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Palestinian Opinions about Governance, Institutions and Political Leaders

**Synthesis of Results of Fafo's Opinion Polls in
the West Bank and Gaza Strip, 2005–2011**

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Executive Summary

Like political leaders elsewhere, Palestinian leaders have to secure the confidence and maintain legitimacy amongst their constituents. Moreover, they have to govern the institutions of society so that these are perceived as trustworthy. The present report considers Palestinian perceptions of their leaders, institutions and organizations. The report is based on a series of seven representative household sample surveys carried out by Fafo in the period 2005 to 2011.

Political Leaders and Institutions: Performance and Trust

Overall, Palestinian governmental institutions enjoy moderate levels of popular confidence. These levels were fairly constant during 2005-2011. Yet since 2007, West Bankers have gradually expressed more confidence in the government of Fayyad and less trust in the government of Haniyeh, whereas the perception of the two governments in the Gaza population, while fluctuating somewhat, has been stable. UNRWA is a much-trusted institution.

Two major developments are a steady reduction in the appreciation of President Abbas' performance, and an increased appreciation of the achievements of Prime Minister Fayyad's government. A narrow majority acknowledged the positive impact of the 'Fayyad Plan' on people's living conditions and the chance of reaching Palestinian statehood.

The PNA's security services have enjoyed improved standing over the past four years.

Democracy and Freedoms

In people's opinion, freedom of expression is lacking, and the populations of the West Bank and Gaza Strip are generally fearful about criticizing their respective authorities. Palestinians consider that corruption is widespread, and a majority holds democracy to be poor or very poor. Overall, the perceptions of Gazans are more negative than those of West Bankers.

Voting Preferences

Despite the turbulence of Palestinian politics in recent years, people's support for both Fatah and Hamas has been quite stable. Nevertheless, Hamas experienced a peak in support right after the war on Gaza (Dec. 2008-Jan. 2009), while Fatah suffered a corresponding trough from which it has since recovered. Fatah has remained more popular than Hamas throughout, in both territories.

Introduction

This brief paper describes the changes in Palestinians' trust and appreciation of their political leaders during the past seven years. The report further examines the state of democracy as perceived by the population of the Palestinian Territories and presents people's views on freedom of expression. Finally, the paper depicts major trends in political affiliation¹.

The statistics presented are based on seven surveys carried out during face-to-face interviews in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, using probability sampling of between 1,800 and 4,000 individuals in each survey². The surveys were implemented by Fafo.

The polls conducted from 2005 to 2011 cover an eventful period: the Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip in August 2005; legislative elections in January 2006; the take-over of the Gaza Strip by Hamas in June 2007 and the subsequent implementation and tightening of the sanctions on Gaza; a brief cease-fire in 2008 followed by the War on Gaza (Dec. 2008 - Jan. 2009); the leak of the 'Palestine papers'; and the 'Arab Spring' protests in the region that started in 2010 and early 2011. These are just some of the events which may have influenced the perceptions of the many Palestinians who generously responded to our questions.

¹ The authors are thankful to Laura E. Mitchell of Fafo for her feedback on a draft of the report.

² The first poll was financed by Fafo. The next four polls were funded by grants from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, while the sixth poll was carried out by Fafo in conjunction with a research project on attitudes to peace and conflict financed by the World Bank. The seventh poll was again funded by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Palestinian Institutions and Political Leaders: Performance and Trust

The polls inquired about people’s confidence in a number of institutions and invited respondents to rate the performance of three political figures.

The confidence of Palestinians in national institutions is fairly low, and their trust in such institutions is generally at a lower level than trust in UNRWA (Figure 1). In general, people in the Gaza Strip express a higher level of trust in institutions than people in the West Bank. UNRWA has a particularly high standing in Gaza.

As this section will show, the level of trust has remained fairly constant over the past few years. Two major changes relate to a steady reduction in the appreciation of President Abbas’ performance and increased confidence in the government and leadership of Prime Minister Fayyad. A third trend is the improved standing of the security services of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) since 2007.

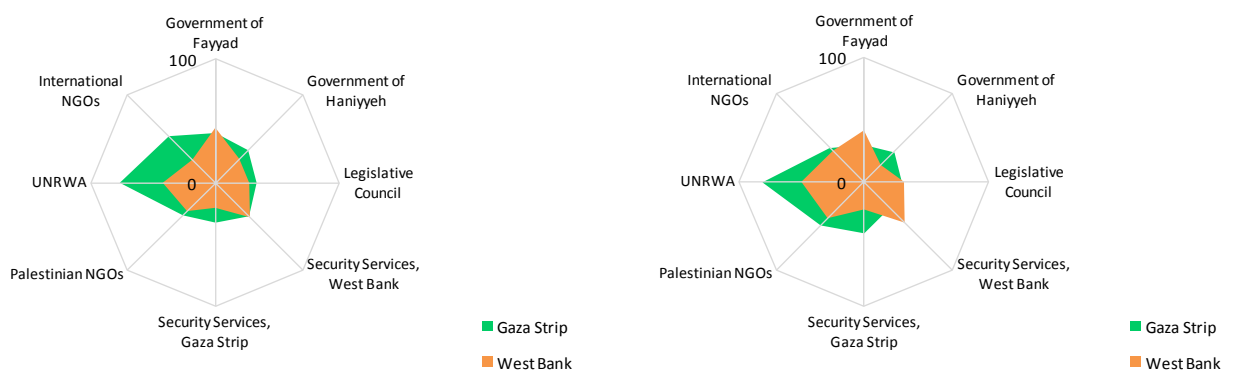


Figure 1: Share of respondents in Gaza and the West Bank that expressed a great deal or quite a lot confidence in various institutions, 2010 (left) and 2011 (right)

The Government of Salam Fayyad

People’s confidence in Salam Fayyad’s government was fairly low: approximately 30 percent said they had quite a lot of or a great deal of confidence in it. This figure remained stable in the years 2007-2009. In the 2010 poll, however, people’s confidence in the Fayyad government received a boost and reached 43 percent (Figure 2). The population in Gaza expressed higher levels of confidence in the Fayyad government during the first three polls than the West Bank population did. In 2010, this confidence rose in both territories, but most noticeably in the West Bank, where 44 percent—20 percentage points up from the previous year—said they had quite a lot or a great deal of confidence in this government. One year later, the populations in both territories have again lost trust in it. The fall in confidence is most dramatic in Gaza, where the trust in the Fayyad government reaches its lowest

level in five years: 30 percent had quite a lot or a great deal of confidence in it. Meanwhile, in the West Bank, the level of trust stands at 41 percent.

