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PRESS RELEASE

The Palestinian Political Pulse

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The Palestinian Political Pulse

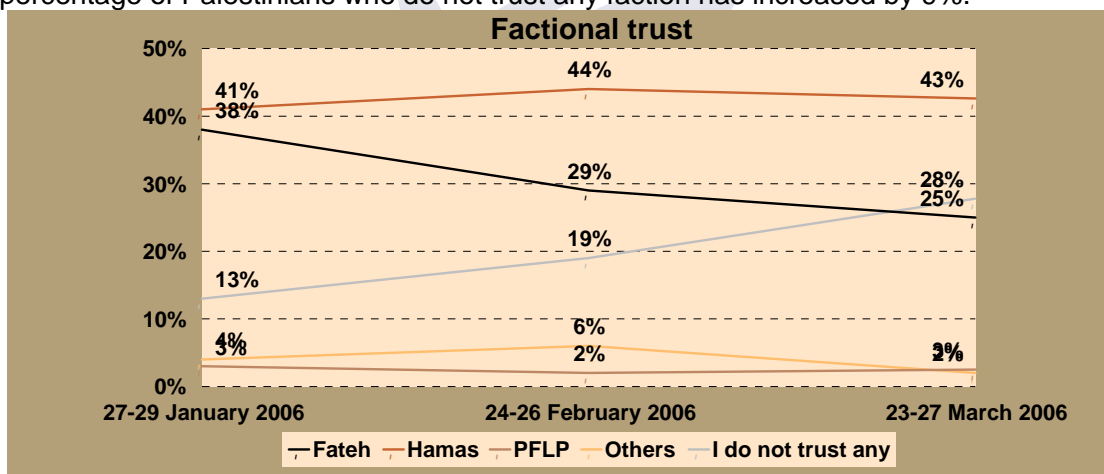
The two-month period since the January 2006 PLC elections has been marked by an increasingly clear divide in Palestinian society along factional lines. More particularly, now more than ever, opinions on a wide variety of issues vary depending on whether respondents trust Hamas, trust Fateh or do not 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 23-27 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 860 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, views on the proposed Hamas-led government, expectations about the performance of the new PLC, and various questions related to trust, tasks and representations of various institutions and political figures.

It is worth noting that the margin of error is +/- 3.3% with a 95% confidence level.

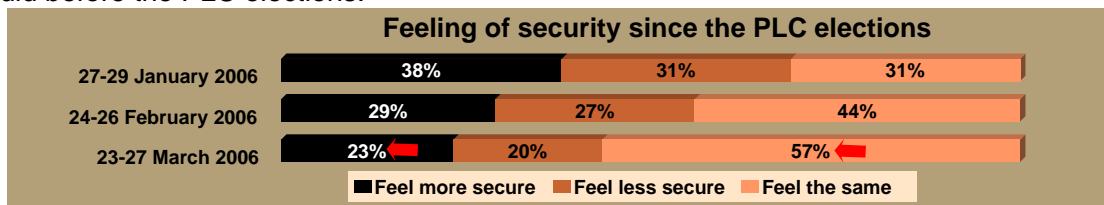
Factional trust

When asked which faction they trust most, 43% of those surveyed said Hamas, 25% said Fateh, while 28% do not trust any faction. As overviewed in the figure below, in the past month, trust in Hamas (-1%) and Fateh (-4%) have slightly decreased, while the percentage of Palestinians who do not trust any faction has increased by 9%.

