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# **Palestinian Opinions about Public Services**

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



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## **Executive Summary**

Since the establishment of the Palestinian National Authority, great strides have been made in providing the population of the West Bank and Gaza Strip with public services. Based on a series of seven representative surveys carried out by Fafo between 2005 and 2011, the present report indicates that Palestinians generally receive all major public services (electricity, water, sanitation, basic schooling, primary and secondary health care) and that they are relatively satisfied with the quality of the provision. There is, however, some variation, and this is largely related to the unstable situation of the Gaza Strip.

### **Access to Services**

The period 2005-2011 saw a marked improvement in the availability of services in the West Bank, while access to services in the Gaza Strip remained stable at high levels. Presently electricity supply, piped water, public garbage collection, primary schools and public primary health care cover more than 95 percent of the population in both territories. One major exception is the lack of an adequate sewage and sanitation system in many areas of the West Bank. In rural West Bank settings, 39 percent of dwellings were not connected to a sewerage system in 2011, while this figure was 15 percent for urban dwellings. The percentage of households lacking public sewage connection in the West Bank has, however, been halved during the six-year period.

### **Perceptions of Public Services**

The years 2005 to 2008 saw a largely positive trend in the level of satisfaction with public services among West Bankers, while people in the Gaza Strip in the same period grew increasingly dissatisfied with most services covered in this report. In February and March of 2008, the level of satisfaction was higher in the West Bank than in the Gaza Strip for all services (Figure 1). Three years later, the gap in satisfaction with services has narrowed between the two territories. On the one hand, satisfaction with sanitation and primary health care services has fallen slightly in the West Bank. On the other hand, a higher share of people in Gaza express more satisfaction with certain public services—schools, primary health care, transportation—than during the three years prior.

Considering all services during the entire seven-year period, and reflecting the improved access of most services there, a clear positive trend emerges in people's satisfaction with public services in the West Bank.

The Gaza Strip has seen a stable to slightly negative development in attitudes toward public service provision. Two particular challenges in Gaza relate to the provision of

electricity and water. While connection to the electricity grid and water network is nearly universal, a vast majority of Gaza households are supplied only a few hours a day. Furthermore, because their tap water tends to be salty, chlorinated and have a smell, Gazans are much more negative than West Bankers in their evaluation of the quality of their water supply services.

## Introduction

This brief paper describes the development of the availability of public services to Palestinians over the past seven years and their evaluation of the services they receive<sup>1</sup>.

The statistics 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 survey<sup>2</sup>. The surveys were implemented by Fafo.

The polls conducted from 2005 to 2011 cover an eventful period, namely: 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 of December 2008 to January 2009; the leak of the 'Palestine papers'; and the 'Arab Spring' protests in the region that started late 2010/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.

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

<sup>2</sup> 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.

## Access and Satisfaction with Services

### Electricity Supply

Today, most households in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip are connected to the electricity grid. In 2005, two percent in the West Bank and one percent in the Gaza Strip lacked access. The nearly universal supply of 2011 contrasts sharply with the 14 percent of West Bank households and two percent of the Gaza Strip households that were without connection in 1992<sup>3</sup>.

People's satisfaction with the electricity supply was fairly stable from 2005 to 2007, when three out of four Palestinians were very or somewhat satisfied with such services (Figure 1). In 2008, however, the share who stated they were unsatisfied increased significantly, due to a drop in user satisfaction in the Gaza Strip. While in the years prior to 2008, only one in ten respondents said they were very unsatisfied, more than three times as many (34 percent or one third) said the same that year. Three years later, in 2011, the level of dissatisfaction in the Palestinian Territories remains the same.

From 2005 to 2011, there was basically no change in the level of satisfaction with the electricity supply in the West Bank, but as noted, in 2008 the satisfaction dropped precipitously in the Gaza Strip. While in the 2008 and 2011 surveys, three out of four West Bankers stated they were very or somewhat satisfied with the electricity supply, only one in ten (2008, eight percent; 2011, 13 percent) held the same opinion in Gaza.