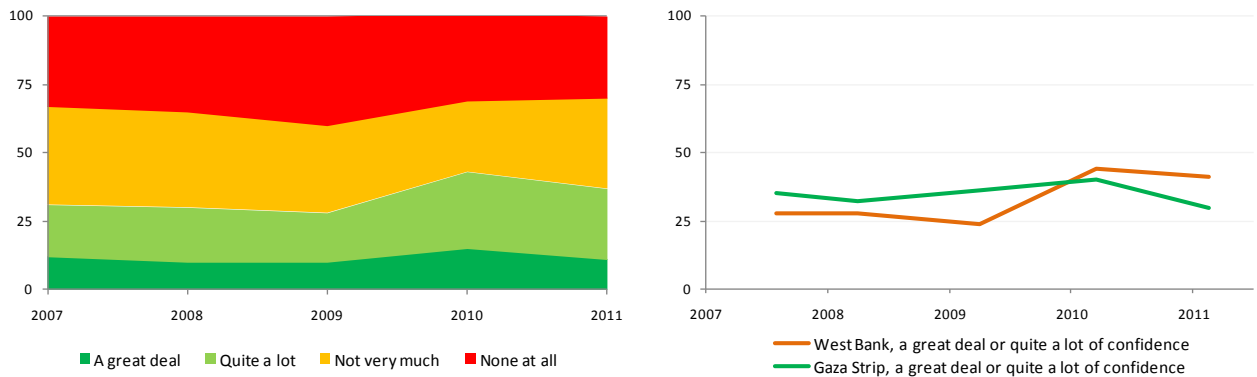


Figure 2: Confidence in Fayyad's government. All (left) and West Bank and Gaza Strip (right)

The Government of Ismail Haniyeh

The confidence in the Hamas government headed by Ismail Haniyeh received a boost in 2009, but a year later dropped to the lowest level in the Fafo polls (Figure 3). In the 2009 poll implemented barely two months after the end of the war on Gaza, 38 percent of the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip declared quite a lot or a great deal of confidence in the Haniyeh government. One year later that confidence dropped to 24 percent³. In 2011, the trust in the Haniyeh government remains at this low level.

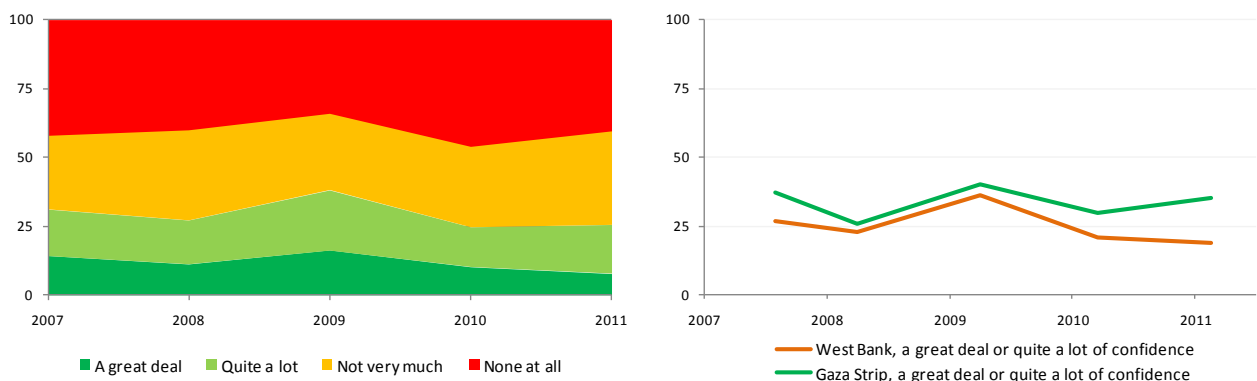


Figure 3: Confidence in the Haniyeh government. All (left) and West Bank and Gaza Strip (right)

³ The reduced trust in Haniyeh's government in Gaza reflects people's party preferences and the loss of many potential voters in 2010 compared to the year before. See below and: <http://fafo.no/ais/middeast/opt/opinionpolls/poll2010.html>

As one might expect, people’s confidence in the Haniyeh government is stronger in the Gaza Strip than in the West Bank. Yet, it is worthy of note that whereas 30 percent of Gaza’s population in the spring of 2010 said they had quite a bit or a great deal of confidence in the government of Haniyeh, 40 percent expressed the same trust in the Fayyad government. One year later, the picture has changed, and the Haniyeh government enjoys more trust in Gaza than the Fayyad government with 35 percent *versus* 30 percent, respectively. In the West Bank, more than twice as many expressed trust in the Fayyad government as in the Haniyeh government both in 2010 and 2011.

The Performance of Abbas, Fayyad and Haniyeh

Some of the Fafo polls asked if people thought that President Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen), Prime Minister Salam Fayyad and Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh generally did a good job. In 2009, we specifically asked how well they did the job during and immediately after the war on Gaza. In the opinion of Palestinians, the performance of President Abbas gradually deteriorated until 2010, but improved somewhat in 2011 (Figure 4). While 70 percent of the respondents considered that President Abbas did a good or very good job in 2005, only 41 percent held the same opinion four years later. In 2011, 54 percent said he did a good or very good job. Many West Bankers penalized Abbas and gave him poor marks after the war on Gaza (Dec. 2008 - Jan. 2009). The rating in Gaza remains at the same level in 2009 and 2011, whereas the share of respondents in the West Bank that said Abbas did a good or very good job leaps from 38 to 58 percent.

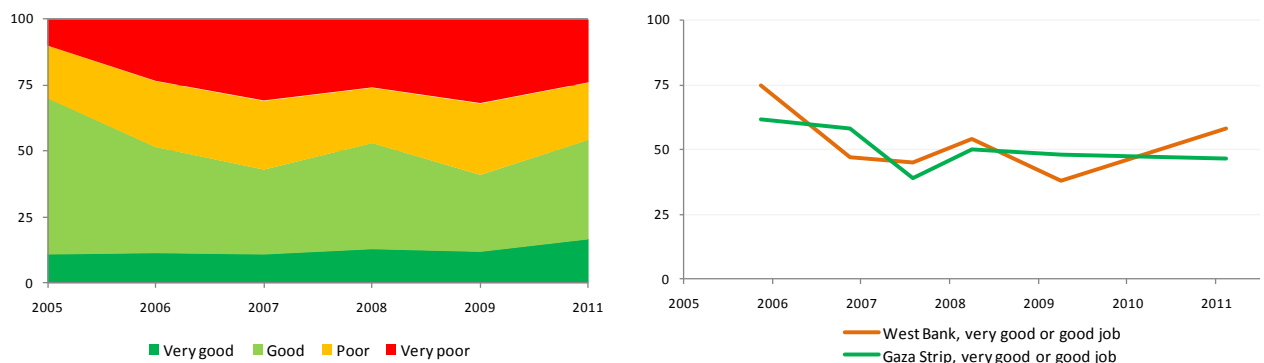


Figure 4: Opinion about the performance of President Abbas. All (left) and West Bank and Gaza Strip (right)

We have comparative statistics for the leadership of both Fayyad and Haniyeh for the years 2008, 2009 and 2011 (Figure 5). As with President Abbas, Prime Minister Fayyad’s score is poorer in 2009 than the year before. In contrast, people thought Prime Minister Haniyeh did a better job in 2009 than previously. For Haniyeh, we also have figures for 2006, when people’s opinions of his leadership were very

similar to 2008 figures. It is plausible that the popularity of Ismael Haniyeh—the *individual*—got a boost in the aftermath of the war, just as the popularity of his government and Hamas benefitted. Conversely, the war on Gaza may have led public opinion to punish both President Abbas and Prime Minister Fayyad. Figures for 2011 again show a change: Abbas and Fayyad do better, while the performance of Haniyeh slumps. The latter reflects the relatively poor marks that people give the Haniyeh *government* in 2011 and the fall in support for Hamas (see below).

