



PRESS RELEASE

The Israeli Elections and the Palestinian Peace Pulse

- ❖ In comparison with NEC's February poll, trust in Hamas has decreased from 44% to 42%, and trust in Fateh has decreased from 29% to 26%. Since the PLC elections in January 2006, the percentage of Palestinians not trusting any faction has doubled from 13% in January to 19% in February to 27% now.
- ❖ Over the past month, support for a peace agreement with Israel has slightly picked up from 73% to 76%. (87% among those trusting Fateh compared to 67% among those trusting Hamas)
- ❖ In general, 37% of Palestinians understand a peace settlement with Israel to be a final agreement ending the conflict, 26% see it as prolonged "hudna", 22% understand it to be a gradual process settling areas of contention, while the remaining 15% do not believe in any kind of peace settlement with Israel. The lack of belief in any kind of peace settlement is three times as high among Palestinians trusting Hamas (24%) than among those trusting Fateh (8%).
- ❖ Over the past month, popular support for Hamas maintaining its position on the elimination of Israel has dropped from 38% to 32%. 76% of Palestinian peace supporters and 45% of Palestinians who are opposed to a peace agreement with Israel believe that Hamas should change its position on the elimination of Israel. Furthermore, while 18% of Palestinians trusting Fateh believe that Hamas should maintain its position on the elimination of Israel, this is the case for 46% of those trusting Hamas.
- ❖ Concerning the upcoming Israeli elections, 26% of Palestinians would like to see Labor win, 7% Kadima, 4% Likud, while for the majority of 63% it does not matter who wins the Israeli elections on the 28th March 2006.
- ❖ In general, 29% believe that Labor is most likely to reach a peace agreement with the Palestinians, 9% think it is Kadima, while 6% say it is Likud. Still, 56% of Palestinians believe that all Israeli parties are the same when it comes to the likelihood of reaching a peace agreement with the Palestinians.

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The results will be available in detail and with cross-tabulations by Monday 27th of March 2006 at 17:00 hours on the following site:
<http://www.neareastconsulting.com>



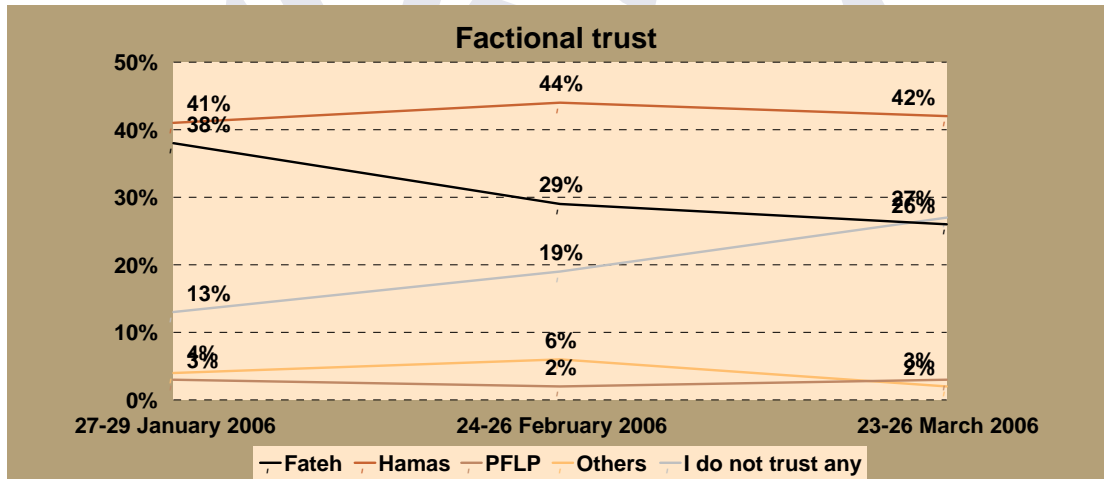
The Israeli Elections and the Palestinian Peace Pulse

Methodology

During the period 23-26 March, 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 701 were successfully completed. The survey covered a number of issues related to factional trust, support for the peace process, and the upcoming Israeli elections. It is worth noting that 60% of households in the Palestinian territories have phone connectivity. Previous surveys conducted by the researchers at NEC do not show much difference in the political attitudes between households who own phone lines and those who do not. Finally, the margin of error is +/- 3.6% with a 95% confidence level.