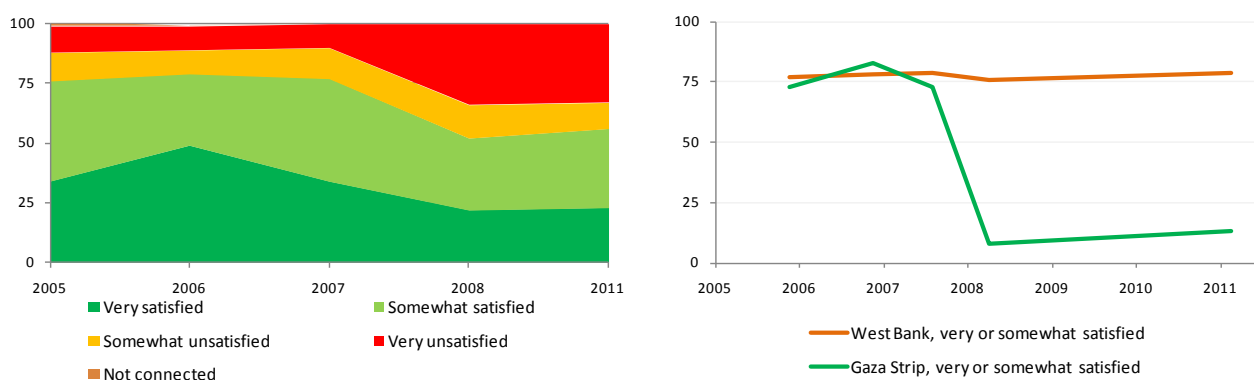


Figure 1: Satisfaction with the electricity supply. All respondents (left) and West Bank and Gaza Strip (right)

<sup>3</sup> References to the situation in 1992 are based on data from Fafo's living conditions survey of that year.



People’s overall satisfaction with electricity services is evidently associated with the delivery of electricity from the public grid to their homes. Fafo’s 2008 and 2011 surveys examined the quality of the service by asking about the number of hours with access to electricity in the house the day (24 hours) preceding the interview. While for those two years, 92 and 94 percent of the households in the West Bank reported 24-hours of uninterrupted supply of electricity, only 16 and 14 percent reported the same in the Gaza Strip.

## Water Supply

Access to piped water in the West Bank has improved from 91 percent in 2005 to 97 percent of households in 2011. The Gaza Strip has enjoyed a stable access of about 99 percent.

Sixty percent to two thirds of the respondents appear to be somewhat or very satisfied with the water supply. Yet, over time people’s level of satisfaction has declined (Figure 2). It is increased dissatisfaction in the Gaza Strip which primarily accounts for the overall negative trend, and Gaza scores significantly poorer than the West Bank in the two latest surveys for which Fafo has data (2008 and 2011). While in 2011, 61 percent said they were somewhat or very satisfied with water supply in the West Bank, only 39 percent of the Gazans were of the same opinion.

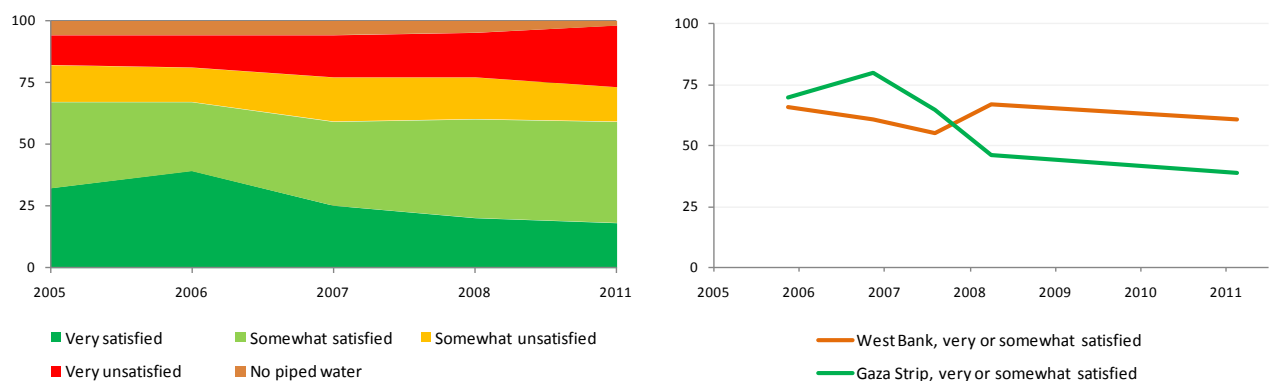


Figure 2: Satisfaction with the water supply. All (left) and West Bank and Gaza Strip (right)

The poorer rating provided by the citizens of Gaza partly reflects the inferior services there. The 2011 survey collected data on two indicators which help explain the regional variation. First, the survey enquired about the number of hours that people had access to piped water the day preceding the interview. While 61 percent of West Bank households reported piped water 24 hours per day, only nine percent of Gaza households did the same.

