



Near East Consulting

POB 4, Ramallah, Palestine
T. +970-2-296-1436
info@neareastconsulting.com
<http://www.neareastconsulting.com/>

PRESS RELEASE

**The Palestinian Political Pulse
June 2006, #6**



**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:
NEC
HSBC Building, 3rd floor
RAMALLAH
Tel: 02-2961436
Fax: 02-2963114
info@neareastconsulting.com
<http://www.neareastconsulting.com>**



The Palestinian Political Pulse

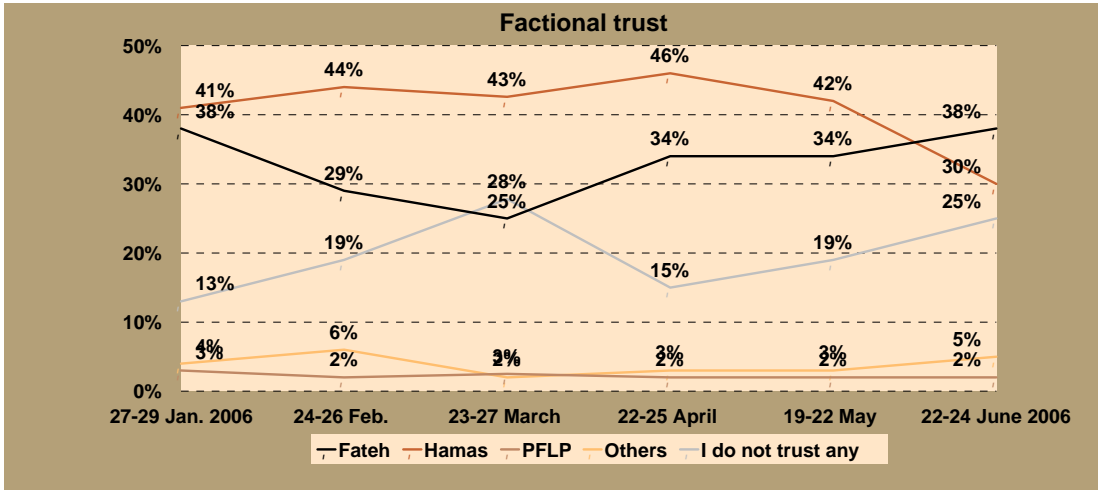
During the period 22-24 June, 2006, Near East Consulting (NEC) conducted a phone survey of over 1,200 randomly selected Palestinians in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and Jerusalem of which 840 were successfully completed. The survey covered a number of issues that fit into NEC's monthly "Palestinian Political Pulse" with the aim of monitoring Palestinian political perceptions over time. These include: factional trust and trust in political figures, perceived priorities of the Hamas-led government, and an evaluation of the performance of the PLC. The survey also included questions that in the future will be placed in the new "Palestinian Security Pulse". These include: Palestinians' feeling of security since the PLC elections, perceived blame for the current security crisis, the likelihood of a civil war, and whether it is more important to keep weapons to resist Israel or to seize weapons to improve internal security.

It is worth noting that the margin of error is +/- 3.38% with a 95% confidence level.

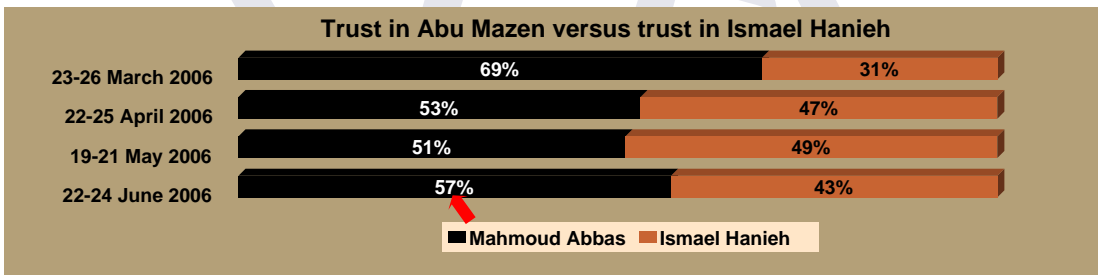
Factional trust and trust in personalities

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 April survey, 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 seemed 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 between March and April (from 28% to 15%). Since April, however, amidst further factional tension, the inability of the Hamas-led government to pay the salaries of the government employees, efforts to reach a common platform through a national dialogue and Abu Mazen's call for a potential referendum on the Prisoners' Agreement by the end of July, the percentage of people not trusting any of the Palestinian faction once again sharply increased. Meanwhile, trust in Hamas has decreased dramatically, while support for Fateh has increased.