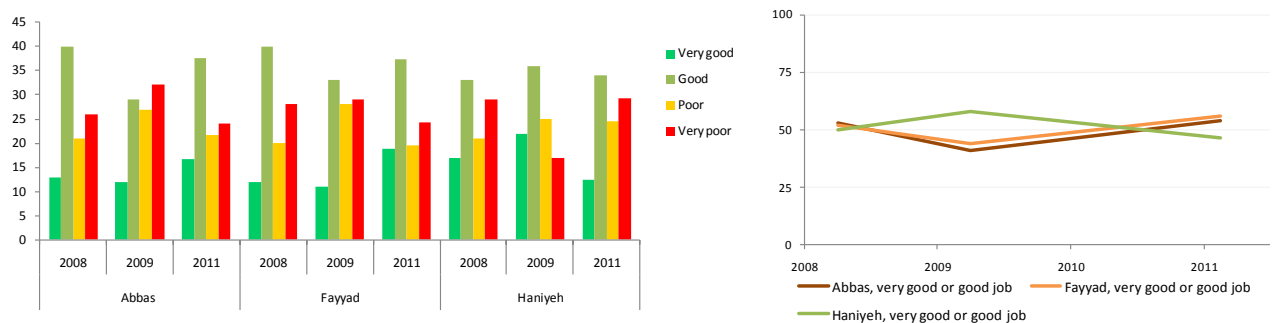


Figure 5: Opinions about the performance of Abbas, Fayyad and Haniyeh.

One noticeable pattern in the data is a tendency towards polarization (except of Haniyeh’s appeal in 2009). While the degrees of support vary, a larger group of respondents considered each politician to be doing a very poor job than did those respondents who considered each to be doing a poor one. Haniyeh’s support in 2009, in contrast, was centered in the middle of the distribution, while the tendency towards polarization was present for him in 2008 and reappeared in 2011.

The ‘Fayyad Plan’

The 2011 poll examined people’s perceptions of Prime Minister Fayyad’s two-year state-building endeavor as it comes to an end in August/September this year. First, when asked if they had heard about the ‘Fayyad plan’, slightly more than a third of all respondents—39 percent in the West Bank and 32 percent in the Gaza Strip—confirmed they had. Next, interviewers explained briefly what the ‘Fayyad Plan’ entailed, and then asked if the respondents agreed or disagreed that this ‘state-building project has improved the living conditions of Palestinians’?⁴ One-half of respondents were in agreement with the statement (48 percent in the West Bank and 54 percent in Gaza). These results were somewhat surprising given that a majority of all Palestinians—45 percent in the West Bank and 93 percent in the Gaza

⁴ The explanation provided to interviewees regarding the ‘Fayyad Plan’ was the following: ‘August this year will mark the end of Prime Minister Fayyad’s two-year ‘state-building plan’. A major component of the ‘plan’ is to speed up the building of state institutions. We would like to ask you some questions regarding your perception of Fayyad’s efforts.’

Strip—had shared that their communities had not at all benefited from the ‘plan’ (Figure 6)⁵. Third, the pollsters asked if the respondents agreed that ‘the state-building project has brought Palestine one step closer to an independent Palestinian state?’ Again, approximately one in two respondents concurred with the statement (52 percent in the West Bank; 54 percent in the Gaza Strip). These results suggest that Fayyad’s efforts have contributed positively to popular opinions of his Palestinian statehood and independence efforts.

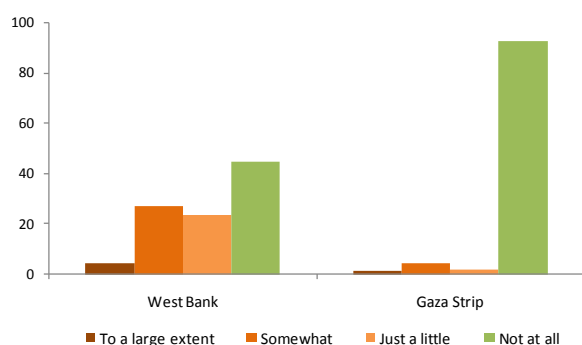


Figure 6: People’s perceptions of having benefitted from projects and activities under the ‘Fayyad plan’, 2011

Fayyad versus Haniyeh in the Fields of Economy and Security

The 2011 poll explored people’s opinions regarding the performance of the Fayyad government in the West Bank and the Haniyeh government in the Gaza Strip related to three issues. Firstly, the poll asked whether the two governments had, over the past three years, improved the economic situation, the security situation, and the relations between the *hamulas* (or clans). On all three accounts, people were clearly more impressed by the job that Fayyad and his team had done in the West Bank than with the achievements of Haniyeh and his Hamas government in the Gaza Strip (Figure 7). Both leaders had performed better on security issues than on the economy. However, here, the very different circumstances and conditions of the two territories need to be highlighted. Haniyeh has much less control over the factors affecting the economy and living conditions of his population than does Fayyad. The Gaza Strip has been subject to a tight Israeli blockade for more than three years, while the West Bank is exposed to Israeli ‘security measures’, which, while having strong negative effects, does not curtail the Palestinian economy in the same manner.

⁵ The introduction to the question stated that, according to Fayyad, his scheme has implemented more than 2,000 projects, including the establishment of new schools, clinics, housing projects and roads.

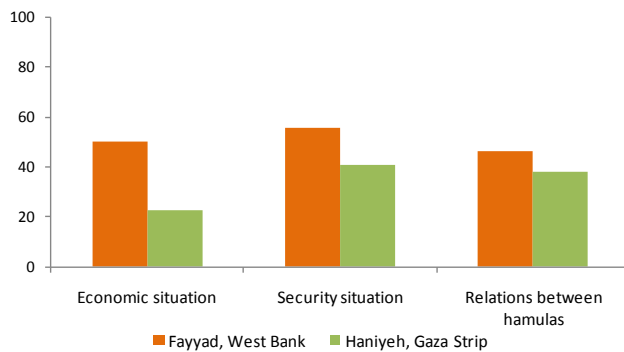


Figure 7: Share of people saying that the two Prime Ministers have improved the economic and security situations in their respective territories over the past three years, 2011

Respondents in the Gaza Strip are nearly as pleased with what Fayyad has achieved in the West Bank as are respondents living under the Palestinian National Authority. In contrast, West Bankers seem to be much less convinced with Haniyeh’s accomplishments than the inhabitants of Gaza, particularly with regard to security (Figure 8).

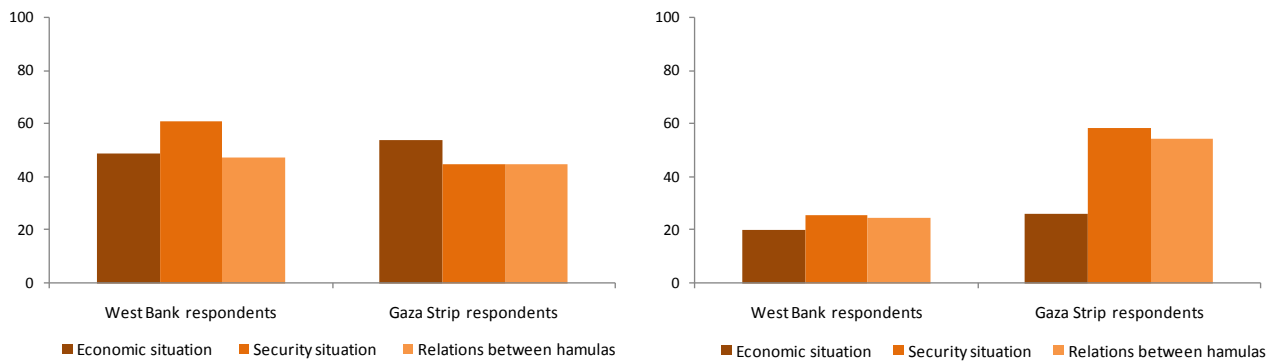


Figure 8: Perceptions of improved conditions over the past 3 years by the Fayyad government in the West Bank (left) and by the Haniyeh government in the Gaza Strip (right), 2011

The Legislative Council

Trust in the Legislative Council is modest. Some 30 percent of respondents have expressed quite a lot or a great deal of confidence in Parliament during the years 2005-2011 (Figure 9). Since the legislative elections in 2006 and Hamas’ victory in the Gaza Strip, people’s trust in their Parliamentarians as a collective grew stronger in Gaza than in the West Bank. However, the 2011 poll shows that this variation across the territories has disappeared.

