

PALESTINIAN SUPPORT FOR THE PEACE PROCESS



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METHODOLOGY

- JMCC follows the following method for its household surveys:
- JMCC's sample size is 1200, and since no single interviewer is expected to interview more than 20 respondents, the number of primary sampling units is normally 60.
- Sample is stratified in the West Bank and Gaza according to population.
- Stratification for districts in the West Bank and Gaza Strip is also carried out according to population.
- Cities in each district are stratified according to population.
- Villages and refugee camps in each district were randomly selected (simple random sampling).
- All population concentrations within each district in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip are considered for selection. Concentrations include towns, villages and refugee camps.
- Each of these concentrations enters into its district data base for randomization purposes on the basis of size. Each concentration is divided by one thousand, which is designated as a single unit. If a certain village, for example, has a population of 10,000, then it is assigned ten units; accordingly it has ten chances of being randomly selected.
- After the population concentrations are randomly selected, interviewers are instructed to go to assigned primary sampling units to conduct the interviews.
- The household selection method is based on a pre-defined route. Interviewers are instructed to follow a specific route when selecting a household. Since most population concentration are not well planned, nor is there a well defined block system, interviewers, particularly in villages and refugee camps, are asked to go to a specific place (mosque, elementary school, etc.) to begin the route. They are instructed to start from that place and then take, for example, the fourth street on the

left. When the street is determined they are instructed to take the third or second house on their right, then following the third house on the left etc.

- In cities the same method is used. The city is divided into neighborhoods. Neighborhoods are also randomly selected. Interviewers have a starting point in each neighborhood then each neighborhood is treated in the same way as above for the selection of households.

PREFACE

This study is the third in a series of public opinion polling projects produced by JMCC. Previous studies include *Palestinian Public Opinion since the Peace Process* (July 1998) and *Palestine's Interim Agreement with Democracy* (May 1998). Each study uses the proper methodology to poll Palestinian sentiment regarding political leadership, democratic institutions, and the peace process with Israel. In conducting these polls, JMCC hopes to offer a thoughtful compilation of data and analysis in order to uncover the social, political and economic reasons behind Palestinian opinion.

This study is an overview of the majority of Palestinians, those who support the peace process, and how their support is linked to certain key variables. Using SPSS and the data obtained over the last five years, we have examined the impact of socio/economic, religious and political backgrounds on support of the peace process. The first section of the study gauges support by area, (Gaza, West Bank and East Jerusalem), residence (villages, refugee camps, cities), age, gender, occupation and marital status.

The final section of the study contrasts support for Palestinian political between the general population and peace process supporters, paying particular attention to Yasser Arafat's popularity, as well as Palestinian's support for Fatah in relation to other political parties. In presenting a look at political affiliation within Palestinian society, the study illustrates how political loyalties effect support for the peace process.

This study is not intended to be exhaustive but to highlight the way in which some key factors influence support for the peace process. JMCC believes that the polling process is an important indicator of Palestinian society, and we intend to continue the project, publishing additional studies in the future.

**I. INTRODUCTION:
HISTORY OF PALESTINIAN PUBLIC
OPINION ASSESSMENT**

From 1967 to the initiation of the Israeli-Arab peace process in 1991, Palestinian popular opinion was in general unified by one simple fact — the Israeli military occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. A formal assessment of popular opinion would have been virtually impossible during this period, however, since the occupation prevented the free expression of opinions on political, social or economic matters. Public elections were barred, there was no freedom of the press and the rule of law was arbitrarily applied. The measurement of public opinion during this period of over two decades was limited to the one-time-only local elections of 1976 (later annulled by Israel), and the elections within trade unions, NGOs, student unions and chambers of commerce. These events and the expression of Palestinian opinion in general were also significantly influenced by the agenda of the Palestinian leadership outside, the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO).

Beginning in 1987, a series of significant political events altered the Palestinian political reality: the intifada or popular uprising in the West Bank and Gaza the end of the Cold War and the Gulf War. The intifada made the Israelis aware that their occupation of the West Bank and Gaza was unsustainable; the end of the Cold War meant a decrease in Israel's regional influence; and the Gulf War placed the Palestinians in a position where they were forced to lower their expectations and make a deal. The intifada raised the profile of the Palestinian issue worldwide, brought about an increase in international support for the Palestinians, and sharpened criticism of Israel's occupation

and human rights record. At the same time, the end of the Cold War meant the decline in influence and support from the Eastern Bloc for the Palestinians, as well as a reduction in Israel's value as a pro-Western ally in the Middle East. Finally, the Gulf War and the Palestinian leadership's support for defeated Iraq left the PLO facing the agenda of the world's one remaining superpower — the United States — with the traditional support of the Arab states seriously damaged.

The confluence of all these events provided the impetus for the initiation of an Arab-Israeli peace process, of which the October 1991 Madrid conference and the two-track (parallel bilateral/multilateral talks) formula were to serve as the basis. From the beginning, however, there was a lack of international consensus on Palestinian representation at the talks. At the 1979 Camp David negotiations, Palestinians had been discussed and Palestinian issues decided without Palestinians at the table. This was not the case at Madrid. However, Israel objected to the PLO's participation in the negotiations and insisted that only non-PLO affiliated Palestinians could participate and then only as part of a joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegation. Therefore, the PLO, while directing the talks behind the scenes, did not officially take part in the negotiations, and the Palestinian delegation directly involved in the talks was composed of prominent figures from inside the Occupied Territories.

It was in the course of these initial rounds of negotiations that the opinions of Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza Strip began to play a more significant role in Palestinian politics, as was the case to some extent during the first year of the intifada. While the Palestinians at the talks had been selected by the PLO and were answerable to the outside leadership, they all — residing in the West Bank or Gaza Strip — had close contact with their constituency and had experienced firsthand the hardships of living

under the Israeli occupation. Thus it happened that at times the positions of the negotiators diverged from that of the absent leadership, due to the negotiators' greater awareness of the needs and opinions of the general population of the Occupied Territories. One example of this was the Palestinian delegation's insistence on an Israeli halt to settlement expansion during any interim phase, something the PLO did not call for in the agreements it was to negotiate later on, in Oslo.

There was clearly a gap between the leadership outside and the general public that needed to be bridged. Assessment of public opinion in the West Bank and Gaza Strip was necessary in order to link Palestinian representatives outside with the population inside and for the outcome of any negotiations with Israel to be perceived as legitimate.

To serve these ends, and building upon the strong tradition of grassroots activism and volunteerism in the Palestinian territories, in 1993 the Jerusalem Media and Communication Centre began conducting comprehensive public opinion surveys and has continued to do so ever since. This study represents the culmination of surveys taken between March 1993 and July 1998; the majority of analysis, writing and drafting was done in the autumn of 1998, while the currently manifestation of the Oslo accords, the Wye Memorandum was being drafted.

JMCC's targeted samples are Palestinians over 18 years of age, living in the West Bank (including East Jerusalem) and the Gaza Strip. Respondents are selected via a sampling frame adopted by JMCC in consultation with sampling experts, and interviews are carried out in randomly selected households. Respondents in the households are selected by specific charts and Kish tables. After the completion of each poll, results are

analyzed by a team of trained pollsters and policy analysts, and are publicized and distributed to the Palestinian and foreign media, Palestinian government officials, international and local NGOs, consulates and embassies, and other interested parties.