Second, while 60 percent of West Bank households did not report negatively on any aspect of their tap water (up from 55 percent in 2008), only nine percent of Gaza households considered their tap water flawless (down from ten percent in 2008). Respondents in the Gaza Strip reported as follows about the quality of their water: four out of five respondents in the Gaza Strip indicated that the tap water tastes salty; one-half claim it tastes too strongly of chlorine; one fifth reports that the tap water is colored; and one in ten households complain that it smells. Too strong taste of chlorine, meanwhile, was the most common complaint in the West Bank, mentioned by one in four households.

### Sewage and Sanitation

While people in the West Bank and the Gaza strip enjoy near universal access to most public services, this is not the case for connections to sewage networks. In 2005, 29 percent of all West Bank households were not connected to a sewage network, dropping to 25 percent in 2011. Due to the rural nature of much of the West Bank, universal access is not to be expected. In the Gaza Strip, the percentage of unconnected households has been stable at around four percent during the past six years. In 1992, 26 percent were connected to a sewage network in the West Bank, and only 50 percent in the Gaza Strip.

There was a gradual positive trend with regard to people’s perception of sewerage and sanitation systems with the proportion of somewhat or very satisfied with such services going up from 44 percent in 2005 to 57 percent in 2008 (Figure 3). In 2011, the level of satisfaction had fallen slightly to 54 percent, but this figure is still much better than the first years for which we have data. Simultaneously, there was a reduction in the share of households that lacked access to sanitation services from 28 and 32 percent in 2005 and 2006 to 16 and 17 percent in 2008 and 2011.

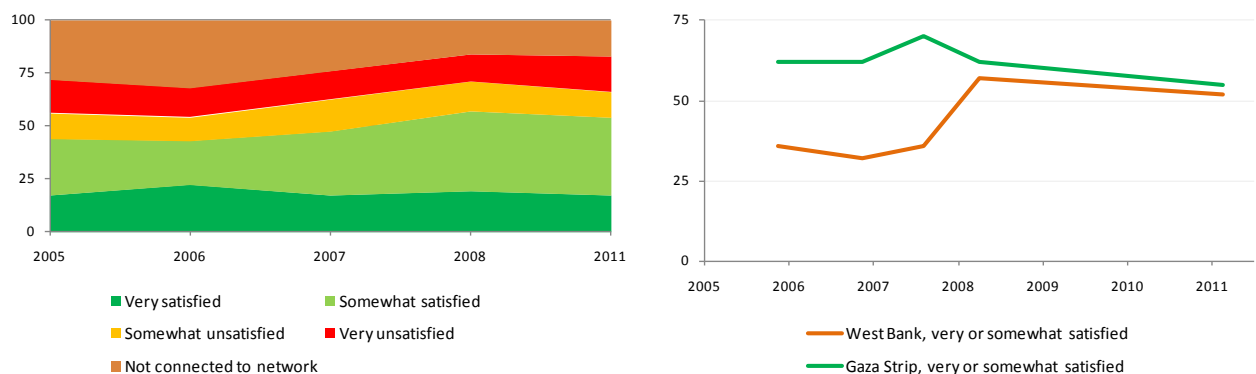


Figure 3: Satisfaction with sewage and sanitation. All (left) and West Bank and Gaza Strip (right)

Sewerage and sanitation systems are one of the public services where the Gaza population is more satisfied than Palestinians in the West Bank. However the perception gap between Palestinians in the two territories, as captured by Fafo's polls, has narrowed. Considering the 2005-2011 period, the level of satisfaction with sanitation services in the Gaza Strip shows a negative trend. The results are influenced by the lower share of dwellings connected to a sewerage system in the West Bank than in the Gaza Strip, which in 2011 was 25 and four percent, respectively. The increased access to services in the West Bank—around 40 percent of the households in our samples said they did not benefit from sanitation services in the first polls—has probably contributed to the improved rating there.

### Garbage Collection

Currently nearly all households—99 percent—have access to public garbage collection. While the Gaza Strip has enjoyed stable high access, the access in the West Bank has improved from 91 percent in 2005.

Garbage collection is the service which enjoys the highest share of Palestinian satisfaction. All surveys have found that a majority has expressed satisfaction with the service (Figure 4). The graphs suggest a slightly positive development in the percentage of the population saying they are somewhat or very satisfied with garbage collection services, reaching more than two thirds (70 percent) of all respondents in 2011. Considering both areas separately reveals that West Bankers more often express satisfaction than people in the Gaza Strip, and that it is the gradually more favorable ratings there that primarily account for the overall positive trend in the level of satisfaction with garbage collection services since 2005.