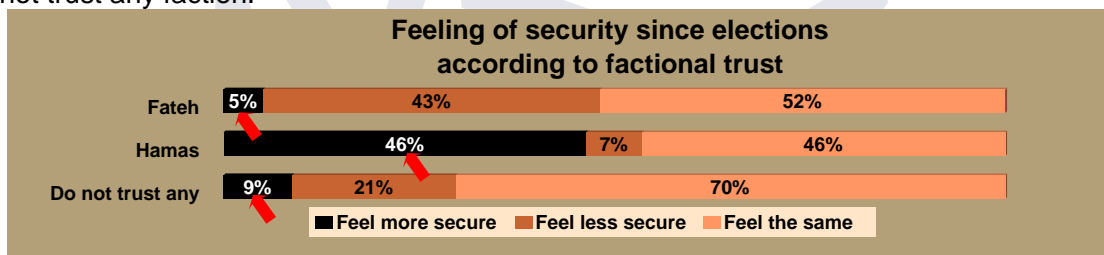




In general, 23% of the respondents feel more secure since the January PLC elections, 20% feel less secure, while the feeling of security for 57% of respondents remained the same since the elections. In comparison with the results to the same question asked immediately after the parliamentary elections in January 2006, the percentage of respondents stating that they feel more secure (-15%) has decreased more than the percentage of respondents who feel less secure (-11%) since the elections, while the percentage who do not feel any different since the elections in terms of security has increased by 13% in the past month. In short, the results overviewed in the figure, below, indicate that in the two months since the PLC elections the feeling of security among Palestinians has decreased, but seems to be stabilizing now as an increasing percentage of the population now say that they feel the same in terms of security as they did before the PLC elections.



Palestinians' feeling of security varies considerably depending on which faction they trust most. For example, whereas 46% of those who most trust Hamas feel more secure since the PLC elections, only 5% of the ones who most trust Fateh and 9% of those who do not trust any faction feel more secure since the elections. To the opposite, of the respondents most trusting Fateh 43% feel less secure since the elections, while this is the case for a mere 7% of those most trusting Hamas most and 21% of those who do not trust any faction.



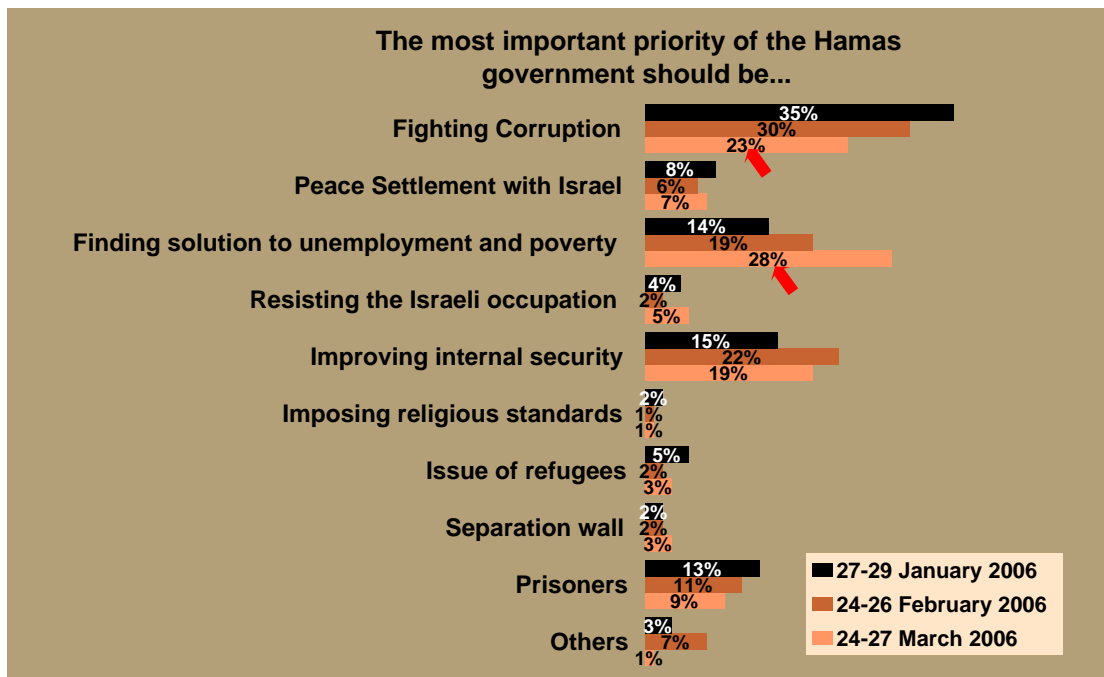
Hamas-led Government

In the past three 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 two main trends: (1) 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% now), (2) the percentage of Palestinians convinced that the new government's priority should be to "find a solution to unemployment and poverty" has doubled since January (from 14% in January to 19% in February to 28% now). Indeed,

