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Policy Alert

Gaza Public Rejects Hamas, Wants Ceasefire

by [David Pollock](#)

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS



[David Pollock](#)

David Pollock is the Bernstein Fellow at The Washington Institute, focusing on regional political dynamics and related issues.



Brief Analysis

A recent, credible poll shows that most Gazans oppose Hamas policies and leaders alike, and favor a ceasefire with Israel.

Today's headlines are that Hamas has just rejected Egypt's offer of a ceasefire with Israel and instead continues to fire rockets indiscriminately at Israeli towns and cities. Less known is a crucial fact: the people of Gaza are solidly against these Hamas policies. Indeed, by a very large majority, they oppose Hamas rule altogether.

These findings are based on a June 15-17 survey by a highly respected Palestinian pollster, who conducted face-to-face interviews throughout Gaza using standard random geographical probability sampling. The poll included 450 Gazans, yielding a margin of error of approximately 4 percent. This is the only credible Palestinian poll taken since the mid-June West Bank kidnapping incident, Israel's subsequent searches and arrests, and the start of the current crisis (for more on the survey, see [PolicyWatch 2276, "New Palestinian Poll Shows Hardline Views, But Some Pragmatism Too"](#)).

GAZANS WANTED A CEASEFIRE EVEN AS HAMAS STARTED FIRING ROCKETS

As tensions mounted and Hamas and other Gazan factions began to step up rocket fire last month, the people of that territory were heavily in favor of a ceasefire -- 70 percent of the poll respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "Hamas should maintain a ceasefire with Israel in both Gaza and the West Bank." This attitude is corroborated by the 73 percent of Gazans who said Palestinians should adopt "proposals for (nonviolent) popular resistance against the occupation." Similarly, when asked if Hamas should accept Palestinian Authority president Mahmoud Abbas's position that the new unity government renounce violence against Israel, a clear majority (57

percent) answered in the affirmative. The responses to all three questions clearly indicate that most Gazans reject military escalation. Attitudes may have shifted since the poll due to anger at Israeli airstrikes, but anecdotal evidence suggests that the Gazan public still supports a ceasefire.

[Download poll data charts \(PDF\)](#)

HAMAS FAILING TO DELIVER

The poll also demonstrates that Gazans are unhappy with Hamas governance -- on multiple levels. A large majority (71 percent) considered crime to be a "significant" problem. Two-thirds said that another significant problem was official corruption. Moreover, a large majority (78 percent) found the "presence of Palestinian militias that are not organized under the formal security structure" to be at least a "moderate" problem.

In light of this dissatisfaction with Hamas security forces and administration, most respondents favored the prospect of the PA taking over Gaza. A remarkable 88 percent agreed with the statement "The PA should send officials and security officers to Gaza to take over administration there" -- including two-thirds who "strongly" agreed.

HAMAS LEADERS HAVE MEAGER POLITICAL SUPPORT

Also very striking, and contrary to common misperception, is the fact that Hamas did not gain politically from the kidnapping of three Israeli teenagers that sparked the current crisis last month. Asked who should be the president of Palestine in the next two years, a solid majority in Gaza named either Abbas or other leaders affiliated with the Fatah Party. In stark contrast, Hamas leaders Ismail Haniyeh and Khaled Mashal rated a combined total of just 15 percent support.

MAJORITY OF GAZANS WANT ISRAELI JOBS

The Gazan economy has receded over the past year as unemployment climbed to around 40 percent. Egypt's closure of multiple smuggling tunnels and the Fatah-Hamas dispute over post-reconciliation salaries have only exacerbated this dire economic situation. The results of the June poll go even further than these indicators, showing that Gazans would be willing to look to Israel for their livelihood. Respondents overwhelmingly (82 percent) said they

"would like to see Israel allow more Palestinians to work in Israel." Still more poignantly, a majority (56 percent) said they "would be personally willing to work in Israel if there was a good, high-paying job." Thus, Gazans actually favored some form of normalization with Israel in order to find work.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The June survey demonstrates the sharp contrast between what most Gazans want and what their Hamas government continually does. The group's popularity was at a low point as the current crisis began, and there is no evidence that it has rebounded. The poll results show that the people of that hard-pressed territory want a ceasefire and even economic opportunity in Israel -- and that they overwhelmingly reject Hamas policies and leaders alike. These fundamental facts should help guide the U.S. government and its regional allies as they search not just for a ceasefire, but also for longer-term economic and political prescriptions for Gaza's fate.

David Pollock is the Kaufman Fellow at The Washington Institute and director of Fikra Forum. ❖



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