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ARAB PUBLIC OPINION PROJECT- ARAB INDEX 2014

Palestinian Public Opinion: Attitudes towards Peace Negotiations and National Reconciliation

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Introduction

This report presents selected results of the 2014 Arab Opinion Index from Palestine (the West Bank and the Gaza Strip). The Arab Opinion Index is the largest opinion poll of its kind in the Arab region—in 2014, more than 20,000 respondents from 15 countries were included. It seeks to elucidate public opinion on a number of social, political, and economic issues, including attitudes towards democracy; political and civic participation; and respondents' views of state institutions in their own country. In addition to the main battery of questions, respondents in Palestine were also asked their opinion on a range of topical issues, such as questions on the peace process and on Palestinian national reconciliation, and elections to the Palestinian presidency and the Legislative Council. The context for these selected questions is US Secretary of State John Kerry's efforts to achieve a framework agreement on the resumption of talks between the Palestinian Authority (PA) and Israel, which coincided with the conduct of the poll. Details of the findings are presented below.

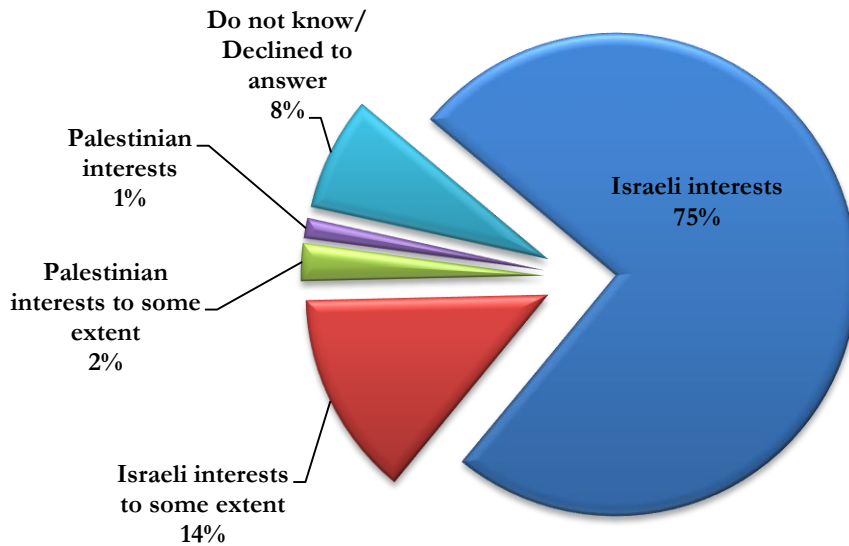
Fieldwork and Sample Size, Description

The fieldwork was carried out by the Qiyas Center for Polling and Survey Research in Palestine, under the direct supervision of the ACRPS, during the period from January 24 to February 2, 2014. The sample was composed of 1,520 respondents who took part in the survey through face-to-face interviews, and were chosen through a systematic, multi-staged, stratified sampling method, giving a sample which is self-weighted with probability proportional to size (PPS). This provides for equal representation for respondents from both parts of the Occupied Palestinian Territories (the West Bank and the Gaza Strip), and between genders. The confidence level for this sample is 97.5%, with a margin of $\pm 2\%$. The ACRPS wishes to express here its gratitude to all of the Palestinian respondents who took part in the survey.