Although public opinion polling in Palestine is a relatively new phenomenon, its impact over the last five years has grown. This may be due partly to the constantly changing political environment, in which the future becomes increasingly difficult to predict and indicators from "the street" become even more important. In this way, public opinion polling enhances the democratic process and assists Palestinian policy-makers in their negotiations with Israel. Finally, public opinion polls play a vital role in the provision of primary data to policy analysts, academics, researchers and journalists, helping to illuminate the intricacies of the Palestine issue.

II. PALESTINIAN SUPPORT FOR THE PEACE PROCESS

The deadline of May 1999, stipulated in the Israeli-Palestinian Agreement on Interim Arrangements for the West Bank and Gaza Strip for the conclusion of a final status agreement, is fast approaching. As yet, however, many key interim phase commitments have not been met and final status negotiations have not even started.

Israel has yet to meet the date for further redeployments from rural areas of the West Bank, has not established a safe passage route for Palestinians between the West Bank and Gaza Strip, continues to obstruct free trade by the Palestinian territories, and has not ended its policy of closure, now in the fifth year. Movement restrictions for Palestinians are far more severe than in the pre-Oslo intifada era, while settlers move around freely on extensive new road networks being built on Palestinian farmland. Most aspects of daily life for Palestinians remain subject to Israeli control, but now, through the mechanism of the Oslo agreements, outside remedies or arbitration are no longer available to them. Joint Israeli-Palestinian committees and sometimes the Israeli security apparatus is the final judge in any dispute. The economy of the West Bank and Gaza Strip is in crisis. According to the Palestine Central Bureau of Statistics, the average unemployment rate is between 15 and 20 percent, jumping closer to 50 percent at times of more severe closure.

The Jerusalem Media and Communication Centre has been monitoring Palestinian public opinion for the past five years. In that time, levels of pessimism have increased dramatically. In the West Bank, an estimated three-quarters of the population say that

they feel less secure since the redeployment from urban areas (which left the vast majority of the country — 97 percent — still under full or partial Israeli control). Almost half of the Palestinian believes that the Legislative Council is ineffective. Almost one quarter does not trust any political party or leading politician.

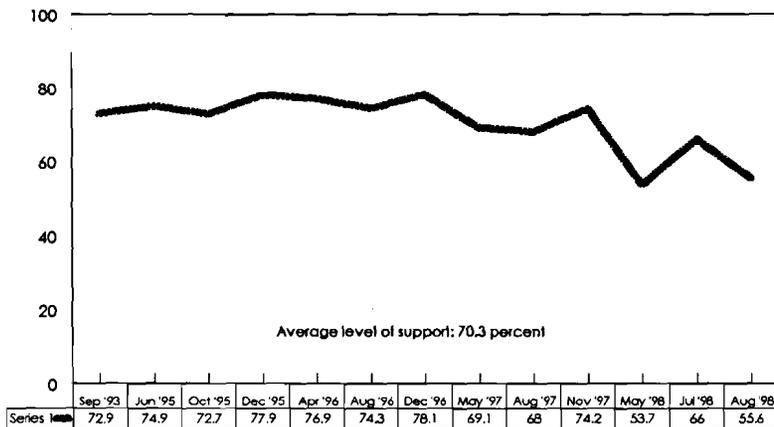
More significantly, public opinion polls have shown consistently that popular Palestinian sentiment is strongly opposed to certain political and territorial concessions that have been discussed by the Americans, the Israelis and the Palestinian leadership. In April 1997, when Israeli prime minister Binyamin Netanyahu first suggested abandoning the interim phase as envisioned under Oslo II to proceed directly to final status talks, 68 percent of Palestinians believed the Palestinian leadership should reject this idea, and only 11 percent were in favor. Moreover, an overwhelming 73 percent of those surveyed around this same period believe that in any final resolution of the Middle East conflict, Palestinians should be granted the right of return to homes evacuated in 1948, a hope unlikely to be fulfilled. Even more, 84.1 percent, do not agree with the idea of an Israeli annexation of key settlement blocs as part of a final resolution, which is exactly the point of all the maps discussed between the Israelis and Americans in late 1997.

Yet in the face of these gloomy indicators for the future, there has always been a remarkably consistent level of support for continuation of the peace process with Israel. On average, between September 1993 and July 1998, 71.5 percent of people polled in the West Bank and Gaza Strip have expressed their support for the peace process (see Chart 1).

CHART 1

Support for the peace process 1993-1998

West Bank and Gaza Strip



What accounts for the apparent contradiction between fairly consistent support for the peace process with Israel and the continuous economic and security decline since the signing of the Declaration of Principles, and the consistent Israeli violations of the Interim Agreement? With the fruits of the peace process slow to appear, why has the high level of support for its continuation remained relatively robust?

One of the most striking trends in public opinion over the past five years is that, alongside the fairly stable support for the Middle East peace process, there has been a sharp decline in confidence in the mechanisms of the current peace process, the Oslo accords, and a lack of faith in their resulting in any satisfactory agreement on final status issues.

The divergence is clear: levels of strong support for the Oslo accords were measured in May 1998 at no more than 11 percent of the population; 47.9 percent expressed lukewarm support. Further, in November 1997, less than half of those surveyed thought that final status issues would be resolved satisfactorily, yet at that time support for the peace process was measured at 74.2 percent. It is this gap which must be addressed a growing number of people who, while clearly believing that a peace process is the way to resolve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, are increasingly reflecting their unhappiness with the results, or lack thereof, of this current process. Drawing a better picture of this large sector of the population will enable greater knowledge and understanding of the opinions of the people on whose behalf negotiations are being conducted, and provide some input into a process which has clearly fallen short of its promises.

This brief paper will present an overview of the majority of Palestinians — those who are committed to a peace process with Israel — and how their support for the peace process is linked to certain key variables. Using SPSS and the data obtained over the last five years of public opinion polling, we have examined the impact of socio/economic, religious and political backgrounds on support for the peace process. This is not intended to be an exhaustive study, but rather a highlight of the way in which some key factors influence support for the peace process.

III. SUPPORT FOR THE PEACE PROCESS

This chapter examines the impact of different variables on support for or opposition to the peace process, including external/environmental factors such as place and type of residence, occupation, and others, as well as personal characteristics such as age and gender.

III.A. Geographical Distribution

Chart 2 below shows the trends in support for the peace process in the Gaza Strip, East Jerusalem, and the greater West Bank.