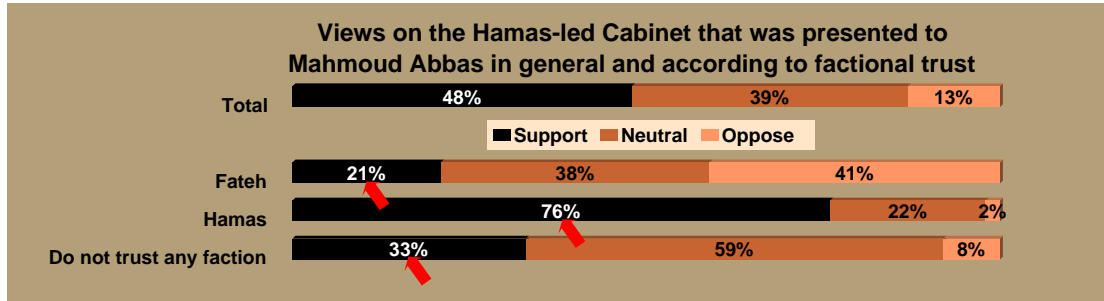


whereas in January the largest percentage of respondents still referred to "combating corruption" as the new government's main corruption, this priority has now been replaced with the need to "find a solution to unemployment and poverty".

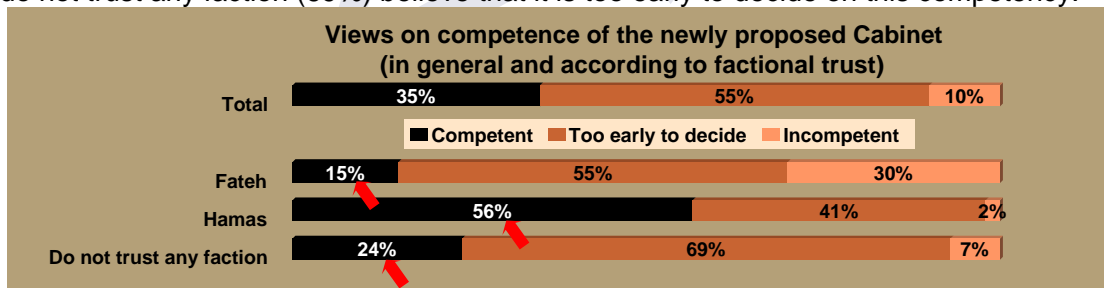
Further worth noting in the results is the decline in "improving internal security" as a perceived priority for the newly formed government, and the continuing low percentage (1%) of respondents who consider the "imposing of religious standards" or the Sharia's law as a priority of the new Hamas-led government.



Although the Hamas-led government was sworn in yesterday, at the time of the survey, Hamas had just presented its cabinet to Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas. When respondents were asked about their views on the proposed Hamas-led cabinet, 48% said that they supported this proposed cabinet, 13% opposed it, while 39% held a neutral position. These views are very diverse when looking at them according to the factional trust of the respondents. As overviewed in detail in the figure below, 41% of Fatah supporters were opposed to the proposed Hamas-led cabinet compared to only 2% of Hamas supporters. The majority of respondents who do not trust any faction (59%) kept a neutral stance on the Hamas-led cabinet for the time being.