Factional trust

When asked which faction they trust most, 42% of those surveyed said Hamas, 26% said Fateh, while another 27% do not trust any faction. As overviewed in the figure below, in the past month, trust in Hamas (-1%) and Fateh (-2%) has slightly decreased since last month's poll, while in this time-frame the percentage of Palestinians who do not trust any faction has increased by 8%. Since the Palestinian PLC elections on 25 January 2006, the most obvious trend is a sharp increase in the number of Palestinians who do not trust any faction as the percentage more than doubled in a period of two months from 13% to 27%.



Support for the peace process

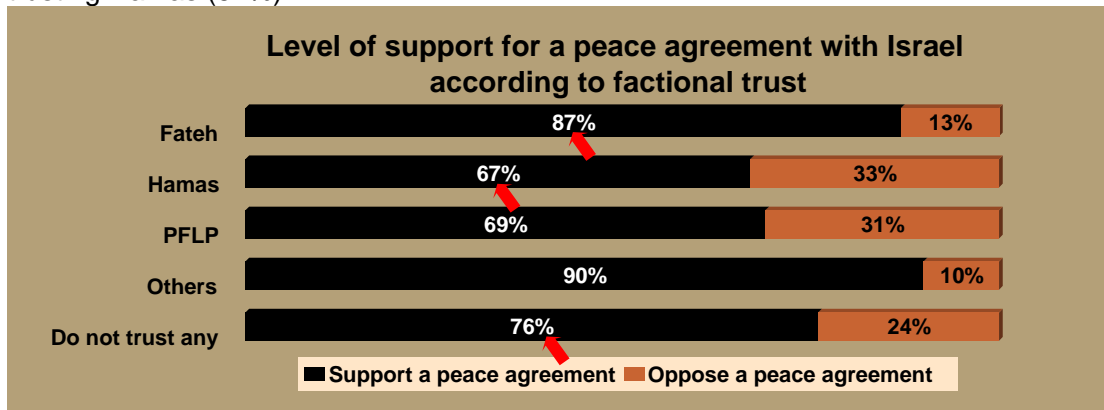
As indicated in the figure below, 76% of the respondents support a peace settlement with Israel. Although this percentage indicates a slight increase in support for a peace



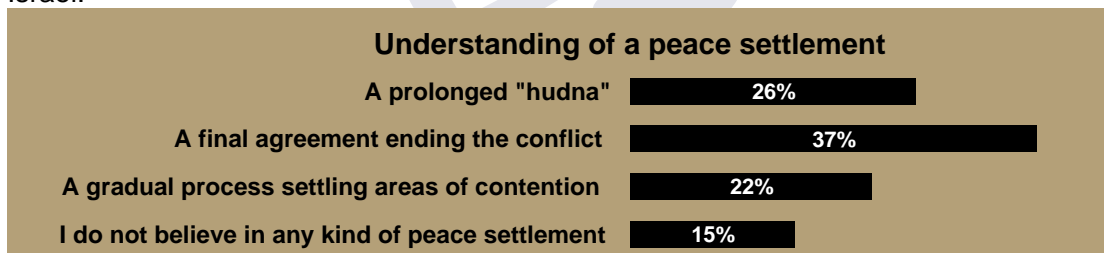
agreement with Israel since last month (+3%), it still reveals a drop in support for a peace agreement since the January PLC elections.



The support for a peace agreement with Israel is significantly higher among those most trusting Fateh (87%) and those not trusting any faction (76%) than among those most trusting Hamas (67%).



