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**NEC RELEASE**

**Palestinian perceptions towards politics, peace, poverty  
conditions and the internal crisis**

**Monthly Monitor #8**



**Near East Consulting**

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*Turning data to information, and knowledge into practice.*



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## **Palestinian Perceptions towards Politics, Peace, Poverty conditions and the internal crisis**

*During the period 7-8 September, 2006, Near East Consulting (NEC) conducted a phone survey of over 1150 randomly selected Palestinians in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and Jerusalem of which 802 were successfully completed. The survey covered a number of issues that fit into NEC's monthly "Palestinian Political Pulse" and "Palestinian Peace Pulse" with the aim of monitoring Palestinian political perceptions over time. These include: factional trust and trust in political figures, Palestinians' feeling of security since the PLC elections, support for a peace agreement with Israel, support for a ceasefire, perceptions on whether or not there is a peace partner in Israel, perceptions on whether or not there is a Palestinian peace partner and opinions on whether or not Hamas should maintain its position on the elimination of Israel.*

*It is worth noting that the margin of error is +/- 3.5% with a 95% confidence level.*

*Also given the recent special circumstances in the oPt and the ongoing crisis stemming from the inability of the Hamas government to pay the salaries of the public employees and the calls for a national unity government, the NEC team added a number of questions about the internal Palestinian political crisis to gauge Palestinian perceptions towards the current situation and who is to be blamed for the current state of affairs.*

### **I. Main findings**

**INCREASE IN POVERTY IN THE WEST BANK AND THE GAZA STRIP:** 65% of the Palestinians are below the poverty line compared to 60% in August. This is a 15% increase in poverty since March 2006. Of those below the poverty line, 38% are living in extreme poverty. Poverty is higher in the Gaza Strip where 73% live under the poverty level, compared to 60% in the West Bank. The percentage of households living in extreme poverty in the Gaza Strip is 50% of the population.

**TRUST IN FACTIONS: FATEH UP, HAMAS STABLE:** Fateh is now the most trusted Palestinian faction as trust in Fateh has increased by 7% in the month of August while trust in Hamas has remained stable. According to those surveyed, 36% said that they trust Fateh, whereas only 32% trust Hamas. The percentage of respondents trusting no



faction has declined from 36% in August to 25% in September. Fateh is slightly stronger in the Gaza Strip than it is in the West Bank.

**TRUST IN ABBAS IS EQUAL TO TRUST IN HANIEH:** Although trust in Prime Minister, Ismaiel Hanieh, is now slightly higher (51%) than trust in Abu Mazen (49%), the level of trust in Hanieh has dropped from 55% in August to 51% in September. However, Mahmoud Abbas is trusted as much as Ismael Hanieh in the Gaza Strip, while the latter is more trusted than Abbas in the West Bank.

**PALESTINIANS BLAME HAMAS MORE THAN THEY BLAME FATEH FOR THE CURRENT CRISIS:** Although 55% of the respondents said that they blame Hamas for the current crisis compared to 45% who said Fateh, the majority of Palestinians still blame both Fateh and Hamas for the current crisis. The percentage is equally distributed between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

**THE MAJORITY OF THE PALESTINIANS SUPPORT THE STRIKE OF GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES:** 76% of the respondents believe that government employees have the right to go on strike for not receiving their salaries. This percentage is higher among those trusting Fateh (93%) than among those trusting Hamas (56%). When it comes to support of the actual strike, 62% declared their support for the current strike compared to 38% who opposed it.

**THE MAJORITY WANT A NATIONAL UNITY GOVERNMENT:** The majority of the Palestinians (68%) believe that a national unity government is the best way to solve the current crisis (76% among Hamas supporters and 56% among Fateh supporters). Only 28% of Fateh supporters believe that calling for new elections is the best way out of the current political crisis.

**PALESTINIANS FEEL LESS SECURE:** There is a decline in the feeling of security among the Palestinians in comparison to last month where Palestinians seemed to be more defiant as a result of the perception of the ability of Hezbollah to stand against Israel. Whereas 26% of the respondents said that they feel more secure since Hamas came to power, the percentage dropped to 16% in September. The feeling of security is stronger among Hamas supporters and among Gaza Strip residents than among Fateh supporters and West Bank residents. Lack of trust is very evident in the West Bank where it dropped from 27% in August to 13% in September.

**INCREASE IN SUPPORT FOR A PEACE SETTLEMENT:** In August, and as a result of the war in Lebanon and the intensification of Israeli attacks in the Gaza Strip, the level of support for a peace settlement was rather low. However, the level of support for a peace settlement has increased or, more properly, returned to its previous levels. The high level of frustration among the Palestinians in August was the reason why only 51% of the Palestinians said that they support a peace agreement with Israel, the percentage is now 64%. Support for peace is stronger among Fateh supporters (77%) than among Hamas supporters (48%).

**INCREASE IN SUPPORT FOR A CEASEFIRE:** More Palestinians today (84%) support a ceasefire between the Palestinians and Israel than in the last month (78%).