CHART 2

Support for the peace process

By area

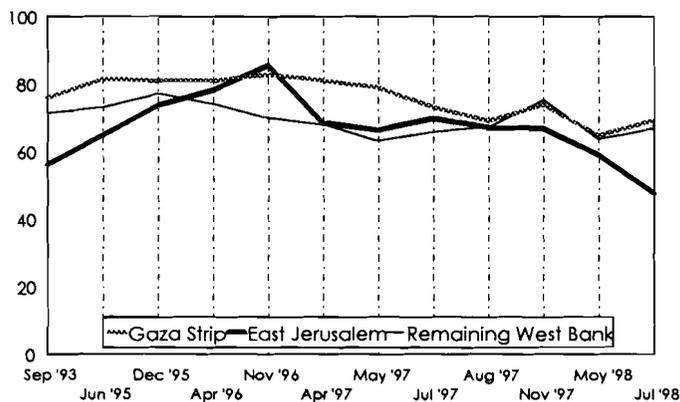
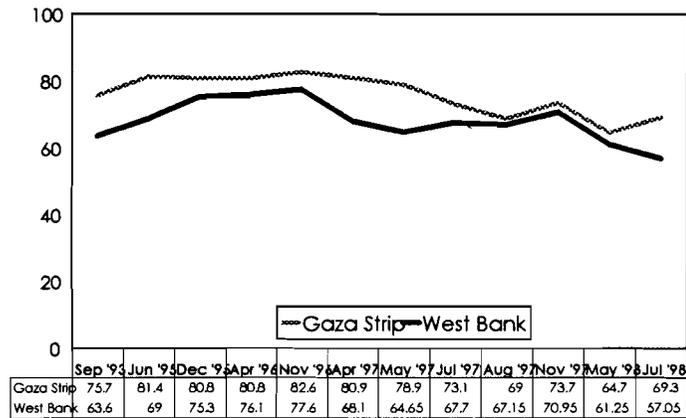


Chart 3 below shows the trends in support for the peace process in the Gaza and the greater West Bank

CHART 3

Support for the peace process

West Bank v. Gaza Strip



Significant differences in levels of support for the peace process between the West Bank and Gaza Strip began to emerge in August 1996, when support was measured at 69.7 percent in the West Bank and 81.9 percent in the Gaza Strip. The divergence, which has persisted, is probably due to a combination of factors. But primarily, by mid-1996, the Palestinian Authority had been in place in Gaza since late 1994, while in the West Bank the Israeli redeployment of late 1995 had left 75 percent of the area still in Israeli hands, including the cities of East Jerusalem and Hebron. The impact of this is clear: only 50.3 percent of people polled in the West Bank in August 1996 felt an improved sense of security after the takeover by the Palestinian Authority,

compared with 76.9 percent of respondents in the Gaza Strip. In this respect, then, the benefits of Oslo have been greater in Gaza than in the West Bank.

In addition, the closure first imposed in 1991 has been tightened since 1994 and even more since the 1996 suicide bombings. The impact of this policy differs between the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and is one factor in the opinion gap between the West Bank and Gaza Strip. In the Gaza Strip, closure has driven the average unemployment rate up to almost 30 percent as of mid-1998. By 1997, over one third of the Gaza population were living under an annual poverty line of US\$650, compared with one quarter of the population in the West Bank. However, public sector employment has greatly increased in Gaza since the installation of the PA. The building boom and infrastructure improvements, because of the small size of Gaza, are more visible than in the West Bank. And finally, while an electrified fence seals off the Gaza Strip and permission to leave is restricted, within the Strip itself movement is fairly free compared to before redeployment.

Economic indicators are more positive in the West Bank, where, according to the Palestinian Bureau of Statistics, some 20 percent live under the poverty line, the average unemployment rate as of mid-1998 was 21 percent, and real per capita GNP is US\$1,630. However, the vast majority of the land remains under Israeli control, and the current division of territory means that Israeli army checkpoints, usually more than one, are a fact of daily life for most West Bank Palestinians. And for many West Bank Palestinians, the raids, arrests, house demolitions and violence of the occupation are also frequent occurrences. These differences in circumstances are contributing factors in the increasing opinion gap.

At the same time, a marked, although less consistent, split between Jerusalem and the remaining West Bank began to appear, with Palestinians from Jerusalem much less supportive of the peace process. As of mid-1998, however, this split began to lessen as levels of support in the remaining West Bank began to fall.

In general, polling carried out in Jerusalem has revealed sharp fluctuations in responses to questions about the peace process, fluctuations that in themselves highlight the special status of the city. There is a 30-point gap between the lowest and highest levels of support for the peace process in Jerusalem (55.9 percent in September 1993 and 85.4 percent in November 1996), with Jerusalemites consistently showing far more dramatic ups and downs in their opinions than Palestinians in Gaza or the remaining West Bank.

Possible reasons for the dramatic ebb and flow in support in Jerusalem are not hard to find. From the beginning of the Oslo peace process, the determination to shift the "difficult" issues to the final phase negotiations meant that, despite significant advancements towards peace, little in East Jerusalem changed positively. Instead, an agreement was achieved between Palestinians and Israelis that bypassed Jerusalem, and settlement activity escalated. The expansion of Ma'aleh Adumim, entailing massive land confiscation from five East Jerusalem villages, was announced and the confiscation order issued. Land clearing activities have been completed on Mt. Abu Ghneim, just southeast of Jerusalem and the foundation work on the new settlement of Har Homa is now finished.

Another significant factor is the Israeli-imposed closure; since 1991 Palestinians without Israeli-issued Jerusalem identity cards could not enter the city without a special

permit. The result, particularly after Israel tightened the closure in retaliation for a series of suicide bombings in 1994, has been the isolation of East Jerusalem and enormous economic, social, political and religious disruption.

Finally, Palestinians in East Jerusalem have been targeted by Israeli government policies aimed at making residence in the city difficult or — for many — impossible. These policies, in place for decades, began to be enforced with rigorous zeal since the installation of the Netanyahu government in May 1996. Measures taken include: enforcing tighter conditions for Arab Jerusalemites to retain their identity cards and residency rights; rigid discrimination in planning, zoning and construction rights and widespread demolition of "illegal" structures (while since 1967 there has been extensive construction for almost 200,000 Jewish settlers in East Jerusalem); and discriminatory taxation levels for Palestinian Jerusalemites far above the level of funds returned in infrastructure and services.

And, while Palestinians in the other major West Bank and Gaza cities are now enjoying at least a partial scale-down of the Israeli military presence, one of the non-negotiable "red lines" for Israeli negotiators is of course Jerusalem, as ongoing settlement and land confiscation and broad-based identity card confiscations bear witness. The final status of Jerusalem has been negatively prejudiced by unilateral Israeli actions taken during the course of the peace process, most publicly during the Netanyahu administration, and this almost certainly has helped to alienate East Jerusalemites from the peace process.

During this same period, a number of Palestinian institutions began pulling out of Jerusalem because of the logistical difficulties involved in continuing to work in the city.

Many foreign donors too, who previously supported Palestinian institutions and activities in Jerusalem, began re-directing their support, out of deference to Israeli sensitivities and the Oslo framework, under which Jerusalem's status is to be determined in final status negotiations. At the same time, there has been increasingly unfavorable media coverage of the performance of the Palestinian Authority, its ministries and security apparatuses, which some analysts believe is intended in part to convince East Jerusalemites that they would be better off remaining under Israeli control.

While it is not possible to specify beyond doubt the reasons for the shaky support for the peace process among East Jerusalem Palestinians, the conditions to which they are subject, as partially described above, certainly play a part in shaping their responses.