In the June survey, trust in Fateh increased from 34% in May to 38%, trust in Hamas decreased from 42% in May to 30%, while the percentage of those not trusting any faction has increased from 19% in May to 25% now.

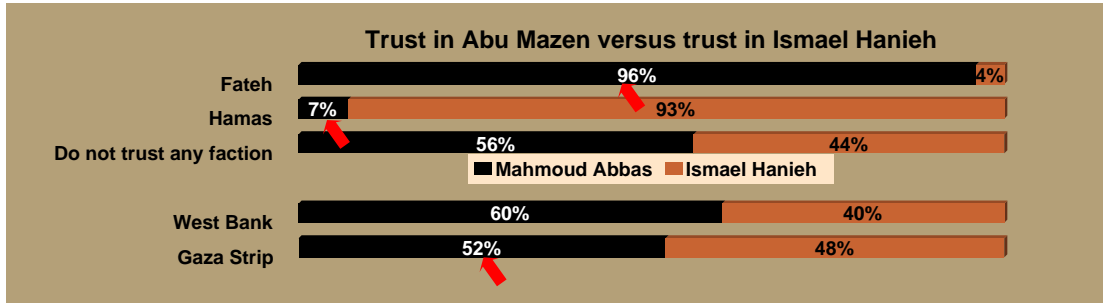


For the fourth month in a row, Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip were asked whether they most trust President Mahmoud Abbas or Prime Minister Ismael Hanieh. As overviewed in the figure below, over time and until May 2006, trust in Mahmoud Abbas declined to the benefit of Ismael Hanieh. However, in the June NEC survey, Mahmoud Abbas seems to have regained some popular trust as in the past month the percentage of respondents specifying that they most trust Abu Mazen has increased from 51% to 57% (+6%). Trust in Ismael Hanieh currently reaches 43%.



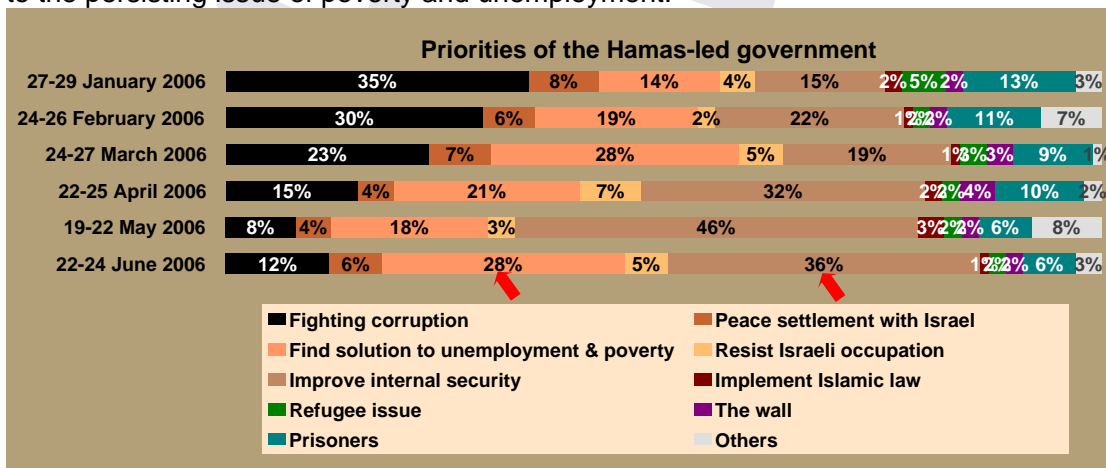
According to factional trust, a very large majority of Fateh supporters and 56% of those who do not trust any faction most trust Mahmoud Abbas, while this is the case for only 7% of the Hamas supporters. It is worth pointing out that trust in Abu Mazen among Hamas supporters has steadily declined in the past four months. Whereas in NEC's March survey still 46% of Hamas supporters said that they most trusted Mahmoud Abbas, this percentage dropped to 20% in April, to 11% in May, while it now merely reaches 7%.