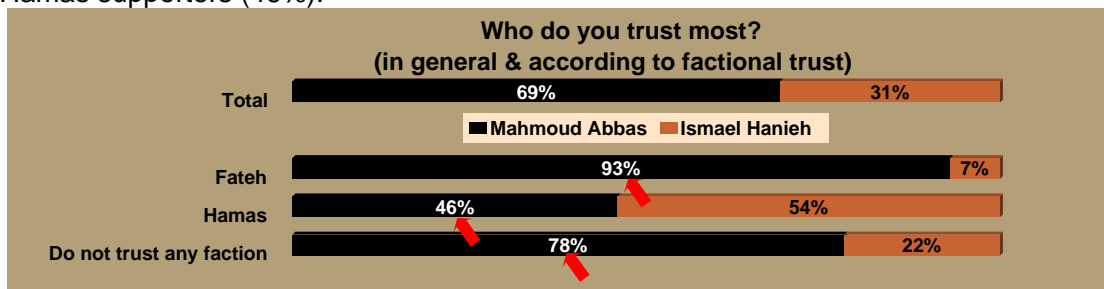


When further asked about the competence of the newly proposed cabinet by Hamas, 35% of respondents believe a Hamas-led cabinet is competent, 11% of Palestinians feel the proposed cabinet is incompetent, while a majority of 55% are of the opinion that it is too early to decide on the competence of the cabinet. According to factional trust, the majority of 56% of Hamas supporters are already convinced about the competence of the newly proposed cabinet, while the majority of Fateh supporters (55%) and those who do not trust any faction (69%) believe that it is too early to decide on this competency.



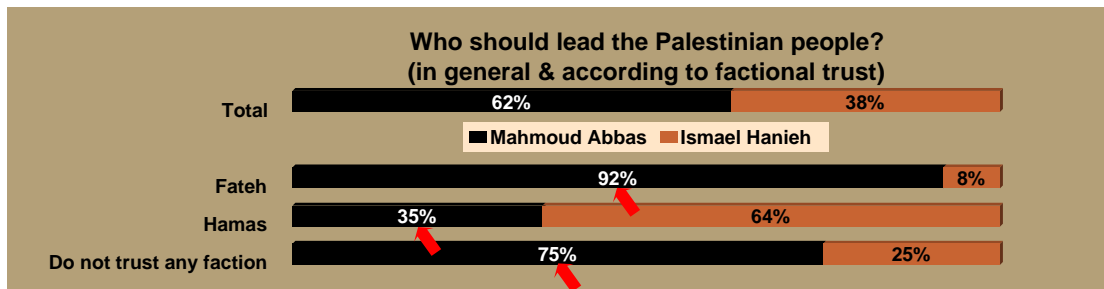
Palestinian leadership and institutions

In the survey, Palestinians were also asked a number of questions related to their opinions, support and trust in Palestinian institutions and leaders. More concretely, respondents were queried whether they trust President Mahmoud Abbas more or Prime Minister Ismael Hanieh more. In general, 69% trust Mahmoud Abbas more, while the remaining 31% trust Ismael Hanieh more. According to factional trust, a very considerable majority of 93% of Fateh supporters and 78% of those who do not trust any faction trust Mahmoud Abbas more, while this is also the case for a large minority of Hamas supporters (46%).