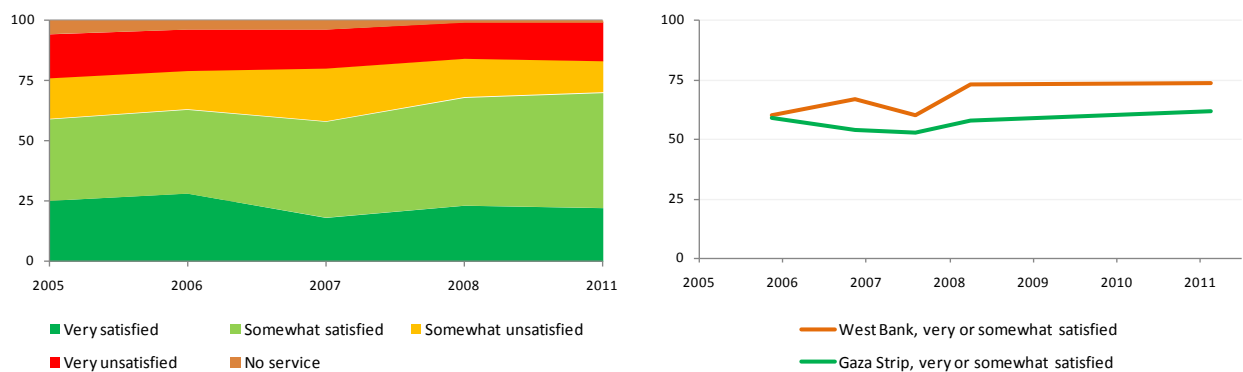


Figure 4: Satisfaction with garbage collection. All (left) and West Bank and Gaza Strip (right)

## Roads and Public Transportation

Access to roads and transportation is universal in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and questions on access were therefore not included. However, Fafo's opinion polls included a question on satisfaction with the roads and the public transportation system for the first time in 2006. People's assessment was stable for the years 2006-2008 as over one-half expressed their satisfaction (Figure 5). It appears that, in people's opinion, the development of roadways and transportation services was positive from 2006 to 2008 in the West Bank, while the lowest score for the first three polls in Gaza was recorded in 2008, with a slightly lower level of satisfaction than in the West Bank. However, as judged by the poll in 2011, since then the roads and/or public transportation services have improved: the level of contentment in the Gaza Strip has almost returned to its peak 2007 levels, and the positive trend for the West Bank has continued. There, nearly three in four respondents (73 percent) expressed satisfaction with the roads and public transportation, up more than 20 percentage points as compared with 2006.

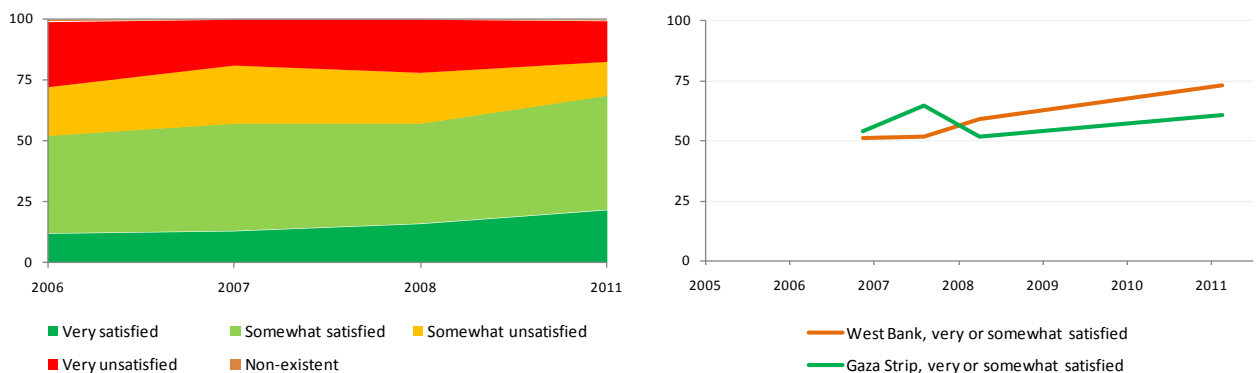


Figure 5: Satisfaction with roads and public transportation. All (left) and West Bank and Gaza Strip (right)

## Street Lighting

The 2011 poll was the first to include a question regarding street lighting, only three percent of all respondents said their community lacked street lights. Two thirds (67 percent) of the respondents stated they were very or somewhat satisfied with this service. People in the West Bank were more often pleased than people in the Gaza Strip (Figure 6). Three out of four respondents expressed satisfaction in the West Bank, while only one in two did the same in Gaza. Furthermore, three times as many in the latter as compared with the former territory said they were very dissatisfied with the street illumination.