Trends in Palestinian Public Opinion on Kerry’s Framework Agreement

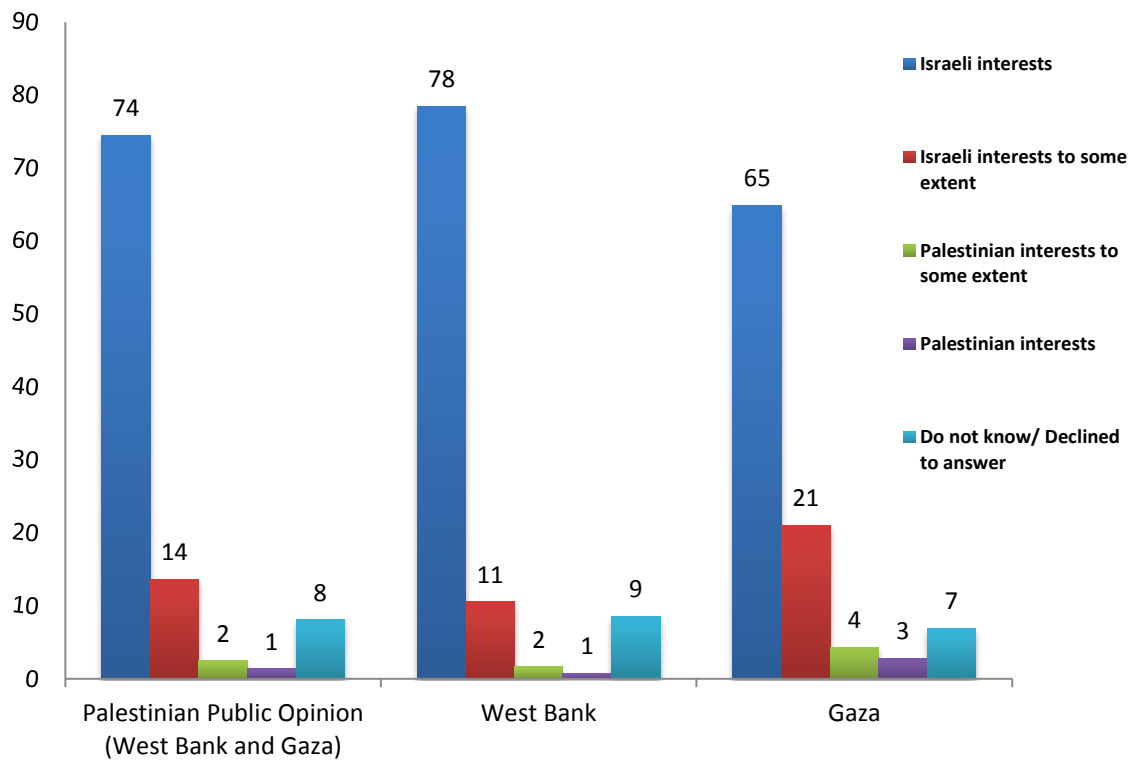
Respondents were asked their opinions of Kerry’s efforts to conclude a framework agreement for the resumption of negotiations between the PA and Israel, and whether the signing of this agreement served Palestinian or Israeli interests. 89% Of the Palestinians believes that the framework agreement would serves Israel’s interests— 75% thought the agreement was in Israel’s interest while 14% thought it was in Israel’s interest “to some extent”. This compares to only 3% of Palestinians who thought it would be in the interest of the Palestinians—1% in the interest of the Palestinians and 2% to some extent.

Figure 1: Respondents' perceptions of whose interests would be served by Kerry’s framework agreement



Analysis of the respondents' views on this point shows that differences between respondents on the West Bank and those in the Gaza Strip were very limited. While 89% of West Bank respondents believe that such an agreement would serve Israel's interests, that figure is 86% in the Gaza Strip. A closer break down shows that 78% of West Bank respondents believe that Kerry's framework agreement would be in Israel's favor outright, with 11% of them indicating that it would serve Israeli interests "to some extent". In the Gaza Strip, those figures were 65% and 21%, respectively. Such a wide consensus is a clear indication of the massive public disapproval for Kerry's proposed framework agreement within the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

Figure 2: Palestinian Opinion in the West Bank and Gaza on Kerry's Framework



Would Palestinians accept providing further concessions?

In a similar vein, and in an effort to deepen understanding of Palestinian public opinion on the Palestinian-Israeli negotiations, respondents were asked about the extent of approval or rejection of a set of various preconditions frequently proposed by the Israelis as preconditions for a final peace agreement. These measures to be taken by the Palestinians include:

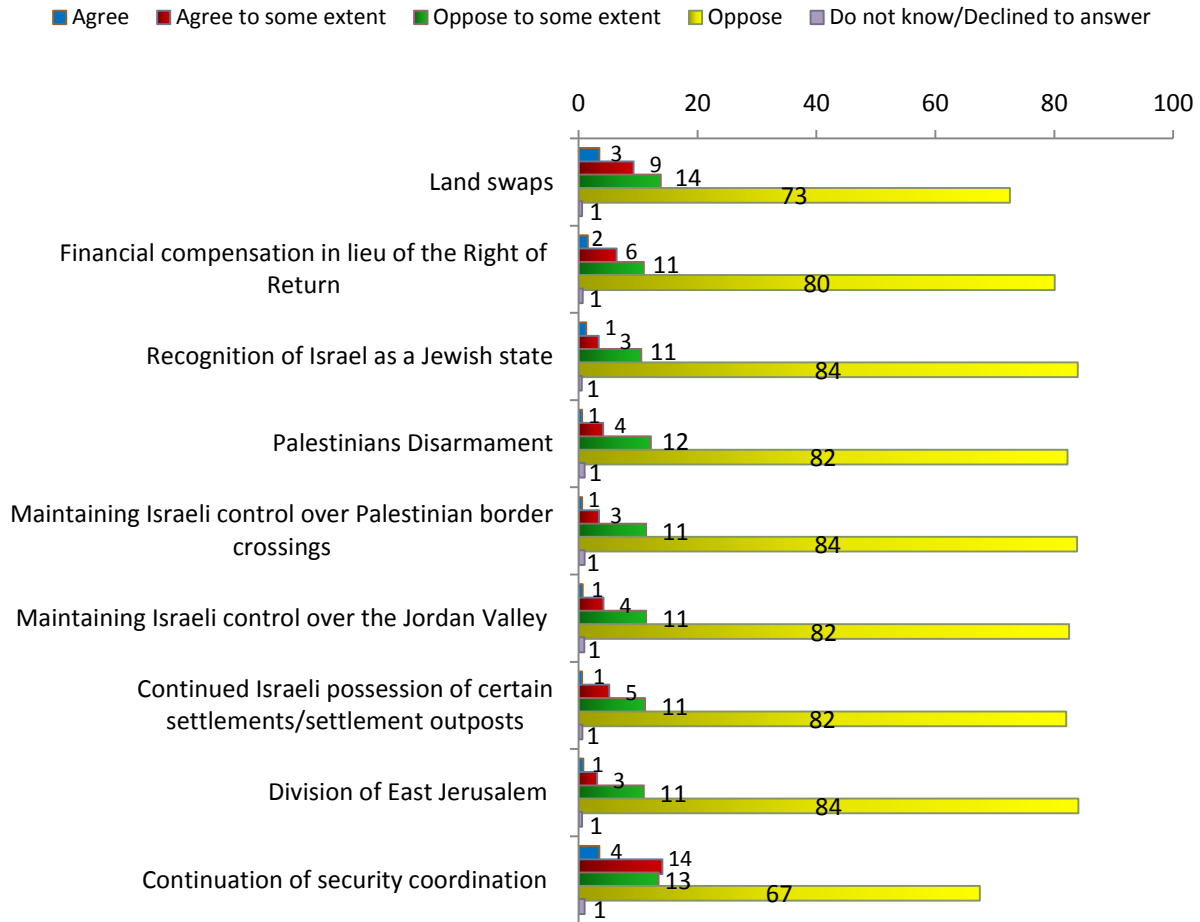
1. Recognition of Israel as a Jewish state
2. Accepting compensation in lieu of the right of return
3. Land swaps
4. Palestinian disarmament
5. Maintaining Israeli control over Palestinian borders
6. Maintaining Israeli control over the Jordan Valley
7. Continued Israeli possession of certain settlements/settlement outposts
8. Division of East Jerusalem
9. Continuation of security coordination (between the PA and Israel)

Respondents were asked whether they would accept such measures in order to arrive at a final peace agreement with Israel. The results show that there is near consensus among Palestinians in their rejection of these measures, with opposition to each of them varying between 80% and 95%. Notably, only a statistically insignificant 1% stated that they do not have an answer to that question, or declined to answer on any of these points, indicating that Palestinians have strongly-held, well-informed opinions.