Lastly, the level of trust in Mahmoud Abbas and Ismael Hanieh differs significantly between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Whereas 60% of Westbankers most trust Abu Mazen and 40% most trust Ismael Hanieh, only 52% of Gazans most trust Abu Mazen, while 48% most trust Ismael Hanieh.



Hamas-led Government

In the past six surveys conducted for the Palestinian Political Pulse, respondents were asked about what should be the main priorities of Hamas-led government. The results in the figure below clearly show that since January the importance of "fighting corruption" had to make way for mainly two priorities as perceived by the public: (1) improving internal security, and (2) finding a solution to poverty and unemployment. Still, between NEC's May and June survey results, one can notice that the perceived priority for the Hamas-led PA government to "find a solution to poverty and unemployment" has gained importance (+10%), while the perceived priority of the Hamas-led government to "improve internal security" has lost importance (-10%). These results could be explained in light of the on-going national dialogue in an attempt to find a common platform. NEC's regular monitoring surveys of the national dialogue and the referendum have shown that the expectations that the national dialogue might succeed have increased substantially in the past two weeks from 51% in NEC's 11 June survey to 68% in NEC's 24 June survey. As hopes for a solution to the factional tensions seem to be rising, the public – logically – becomes less concerned about internal security issues, and turns its attention to the persisting issue of poverty and unemployment.¹



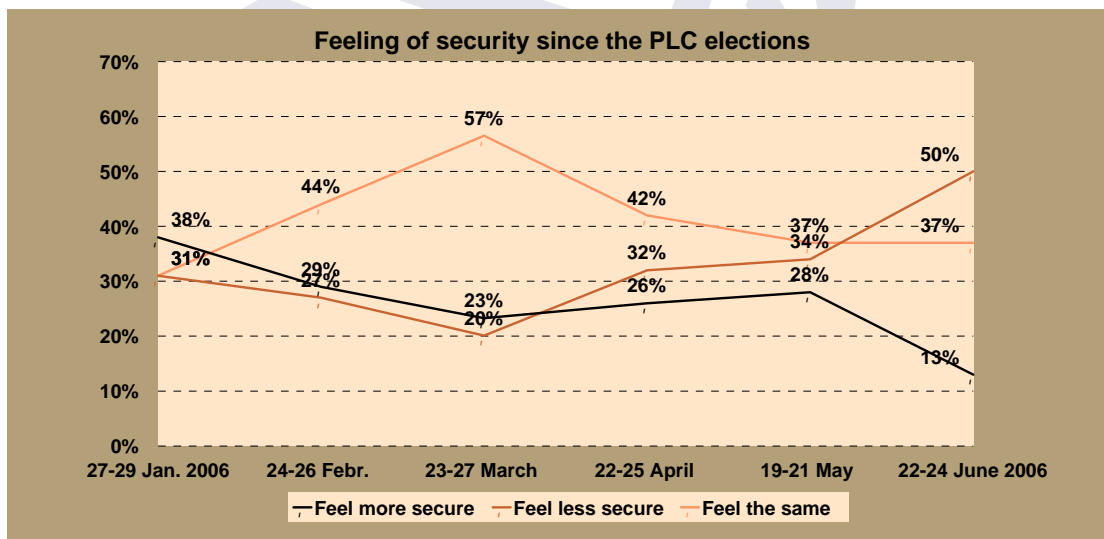
¹ NEC is currently constructing a poverty profile of the Palestinian people. The latest NEC results show that the percentage of Palestinians below the poverty line has increased from 52% in March 2006 to 63% in NEC's June survey.