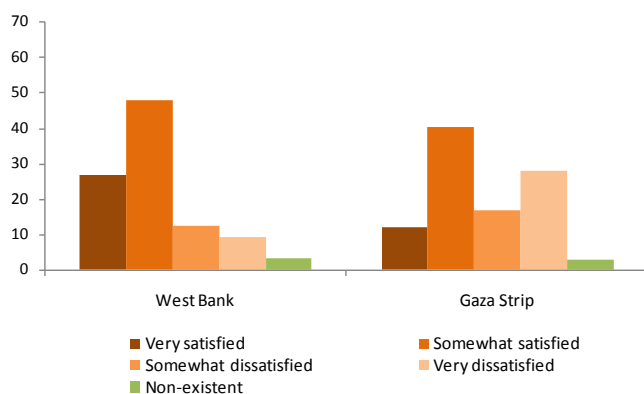


Figure 6: Satisfaction with street lighting in living area, 2011. West Bank and Gaza Strip

### Public Primary Schools

Public primary schools are available in nearly all communities, and in the West Bank only one percent stated that they lacked access, while none lacked access in the Gaza Strip.

Overall, the population rated public primary schools rather well as seven in ten said they were somewhat or very satisfied with them. However, the polls suggest that people grew gradually dissatisfied with the public schools from 2005 to 2008 (Figure 7). The proportion of people in the West Bank and Gaza Strip who expressed their satisfaction with the performance of public schools was similar until 2008, when the Gazans’ level of satisfaction plunged to 50 percent. This shift likely is associated with a number of factors, including: the turmoil in the public sector after Hamas’ take-over in the Gaza Strip and the fact that teachers on the pay-roll of the Palestinian National Authority did not go to work and were substituted frequently by less qualified teachers. The same year the share of West Bankers expressing satisfaction with public primary education also increased somewhat, rendering the gap in satisfaction between the West Bank and Gaza Strip substantial. In the 2011 survey, people’s satisfaction with public schools in Gaza was back at previous levels, which is rather remarkable given the destructions of schools in the Gaza Strip during Israel’s war on Gaza two years earlier. In the West Bank, Palestinians were more content than ever as 82 percent stated they were somewhat or very satisfied with public, primary schools.

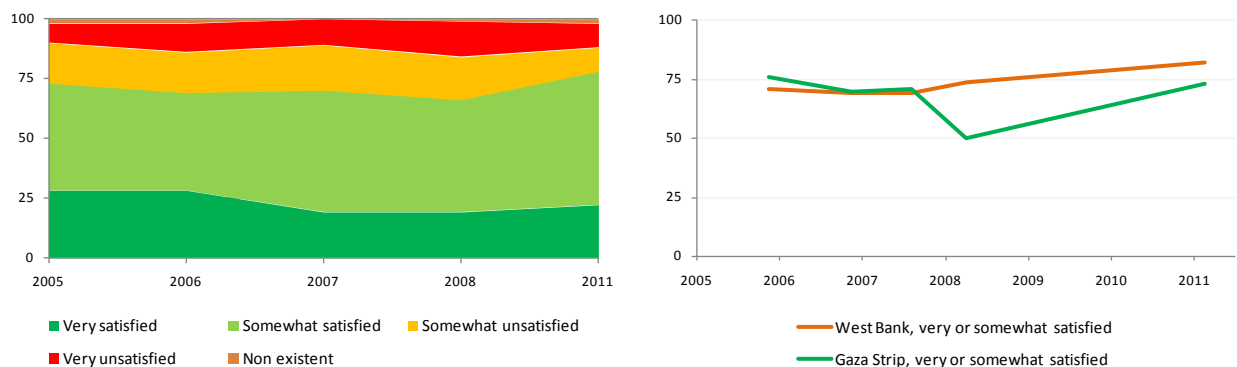


Figure 7: Satisfaction with public primary schools. All (left) and West Bank and Gaza Strip (right)

Compared to UNRWA and private providers of primary schooling, the public educational system seems to be doing well (Figure 8). A significant proportion of the respondents claim that private and UNRWA schooling is not offered in the areas where they live. If these respondents are kept outside the calculation, UNRWA schools receive the best score with 85 percent stating they are somewhat or very satisfied. Public schools are ranked second and private schools third with scores of 80 and 77 percent, respectively. This higher level of satisfaction with UNRWA's primary schools is caused principally by the good score in the Gaza Strip, where 93 percent of the respondents with an opinion express satisfaction with UNRWA.