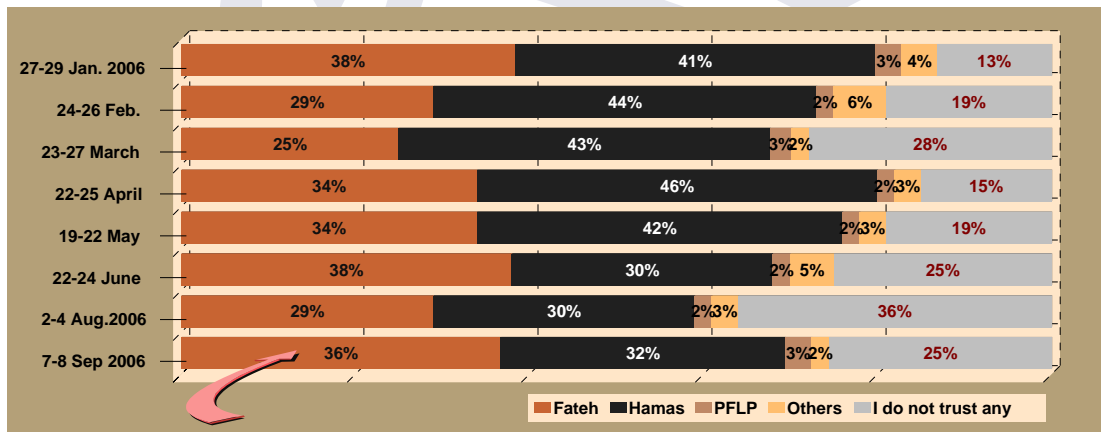
**DECLINE IN SUPPORT FOR HAMAS POSITION VIS-À-VIS THE ELIMINATION OF THE STATE OF ISRAEL:** Although in August a majority of Palestinians (54%) agreed that Hamas should not change its position regarding the elimination of the state of Israel, the percentage now stands at 40%. This position is also more pronounced in the Gaza Strip than it is in the West Bank. Opposition to the Hamas position is also significant among Hamas supporters of which 38% of them believe that Hamas should change its policies vis-à-vis the elimination of the state of Israel.

**NO PEACE PARTNER IN ISRAEL, BUT PEACE PARTNER IN PALESTINE:** Only 22% of the Palestinians believe that there is a peace partner for the Palestinians in Israel, while 81% of the respondents believe that there is a peace partner for Israel in Palestine. In fact, 74% of the respondents who declared their trust in Hamas believe that there is a peace partner for Israel among the Palestinians.

## II. Factional trust and trust in personalities

Since NEC systematically began to publish its survey results on factional trust after the January 2006 PLC elections, trust in the two main political factions: Hamas and Fateh has fluctuated on a nearly monthly basis, although both factions do have their core group of strong supporters. However, a proportion of supporters of these two factions float between these two main rival factions or are sufficiently disillusioned with those factions to increasingly affirm that they do not trust any of the existing Palestinian factions. As illustrated in the figure below, since the August NEC survey, trust in Hamas has remained stable at 32%, (+2%) while trust in Fateh has increased by 7% (36%), and the percentage of Palestinians not trusting any faction has decreased by 11% (25%).

Figure 1: Factional trust: January, 2006 till September, 2006

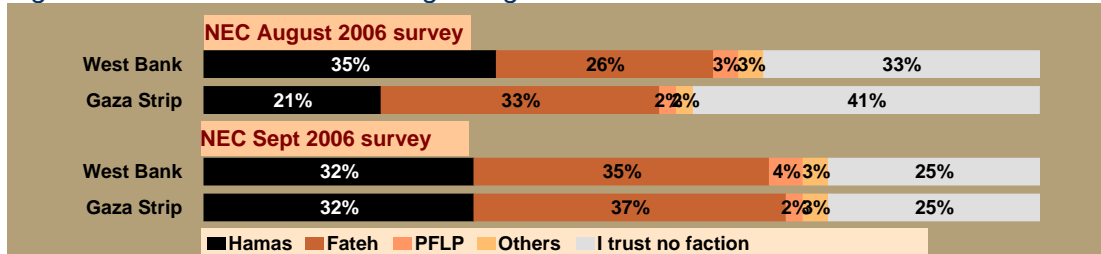


Factional trust also fluctuates considerably over time between the two different regions of the occupied Palestinian territories (oPt). Overall, however, since the NEC August survey trust in Hamas has been stronger in the West Bank than in the Gaza Strip. The September survey clearly shows that trust in Fateh has regained ground in the West Bank where 35% of the respondents declared their support to Fateh compared to 26% in



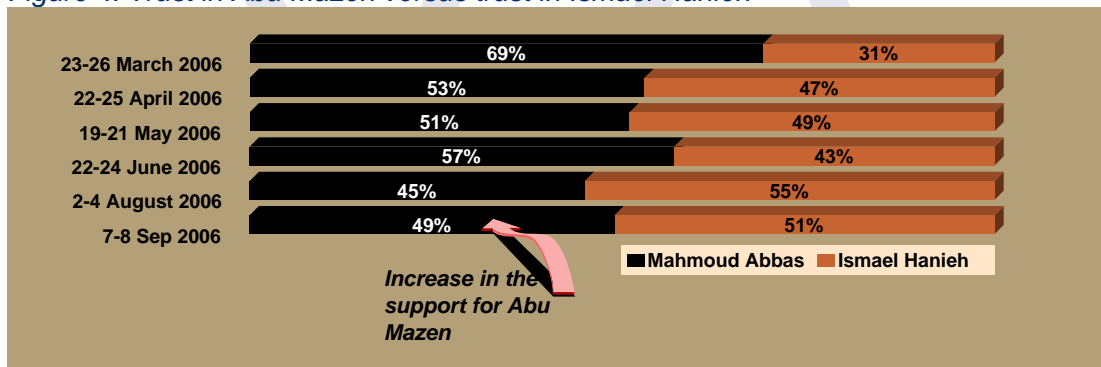
August. Hamas also gained some ground in the Gaza Strip where trust there has increased from 33% in August to 37% in September.