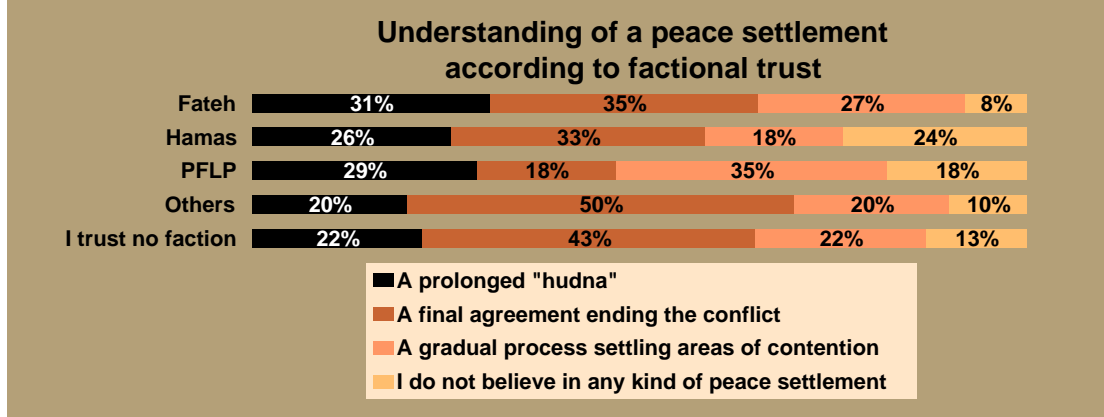
In an attempt to specify more clearly what the level of support for a peace agreement actually translates into, interviewees were asked about their understanding of a peace settlement. As illustrated in the figure below, 37% understand a peace agreement with Israel to be a final agreement ending the conflict, 26% see it as a prolonged "hudna" or cease-fire, 22% understand it to be a gradual process settling areas of contention, while the remaining 15% of Palestinians do not believe in any kind of peace settlement with Israel.



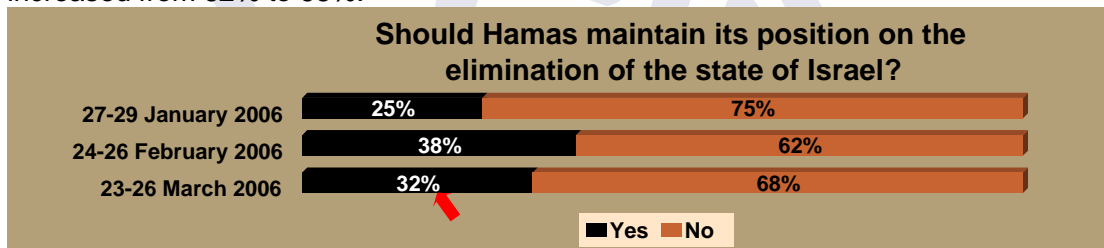
When examining Palestinians' understanding of a peace settlement according to the faction they trust most, the analysis reveals that a considerably larger percentage of Palestinians who trust Hamas (24%) than those who trust Fateh (8%) and those who do not trust any faction (13%) do not believe in any kind of peace settlement with Israel.



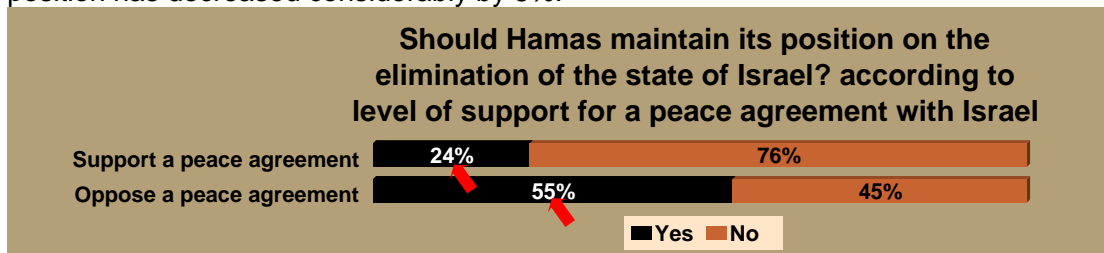
Overall, across most factional lines the most common understanding of a peace settlement, albeit in various degrees, seems to be a final agreement ending the conflict.