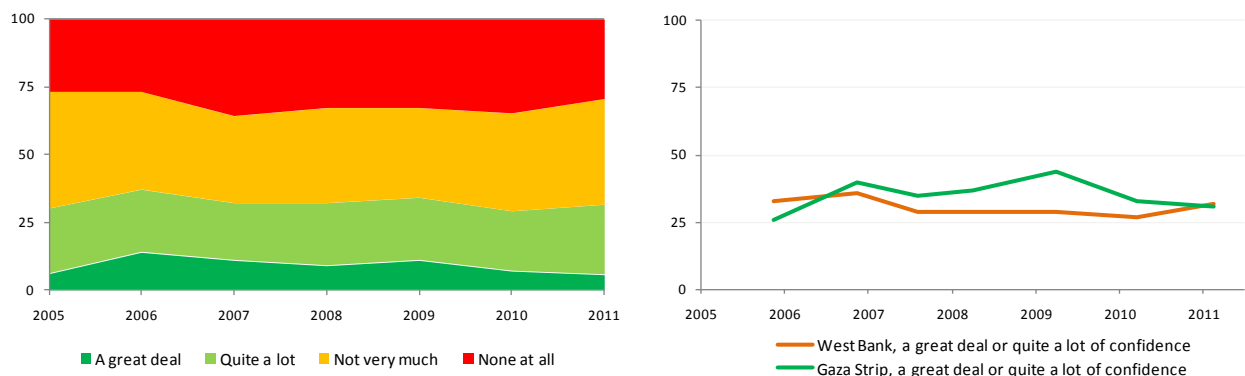


Figure 9: Confidence in the Legislative Council. All (left) and West Bank and Gaza Strip (right)

Compared to Iran and Jordan, the two only Middle Eastern countries for which World Values Survey data are available, the Legislative Council scores relatively poorly. In Iran (2005), 42 percent had quite a lot or a great deal of confidence in the parliament, while the corresponding figure for Jordan (2007) was 65 percent⁶.

Police and the Courts

In 2011, over one-half of Palestinians (55 percent) said they had quite a lot or a great deal of confidence in the (civil) police force (Figure 10). Fourteen percent expressed no confidence in the police at all. The difference in opinion between the West Bank and Gaza Strip was minimal. People’s trust in the courts stood at similar levels, and again the variation between the two territories was insignificant (Figure 10).

There is little comparative data from the Middle East. However, the World Values Survey reports that 56 percent of Iranians (in 2005) and 92 percent of Jordanians (in 2007) have quite a lot or a great deal of confidence in the police.

The data for earlier years suggests a withering of people’s confidence in the courts over time (Figure 11). A fall in people’s trust was visible both in the West Bank and Gaza Strip between the polls in 2005 and 2006, and four years later the picture had become even bleaker. However, the 2011 poll indicates that people view the courts as more trustworthy. A word of caution regarding this conclusion is required as the number of answer categories to this question were increased from three to four between the earlier polls and the one in 2011, which may have had an impact on the results.

⁶ Data for this and other comparisons in this paper are generated from the World Values Survey web site, <http://www.wvsevsdb.com/wvs/WVSAalyzeQuestion.jsp>.

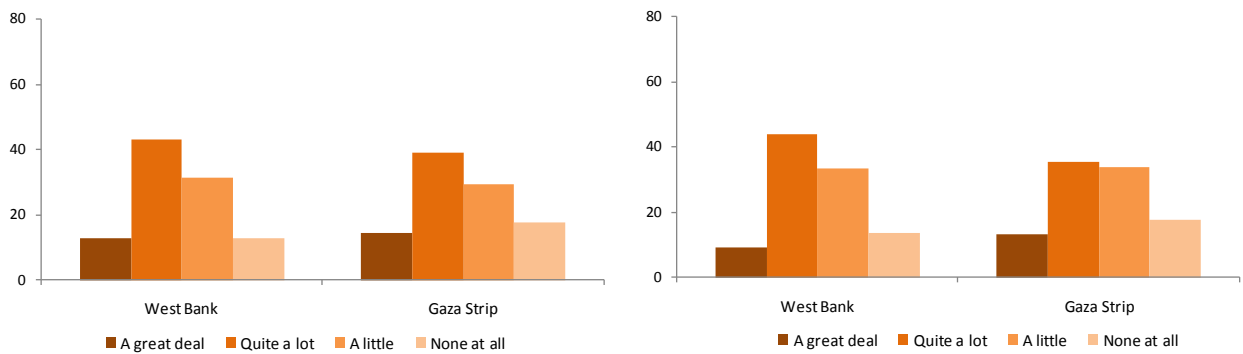


Figure 10: Confidence in the police (left) and the courts (right), 2011

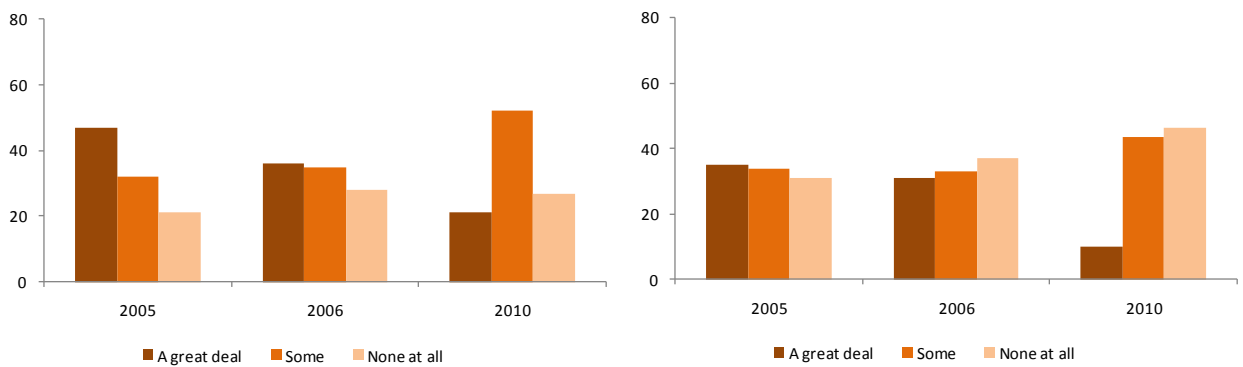


Figure 11: Confidence in the courts, three years. West Bank (left) and the Gaza Strip (right)

The 2011 poll included two additional questions that shed light on Palestinians' opinions regarding the judicial system (Figure 12). Only 13-14 percent of respondents are convinced that the judiciary functions in an impartial and fair way, while six in ten think the courts operate impartially and fairly to some extent. The measures of people's trust in the Gaza Strip are lower than in the West Bank.

A second indication that the 'modern' judiciary is not performing adequately, is that people's trust in the 'parallel' system of clan or tribal law is at the same level (Figure 12). In this parallel system of law, settlements to conflicts are reached, and compensation for wrong-doings and offences are arranged outside the realm of the courts.