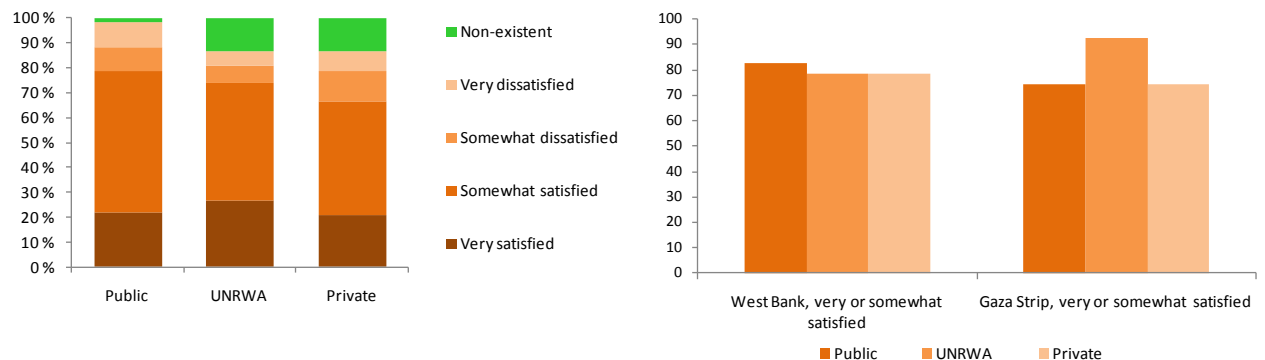


Figure 8: Satisfaction with three main providers of primary education, 2011. All (left) and West Bank and Gaza Strip (right; all respondents claiming service to be non-existent are excluded)

## Best Provider of Education

The picture becomes somewhat different when the respondents are requested to identify the *best* provider of educational services overall and not consider the performance of primary schools only (Figure 9). In the West Bank, people tend to have the highest confidence in private schools, while public schools follow in second place. In Gaza, three in four respondents (78 percent) said that UNRWA provides the

best education with the two other types of school trailing far behind. The results are almost identical to those found in the survey conducted a year earlier.

The diverse answers in the two areas are a reflection of the differing relative number of suppliers of educational services and of people’s varied experiences with them. These different responses are perhaps also a sign that the services offered by the same kind of provider may be dissimilar in quality in the two territories.

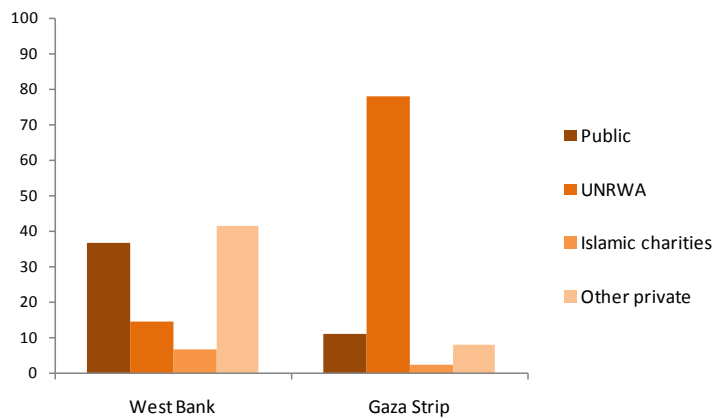


Figure 9: Type of institution providing the best schooling, 2011

### Public Primary Health Care

During the six-year period of the polls, fewer and fewer respondents said they lacked access to public primary health care in their communities, and availability is now just about universal. In the West Bank, seven percent lacked access to public primary health care services six years ago, while in the Gaza Strip, availability has been stable at practically 100 percent.

The polls indicate an overall positive trend in the level of satisfaction with public-sector primary health services (Figure 10). A comparison of the two Palestinian territories shows a picture similar to the one presented for primary schools above: one year after Hamas’ take-over, people’s satisfaction with services drop significantly in the Gaza Strip. While in the years 2005-2007, the inhabitants of Gaza were more content with public primary health care than the inhabitants of the West Bank, the opinions had changed in 2008. The level of satisfaction slid by 11 percentage points in Gaza, while it increased by 21 percentage points in the West Bank. Three years later, the gap has closed, and Gazans are as content with public primary health care as the population in the West Bank. While in 2011, the level of satisfaction in the Gaza Strip stood at the same level as in 2005 and 2006, in the West Bank, it had risen with 16 percentage points from 2005 to 2011 and 70 percent said they were somewhat or very satisfied with public primary health care.