The following table shows the breakdown of figures illustrated in Chart 2 detailing support for the peace process:

Date of Poll	Gaza Strip	East Jerusalem	Remaining West Bank
September '93	75.7	55.9	71.3
June '95	81.4	64.9	73.1
December '95	80.8	73.5	77.1
April '96	80.8	78.2	74.0
November '96	82.6	85.4	69.8
April '97	80.9	68.3	67.9
May '97	78.9	66.3	63.0
July '97	73.1	69.7	65.7
August '97	69.0	67.0	67.3
November '97	73.7	64.7	66.6
May '98	58.9	75.3	63.6

Chart 2 and the table above illustrate the fluctuations in levels of support for the peace process found in East Jerusalem, the remaining West Bank and the Gaza Strip, with Jerusalem's support registering a low of 55.9 percent in September 1993. In this poll, conducted immediately after the signing of the Declaration of Principles, people were asked whether they supported a continuation of the negotiations. The initial lack of support expressed by Palestinians from Jerusalem at that point is in stark contrast to the strong support that was shown in the Gaza Strip, with 75.7 percent, and the remaining West Bank at 71.3 percent.

Jerusalem residents registered their highest level of support for the peace process — 85.4 percent — in November 1996, shortly after the violent confrontations of September in which 85 Palestinians and 11 Israelis died. This time, feelings were similar in the Gaza Strip, where 82.6 percent of people expressed support for the peace process, although support was down in the remaining West Bank, at 69.8 percent.

In general, however, while Jerusalem has shown dramatic ups and downs, the average level of support for the peace process is 68.6 percent, close to that in the remaining West Bank, 69.8 percent, with the Gaza Strip higher than the rest of the country at 76.5 percent.

In the remaining West Bank, the lowest level of support was 63 percent measured in May 1997, and the greatest 77.1 percent in December 1995 (just after the signing of Oslo II), reflecting a far greater consistency in West Bank attitudes outside of Jerusalem.

Until recently, opinions registered in the Gaza Strip were the most consistent of the three areas, and levels of support began high (75.7 percent in September 1993) and subsequently increased. However, a public opinion poll conducted in July 1997 found that support for the peace process in Gaza had dropped to 73.1 percent, and by May 1998, support had declined to an unprecedented low of 64.7 percent.

III.B. Residential Distribution

There appears to be a fairly strong consensus among Palestinians with regard to support for peace, whatever their residential background. Charts 4, 5 and 6 show the levels of support for the peace process in urban areas, villages, and refugee camps, and the different locales all have a similar average. However, refugee camp residents began with higher hopes for the peace process, it appears, with 81.7 percent expressing support in June 1995, compared with only 72.8 percent support in urban areas and 74.8 percent in villages.

CHART 4

WBGs: Villages

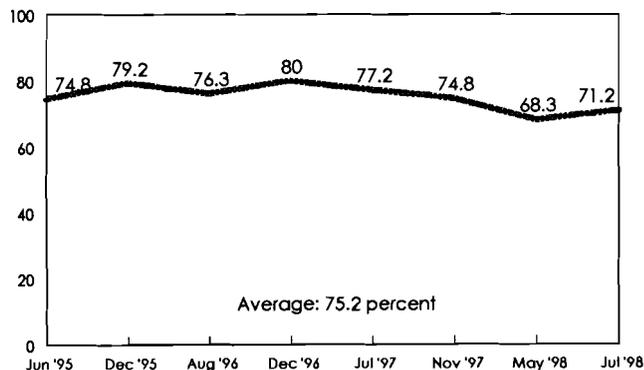


CHART 5

WBGs: Camps

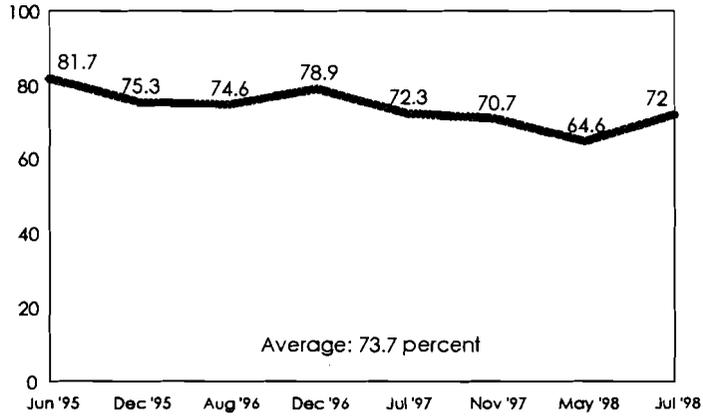
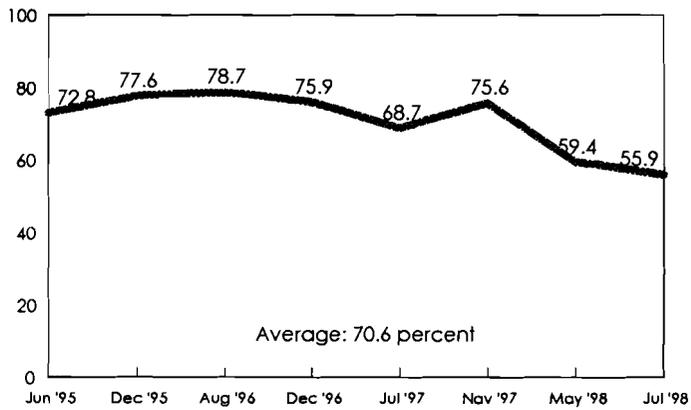


CHART 6

WBGs: Cities/towns



The broad-based support for the peace process among Palestinians regardless of residence, seems contradictory to the situation: many of the villages remain in Area C, under full Israeli occupation, while most of the urban areas, except for Hebron and Jerusalem, are under Palestinian control. However, the differences in circumstances are not reflected in support of the peace process, but in concerns such as the economy and continuing Israeli occupation. For example, the vast majority of people were expressing support for the peace process in November 1997, and people in all three types of locale rated the economic situation as the most important problem facing Palestinians at that time. However, in the villages — many of which are farming-based and thus feel the impact of Israeli control, and settlement and bypass road construction — 27.9 percent of people listed the economy as problem number 1, while 14.7 percent felt that the biggest problem is the Israeli occupation. In refugee camps, by contrast, 34.6 percent listed the economy first, and only 5.7 percent the occupation. Similar results were found in the cities and towns, where 31.3 percent listed the economy first and 6.6 percent the occupation.

From mid-1998 onward, however, urban area residents seem to be going against the trend reflected in camps and villages. By July 1998, town dwellers were expressing only 55.9 percent support for the peace process, well below the levels expressed in villages (71.2 percent) and camps (72 percent). This was an almost 20 percent drop from just seven months before. Oddly enough, the urban areas are all Area A, under Palestinian jurisdiction as a result of the peace process.

III.C. Gender Distribution

Poll results were examined for differences in opinion according to gender. While men and women in general follow similar trends in terms of the rise and fall in levels of support for the peace process, there has been on average a consistent gap of almost 10 percent between the two groups. Women consistently express higher levels of support for the peace process than men.

