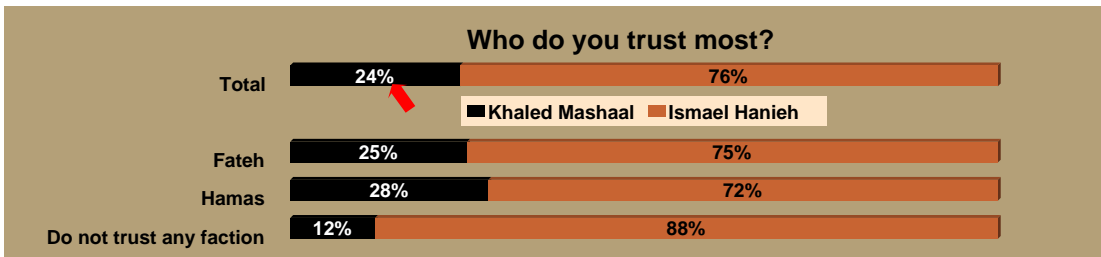


According to factional trust, a very considerable majority of 96% of Fateh supporters and 56% of those who do not trust any faction trust Mahmoud Abbas most, while this is the case for only 20% Hamas supporters. It is worth pointing out that in NEC's March survey still 46% of Hamas supporters said that they trusted Mahmoud Abbas more than Ismael Hanieh.

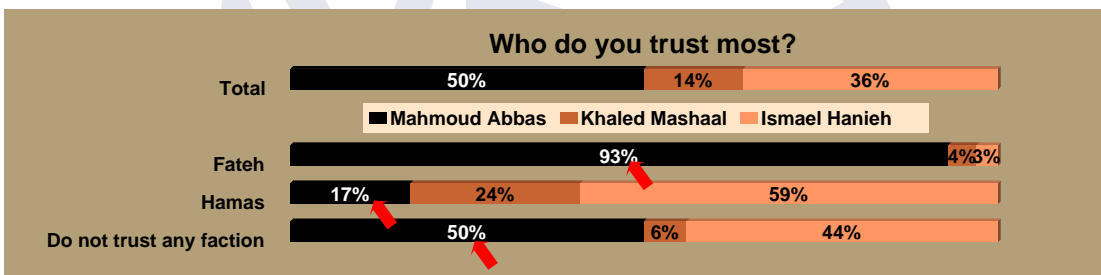




When people were asked to indicate whether they trust Khaled Mashaal or Ismael Hanieh most, the results indicate that Ismael Hanieh (76%) is far more trusted than Khaled Mashaal (24%). Even according to factional trust, the trust in Khaled Mashaal does not differ significantly between Fateh supporters (25%) and Hamas supporters (28%). Khaled Mashaal is least trusted among Palestinians who do not trust any existing faction (12%).

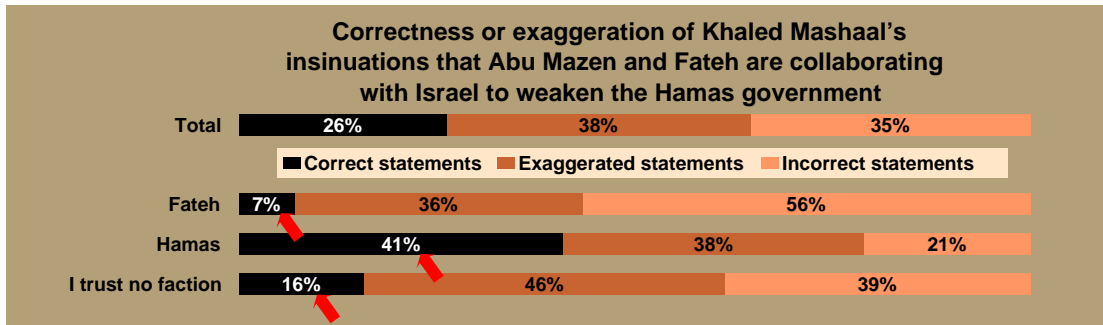


When people were asked to indicate who they trusted most of the three leaders (Mahmoud Abbas, Ismael Hanieh, and Khaled Mashaal), Mahmoud Abbas is clearly the most trusted of the three (50%), followed by Ismael Hanieh (36%) and only then by Khaled Mashaal (14%). According to factional lines, trust in President Mahmoud Abbas is extremely high (93%) among Fateh supporters, considerable among those who do not trust any faction (50%), and low among Hamas supporters (17%). Trust in Prime Minister Ismael Hanieh is much higher among Hamas supporters (59%) and those who do not trust in Palestinian faction (44%) than among Fateh supporters (44%). Trust in Hamas leader Khaled Mashaal is only considerable among Hamas supporters (24%).

