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Hamas and Fateh Neck and Neck As Palestinian Elections Near

A just-completed Office of Research survey in the Palestinian Territories shows a much closer race at the polls than some have predicted. Among likely voters, 32 percent intend to back Fateh on the National Ballot, while 30 percent say they will support Hamas. Corruption is the leading issue among the Palestinian public, with most believing that Hamas is more qualified than Fateh to clean it up. While Hamas is seen as less able than Fateh to advance negotiations with Israel, a majority of both Fateh and Hamas supporters back a continuation of the ceasefire, ongoing talks with Israel, and a two-state solution.

The survey, conducted January 13-15, indicates that eight-in-ten among the electorate are either “very likely” (53%) or “somewhat likely” (28%) to vote on the National Ballot in the January 25th elections for the Palestinian Legislative Council. Among likely voters, about a third each intend to vote for Hamas and Fateh (Table 1). Independent Palestine, led by Mustafa Bhargouti, is backed by 13 percent of likely voters. Based on these results, Fateh would gain roughly 24 of the 66 National Ballot seats, Hamas 22 seats, Independent Palestine 9 seats, with the remaining 11 split among smaller parties.

These results show a closer race than other published surveys of likely voters, which have tended to place Fateh ahead at the polls by a wider margin (Appendix, Table 1). Independent polls have generally anticipated that voter turnout will be between 75 and 86 percent (Appendix Table 2).

**Table 1. “Who are you going to vote for on the National Ballot in the upcoming legislative elections?”
(among likely voters)**

	Total	West Bank	Gaza	Jerusalem	Likely PLC Seats
The Alternative	6%	8%	3%	12%	4
Independent Palestine (Mustafa Bhargouti)	13	16	7	14	9
Martyr Abu Ali Mustafa	8	8	8	7	5
Martyr Abu al-Abbas	1	2	0	5	0*
Freedom and Social Justice	1	0	2	2	0*
Change and Reform (Hamas)	30	27	36	24	22
National Coalition for Justice and Democracy	1	1	1	3	0*
The Third Road (Salem Fayed)	3	3	4	2	2
Freedom and Independence	1	1	1	2	0*
Justice for Palestine	0	0	0	0	0
Fateh movement	32	30	37	29	24
Don't know/ No answer	3	5	2	2	TOTAL: 66

*due to a 2% threshold these parties will not likely receive seats

The Local Ballot, through which the other 66 seats of the Palestinian Legislative Council will be chosen, cannot be predicted on basis of the January survey, due to sample size. However, an independent study with a larger sample, conducted by noted Palestinian researcher Khalil Shikaki December 29-31, placed party

**The figures cited are based on a face-to-face survey conducted January 13 to 15 among a representative sample of 1000 adult Palestinians in the West Bank (54%), Gaza Strip (36%) and East Jerusalem (10%). The surveys were carried out by the Jerusalem Media and Communications Center using stratified random sampling. At a 95% confidence interval, the sampling error for the poll is ±4%.*

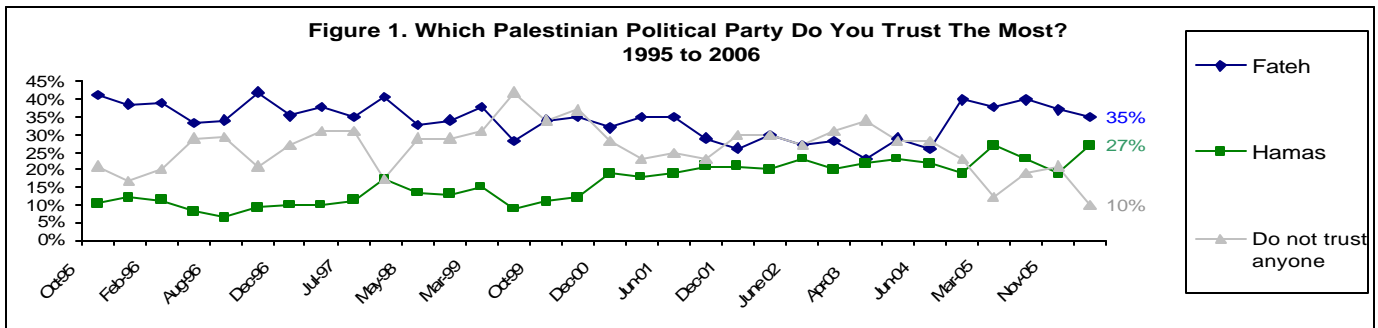
affiliation of 40 of the likely winning candidates as follows: 19 (48%) as affiliated with the List of Change and Reform (Hamas), 18 (45%) affiliated with the Fateh List, and 3 (or 7%) as independents.