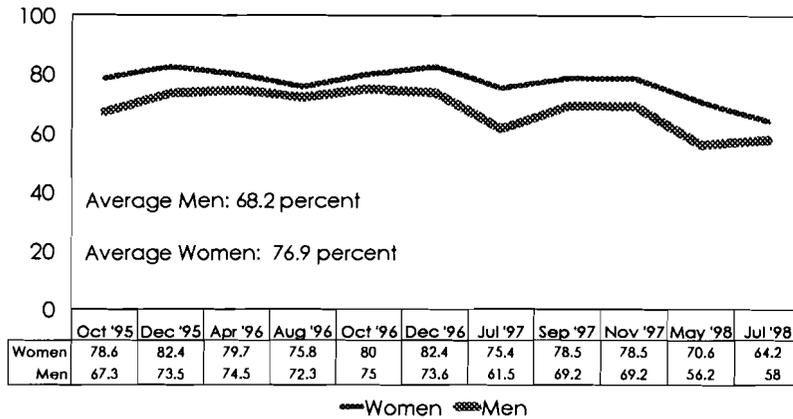
Chart 7 shows that men in general express lower levels of support for the peace process than women. October 1996 marked the high point in support for the peace process among men, at 75 percent; the low point occurred in July 1998 when only 58 percent surveyed said that they "strongly" or "somewhat supported" peace process.

Women expressed their highest levels of support for the peace process, 82.4 percent, in December 1995 and December 1996 (periods of Israeli redeployment). The lowest level of support among women was registered in July 1998, at 64.2 percent. While the drop in support is consistent with the trend among men registered at the same time, support among women is still on average 12.7 percent higher. Overall, however, support among women and men has fallen to the same extent, with a 17-18 percent difference between their highest and lowest levels.

CHART 7

Support for the peace process

By gender



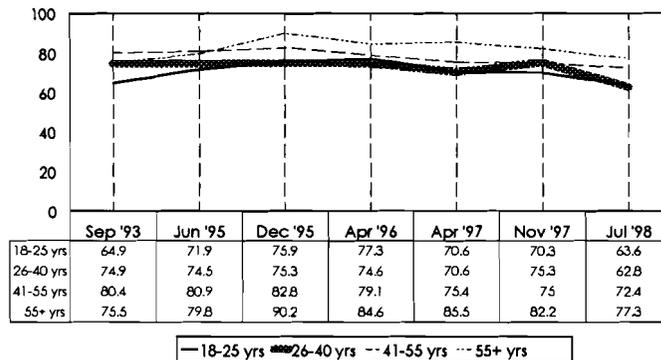
III.D. Distribution By Age

An examination of the age of respondents in favor of the peace process showed no significant difference from the general poll results, with the average age of peace process supporters remaining around 33 years old. Variations did emerge between different age groups, however.

CHART 8

Support for peace process

By age group



The older generation aged 55 and up, showed consistently higher levels of support for the peace process than their juniors. The highest level of support among those aged 55 and up, 90.2 percent, was recorded in December 1995, around the time of the Israeli redeployment from West Bank towns. In contrast, at that point, support among the 18-25 age group was high but still, at 75.9 percent, almost 15 percent lower. Those aged 26 to 40 years felt about the same; 75.3 percent said they supported the peace process, compared with 82.8 percent of 40- to 55-year-olds.

The differences between age groups are not as wide in any other public opinion poll until July 1998, when 63.6 percent of 18- to 25-year-olds expressed support for the peace process, compared with 77.3 percent of those over 55. This level of support among younger people is the lowest recorded since September 1993, when in response to the question of whether the Palestinian-Israeli negotiations should continue, only 64.9 percent of 18- to 25-year-olds said "yes."

By contrast, the age groups in the middle, those aged between 26 and 55, showed relatively strong levels of support for negotiations, possibly because this is the sector of the population with families to support and a living to make — they are the ones most seriously affected by the lack of progress in the negotiations, and they stand to lose the most if those negotiations are abandoned for a return to confrontation.

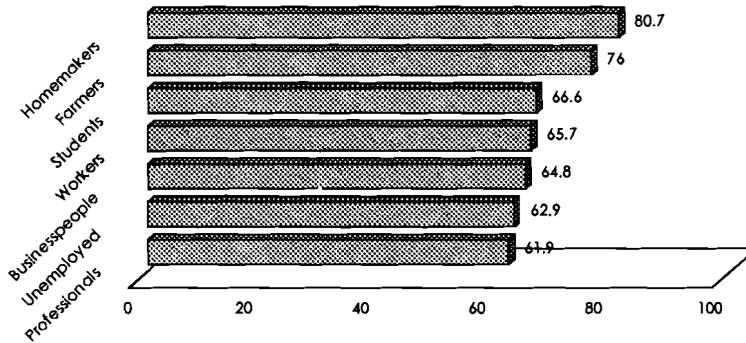
III.E. Socio/Economy Profile

III.E.1. Breakdown by Profession

Unsurprisingly, given the higher levels of support for the peace process registered among women, homemakers as a group express the greatest support for negotiations. On average, 80.7 percent of housewives surveyed between October 1995 and July 1998 said they either strongly support or somewhat support the peace process (see Chart 9). At the other end of the spectrum, professionals (i.e., doctors, lawyers, accountants, etc.) were the least supportive, with an average level of support of only 61.9 percent for this same period. Unemployed people were the second to last in terms of their support, followed by businesspeople, laborers, and then students. There is then a 10 percent jump to farmers, 76 percent of whom on average support the peace process. On the face of it, this seems difficult to understand, since farmers are the most affected by land confiscation and settlement policies — at the same time, they are the least affected to a certain extent by the closure. They can still work, and they can still access local markets, although external markets for their produce are a problem. In addition, they may be less educated or less political aware than students, professionals and others.

CHART 9**Support for the peace process**

By occupation



(Average levels taken from poll results Oct '95 - Jul '98)

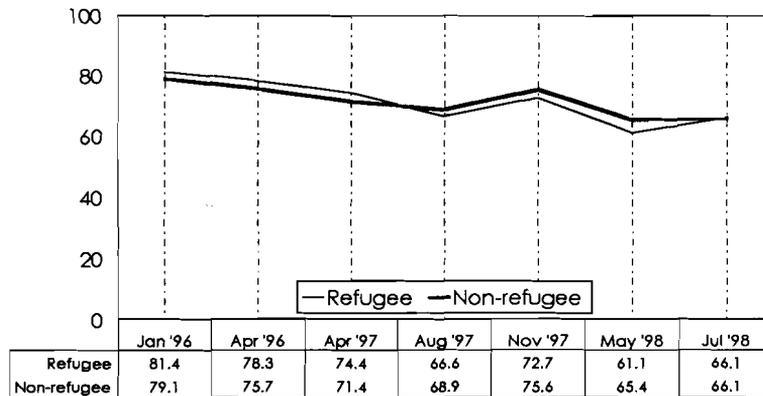
III.E.2. By Refugee Status

As illustrated below, no significant differences in support for the peace process were found between 1948 refugees and the rest of the population. Small variances have narrowed to nothing, with the same level of support registered by both groups in July 1998.