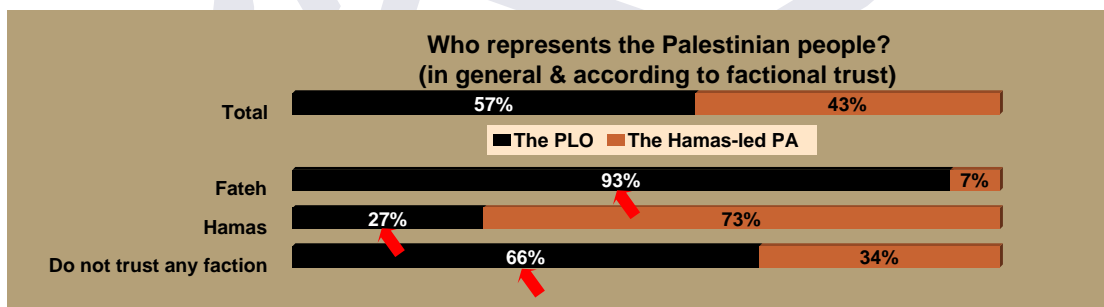




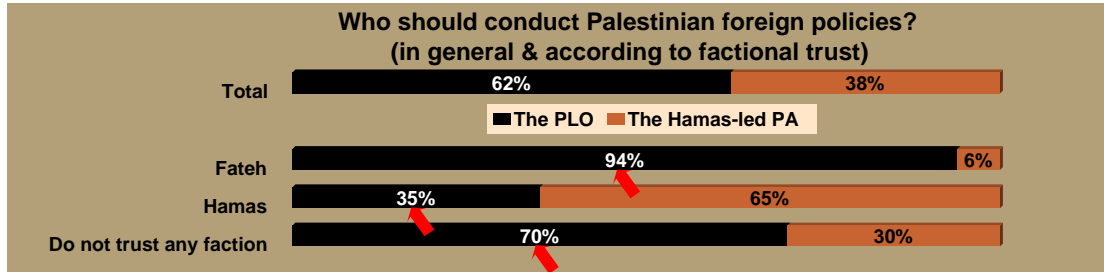
In an attempt to go slightly more specific, respondents were also asked whether they thought Mahmoud Abbas or Ismael Hanieh should lead the Palestinian people. Albeit to a slightly lesser extent than the trust in Mahmoud Abbas, still 62% of the respondents believe that Mahmoud Abbas should lead the Palestinian people. This belief that Mahmoud Abbas should lead the Palestinian people is far more pronounced among Fateh supporters (92%) and those who do not trust any faction (75%) than among Hamas supporters (35%).



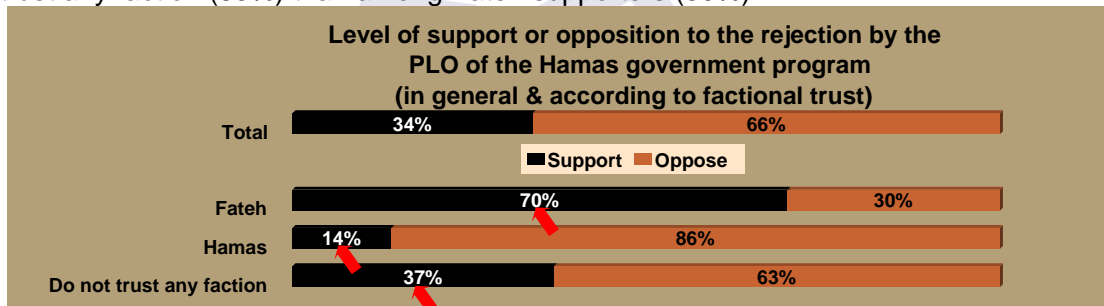
Moving away from the main two Palestinian political personalities towards institutions, respondents were asked who, in their opinion, represents the Palestinian people. In general, 57% of Palestinians believe that the PLO represents the Palestinian people, while the remaining 43% are of the opinion that the Hamas-led PA represents the Palestinian people. Again, according to factional trust and as illustrated in the figure below, it is clear that the conviction that the PLO is the representative of the Palestinian people is far stronger among Fateh supporters (93%) and the subgroup of Palestinian society who do not trust any faction (66%) than among Hamas supporters (27%).



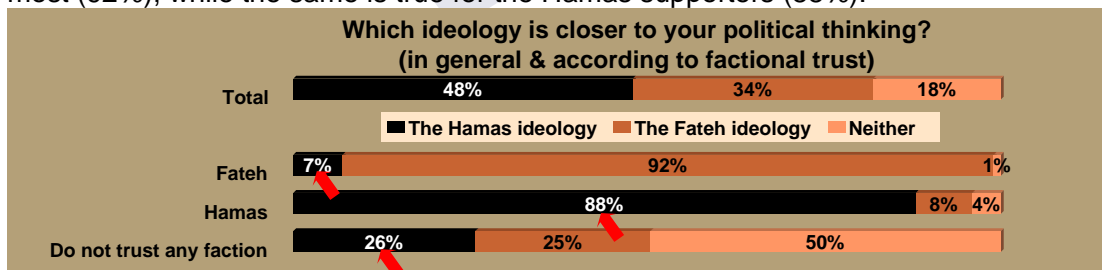
As for Palestinian foreign policies, 62% of Palestinians feel that they should be conducted by the PLO, while 38% believe that they should be conducted by the Hamas-led PA. The belief that a Hamas-led PA should conduct Palestinian foreign policies is shared by only 6% of Fateh supporters, by 30% of those who do not trust any faction, and by 65% of Hamas supporters.