A Jerusalem Media and Communications Center survey in December found that 53 percent of Palestinians expect the elections to be honest; 40 percent do not. The same survey also showed that Hamas supporters (45%) are significantly more likely than Fateh supporters (25%) to expect the elections to be dishonest.

The Office of Research survey finds that one fifth (22%) of the overall population still feels they may switch their vote at the last minute, including 17 percent who would change their minds to Hamas, 15 percent who are likely to change their minds to Independent Palestine, and only 10 percent to Fateh.

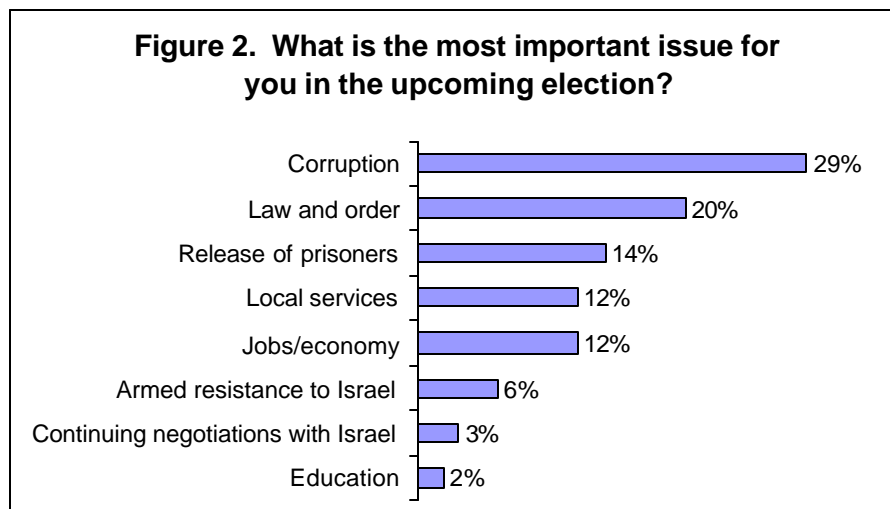
Trust In Hamas Up, Trust In Fateh Steady

The likely success of Hamas at the polls reflects the long-term rise of public trust in the party. The proportion in the January survey who say they trust Hamas matches the historic high of 27%, first seen in spring 2005, and represents a 6 point increase since November. Fateh support has held steady since the late fall, falling only 2 percentage points. The recent boost in trust for Hamas appears to come not from traditional Fateh ranks, but from those who previously trusted “no party” (10% now versus 19% in November) (Figure 1).



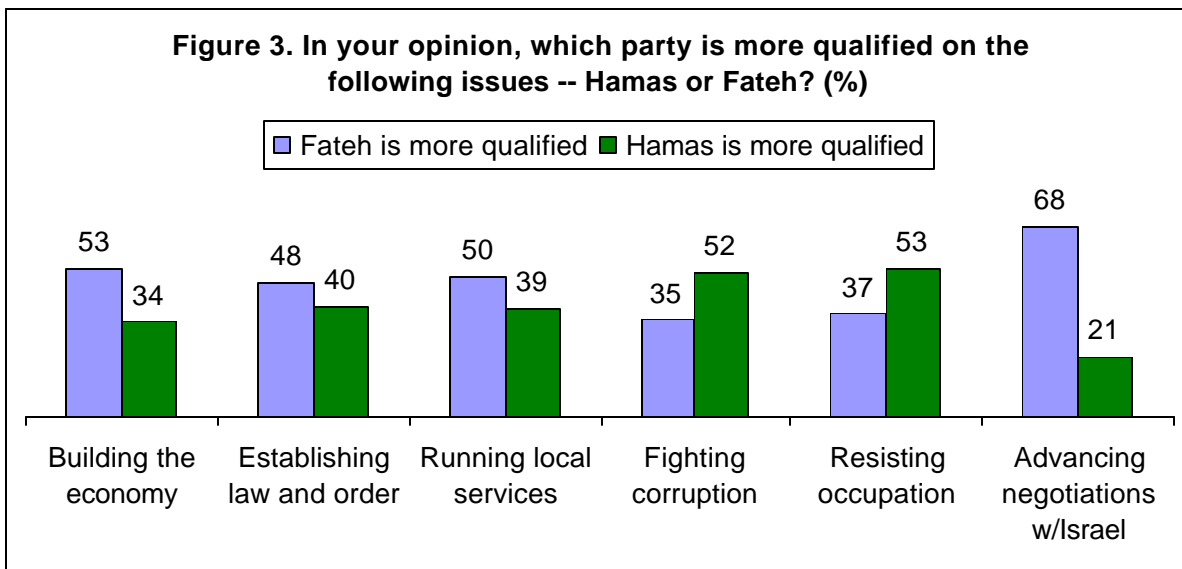
Concerns Over Corruption Fuel Hamas Vote