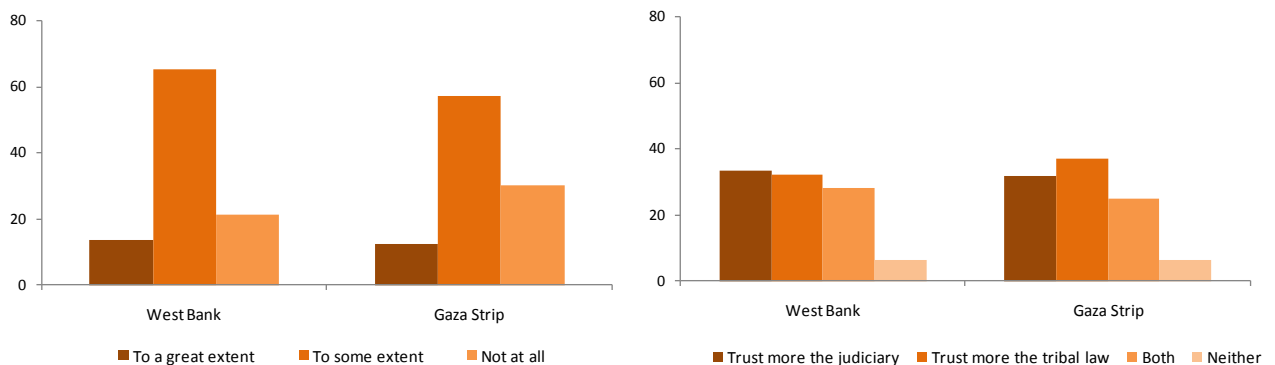


Figure 12: Extent to which civil courts operate impartially and fairly (left) and trust in civil courts versus tribal or clan law (right), 2011

In 2011, 53 percent in the West Bank and 49 percent in the Gaza Strip had quite a lot or a great deal of confidence in the courts. That figure compares to 43 percent in Iran (2005) and 90 percent in Jordan (2007), according to the World Values Survey.

Corruption

Six years ago, six percent of the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip thought the Palestinian National Authority was very successful while 31 percent said it was quite successful in fighting corruption. West Bankers were slightly more positive than Gazans towards the efforts of the PNA. One in five thought the Attorney General would be able to prosecute cases against PNA officials, and another 43 percent believed that the Attorney General might be successful in so doing. These results suggest doubt in people’s attitudes that the PNA has the will and/or capacity to effectively tackle corruption and also underscore the skepticism in Palestinian society towards the PNA. The trust figures in the polls presented above also reflect such skepticism.

In 2011, six in ten West Bankers and four in ten Palestinians in the Gaza Strip believe that corruption in the Palestinian Territories has increased over the past three years. Three in ten Palestinians are of the opinion that it has become a lesser problem (Figure 13)⁷. One half of all Palestinians admit that people they know use bribes ‘to get away with things’ to some or a great extent (Figure 13). Only a quarter of all respondents claim having relatives and friends who never use bribes. Clearly, bribes and corruption are considered by respondents to be a common phenomenon in the Palestinian Territories.

⁷ The question used Transparency International’s definition of corruption, namely: ‘the abuse of entrusted power for private gains’.

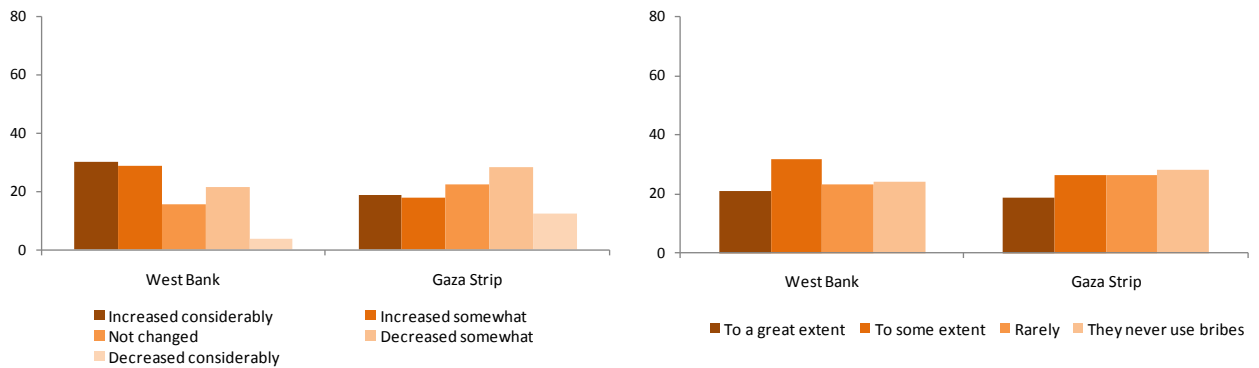


Figure 13: Prevalence of corruption in the Palestinian Territories today as compared with three years ago (left) and the extent to which people whom the respondent knows get away with things by using bribes (right), 2011

Democracy and Human Rights

The population of the West Bank and Gaza are clearly discontent with how their state-to-be is presently governed, how they are treated as subjects by those in power and the human rights situation. In 2011, nearly one quarter of the respondents state that, everything considered, the state of democracy is satisfactory. Three quarters consider that it is poor or very poor (Figure 14). This dissatisfaction might partly explain the rather modest share of respondents declaring that they would have participated in national elections, had they been held 'today' (see below). The variation in opinion between the West Bank and Gaza Strip is insignificant.

People's assessment of the general situation of human rights and public freedoms fairs only slightly better than their appraisal of democracy. Three in ten view human rights and public freedoms as satisfactory, while seven in ten think it is poor or very poor (Figure 14). The results show no differentiation between the situation on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. However, an indication of disparity between the two territories with regard to individual freedoms and human rights will be presented next.

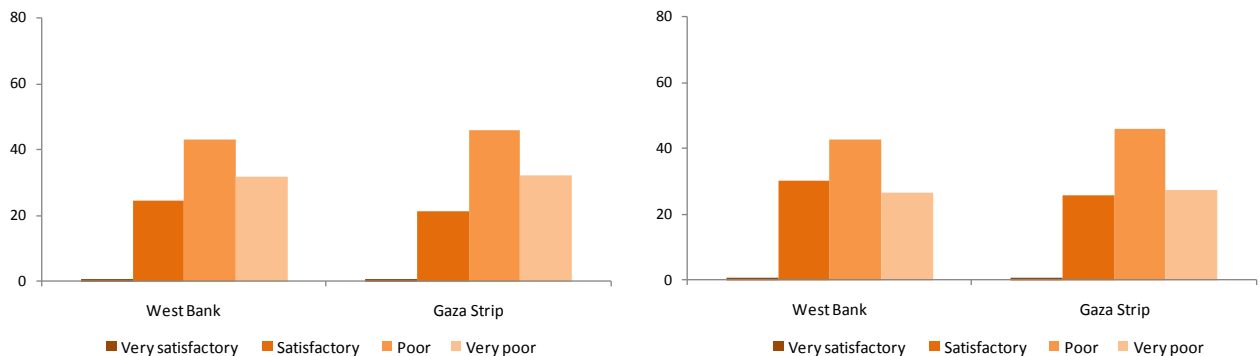


Figure 14: Level of satisfaction with democracy (left) and public freedom and human rights (right) in the Palestinian Territories, 2011

The population is divided in its opinions regarding freedom of expression in the West Bank during Fayyad’s term as Prime Minister (Figure 15). About a quarter of the respondents think it has improved, while as many believe the situation has deteriorated. Others assert that this freedom has generally remained the same. The opinions of people in the Gaza Strip are a bit more polarized about freedom of expression in the West Bank with a higher share of respondents thinking freedom of expression has progressed *and* regressed.

People are generally less impressed by the performance of Prime Minister Haniyeh in this regard, and nearly 50 percent of respondents believe people’s freedom of expression has become more restricted in the Gaza Strip under his leadership (Figure 15). In contrast, 15 percent think freedom of expression has improved in the Gaza Strip.