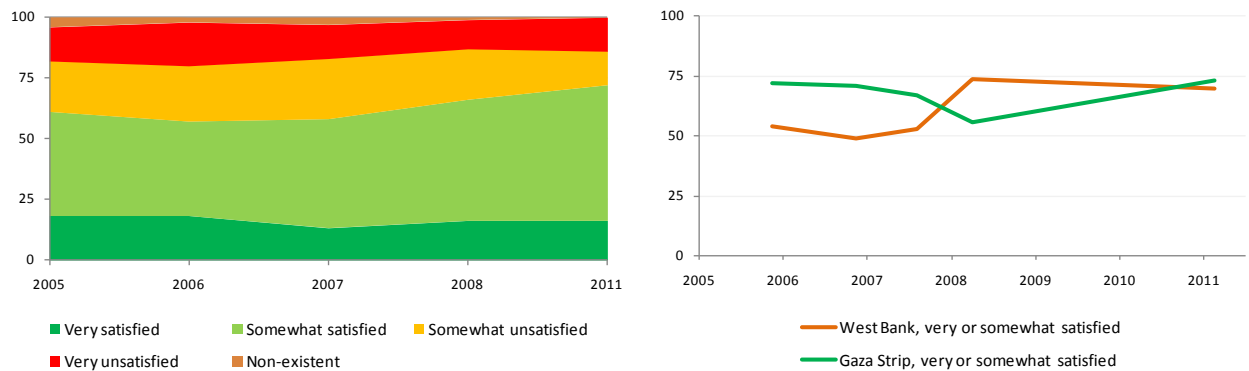


Figure 10: Satisfaction with public primary health services. All (left) and West Bank and Gaza Strip (right)

Compared to UNRWA and private providers of primary health care, public primary health care scores slightly poorer (Figure 11). The satisfaction with UNRWA is particularly high in the Gaza Strip, where 87 percent of the respondents with access to the UN agency’s primary health care services in their living area state that they are somewhat or very satisfied with it.

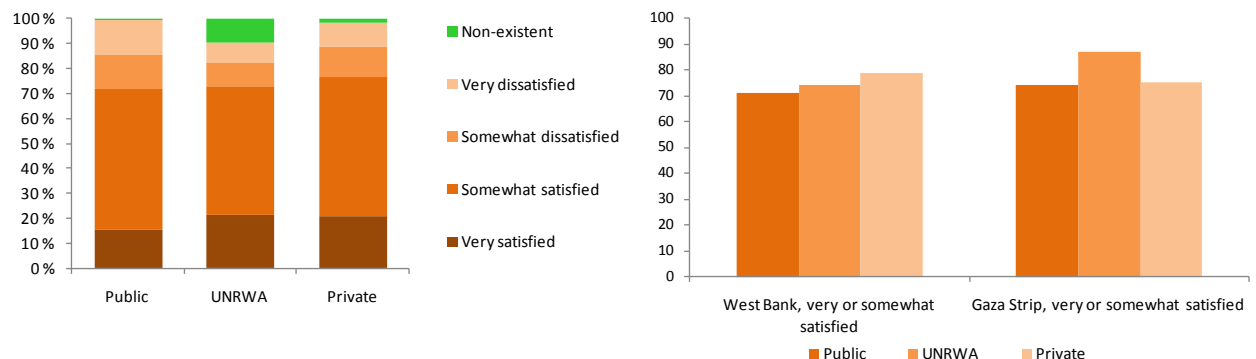


Figure 11: Satisfaction with three main providers of primary health care, 2011. All (left) and West Bank and Gaza Strip (right; respondents claiming service as non-existent are excluded)

## Public Secondary Health Care (Hospitals)

The situation with regard to secondary health care (a term referring to hospitals and specialized medical services) mirrors that of primary health care just given (Figure 12). For the Palestinian territories on the whole, the percentage of respondents that expressed satisfaction with the services increased from 2005 to 2011, while those who claimed they lacked access to public hospitals decreased from ten to less than one percent.