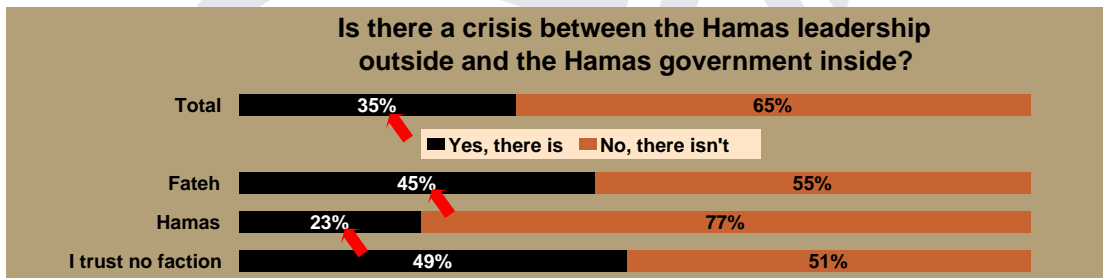


The latest NEC survey started on the day Hamas leader Mashaal in a statement insinuated that Abu Mazen and Fateh are collaborating with Israel to weaken the Hamas government. When people were asked their opinions about the Mashaal insinuations, in general, only 26% believed that these insinuations were correct, 38% considered them to be exaggerated, while 35% said that they were incorrect.

According to factional lines, the belief that Mashaal's insinuations were correct was far more pronounced among Hamas supporters (41%) than among Fateh supporters (7%) and those who do not trust any faction (16%). Also, the results in the figure below indicate that 21% of Hamas supporters shared the belief that Mashaal's insinuations with regard to Abu Mazen and Fateh are incorrect.



The rapid statement from the Prime Minister's Office after Khaled Mashaal's insinuations indicating that the Prime Minister's Office does not stand behind Mashaal's statements, showed a difference in opinion between the Hamas leadership outside Palestine and the Hamas leadership inside. When NEC asked Palestinians if, in their opinion, there is a crisis between the Hamas leadership outside and the Hamas leadership inside, a majority of 65% believe that there is no crisis. The results further reveal that 49% of those who do not trust any Palestinian faction and 45% of Fateh supporters believe that there is a crisis between the Hamas leadership outside and the Hamas government inside. Among Hamas supporters, 23% believe that there is such a crisis within Hamas.



Expectations about the performance of the PLC

Given the newly elected PLC and the very different composition of the current PLC in comparison to the previous one, NEC last month took the initiative to begin monitoring the performance of the PLC through the eyes of their constituents. In the questions asked about the performance of the PLC, respondents were still asked about their *expectations* on several issues pertaining to the performance of the newly elected PLC as too little time has passed since its inauguration to be able to evaluate its performance meaningfully.

In general and in comparison to the results to the same questions in NEC's survey one month ago, people's expectations about the performance of the PLC have become considerably less positive. Indeed, whereas in March expectations on six of the seven questions pertaining to the performance of the PLC were mildly positive, this time, none



of the percentages on expectations on the performance of the PLC exceed the 50% mark.

As overviewed in the figure below, the most negative rate concerned the expectation that the PLC will make courageous decisions vis-à-vis the Palestinian-Israeli conflict as only 36% of the sample expects the newly elected PLC to do so. For the remainder, 49% believes that the PLC's general performance will be positive, 49% are of the opinion that the PLC will address the concerns of the people adequately, while respectively 47% feel that the PLC will mirror the views of the people and that it will be effective. Lastly, 46% believe that the PLC will represent them well as a person, and 42% are sure that the PLC members will make good on their campaign promises.