Nearly a third of all voters (29%) name corruption as the most important issue in the upcoming election, followed by law and order (20%), the release of prisoners (14%) and jobs/the economy (12%) (Figure 2). Similarly, the public believes “a reputation for not being corrupt” is the leading quality to look for in a candidate (34%), followed by economic experience (13%), academic credentials (12%), and a history of national struggle (10%).



When the parties are directly compared, likely voters tend to see Hamas as more qualified to clean up corruption, resist occupation, and uphold societal values (Figure 3). Accordingly, those who believe that corruption is the most important issue in the election are more likely to vote for Hamas (40%) than Fateh (25%) (Table 2). Those who identify as “religious and conservative” also tend to prefer Hamas (47%) to Fateh (28%).

A lack of hope in the peace process may also contribute to support for Hamas. Likely voters who have little or no hope that there will be a peaceful resolution to the conflict clearly prefer Hamas (30%) to Fateh (12%). In addition, those who believe armed resistance to Israel is the most important issue in the campaign are twice as likely to vote for Hamas (55%) than to vote for Fateh (21%).



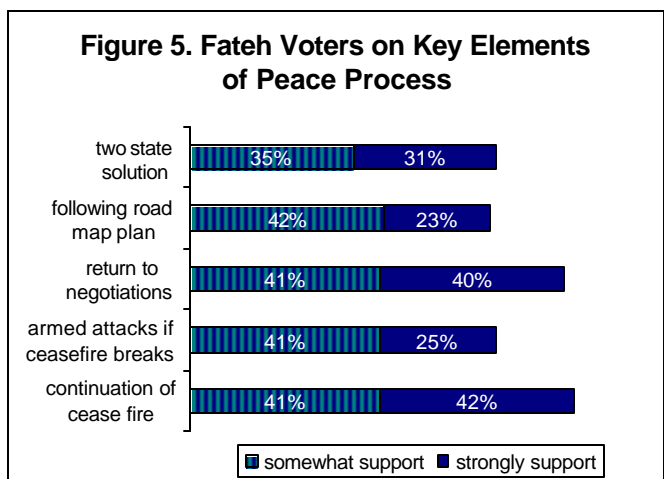
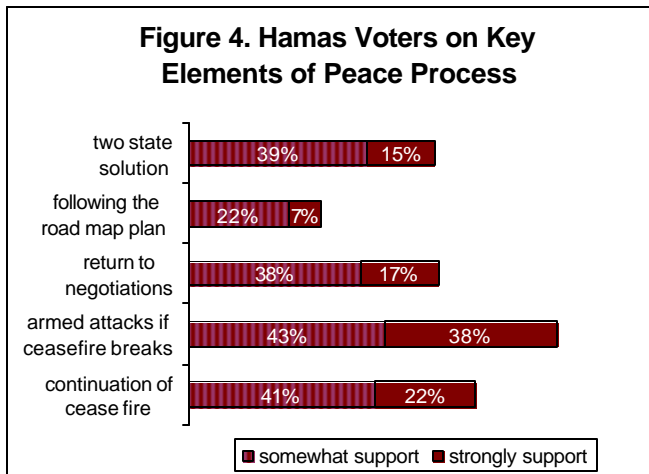
Fateh Support Based on Desire for Law and Order, Advancing Negotiations with Israel

Likely voters see Fateh as more qualified to establish law and order, build the economy, run local services, and move negotiations with Israel forward. Those who consider these issues to be most important are significantly more likely to vote Fateh than Hamas (Table 2). Those who identify themselves as “religious and modern” also tend to prefer Fateh (34%) to Hamas (23%). Those that have at least “some” hope that there will be a peaceful resolution to the conflict in the next five years widely prefer Fateh (40%) over Hamas (19%).