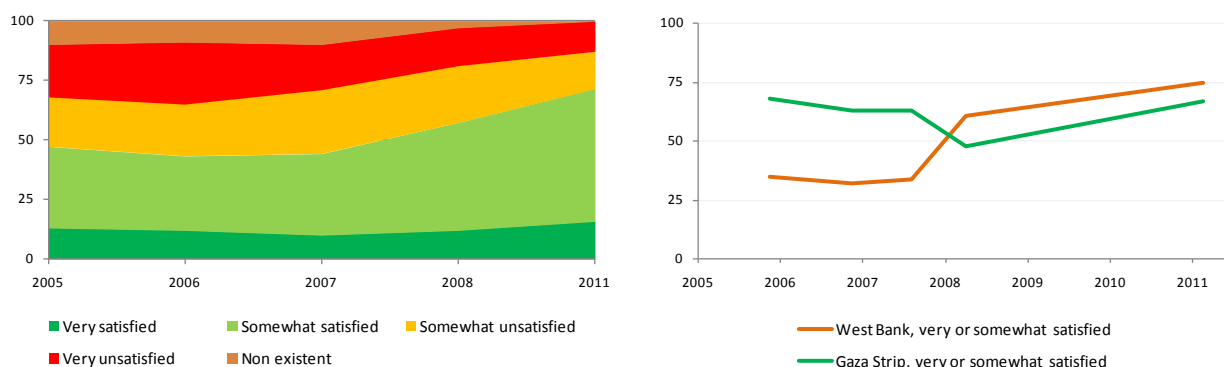


Figure 12: Satisfaction with public secondary health services. All (left) and West Bank and Gaza Strip (right)

Considering the West Bank and Gaza Strip separately, the statistics suggest similar trends in people’s satisfaction with public secondary health care as with public primary health care, only more dramatic. The share of satisfied respondents was much higher in the Gaza Strip than in the West Bank in the years 2005, 2006 and 2007. While during these years an average of 34 percent in the West Bank reported to be somewhat or very satisfied with the public hospitals, the comparable figure for Gaza was 65 percent. This figure was turned upside down in 2008, when a higher proportion of respondent in the West Bank than in the Gaza Strip said they were very or somewhat satisfied (61 *versus* 48 percent). While the gap is still present three years on, people in both areas have become considerably more content: 75 percent in the West Bank and 67 percent in the Gaza Strip are somewhat or very satisfied with public secondary health care.

The abrupt change in the level of satisfaction in the West Bank in 2008 is partly explained by the fact that people’s access to services improved significantly from that year onwards. While maximum one percent of respondents in the Gaza Strip stated they lacked hospitals or specialist services in their communities in the 2005, 2006 and 2007 polls, some 15 percent stated the same in the West Bank. In 2008 four percent of West Bankers said they lacked such services, while almost none did so in 2011.

### Best Provider of Health Services

While a majority of Palestinians have expressed their satisfaction with public primary and secondary health services, when compared with other service providers, just one in five ranks public services first (Figure 13). The picture echoes the situation presented above regarding the best supplier of education. In 2011, the private sector is the preferred sector by a majority of West Bankers, while UNRWA tops the ranking in the Gaza Strip. Compared to one year earlier, the public sector scores five percentage points better in the West Bank whereas UNRWA has lost four percentage

points. In the Gaza Strip, the UN agency has gained the 'votes' of 13 percent, while the public health sector and private sector have lost seven and four percentage points, respectively.

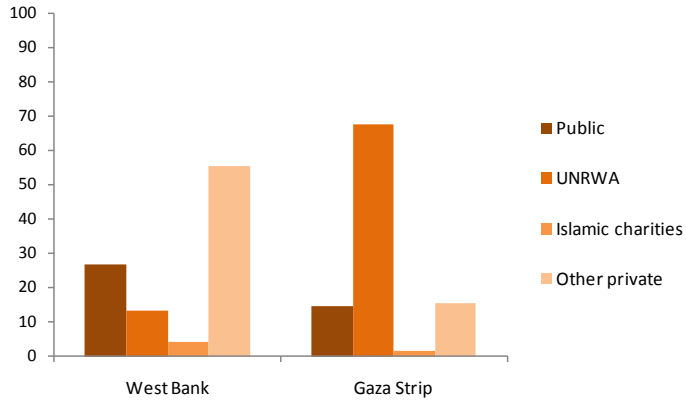


Figure 13: Type of institution providing the best health services, 2011

## **Conclusion**

This survey of the availability of services and user satisfaction rates illustrates that availability of services has been nearly universally extended. While user satisfaction with services is generally quite high, there remain some challenges to be met. This is particularly the case in the Gaza Strip, where interruptions in some services, such as electricity supply, naturally have led to poor evaluations.

## Appendix: The Surveys

The seven surveys were implemented by Fafo in the years 2005-2011. The surveys' objective was partly to map socio-economic conditions and partly to examine people's perceptions of services and 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.



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