The perceptions of somewhat different situations in the West Bank and Gaza Strip are found using another indicator of individual freedom. ‘Can people in the two territories criticize the authorities without fear?’, the 2011 poll asked. Thirty-one percent thought this was the case in the West Bank, while only 18 percent believed this was true for the Gaza Strip. The respondents’ opinions did not differ significantly between the two territories. While, in people’s view, the situation is worse in Gaza than in the West Bank, suspicion and distrust are prevalent features of the general mood of the ruled towards the rulers.

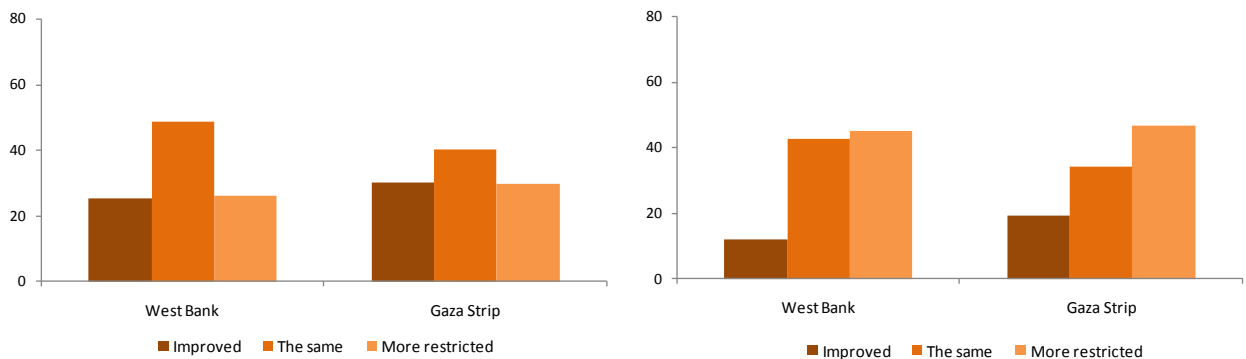


Figure 15: Perceptions of freedom of expression in the West Bank since Fayyad's government came to power (left) and in the Gaza Strip since Haniyeh's government came to power (right), 2011

The Security Services, West Bank

People's confidence in the security services of the Palestinian National Authority is at a slightly higher level than that of the Legislative Council. After years of decline in confidence, PNA's security services—currently operating in the West Bank only—have regained some terrain and reached the same level of confidence in 2011 as six years previously (Figure 16). Until recently, the trends related to trust had been fairly similar in the two Palestinian Territories. Today four in ten Palestinians express quite a bit or a great deal of confidence in the security services on the West Bank. The 2011 poll suggested a dip in the confidence of the Gaza population, while the positive trend continued on the West Bank.

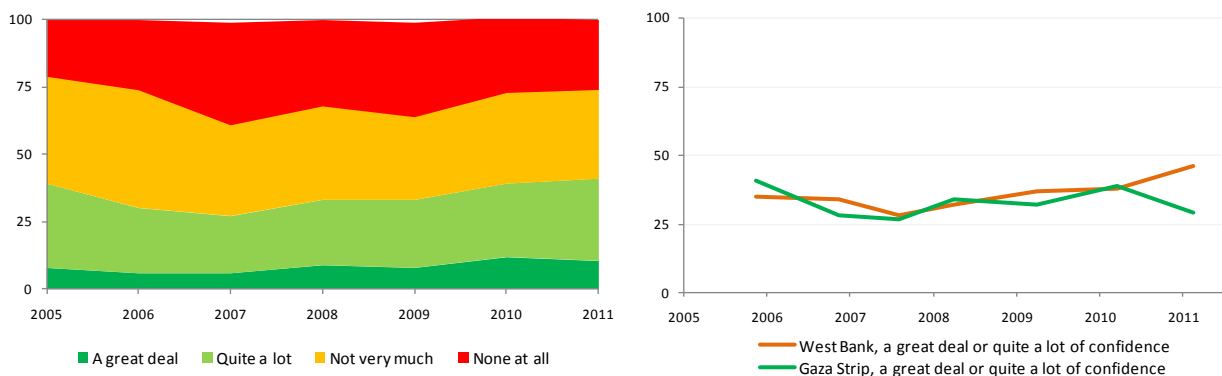


Figure 16: Confidence in PNA's security services. All (left) and West Bank and Gaza Strip (right)

The Security Services, Gaza Strip

In the period 2006-2011, the security services of the Hamas government in Gaza (the 'Executive Forces') enjoyed a considerably lower level of popular confidence than the PNA's security services in the West Bank. While 41 percent of the respondents

conveyed quite a bit or a great deal of confidence in the PNA security services this year, only 31 percent expressed such confidence in the Hamas security services (Figure 17). A comparison of the two Palestinian territories shows that people's confidence in Gaza's security forces has been consistently higher in the Gaza Strip than in the West Bank. While people's confidence in Gaza fell to its lowest level last year, at 32 percent, it reached its highest level this year, at 41 percent.

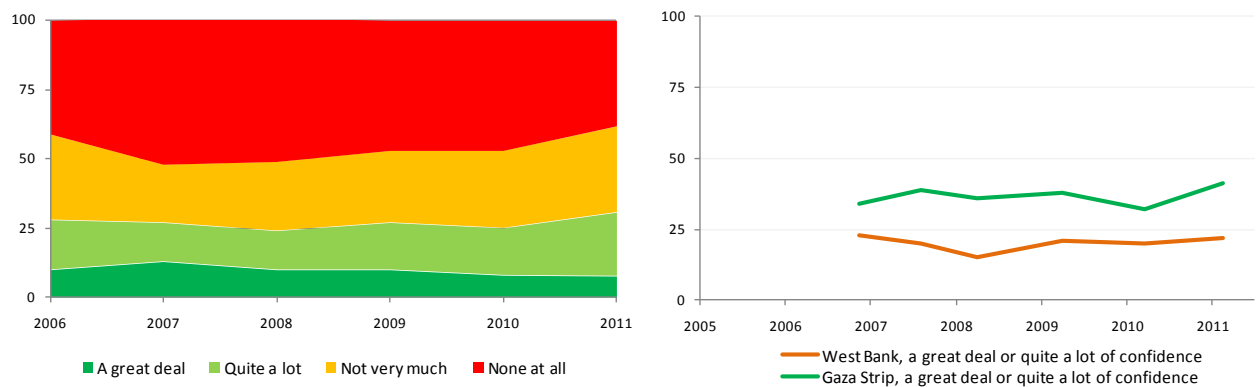


Figure 17: Confidence in Hamas' security services. All (left) and West Bank and Gaza Strip (right)

The Civil Service

A majority of Palestinians has some or a lot of confidence in civil servants (Figure 18). However, few people give the civil service top grades. The assessment of West Bankers is somewhat more positive than the assessment of people residing in the Gaza Strip.