Figure 3: Factional trust according to region



For the sixth 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 June 2006, trust in Mahmoud Abbas declined to the benefit of Ismael Hanieh. However, since the Israeli soldier was kidnapped in the Gaza Strip, which led to an intensification of Israel's military actions in the Gaza Strip and as a result of the failure of the national dialogue the popularity of Abu Mazen has tumbled down in comparison to Ismael Hanieh. However, during last month, Abu Mazen's popularity has regained some strength and it has become almost on the same level as the popularity of Prime Minister Hanieh who is trusted by 51% of the Palestinians.

Figure 4: Trust in Abu Mazen versus trust in Ismael Hanieh

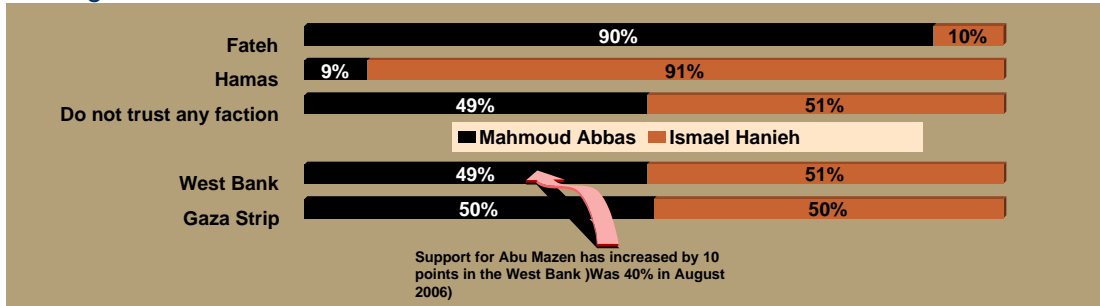


According to factional trust, a large majority (90%) of Fateh supporters continue to trust Mahmoud Abbas most, while only 9% of those trusting Hamas favored Abu Mazen. Support for Abu Mazen (49%) among those trusting no faction is slightly lower than that of Hanieh (51%).

The slight increase in the level of trust in Mahmoud Abbas is due to the fact that while only 40% of Westbankers declared their confidence in Abu Mazen in August, the percentage increased to 49% in September. Trust in Ismael Hanieh differs significantly between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.



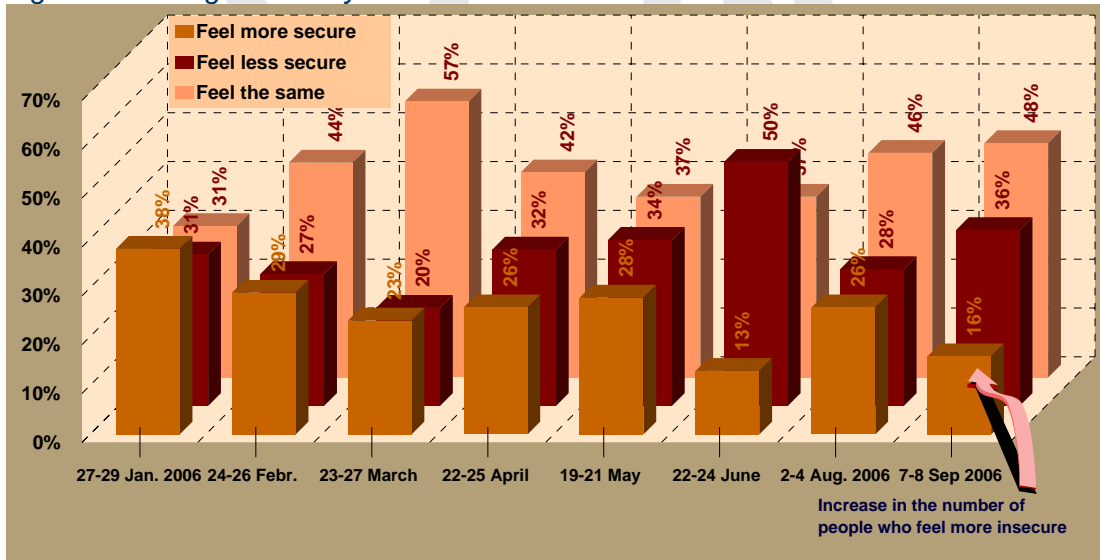
Figure 5: Trust in Abu Mazen versus trust in Ismael Hanieh according to factional trust and region of residence



### III. Feeling of Security

In comparison to the results of last month, this month's results reveal a decline in the feeling of security among the Palestinians. Indeed, whereas NEC's August survey showed a rise in the feeling of security among Palestinians. As overviewed below, the percentage of respondents who specified that they feel more secure has decreased from 26% in August to 16% in September. This decline could be attributed to the increase in the tension between Fateh and Hamas as a result of the strike of government employees combined with the financial crisis of the Hamas-led PA government.