CHART 10

Support for the peace process

By refugee status



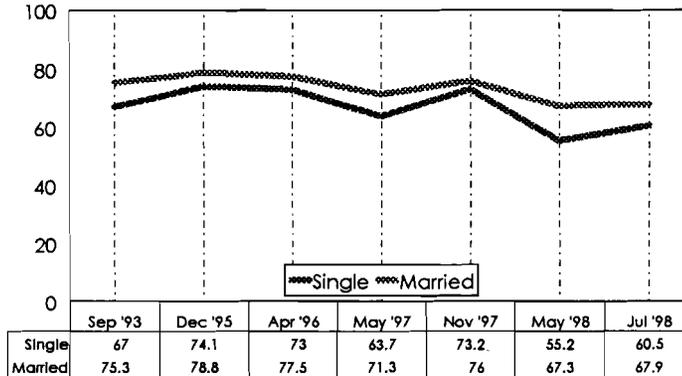
III.E.3. By Marital Status

Fairly consistent differences were found between single and married people, in terms of how they saw the peace process. In general, levels of support followed similar trends in both groups, but single people's support declined in the period following the September 1996 clashes and never really recovered.

CHART 11

Support for the peace process

By marital status



III.E.4. Perceptions of the Economic Situation

Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, regardless of whether or not they support the peace process, appear to feel that the current process, or perhaps the way in which it is being implemented, is "bad for business." At least one third of the general population feels that the economic situation is the most pressing problem currently facing Palestinians. Peace process supporters share this view equally.

Opinions on the impact of the peace process on perceptions of personal economic situations as a whole are only slightly less negative: in December 1997, 43.7 percent of people asked to compare their current personal economic situation with that before the peace process felt that their situation had gotten worse, while 38.1 percent felt there had been no deterioration but also no improvement. Only 16.9 percent felt that their financial status was better as a result of the peace process. Given that in 1996, one year before, 25 percent of those surveyed were already rating their personal economic situation as

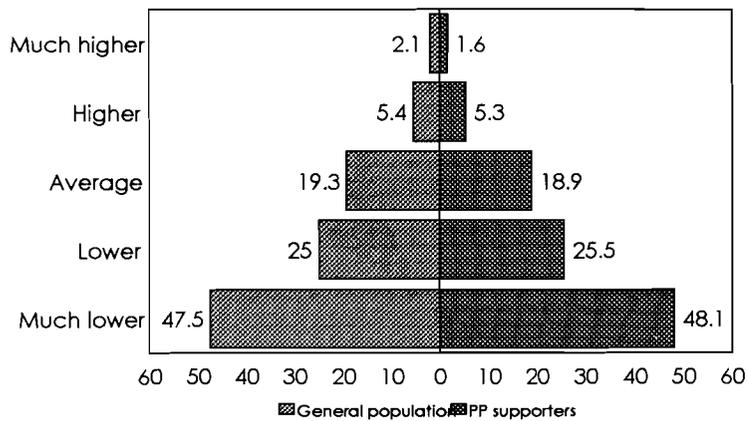
"difficult" or "miserable" and 37.5 percent "average," responses in 1997 indicate that by this time Palestinians were already seeing the effect of the closures and other policies affecting the economy were adding up and taking a personal toll.

This trend has continued. By July 1998, the majority of people were feeling that their personal economic situation was bad. Almost three quarters, 72.1 percent, of those polled in July 1998 said their financial situation was either somewhat or much lower than average. Only 7.3 felt that their personal economic situation was either somewhat or much better than average. In fact, those opposed to the peace process appeared to feel somewhat better off than those who support it. Only 60.3 percent of those opposed felt that their income levels were a bit or much lower than average, while 12.8 percent felt that their income was a bit or much higher than average.

CHART 12

Change in financial status over last year

General population v. peace process supporters

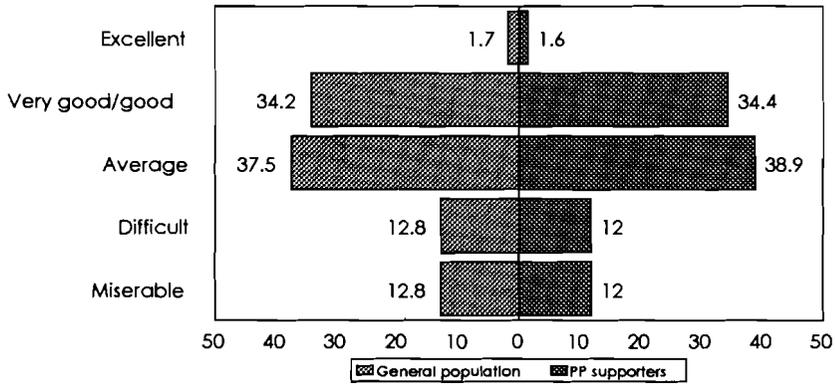


(Average responses from polls conducted in April, July and September 1997)

CHART 13

Perceived economic situation the year before

General population v. peace process supporters



(Average responses from polls conducted between June 1995 and October 1996)

IV. POLITICAL AFFILIATION

This section will illustrate the extent to which political loyalties are a factor in support for or opposition to the peace process, given that the PLO, which signed the peace agreements and the PA, which is implementing the Oslo arrangements, are dominated by Fateh, the political faction headed by Yasser Arafat.

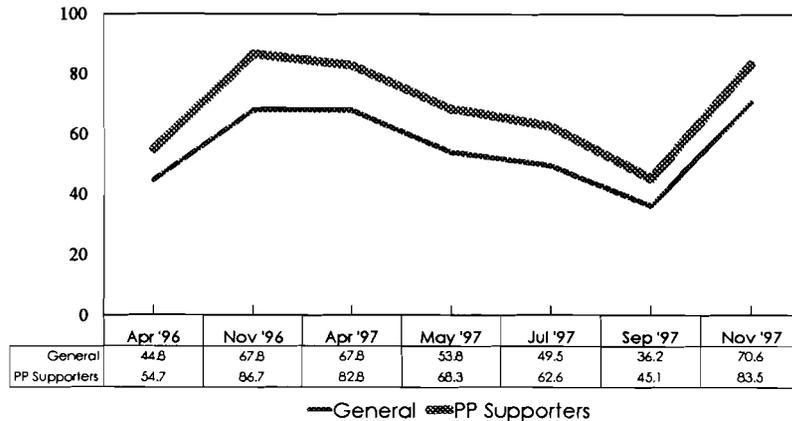
IV.A. Support for Arafat

Not surprisingly, those people who express support for the peace process have greater faith in PLO chairman and PA president Yasser Arafat than those who oppose the peace process, and the general population. Between mid-1995 and mid-1998, when asked which leading figure they trusted most, on average 39.5 percent of the general population responded "Yasser Arafat," compared with 50.4 percent of those people who support the peace process. Of those who described themselves as opposed to the peace process, in November 1997 and May 1998, only 12.3 and 13.1 percent respectively trusted Arafat over other politicians.

Given the general dissatisfaction with the peace process, its economic impact, and Oslo as a mechanism for peace, it seems plausible that it is faith in Arafat himself — or "Abu Ammar" as he is popularly known — that for many people leads to greater faith in the peace process rather than confidence in the process increasing support for Arafat.