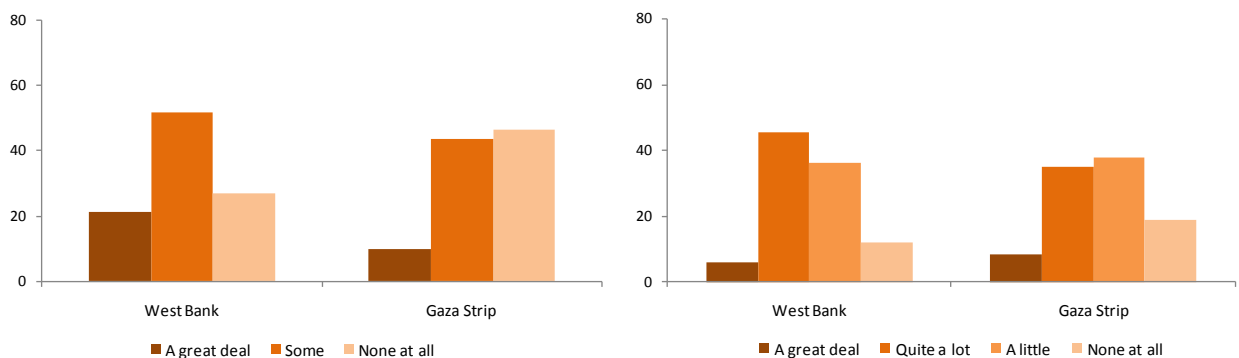


Figure 18: Confidence in the civil service, 2010 (left) and 2011 (right)

The World Values Survey has comparative data for Iran (2005), Jordan (2007) and Egypt (2008). In contrast to the 51 percent in the West Bank and 43 percent in the Gaza Strip that had a great deal or quite a lot of confidence in the civil service, the

civil services of these three countries enjoyed the confidence of 31, 62 and 63 percent of their populations, respectively.

Palestinian NGOs

After a slightly negative downward trend in people’s confidence from 2005 to 2010, local Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) increased their standing in the 2011 poll and reached a level of trust on par with most other Palestinian institutions (Figure 19). The trends have been somewhat different in the two areas. People’s confidence in Palestinian associations in the Gaza Strip dropped abruptly from 2005 to 2006, although the trend has been positive from then onwards, with 49 percent of Gazans expressing quite a lot or a great deal of confidence this year. On the other hand, the polls suggest a more constant negative trend in the West Bank up until 2010, when the trend shifts upward slightly, and in 2011, 41 percent said they trusted Palestinian NGOs.

The 2010 and 2011 polls also asked about trust in Islamic charities, which came out with better scores. For these two years, 41 and 49 percent in the West Bank and 47 and 54 percent in the Gaza Strip expressed quite a lot or a great deal of confidence in them.

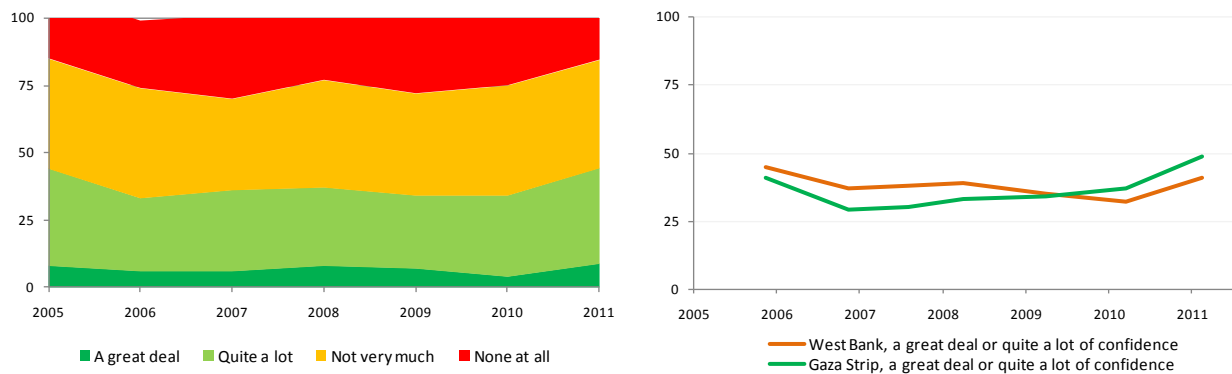


Figure 19: Confidence in Palestinian NGOs. All (left) and West Bank and Gaza Strip (right)

Trust in International Organizations

International NGOs

People's trust in international Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) does not differ significantly from that of national NGOs (Figure 20). However, while the level of confidence in the two territories was comparable in the 2005-2008 period, the two following years saw a significant raise in the trust level in the Gaza Strip and in May 2010, more than one-half of Gazans (53 percent) said they had a great deal or quite a lot of confidence in international NGOs. One year later, that figure had fallen to 39 percent, while 34 percent of West Bankers stated they had a great deal or quite a lot of confidence in international NGOs⁸. The surge in trust in the Gaza Strip in 2009 and 2010 should be seen in light of the more prominent role and positive media coverage of international organizations in the aftermath of the war on Gaza in early 2009. In 2011, people's confidence in international organizations had fallen but still stood at a higher level than before the 2009 war.

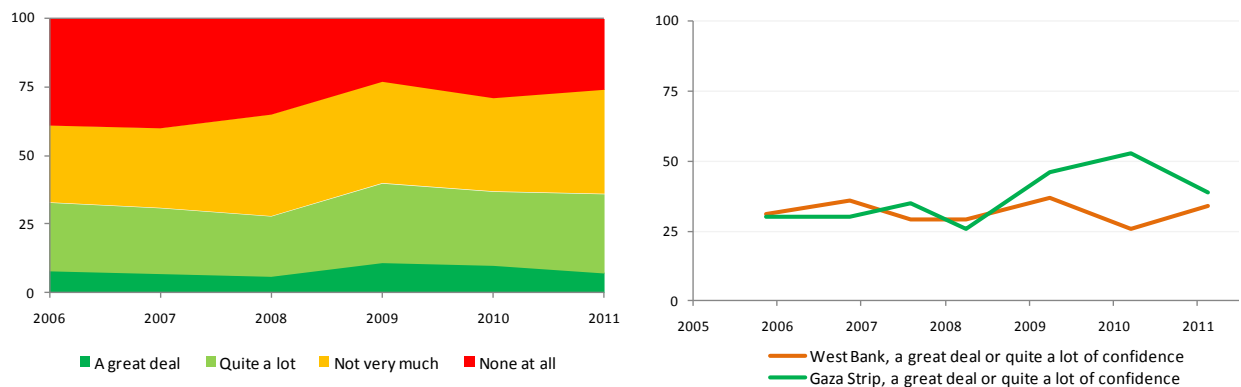


Figure 20: Confidence in international NGOs. All (left) and West Bank and Gaza Strip (right)

UNRWA

UNRWA, the UN agency providing basic education, health and, to a lesser extent, social services to Palestinian refugees, is the single most-trustworthy institution in the eyes of people in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. In the years 2005-2011, more than one half and up to two thirds of respondents have expressed quite a lot or a great deal of confidence in UNRWA. Over time, however, the confidence in the UN agency has seen a slow downward trend (Figure 21). This is primarily caused by

⁸ It should be noted that the Fafo polls for the years 2005 to 2008 asked about confidence in international companies and NGOs, while in 2009, 2010 and 2011 the question was restricted to international NGOs and agencies (not including UNRWA) only.

diminishing trust among the population of the West Bank. People’s confidence in the Agency has consistently been higher in Gaza than in the West Bank, with around 30 percentage points more people admitting quite a lot or a great deal of confidence. This is almost certainly related to the higher share of Palestinian refugees residing there and being served by UNRWA. Similarly, camp residents, the vast majority of whom are refugees, have a higher confidence in UNRWA than other Palestinians. In 2011, 78 percent of camp residents expressed quite a lot or a great deal of confidence, while 64 percent of non-camp urban and 41 percent of non-camp rural Palestinians did the same.