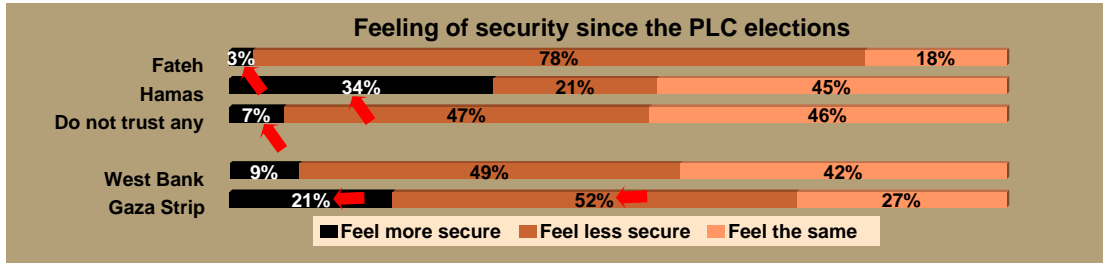
Security issues

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

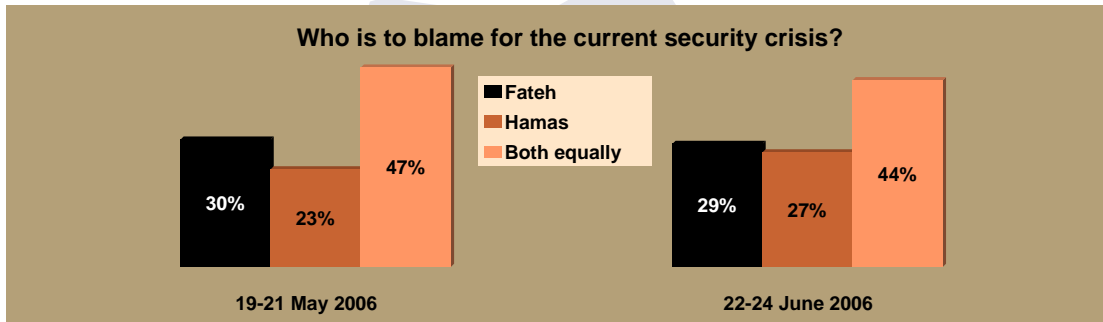
As illustrated in the figure below, the percentage of Palestinians who stated that since the PLC elections they feel the same in terms of security had been steadily increasing in the first two months after the elections. However, since NEC's March survey the percentages of people feeling the same since the PLC elections in terms of security drastically plunged from 57% in March to 42% in April to 37% in May and June. At the same time, the percentage of Palestinians feeling less secure since the PLC elections in NEC's March survey reached 20%, and since then has steadily increased to reach a six-month high of 50% in NEC's June survey. In addition, the results reveal that while in May still 28% of the respondents specified that they feel more secure since the PLC elections, this percentage has more than halved in a one-month period and now stands at 13%.



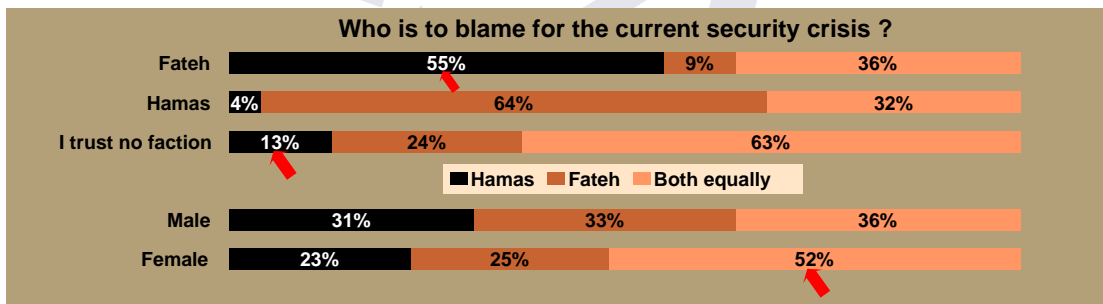
Palestinians' feeling of security varies considerably depending on which faction they trust most and the region they reside in. For example, whereas 78% of Fateh supporters and 47% of those who do not trust any political faction feel less secure since the PLC elections, this is the case for 21% of Hamas supporters. Also, although a considerably higher percentage of Gazans (21%) than Westbankers (9%) feel more secure since the January PLC elections, a higher percentage of Gazans (52%) than Westbankers (49%) also state that they feel less secure since the PLC elections.