Seven of these presumptive Israeli preconditions are opposed by more than 90% of respondents, including: the partition of East Jerusalem; the recognition of Israel as a Jewish state; continued Israeli control over Palestinian borders; Palestinian disarmament; continued Israeli control of the Jordan valley; retention of some settlements; and compensation in lieu of the right to return. In terms of the acceptance or rejection of these measures, there was no marked difference between the West Bank and Gaza. Notably, most of these preconditions set by the Israelis reflect the present status quo: with Israeli control over Palestinian borders and the Jordan Valley intact, and ongoing Israeli-Palestinian coordination on security matters as well as continued settlement activity in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. These all contribute to the day-to-day suffering of the Palestinians.

Palestinians' nearly unanimous rejection of the Israelis' proposed conditions clearly reflects the lack of desire amongst Palestinians to make further concessions in order to reach a peace agreement with the Israelis. Such a strongly-held consensus reflects the fact that these points have come to be enshrined as incontrovertible principles for Palestinian statehood.

Figure 3: Respondents' agreement to/opposition toward a variety of Israeli preconditions to a peace treaty



Palestinian National Reconciliation

Participants in the survey were asked to rank three measures widely discussed as means of achieving national reconciliation in order of their importance, and to indicate which of these was “the most important”. The measures identified were: holding presidential elections; holding legislative elections; and a re-structuring the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). Given the seven-year-old, ongoing political disunity between Hamas

and Fateh, this issue is of particular concern for Palestinians living in the Occupied Territories. Unlike other sections of this survey, respondents' views on these proposed measures were less unanimous, suggesting that the Palestinian public views all of these as significant for the future of Palestinian political unity and reconciliation. The restructuring of the PLO was the measure most widely cited as "the most important" for this aim, with 38% of respondents selecting it. This was followed by legislative elections, with 28%, and presidential elections with 24%.

There was no statistically significant difference between West Bank survey respondents and those in the Gaza Strip on which single step would be most important for national reconciliation.

The re-structuring of the PLO was chosen by 38% in the West Bank and 37% in Gaza. Differences in respondents' views on the relative importance of presidential or legislative elections to achieve reconciliation were similarly not statistically significant. Five percent of those surveyed thought the three steps were of equal importance.

Table 1: Respondents' evaluation of the most important measures to be taken in order to achieve of Palestinian national reconciliation

(% of respondents who offered this answer)	Most important measure	Second most important measure	Third most important measure	All are equally important	None of these is important	Do not know/ Declined to answer
Re-structuring the Palestine Liberation Organization	38	25	27	5	1	4
Holding legislative elections	28	36	25			
Holding presidential elections	24	29	38			

In an effort to gain a deeper, more nuanced understanding of Palestinian public opinion on this issue, respondents were also asked to describe the first- and second most significant obstacles to national reconciliation. The results demonstrate that there is a lack of a consensus on this point. In fact, the respondents provided more than 500 different answers, which have been divided into 13 main categories for the purpose of this report.

Of those surveyed, 35% expressed the view that the partisan and personal interests of the leadership of Palestinian factions form the main obstacle to national reconciliation; 20% saw the Israeli occupation as the main obstacle; 9% thought interference by foreign powers (including the US, Israel, Iran, and various Arab states) were responsible; 4% blamed Hamas's leadership and the government in Gaza; and 4% blamed the PA leadership for the failure to reach a reconciliation.

Table 2: The first and second most significant obstacles to Palestinian national reconciliation as described by respondents