Very much related to Palestinians' opinions about both support for a peace agreement and their understanding of a peace agreement, is their position vis-à-vis the Hamas refusal to recognize the state of Israel. In general, a minority of 32% of the respondents believe that Hamas should maintain its position on the elimination of the state of Israel. In comparison to the results on the same question in the NEC February poll, the belief that Hamas should change its position on the elimination of the state of Israel has increased from 62% to 68%.

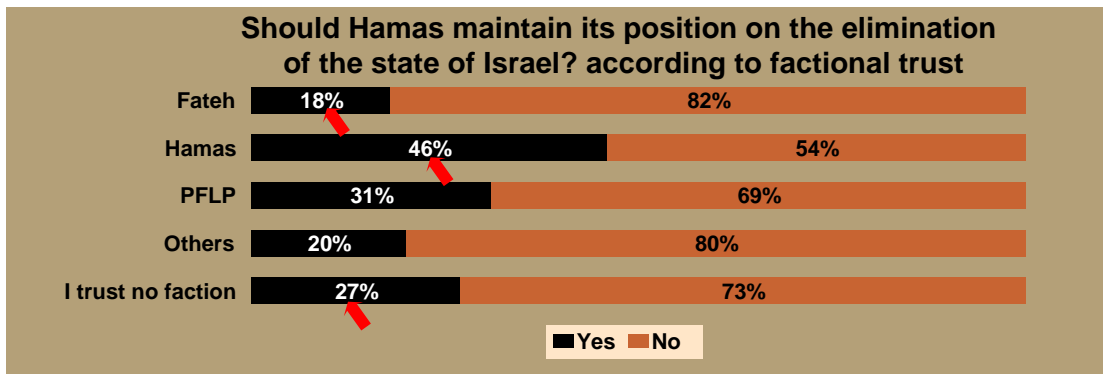


Moreover, a higher percentage of respondents who oppose a peace agreement with Israel (55%) than those who support a peace agreement with Israel (24%) believe that Hamas should maintain its position on the elimination of Israel. In comparison with last month's poll, it is worth noting that the percentage of respondents opposed to a peace agreement who believe that Hamas should keep its position on the elimination of the state of Israel has practically remained the same (+1%), while the percentage of respondents supporting a peace agreement who believe that Hamas should maintain its position has decreased considerably by 8%.





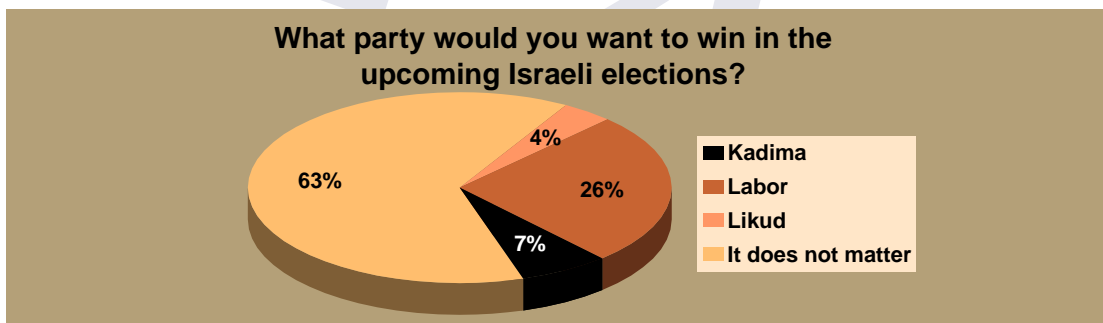
When examining Palestinians' opinions with regard to the Hamas position on the elimination of Israel according to the faction they trust most, it is blatant that a significantly higher percentage of Palestinians trusting Hamas (46%) than those trusting Fateh (18%) or even those not trusting any faction (27%) are of the belief that Hamas should uphold its position concerning the state of Israel.