Although the above analysis has shown that a majority of the Palestinian public is more inclined to support the PLO than the Hamas-led PA on several issues, only a minority of 35% supports the PLO rejection of the Hamas government program. According to factional trust, the opposition to the rejection by the PLO of the Hamas government program is more pronounced among Hamas supporters (86%) and those who do not trust any faction (63%) than among Fateh supporters (30%).



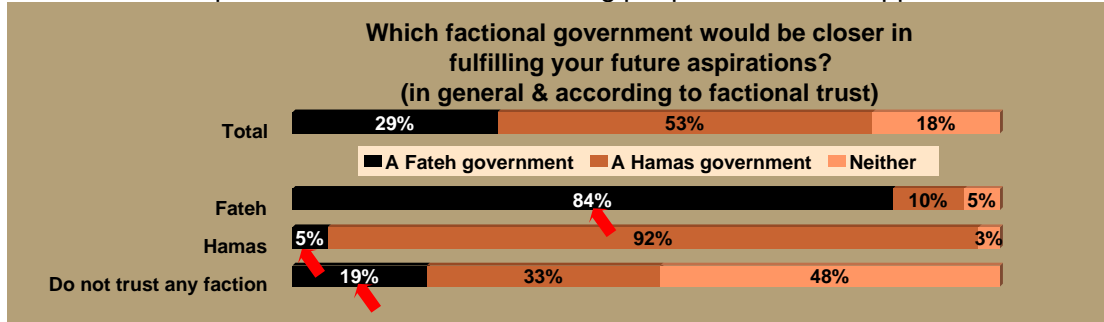
Palestinian interviewees were also questioned about the ideology of Hamas versus the ideology of Fateh. Of the general sample, 48% of the respondents stated that the Hamas ideology is closer to their political thinking, 34% said the Fateh ideology is closer to their political thinking, while 18% specified that neither the Hamas ideology nor the Fateh ideology are close to their political thinking. Not unexpectedly, the failure to identify with either the Hamas or the Fateh ideology is the highest among the subgroup of Palestinian society who do not trust any faction (50%). The results further clearly illustrate the large extent to which Fateh supporters identify with the ideology of the faction that they trust most (92%), while the same is true for the Hamas supporters (88%).



A slight majority of 53% of the respondents believe that a Hamas government is best suited to fulfill their future aspirations, 29% specify that a Fateh government is better placed to do so, while 18% say that neither of these two factional governments are



suitable to fulfill their future aspirations. As detailed in the figure below, once more answers on this question are much divided along people's factional support.



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, the timing is ideal to begin monitoring the performance of the PLC through the eyes of their constituents. In the survey conducted for this analysis, 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.

As overviewed in the figure below, overall, on the seven questions that respondents were asked to rate the PLC's future performance on, the expectations are more positive than negative. The most negative rate concerned the expectation that the PLC will make courageous decisions vis-à-vis the Palestinian-Israeli conflict as slightly less than half of the sample (49%) expects the newly elected PLC to do so. For the remainder, 59% believes that the PLC's general performance will be positive, 63% are of the opinion that the PLC will address the concerns of the people adequately, while respectively 60% feel that the PLC will mirror the views of the people and that it will be effective. Lastly, 54% believe that the PLC will represent them well as a person, and 51% are sure that the PLC members will make good on their campaign promises.