Figure 6: Feeling of security since the PLC elections



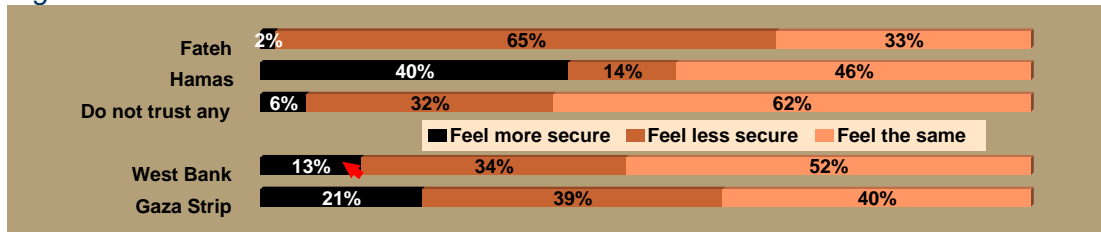
Palestinians' feeling of security varies considerably depending on which faction they trust most and the region they reside in. For example, whereas 65% of Fateh supporters and 32% of those who do not trust any political faction feel less secure since the PLC elections, this is the case for 14% of Hamas supporters. According to region, a higher percentage of Gazans (39%) than Westbankers (34%) feel less secure since the PLC

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elections, while a considerably lower percentage of Gazans (40%) than Westbankers (52%) feel the same since those elections.

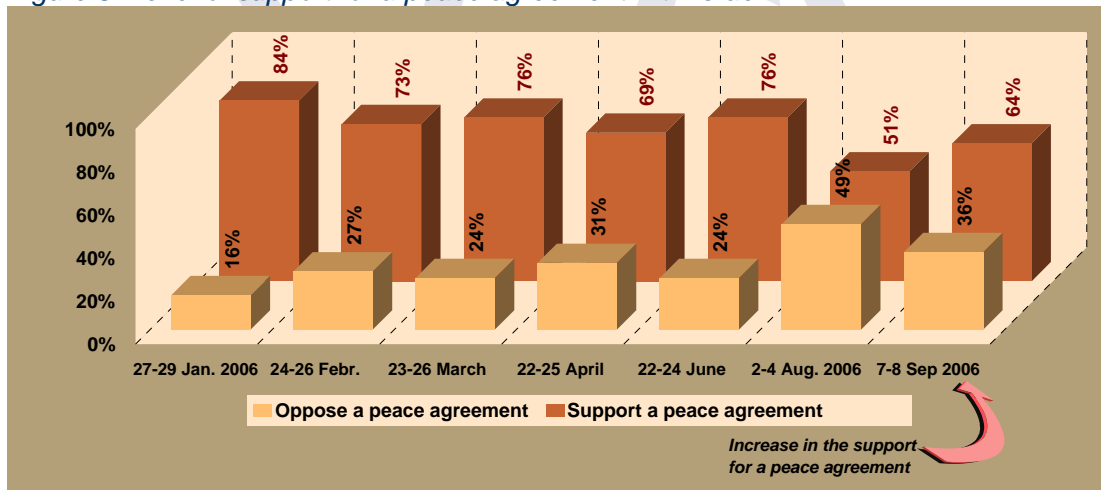
Figure 7: Feeling of security since the PLC elections according to factional trust and region of residence



#### IV. Perceptions about peace with Israel

During the months of July and August, the Israeli military operations in the Gaza Strip combined with the Israeli attacks in Lebanon between Israel and Hezbollah have had a dramatic impact on Palestinians' support for a peace settlement with Israel. Whereas in NEC's June survey 76% of respondents continued to support a peace settlement with Israel, this percentage has decreased by 25% from 51% in August. However, over the course of the past four weeks, Palestinian support for a peace agreement with Israel has gained mote grounds and has increased to 67%, as elaborated in the figure below.

Figure 8: Level of support for a peace agreement with Israel

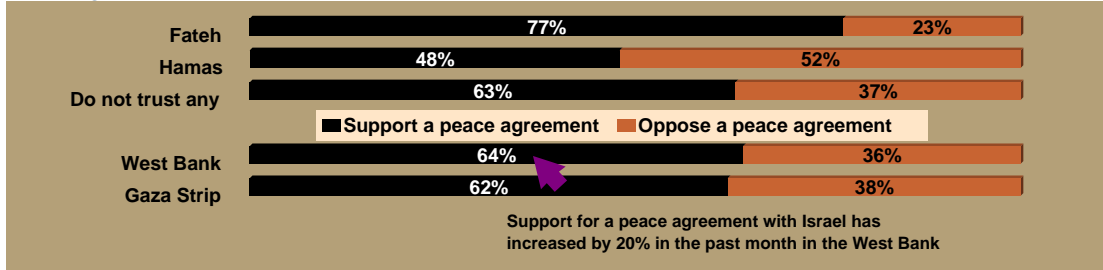


The support for a peace agreement with Israel remains significantly higher among those most trusting Fateh (77%) and those not trusting any faction (63%) than among those most trusting Hamas (48%). It is worth noting here that the highest increase in support for a peace agreement with Israel was in the West Bank where it increased from 44% in August to 64% in September 2006.