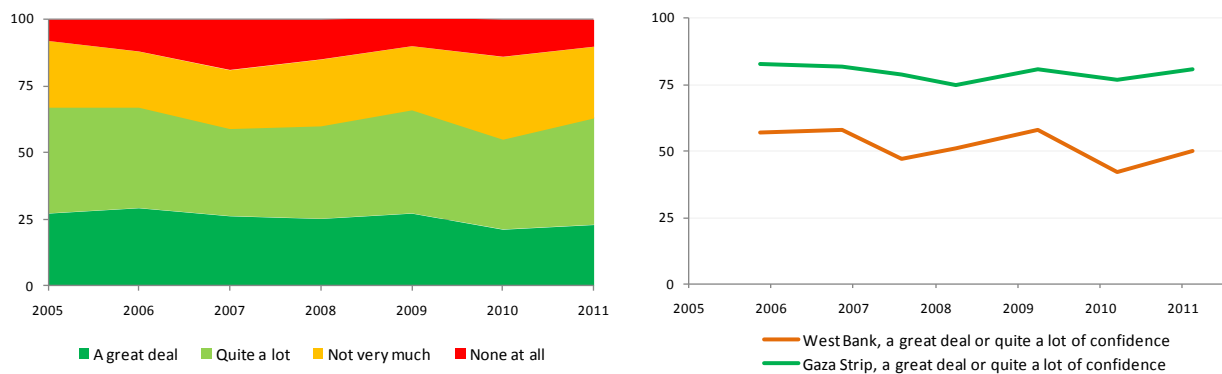


Figure 21: Confidence in UNRWA. All (left) and West Bank and Gaza Strip (right)

Voting Preferences

A higher share of the population in the West Bank than in the Gaza Strip appears to be tired of politics and claims they would abstain from voting if parliamentary elections were held (Figure 22, Figure 23). In the 2011 poll, one third of all respondents (35 percent) aged 18 and above suggested they would not participate in the ballots. Moreover, West Bankers are less likely than Gazans to know (or to wish to reveal) which party they would prefer had there been elections. In this year's poll as many as 18 percent of the population in the West Bank as compared with six percent in the Gaza Strip were undecided. Altogether one half of all possible voters (49 percent) either said they would refrain from participating in national elections or that they had not decided how to cast their vote.

Party preferences have remained fairly stable over time, although fluctuations occur, primarily in the West Bank. Following the Israeli war on Gaza (Dec. 2008-Jan. 2009), the popularity of Hamas grew, while that of Fatah fell. One year later, Fatah had regained its strength at the expense of Hamas. In fact, Hamas had lost terrain in both territories, and we recorded the poorest rating for Hamas in the Gaza Strip in 2011 when 17 percent of all adults declared they would support the Islamist movement 'had there been elections today'. The share of Hamas voters plunged from 11 percent in 2010 to seven percent of all Palestinian respondents in the West Bank in 2011. A striking result is that even in the Gaza Strip, Fatah attracts more voters than Hamas.

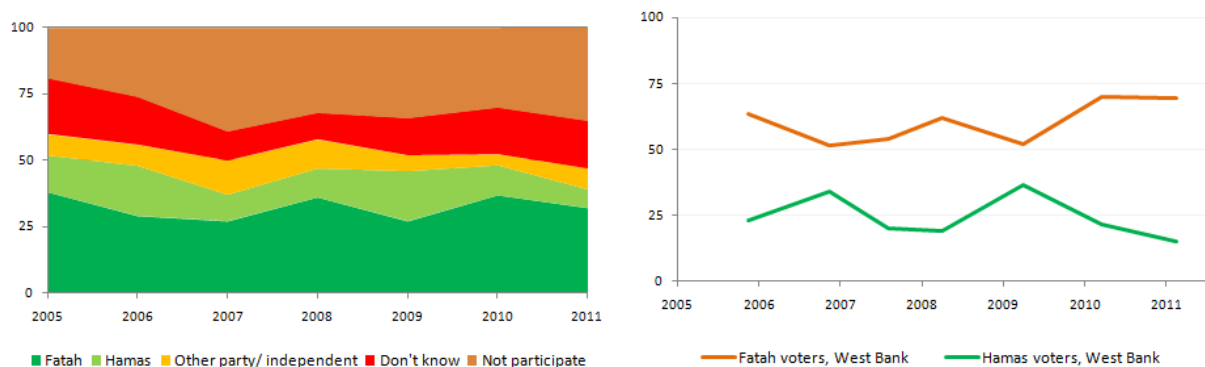


Figure 22: Electoral behavior were an election held today. West Bank, all respondents (left) and only respondents who would have voted and have made up their mind (right)

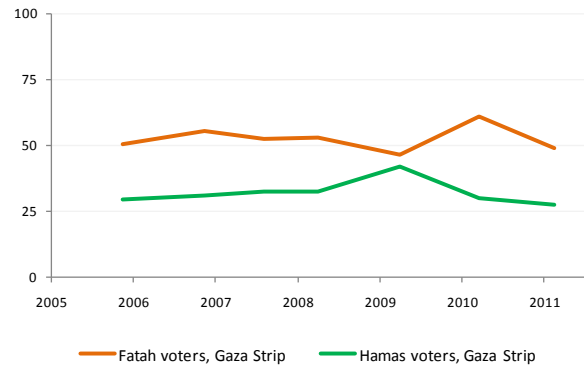
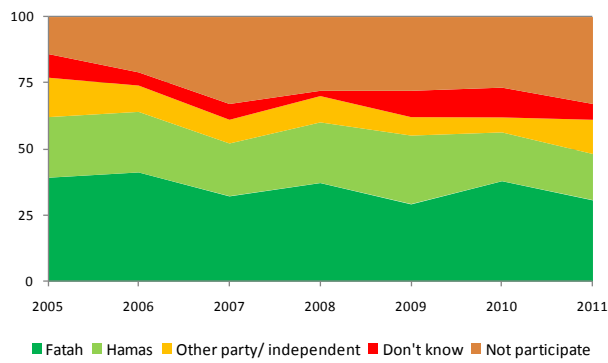


Figure 23: Party preferences were elections held today. Gaza Strip, all respondents (left), only respondents who would have voted and have made up their mind (right)

Appendix: The Surveys

The surveys were implemented by Fafo in the years 2005-2011. The surveys' objective was both to map socio-economic conditions and to examine people's perceptions of political issues and their party preferences. The polls were conducted at different times of the year (Table 1). The respondents are made up persons aged 18 and above. One individual was randomly selected in each household, which was also randomly selected to be representative of the entire population in the Palestinian Territories. The interviews were conducted face-to-face with each person, in the vast majority of cases in the person's home. We also collected some information pertaining to each household and about each household member, but to a varying extent in the various surveys.

The sampling error around the estimates varies considerably both between surveys because of differences in sample size, and between indicators because of how indicators interact with the sampling design. In general a precision of better than +/- 3 percent can be assumed, although some estimates may have higher uncertainty.

The response rate was generally high (90 percent and more).

Year	Month	Number of respondents
2005	November/ December	1 849
2006	November/ December	1 960
2007	July	1 953
2008	February/ March	4 069
2009	February/ March	3 493
2010	February (West Bank)/ May (Gaza)	1 899
2011	February	1 805

Table 1: Time of fieldwork and sample size for each of the seven household surveys

Additional information about each survey and comprehensive tabulation reports, which include a variety of background variables such as gender, age, place of residence, socio-economic status and political preference, are available on Fafo's web pages: <http://www.fafo.no/ais/middeast/opt/index.htm>. Interested users may also make their own custom tabulations on the web or request access to the micro data files.

Palestinian Opinions about Governance, Institutions and Political Leaders



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