CHART 14**Approval of Arafat as PA head**

General population vs. peace process supporters



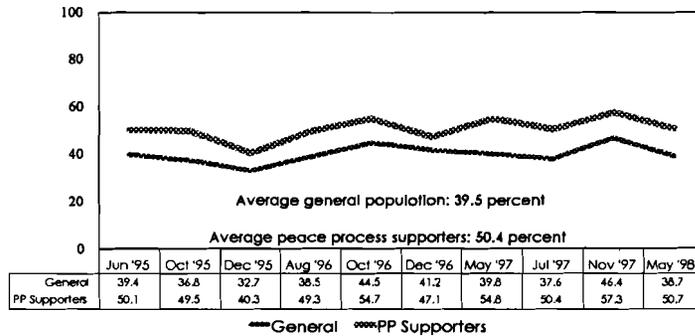
In general, there is a fairly consistent gap between 11 and 13 percent between the percent of the overall population who trust Arafat most and those peace process supporters who trust the Palestinian leader above other politicians. Both groups expressed their lowest levels of faith in Arafat in December 1995, shortly after the signing of the Taba Accord governing the interim phase delivered the phenomenon of Areas "A", "B" and "C" to Palestinians for the first time. Peace process supporters, and the general population as a whole, fluctuate in their support for Arafat above other politicians, while those opposed to the peace process remain fairly consistent. In light of the rise in public mistrust of all politicians, these fluctuations probably do not reflect an actual decrease in support for Arafat personally. In addition, of course, public support is wider than reflected in the chart, since people may have a lot of trust in Arafat but not above all other national leaders.

The public's approval of Yasser Arafat as the head of the Palestinian Authority reached a high of 67.8 percent among the general population not long after the September 1996 clashes. Chart 14 shows the trends in approval, which suggest that support for Arafat as the president of the Palestinian Authority is bolstered by the political situation, and by such events as the clashes with the Israelis in September 1996, or the second Gulf crisis in November 1997. In particular, Arafat appears to garner higher approval ratings in situations where he is the underdog, standing up against Israel and the US, rather than in situations where he is seen as their negotiating partner.

CHART 15

Arafat as most trusted politician

General population vs. peace process supporters



The public appears to make a distinction, therefore, between Arafat, politician and leader of the PLO, and Arafat, president of a national authority who is confronting an intransigent, right-wing Israeli government, with very little room to maneuver, and trying to get the best deal he can for the Palestinians. This distinction seems to be somewhat flexible, however, with the "feel-good" factor influencing levels of support for Arafat. For example, the brief high in support that followed the redeployment from West Bank towns in late 1995 was quickly replaced by extreme lows coinciding with the tight

closures of spring 1996. The severe restrictions on movement of people and goods, which was applied even to movement between neighboring villages in the West Bank, were enforced by the Israelis in retaliation for a suicide bombing. The reality on the ground of the territorial fragmentation achieved by the Oslo II agreement was rapidly revealed, therefore, and this coincided with lowered support for Arafat and the PA.

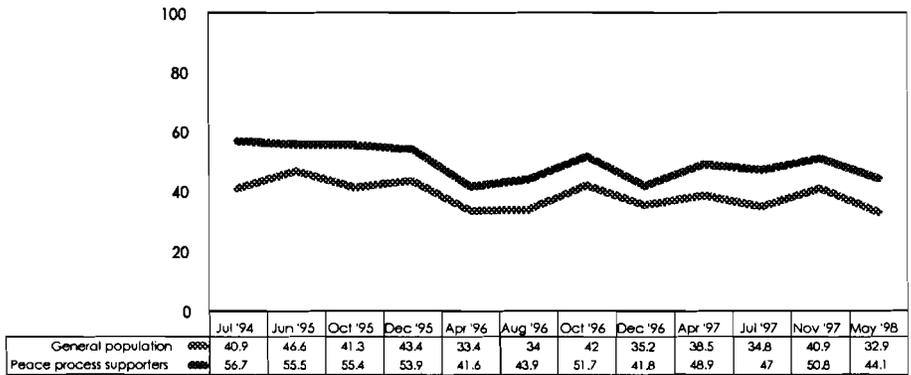
IV.B. Support for Fateh

An examination of the support for Fateh, the party headed by Arafat which has a majority within the PLO, on the Palestine National Council and within the Legislative Council, shows that, beginning in December 1995, the public has not extended what approval they do have for Arafat to his party. From July 1994 to December 1995, those people expressing support for the peace process had also been registering fairly high levels of support for Fateh. Chart 16 shows that support for Fateh was over 50 percent in the period leading up to December 1995, although decreasing slightly but consistently. However, by April 1996, support had dropped by just over 12 percent, and since that time has not regained the levels registered in 1994-95. Furthermore, from this point onward, support for Fateh among peace process supporters, while remaining consistently higher than among the general population, has mirrored the up and down trend shown among the wider public.

CHART 16

Support for Fateh

General population vs. peace process supporters



IV.C. Support for Other Politicians

The perception of Yasser Arafat as a "one-man show," whose absence would leave a political vacuum, is consistently borne out by poll results. The majority of Palestinians rate Arafat as the politician or public figure they trust the most; levels of public confidence in the PLO chairman usually register at or above the 50 percent mark. After Arafat, most people surveyed consistently respond that they "trust no one."

Sheikh Ahmad Yassin, the spiritual leader of Hamas, and Dr. Haidar 'Abdel Shafi a respected independent, are the personalities consistently receiving the next highest ratings. However, the percentage of public confidence garnered by these two men falls far below that of Arafat and far below the percentages of those saying they trust no one. Yassin is the only religious/Islamic movement leader to show significant levels of support; and after 'Abdel Shafi, support for secular leaders, even close Arafat associates, is minimal. Clearly, Arafat's departure from the political scene will leave behind great

uncertainty, since the popular mandate he possesses does not appear to be transferable. Although Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) has been talked about as Arafat's handpicked successor, he has almost no popular support, according to poll results.

Chart 17 shows the levels of trust in Sheikh Yassin, 'Abdel Shafi and "no one," on the part of the general public and those who say they support the peace process. The similarity in trends between the general population and peace process supporters is striking, particularly the sharp rise in the number of those who "trust no one." Sheikh Yassin's gradual rise in popularity, as well as the gradual decline in Haidar 'Abdel Shafi's place of prominence, are similar in both groups.

CHART 17

Support for other politicians

Peace process supporters

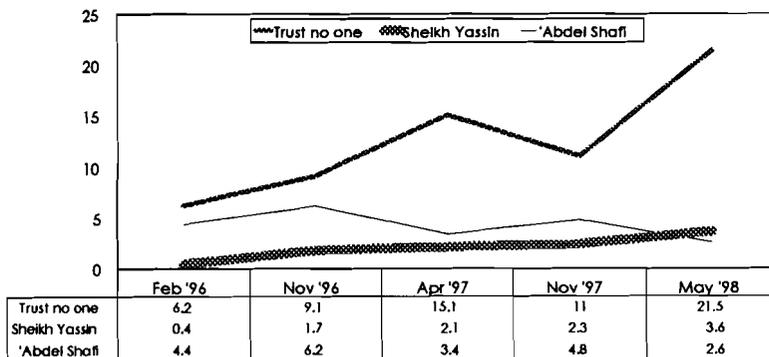


Chart No. 20

IV.D. Support for Others Parties

The percentage of the population who express support for or confidence in one of the secular or religious parties opposed to the current peace process has at times been higher than the percentage of people who say they themselves are opposed to the peace process.