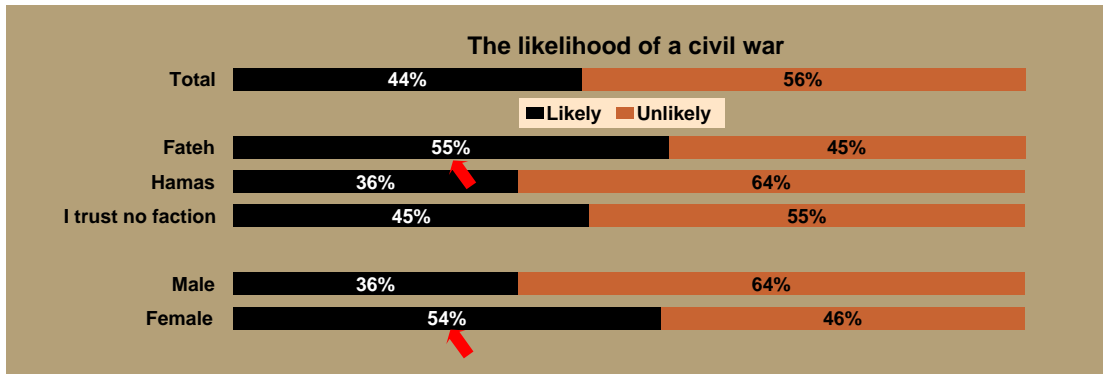
For the second month in a row, interviewees were asked who is to blame for the current security crisis. Since NEC's May survey, Palestinians' opinions about who is to blame for the security crisis have not changed dramatically. As overviewed in the figure below, currently 29% blame Fateh for the security crisis, while 27% blame Hamas, and 44% blame both factions equally.



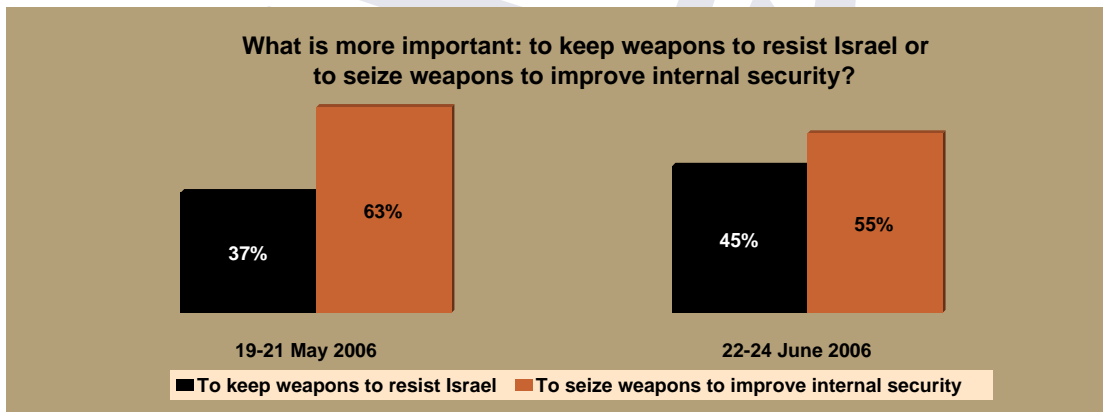
According to factional trust, 55% of Fateh supporters blame Hamas for the security crisis in the Gaza Strip, while 64% of Hamas supporters blame Fateh for this crisis. Opinions on this issue do not vary significantly depending on whether respondents live in the West Bank or the Gaza Strip. However, females (52%) much more than males (36%) seem to blame both Fateh and Hamas equally for the security crisis.