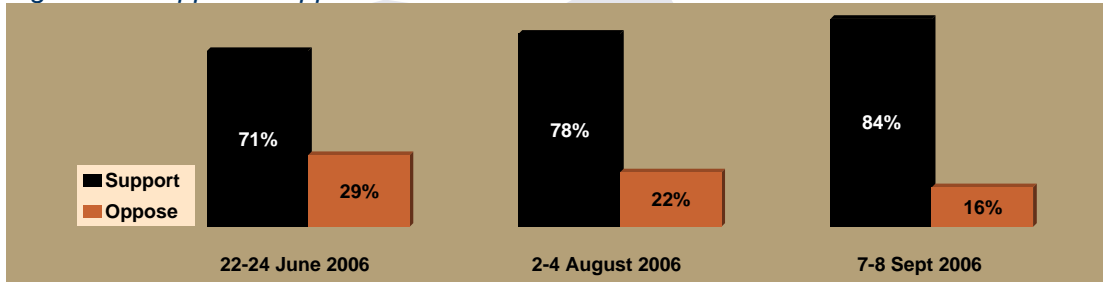


Figure 9: Level of support for a peace agreement with Israel according to factional trust and region (Sep 2006)



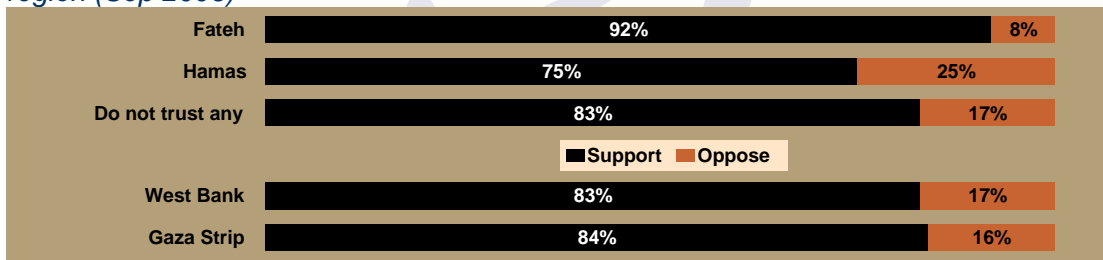
As for the support for a ceasefire with Israel, the results of September show a slight increase in support for a cease fire with Israel from 78% in August to 84% in September, as indicated in figure 10, below.

Figure 10: Support or opposition to a ceasefire between the Palestinians and Israel



Support for ceasefire is higher among Fateh supporters than among Hamas supporters. Whereas 92% of the former want a cease fire with Israel, 75% want that from among the later. The level of support for a cease fire is the same in the West Bank and in the Gaza Strip.

Figure 11: Support or opposition to a ceasefire with Israel according to factional trust and region (Sep 2006)

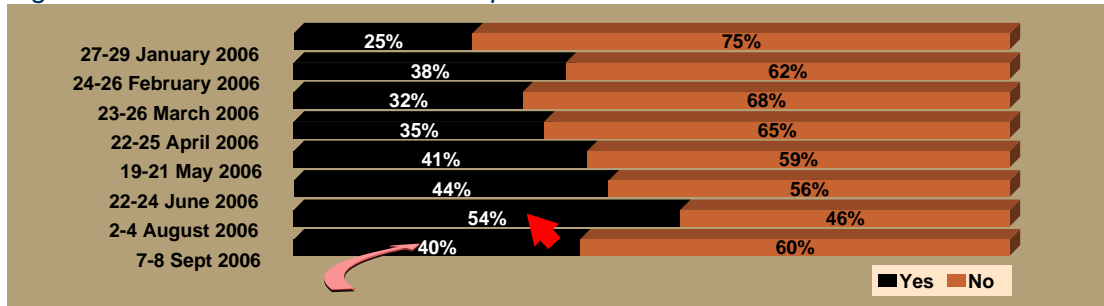


The increase in support for a peace agreement with Israel was also reflected on the extent to which Palestinians feel about the issue of the Hamas position on the 'elimination' of the state of Israel. When there was a dramatic decline in support for a peace settlement with Israel among Palestinians in August 2006, for the first time since January 2006, there was a majority of Palestinians (55%) who believed that Hamas



should maintain its position on the elimination of Israel. However, after the end of the war in Lebanon and the relative decline in the Israeli attacks in the oPt, the percentage of Palestinians wanting Hamas to maintain its position of the elimination of the state of Israel has dropped to 40%.

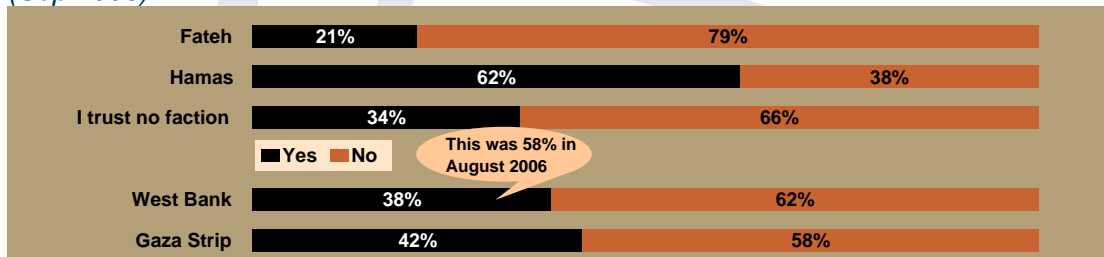
Figure 12: Should Hamas maintain its position on the elimination of the state of Israel?



When examining Palestinians' opinions with regard to the Hamas position on the elimination of Israel according to the faction they trust most, it is evident that a significantly higher percentage of Palestinians trusting Hamas (62%) than those trusting Fateh (21%) or even those not trusting any faction (34%) are of the belief that Hamas should uphold its position concerning the state of Israel.