Chart 18 shows the distribution of political affiliation for parties other than Fateh among the general population. The bulk of support lies with Hamas and other Islamic parties, rather than the secular opposition parties, the Popular and Democratic Fronts for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP and DFLP). One possible explanation is that people support and approve of Hamas' social program, while holding differing views on Palestinian participation in the peace process. The relatively healthy levels of support for Hamas in particular may well be a reflection on the perceived lack of a comprehensive platform offered by other parties opposed to the peace process.

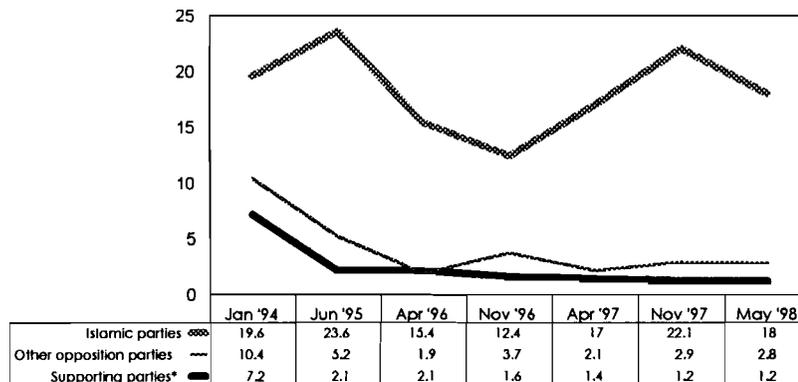
Among peace process supporters, the same general trends in political affiliation can be seen in Chart 19, although support for Islamic parties was very low in January 1994, 3.3 percent, compared with 19.6 percent among the general public. This is understandable given the short time that had elapsed since the signing of the Declaration of Principles. Support for Islamic parties among the general population fluctuates, but has been on the rise, with the most recent levels registering at 15.9 percent in November. Again, the social programs of the Islamic parties, especially in light of the continuous decline in living standards and economic indicators, may be in part responsible for the increase in support for Hamas and other parties.

It should be noted that support for Hamas and other Islamic parties declined dramatically during 1996, when Hamas carried out a number of bus bombings inside Israel, which was followed by a severe punitive closure by the Israeli military authorities, causing serious economic damage and social disruption. Support for Hamas rose in November 1997, which may be explained in part by Israel's failed assassination attempt against Hamas official Khalid Mash'al in Jordan, which led to a deal in which the Israelis released Sheikh Ahmad Yassin, the Hamas spiritual leader.

CHART 18

Political affiliation (excluding Fateh)

General population

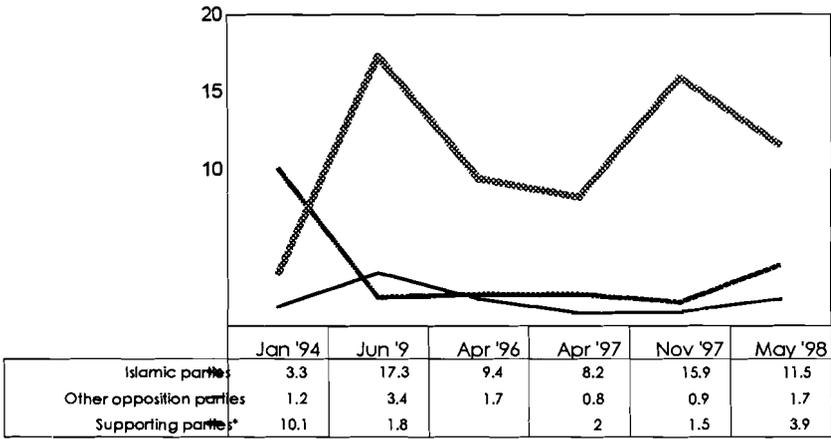


* supporting the peace process

CHART 19

Political affiliation (excluding Fateh)

Peace process supporter



* supporting the peace process

V. POLL RESULTS AND POLITICAL EVENTS

The strong support for the peace process that was registered in October 1996 — at 79.3 percent the highest national average from 1993-1997 — at first appears contradictory to the anger that erupted in September. However, an examination of the responses to poll questions about the September clashes highlights the link in people's minds between the violence and the political process. The feeling that, despite the high number of fatalities, the clashes had been beneficial to the Palestinian cause was widespread through the Palestinian territories: 77.2 percent of those polled in late October 1996 felt that the confrontations had been beneficial; 10.8 percent not beneficial; and only 6.9 percent detrimental. This fits in with previous popular feelings of frustration over what appeared an interminable stalemate in the political process, combined with continuous Israeli settlement activity and other provocative acts — it is highly probable that many people were simply relieved that something had happened which might kick-start the peace process. Over half of those polled in October 1996, 56.5 percent, approved of the way in which the Palestinian Authority had used the events to achieve political gains.

It is important to note, however, that the rise in November 1997 was largely in Gaza — 85.4 percent of Gazans polled expressed support for the peace process, almost 5 percent higher than at any other time. In the West Bank, however, while support was measured at a healthy 72.1 percent, this was over 13 percent lower than in Gaza, and was not the highest level of support ever measured in the West Bank.

Lower levels of support appear to be the result of a generally discouraging political atmosphere rather than individual incidents. May 1998 marks the lowest level of support ever expressed for the peace process. This was at a time when there had been no particularly dramatic occurrences, just a depressing sameness about the lack of movement and lack of hope for any significant change on the political level. The previous year, in May 1997, poll results also showed a decline in support for the peace process. However, while last year, the newspaper commentaries were all devoted to marking Netanyahu's first year in office as Israeli prime minister, the poll in May 1998 was carried out shortly after the commemoration of the 50th anniversary of al-Nakba, the mass displacement of Palestinians from their land during the creation of the state of Israel.

VI. CONCLUSION

The importance of polling to political analysts — and particularly journalists — is clear. With every new public opinion survey that comes out, results are eagerly cited: Palestinians support suicide bombings, Palestinians support Hamas, etc. Often, particularly in the international and Israeli media, certain findings are seized upon with fervor and cited extensively. Other, more serious researchers are interested in more in-depth analysis of the trends. With the majority of poll-watchers, their objective is to try and predict what is going to happen on the popular level. While the ability to make more accurate political forecasts is one factor enhancing the value of public opinion polls, there are many other reasons that, in the long-term, should take precedence. The link between the ongoing peace negotiations and any peaceful resolution to the Middle East conflict is the true legitimacy that comes from the participation of the constituency on whose behalf negotiations are being conducted. It is perhaps this link that can best be served by polling activities, since allowing the public to voice their opinions, and to have those opinions assembled together into hard data is one very clear way in which the public as a whole can "participate" in the process. Rather than superficial projections about what may or may not happen, Palestinian interests would be better served in examining why certain scenarios come to pass, what the feelings are that would underpin this or that scenario. The continuing and increasing decline in support for the peace process is the perfect case in point: energy is better spent examining and addressing the underlying reasons for the decline rather than, in any analysis of the future, divorcing that decline from the underlying causes.