Table 2. Support for Political Party By Leading Issue In The Campaign							
	Jobs/ economy	Corruption	Local Services	Law and order	Continuing negotiations with Israel	Armed resistance to Israel	Releasing Prisoners
NATIONAL AVERAGE	12%	29%	12%	20%	3%	6%	14%
Independent Palestine Voters	15	11	27	9	19	11	10
Hamas Voters	27	40	20	27	5	55	22
Fateh Voters	42	25	24	38	57	21	42

Most Still Support Ceasefire, Negotiations, Two-State Solution

Majorities of both Fateh and Hamas likely voters support the continuation of the cease fire, a return to negotiations with Israel and a two-state solution, though backing is much more widespread among Fateh voters. The most clear division is on the road map plan: Hamas supporters oppose the road map, while Fateh backers favor it. Though supporters of both parties approve of armed attacks if the ceasefire breaks down, Hamas voters are more likely than Fateh voters to back a resumption of attacks (Figures 4 and 5).



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Methodology

Findings are based on a nationwide public opinion survey conducted January 13 to 15, 2006. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with 1000 Palestinian adults (ages 18 and over) in the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem. The fieldwork was conducted by the Jerusalem Media and Communications Center. The questions were written by the Office of Research and translated by the contractor, with Office of Research approval.

Respondents were selected by stratified random sampling, with stratification based on region (Gaza (37%), West Bank (53%), and East Jerusalem (10%)). The margin of error, assuming a 95% confidence level, is $\pm 4\%$ for the overall sample.

The margin of error is higher when analyses are conducted among subgroups. In addition to sampling error, the practical challenges of survey research may also introduce other sources of error into the findings.

Additional information on methodology can be obtained from the analyst.

Appendix

Date Sample	FAFO Nov. 19 - Dec. 10 1849			Bir Zeit DSP Dec. 5-7 1293	PCPSR Dec. 29-31 4560	PCPO Dec. 28-Jan. 2 1200	Bir Zeit DSP January 14 1500	An-Najah U. Jan. 5-6 1360		
	Region	WB	Gaza	Total	Total	Total	Total	Total	WB	Gaza
% Fateh	38	39	38	37	43	38	35	43	34	39
% Hamas	14	23	17	20	25	27	30	33	29	31

Date Sample	FAFO Nov. 19 - Dec. 10 1849			Bir Zeit DSP January 14 1500	PCPO Dec. 28-Jan. 2 1200	JMCC Dec. 5 - 9 1199			An-Najah U. Jan. 5-6 1360		
	Region	WB	Gaza	Total	Total	Total	WB	Gaza	Total	WB	Gaza
% Yes, I plan to vote	76	83	79	83	83	66	73	68	85	88	86

Ballot		Electoral district															
		Jerusalem	Jenin	Tubas	Tulkarem	Nablus	Qalqilia	Salfit	Ramallah and al-Bireh	Jericho	Bethlehem	Hebron	North Gaza	Gaza	Deir al-Balah	Khan Younis	Rafah
The Alternative	%	12	15	18	2	3	4	21	10	--	10	4	4	4	3	--	--
Independent Palestine	%	13	6	18	11	11	26	--	44	60	13	10	8	6	8	8	6
Martyr Abu Ali Mustafa	%	7	3	9	7	3	13	11	10	--	17	8	19	5	5	9	3
Martyr Abu al-Abbas	%	5	--	--	--	--	--	--	6	--	--	3	--	--	--	2	--
Freedom and Social Justice	%	2	--	--	--	--	--	--	1	--	--	1	2	1	--	8	--
Change and Reform	%	23	23	18	31	34	26	16	14	40	17	36	25	44	42	28	31
National Coalition for Justice & Democracy	%	3	--	--	7	--	--	--	--	--	--	1	--	--	--	4	--
The Third Road	%	--	8	9	7	--	9	5	1	--	7	2	4	8	--	--	--
Freedom and Independence	%	2	--	--	--	1	--	--	1	--	--	1	--	1	3	--	--
Justice for Palestine	%	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	1	--	--	1	--	--	--	2	--
Fateh Movement	%	32	42	27	36	45	22	32	7	--	23	29	38	30	40	36	54
Don't Know	%	2	3	--	--	3	--	--	1	--	10	3	--	2	--	4	--
No Answer	%	--	--	--	--	--	16	3	--	3	1	--	--	--	--	6	1
Sample Size	#	101	73	11*	50	89	26*	20*	82	9*	44	139	58	139	49	70	41

*Sample size in these cities is too small to accurately predict results with any degree of confidence.