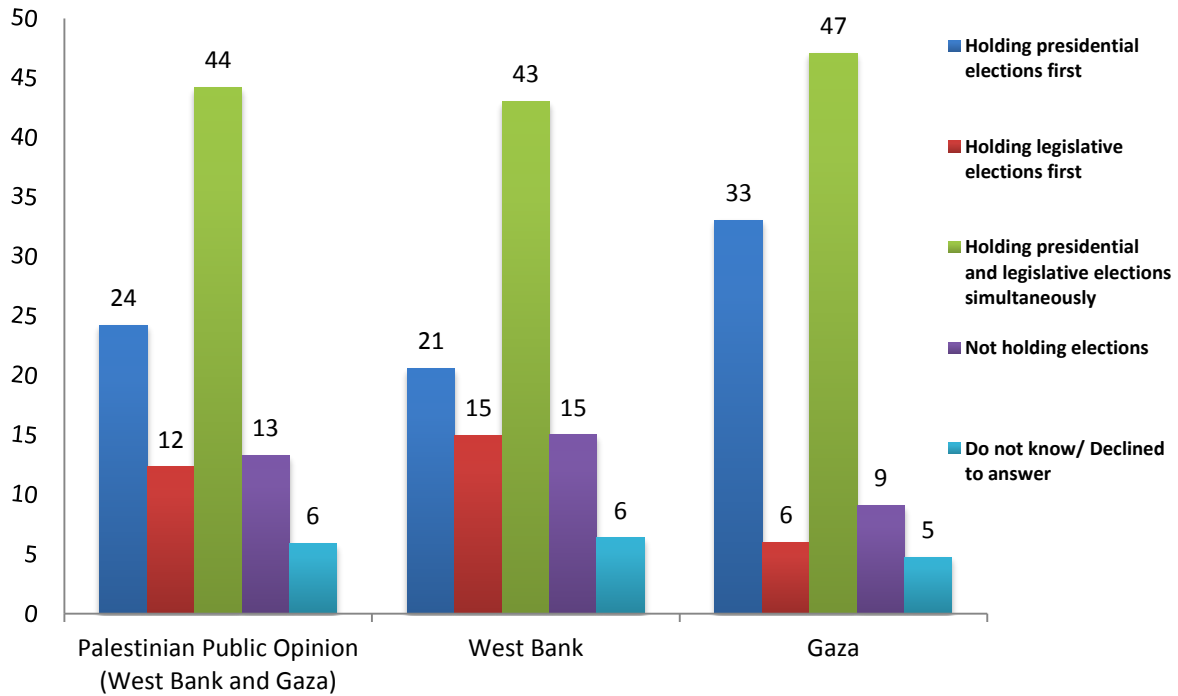
(% of respondents who offered this answer)	Most significant obstacle	Second most significant obstacle	Averaged (first + second most significant)
Partisan and political interests of the Palestinian faction leaders	35	24	30
The Israeli occupation	20	17	19
Intervention by foreign powers	9	19	13
The lack of a will for reconciliation	4	4	4
The Hamas leadership and the government in the Gaza Strip	4	3	4
The Fateh leadership and the Palestinian Authority (in the West Bank)	4	3	4

Discord and spite between the two sides	2	3	3
Economic problems	2	4	3
Differences of opinion and discord between the two sides on fundamental issues	2	3	3
Instability/the lack of security	1	1	1
The lack of democracy and political pluralism	0.3	1	0.4
Domestic Arab affairs which distract Arab states from supporting the Palestinian cause	0.2	1	0.4
Presidential and legislative elections	0.3	0.1	0.2
Other reasons	2	3	3
Do not know/Declined to answer	13	16	14
Total	100	100	100

Presidential and Legislative Elections

Given that national reconciliation is often linked with legislative and presidential elections, and that the legal mandates for both Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and the Palestinian Legislative Council expired years ago, respondents were asked whether they thought priority should be given to either presidential or legislative elections. The results show that 44% of Palestinians favor presidential and legislative elections being held simultaneously, while 24% chose holding presidential elections first, and 13% chose legislative elections.

Figure 4: Should presidential or parliamentary elections be held first, held together, or not held?