The view that a civil war is likely to break out is held by 44% of the Palestinian public. In NEC's May survey, 45% of the respondents believed that a civil war was likely. Fateh supporters (55%) more than Hamas supporters (36%) and those who do not trust any faction (45%) believe in the likelihood of a civil war. Also, a higher percentage of women (54%) than men (36%) believe that a civil war is likely.



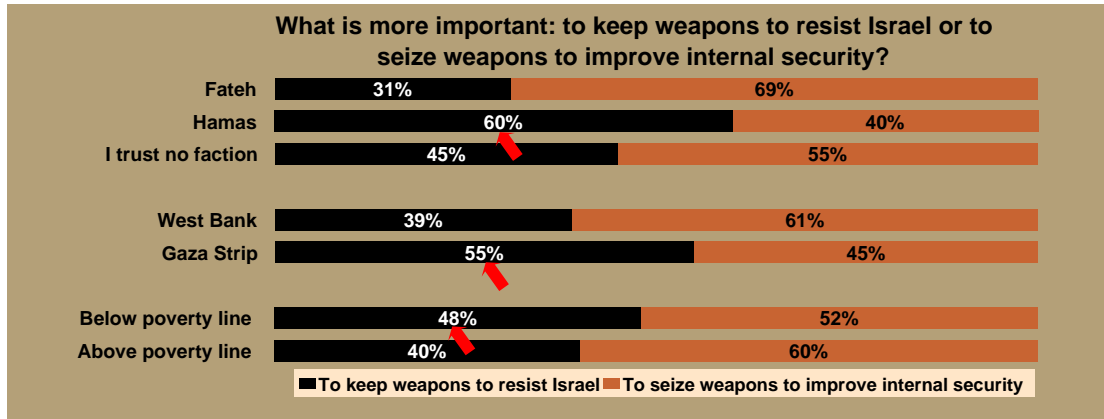
For a second month in a row, interviewees were asked whether it is more important to keep weapons to resist Israel or to seize weapons to improve internal security. As overviewed in the figure below, while a majority of respondents continue to believe that it is more important to seize weapons to improve internal security than to keep them to resist Israel, this majority has shrunk over the past month (55% compared to 63% last month).



Support for the view to seize weapons to improve internal security rather than to keep them to resist Israel varies significantly according to the factional trust, region of residence, and the poverty level of the respondents. More specifically, the view that it is more important to seize weapons to improve internal security is more widely held among Fateh supporters (69%) and those who do not trust any faction (55%) than among Hamas supporters (40%). In addition, a higher percentage of Palestinians in the West Bank (61%) than in the Gaza Strip (45%) find it more important to seize weapons to improve internal security than to keep them to resist Israel. This is the reverse picture of last month as at that time a higher percentage of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip (70%) than in the West Bank (59%) believed it to be more important to seize weapons to improve internal security than to keep them to resist Israel. Lastly, a higher percentage of Palestinians who are financially relatively better-off (60%) than those with a monthly



household income below the poverty line (52%) find it more important to seize weapons to improve internal security rather than to keep them to resist Israel.



Evaluation of 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 March took the initiative to begin monitoring the performance of the PLC through the eyes of their constituents.

In general and in comparison to the results to the same questions in NEC's previous surveys, people's evaluation of the performance of the PLC has become considerably less positive. Indeed, whereas in March results on six of the seven questions pertaining to the performance of the PLC were mildly positive, by April, none of the results on the performance of the PLC exceeded the 50% mark. The results on the performance of the PLC in the June survey show a further deepening of the negative public perceptions about the PLC.

As overviewed in the figure below, the most negative rate concerned the evaluation of the PLC members making good on their campaign promises as only 32% of the sample believes that the PLC members do so. For the remainder, 42% believe that the PLC's general performance is positive, 41% are of the opinion that the PLC addresses the concerns of the people adequately, while 43% feel that the PLC mirrors the views of the people. Furthermore, respectively 40% believe the PLC to be effective and feel that the PLC represents them well as a person. Lastly, 36% are of the opinion that the PLC makes courageous decisions regarding Israel.