The belief that Hamas should maintain its position on the elimination of the state of Israel also varies according to the region of residence of the respondents. As detailed in figure 13, below, the belief that Hamas should maintain its position towards Israel is 4% lower in the West Bank (38%) than in the Gaza Strip (42%).

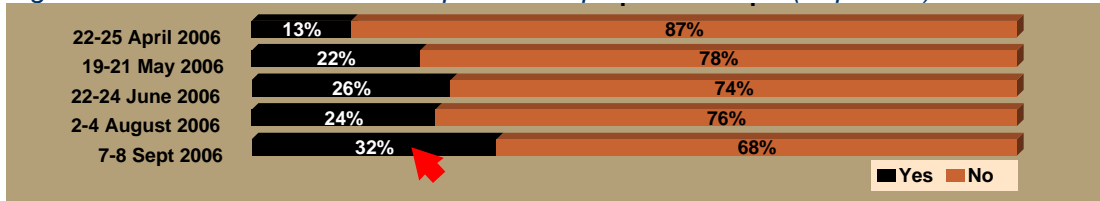
Figure 13: Should Hamas maintain its position on the elimination of the state of Israel? (Sep 2006)



For the fifth month in a row, Palestinians were asked if they believe that Palestinians have a partner for peace in Israel. While 76% of the respondents said that there is no partner for peace in Israel, this percentage has declined to 68% in September.

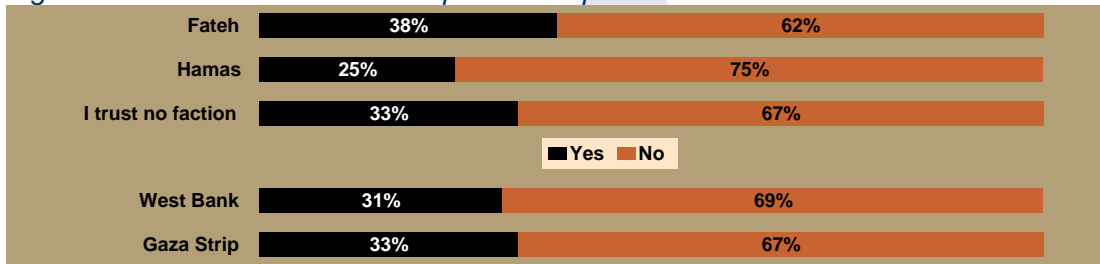


Figure 14: Do Palestinians have a partner for peace in Israel? (Sep 2006)



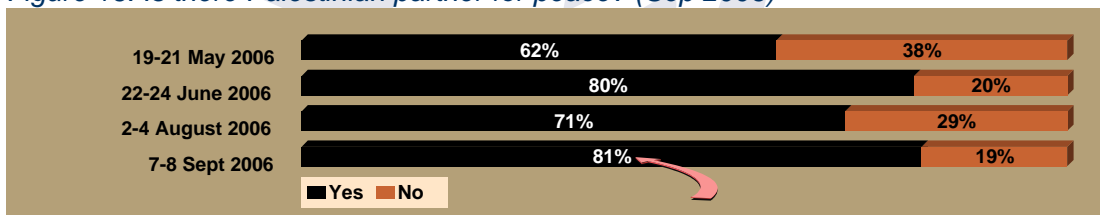
Once more, according to factional trust, a higher percentage of Fateh supporters (38%) than Hamas supporters (25%) and those who do not trust any existing Palestinian faction (33%) believe that Palestinians have a partner for peace in Israel. The belief that Palestinians have a partner for peace in Israel is slightly more widespread in the Gaza Strip (33%) than it is in the West Bank (31%). Only 20% of West Bank residents said that there is a peace partner for the Palestinians in Israel in August 2006.

Figure 15: Do Palestinians have a partner for peace in Israel?



It is often said, especially since Hamas won the January 2006 PLC elections, that there is no Palestinian peace partner. This view, however, is not shared by a notable majority of the Palestinian public. As detailed in figure 16, below, 81% of the respondents continue to believe that there is a Palestinian partner for peace, a 10% increase on the August 2006 figure.

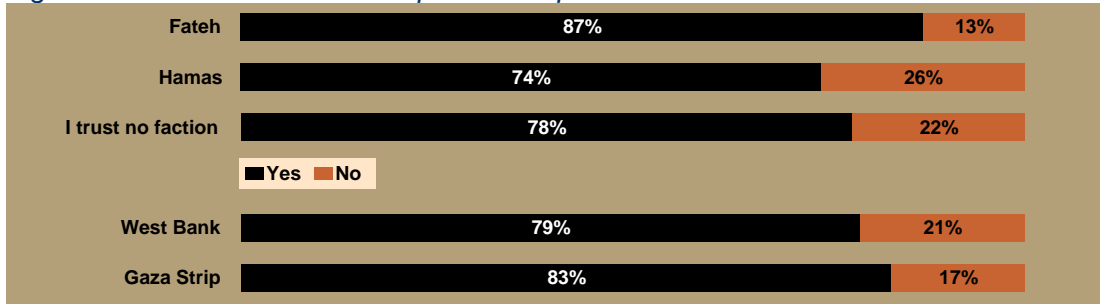
Figure 16: Is there Palestinian partner for peace? (Sep 2006)



A larger percentage of Fateh supporters (87%) and those who do not trust any faction (78%) than Hamas supporters (74%) believe that there is a Palestinian partner for peace. As illustrated in figure 17, below, more Gaza respondents believe that there is a Palestinian partner for peace than West Bank respondents.