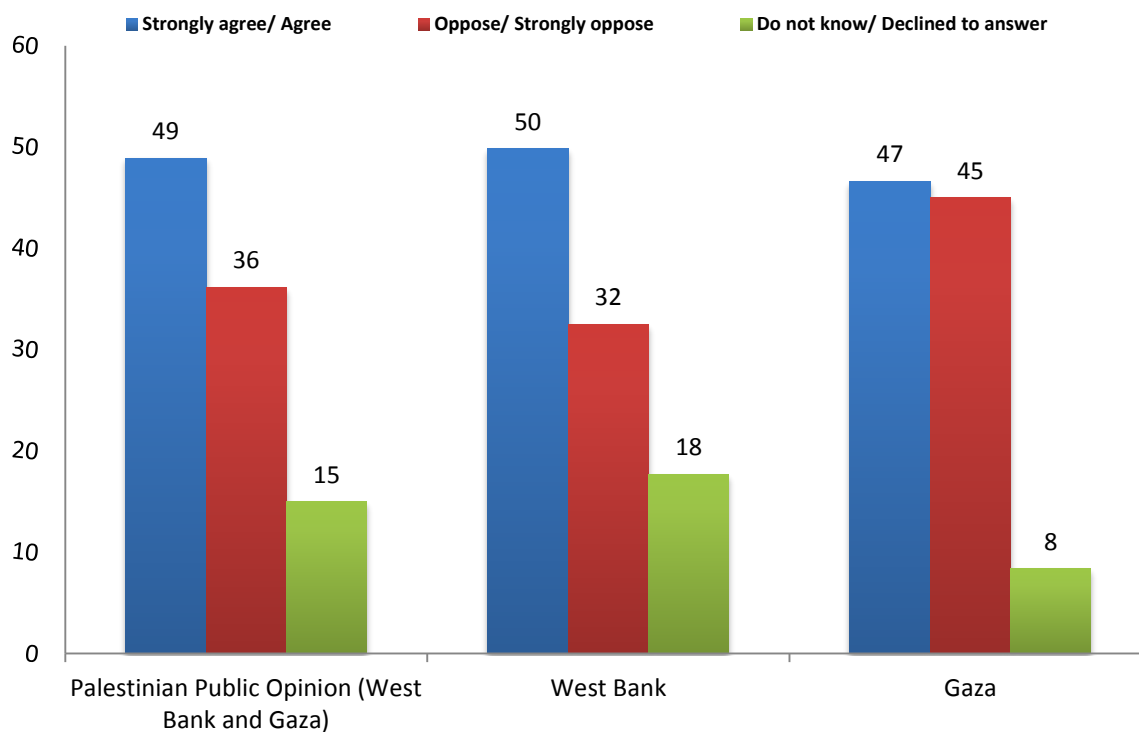


In the same context, those surveyed were asked to what extent they supported or opposed the return of the Palestinian Legislative Council elected in 2006, the constitutionally mandated term of which has expired and which has not functioned for several years. The results showed that nearly half (49%) of the respondents supported a re-convening of the Legislative Council’s (with 18% strongly supporting and 31% supporting), while 36% were against the idea (19% opposed and 17% strongly opposed).

Support for a re-convening of the Palestinian Legislative Council was roughly equally divided between the West Bank (50%) and the Gaza Strip (47%). At 45%, respondents from the Gaza Strip were more strongly opposed to a re-convening of that Council (24%

“opposed” and 21% “strongly opposed”) compared to those in the West Bank, only 33% of whom were opposed to the 2006 Legislative Council returning to function (18% opposed and 15% strongly opposed). This difference is likely a reflection of a strong opposition to the Hamas movement (which dominated the 2006 Palestinian Legislative Council) in the Gaza Strip. Finally, 18% of West Bank respondents responded “Do not know” to this question, compared to 8% of those in the Gaza Strip.

Figure 5: Those for and Against the Return of the Palestinian Legislative Assembly (Elected in 2006)



Summary

The results show that the Palestinian public is nearly unanimous in viewing the framework agreement being proposed by US Secretary of State Kerry as serving Israeli interests. Palestinians also reject the terms usually presented by the Israelis as necessary preconditions for a final peace agreement, including the recognition of Israel as a Jewish state, continued Israeli control of Palestinian borders, the acceptance of compensation in lieu of the right of return, and continued Israeli control of the settlements. These findings demonstrate that Palestinians are unwilling to make concessions on these matters, which have are now enshrined as national principles for the Palestinian people.

The results further reveal that Palestinians can pinpoint a number of factors that hinder national reconciliation, primarily the personal and party interests of the Palestinian leadership; the Israeli occupation; and foreign meddling. The Fatah leadership and the PA, like the Hamas leadership and the Gaza government, are both equally blamed, by 4% of Palestinians, as the main obstacles to reconciliation.