

51% of the Palestinians believe that Abbas is firm against corruption

49% favors negotiations while 17% prefers the resistance option

71% support a peace settlement with Israel and the majority would voter for Fateh in case the legislative and the presidential elections were held next week

Ramallah: Near East Consulting (NEC) February 2010 monthly survey reveals that 49% of the Palestinians consider the negotiation option as the best option to be adopted for ending the Israeli occupation, as opposed to 17% that believe resistance to be the most suitable alternative. The remaining 34% thinks that both resistance and negotiations are the best options for the Palestinian interest. The strong support for negotiations is also echoed on the level of support Palestinians have for reaching a peace agreement with Israel. Approximately 71% reiterated their support for a peace settlement with Israel while 29% opposed it. Consistently, the results also show that 68% of the respondents oppose Hamas's position towards the elimination of Israel, compared to 32% that support this it.

The survey was carried out between 13- 15 February on a random sample of 880 Palestinians from both sexes in the West Bank and Gaza strip, including Jerusalem. The margin of error is +/-3.4% and the confidence level is 95%.

In response to the question on the voting preference of the respondents, the results show that 48% said that they would vote for Fateh in case the presidential election were held next week, compared with 11% that would vote for Hamas, while 10% mentioned the candidates of other groups. Still, 31% said that they will not participate or will refrain.

About, 45% expressed their confidence toward Abbas, versus 13% trusts Hanieh, and 42% refused to answer. Nearly half of the respondents (51%) think that Abbas works hard against corruption in the PA.

As for the legislative elections, 49% said that they will vote in favor of the Fateh list, 11% in favor of the Hamas list and 10% for other lists. Again 30% said that they will not vote at all.

Having said that, according to NEC's previous surveys the level of support for Fateh may not necessarily translate into the ballot boxes as it appears. This is due to a number of reasons. First, Fateh is becoming a pluralistic organization in the sense that it is not united under a single dogma or ideology, unlike Hamas. Second, the negative perception people have about the Fateh leadership will alienate a large percentage of voters which will lead to a fragmentation of the Fateh vote. Third, Fateh will gain support from the non-partisans who comprise more than one third of the population only if concrete progress is made on the Palestinian-Israeli front. Lack of progress will shift the support to Hamas especially as the majority of the non-aligned respondents seem to be ideologically more in tune with Hamas than with Fateh.

In another context, 54% consider Fayyad's caretaker government to be the legitimate one, in contrast to 19% who expressed the legitimacy to the Hanieh government in Gaza, and 27% believes that both governments are illegitimate.

About the factional support, 45% stated their support to Fateh, 12% support to Hamas, 4% said that they trust other factions, while 39% said that they don't trust any of the current factions. Support of Fateh is stronger in the West Bank (47%) as opposed to 43% in Gaza. Conversely, support for Hamas goes up to 16% in Gaza, and only 10% in the West Bank.

Again, while the majority said that they trust Fateh most, the analysis of NEC's monthly surveys direct to the conclusion that a distinctive part of those who trust no faction, are closer to Hamas ideologically. An issue which renders Hamas significantly stronger than it appears. Support for Fateh among this segment of the population is reflected in their belief that the Fateh strategy is better for maximizing the Palestinian national interest. In response to the question as to which strategy respondents think is better for maximizing Palestinian national interest. 49% said the Fateh strategy while 12% favored Hamas'. About 38% gave no preference to neither to the Fateh nor Hamas strategies.

As for their general outlook, the majority (88%) feel concerned about the current situation in the oPt, and 32% attributed their concern to the economic hardship, 26% to the Israeli occupation, 21% to the internal Palestinian dispute, 9% to the lack of security and safety, and 3% to family problems. Regarding their feeling of security, 52% of the Palestinians don't feel secure towards themselves, their families, and their properties, compared with 48% who feels secure.

As for the economic condition of the respondents, 46% are determined as living below the poverty level, of which 18% live in extreme poverty. The poverty situation in the West Bank also is 46% as well as in Gaza.

The decrease in the level of poverty is most likely due to the resumption of assistance to the Fayyad governments as well as his policies towards building the Palestinian infrastructure, economy, and institutions.