Figure 17: Is there a Palestinian partner for peace?

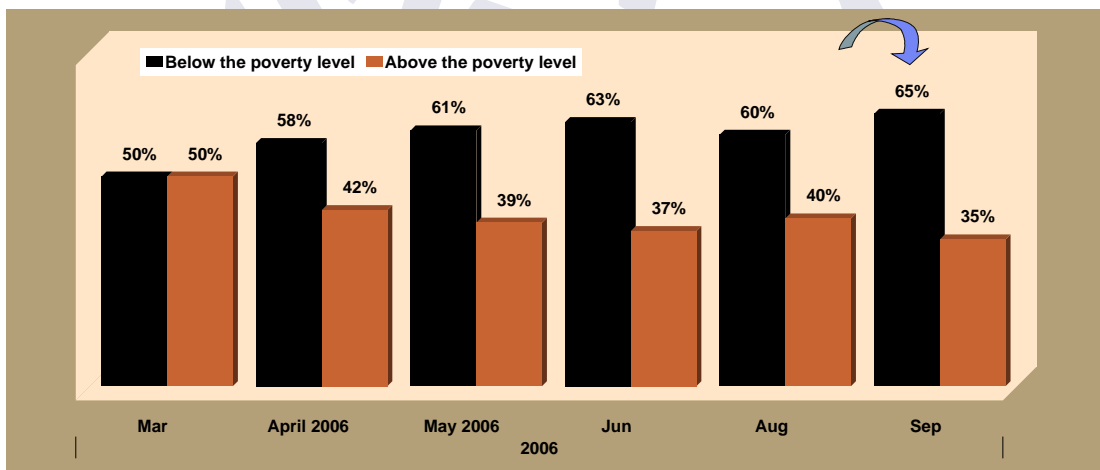


## V. The domestic Palestinian crisis

### A. Poverty in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip

While poverty in the oPt is not solely determined by Palestinian local politics alone, the recent deterioration in the economic situation has largely been attributed to the inability of the present government to pay the salaries of its employees. This failure has led to an increase in the economic hardship. As indicated in the figure below, there has been a gradual increase in the number of people falling in the poverty trap since Hamas has assumed power. Today, more than 65% of the Palestinian households fall under the poverty line that is calculated by NEC on the bases of the reported household income of the respondents and the dependency ratio.

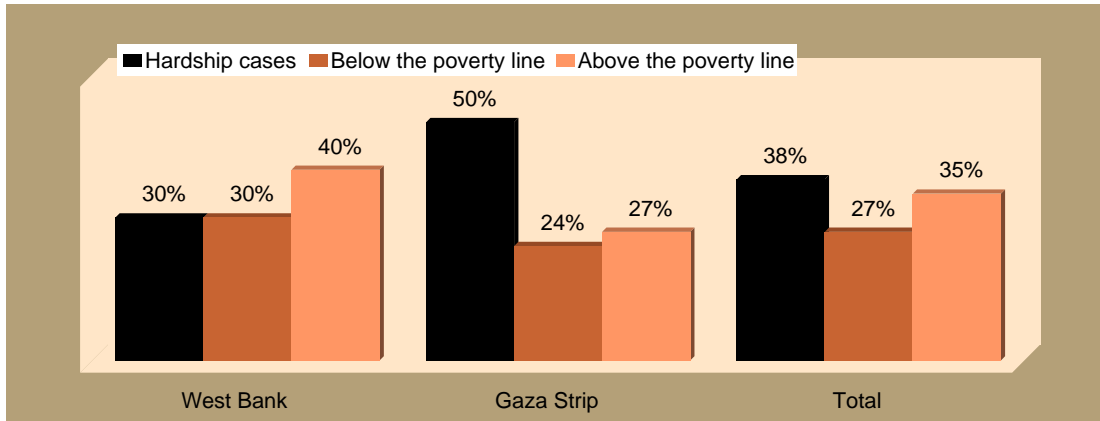
Figure 18: Evolution of poverty March-September 2006



The level of poverty, however, seems to be more pronounced in the Gaza Strip than in the West Bank. As elaborated in figure 19, below, 74% of the respondents in the Gaza Strip fall under the poverty level compared to 60% in the West Bank.



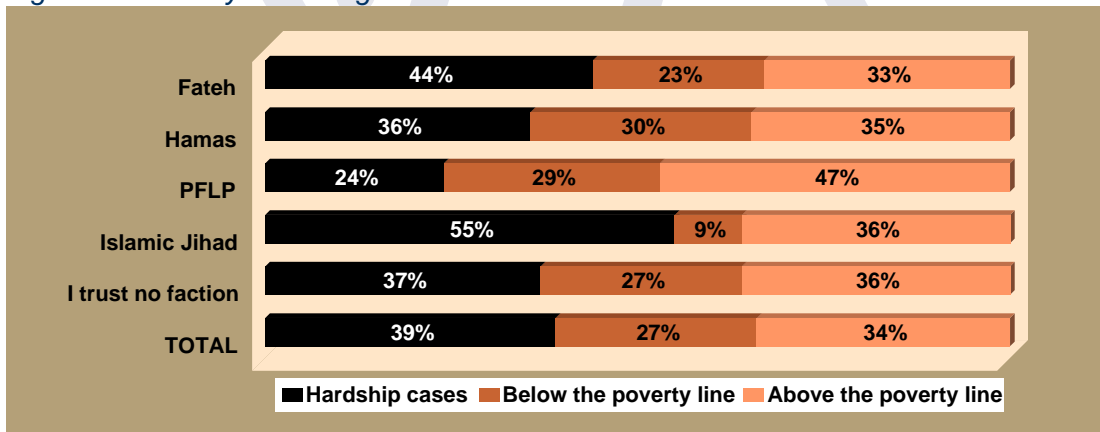
Figure 19: Poverty according to region (sep 2006)