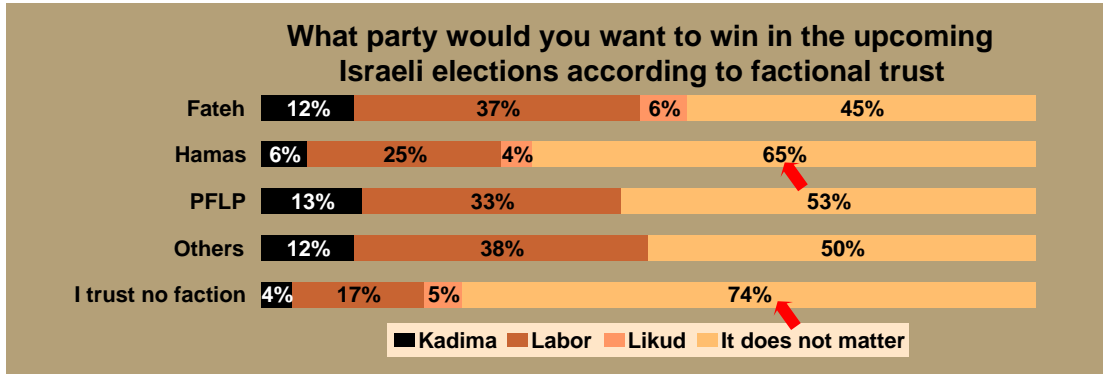
Upcoming Israeli Elections

Given the potential impact on future relations between Palestinians and Israelis, interviewees were queried about their opinions pertaining to the Israeli elections and the main parties that will partake in these elections.

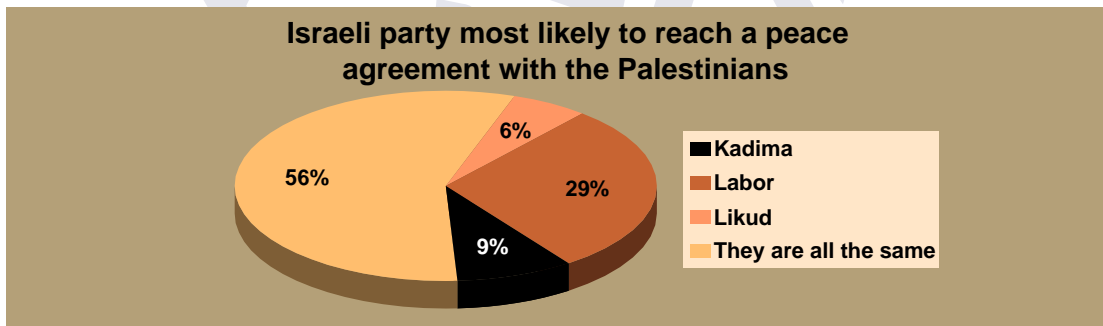
When asked which party they would want to win in the Israeli elections, the preference went to the Labor party with 26%, followed only in a far distance by Kadima (7%) and Likud (4%). Most strikingly, however, is that the majority of 63% of Palestinians are of the opinion that it does not matter who wins the Israeli elections on March 28, 2006.



The indifference of Palestinians towards the Israeli elections varies according to factional trust, whereby a higher percentage of Palestinians who do not trust any Palestinian faction (74%) and a higher percentage of Palestinians trusting Hamas (65%) than those trusting Fateh (45%) specified that it does not matter to them which Israeli party wins the Israeli elections.



With an eye on potential future developments with regard to a peace agreement after the Israeli elections, interviewees were asked which of the main Israeli political parties would be most likely to reach a peace agreement with the Palestinians. In general, 29% of the surveyed Palestinians believe that Labor is most likely to reach a peace agreement with the Palestinians, 9% responded that the newly formed Kadima party is most likely to reach a peace agreement with them, while 6% believe that Likud is the better party to reach a peace agreement with the Palestinians. Once again, however, a majority of 56% of the respondents are of the opinion that all Israeli parties are the same when it comes to the likelihood of reaching a peace agreement with the Palestinians.



According to factional trust, it is clear that the belief that all Israeli parties are the same when it comes to reaching a peace agreement with the Palestinians is more widespread among Palestinians not trusting any Palestinian faction (66%) and those trusting Hamas (59%) than among those trusting Fateh (38%). Furthermore, the opinion that Labor is the Israeli party that is most likely to reach a peace agreement with the Palestinians is most widespread among Fateh supporters (40%).