Moreover, when examining the figure above, it is important to stress that about 50% of the respondents in the Gaza Strip live under extreme poverty conditions compared to 30% in the West Bank.

in addition, when examining the level of poverty according to trust in political factions, one can notice that, and perhaps contrary to popular belief, that respondents trusting Fateh are one of the most economically vulnerable in the oPt, as illustrated in figure 20, below. In fact, people trusting Fateh are the poorest of all when compared to the other respondents who trust other factions, including those who do not trust any faction.

Figure 20: Poverty according to factional trust



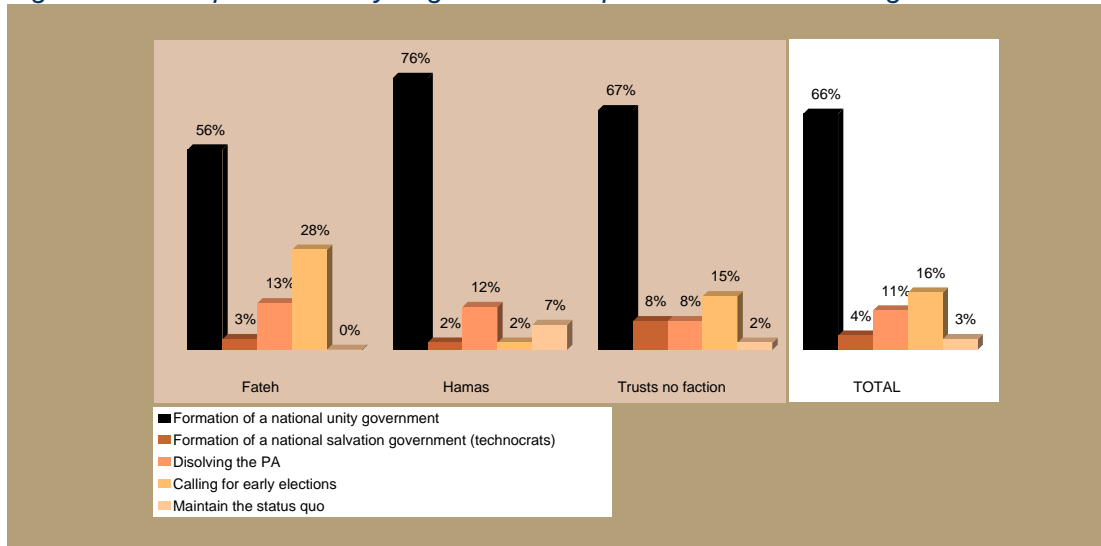
### B. The way out

The majority of the Palestinians believe that the best way out of the current crisis is through the formation of a national unity government. As illustrated in the figure, below, 66% of the respondents believe that a national unity government is the best way out compared to only 16% who want new elections and 11% who prefer the PA to be



dissolved. Although the majority of those trusting Fateh want a national unity government (56%), this support is stronger among those trusting Hamas (76%). Support for early elections is more evident among Fateh supporters (28%) while only 2% of Hamas supporters opted for that.

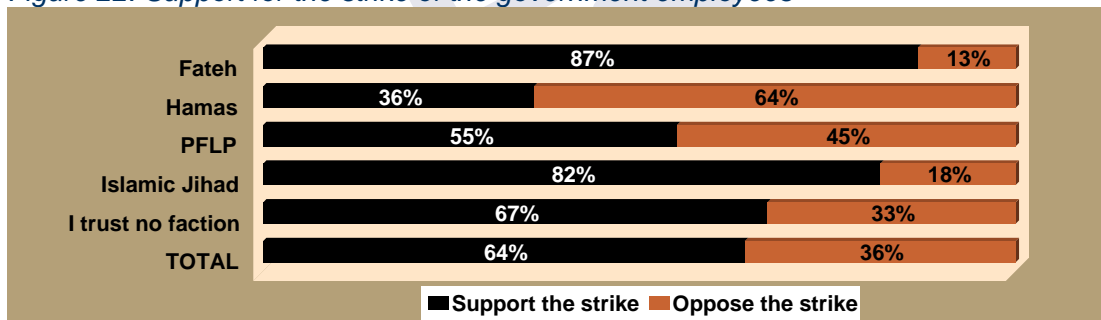
Figure 21: Most preferred way to get out of the present crisis according to factional trust



### C. Support of the Strike

Although 64% of the respondents declared their support for the strike of the government employees and 36% opposed it, the main opposition to the strike seem to come from the respondents who trust Hamas most. As indicated in figure 22, below, only 36% of Hamas supporters support the strike compared to 87% of the Fateh supporters and 67% of the respondents who trust no faction. Ironically, 82% of those trusting Islamic Jihad seem to agree with the Fateh supporters than with the Hamas supporters on this issue, as indicated below.

Figure 22: Support for the strike of the government employees



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