**Background about Opinion Leaders’ Survey, Methodology and Sample**

**General Introduction:**

The opinion leaders’ survey conducted by the Development Studies Programme is considered the first of its kind in Palestine. It is the first in regard to its population and the issues approached. The survey is significant and important; it discusses issues representing scenarios and strategies for the current and future status of the Palestinian Territory. The survey lays a solid ground towards reading the Palestinian leaders’ approach, helping to understand the process of mobility and polarization of the Palestinian public in relation to the changing events on the ground.

It is important to mention that this survey differs from general public opinion polls in that an opinion leaders’ survey does not include the majority of community segments and does not represent the population as a whole, as is the case in general public opinion polls. In the conduct of this opinion leader survey, the population of the sample was targeted and selected from lists that are available as explained later.

The issues discussed in the survey are comprehensive and diverse; the poll includes the issues of most concern and interest to the Palestinian community over the mid to long term. Some issues deal with general approaches, some with scenarios and strategies, while others monitor the positions of less controversial issues. In addition, the style in formulating the questions as well as the quality of answers are diverse; some answers reflect preferences of the sample population while others reflect their visions and the assumptions towards the most viable strategies and approaches.

For the purpose of this survey, the concept of an “opinion leader” was defined as follows: Palestinian individuals living in the West Bank and Gaza Strip who contribute to changing and altering the status of the Palestinian community on the long-term level. These individuals influence public awareness and decisions regarding various political, legislative, social, economic, cultural, and academic issues. In addition, these groups have the capacity to access resources, and thus empower themselves on different levels, increasing their influence on the national level. The term opinion leaders may imply a sense of unity among the individual members of this group. However, the group is heterogeneous and diverse; its members affiliate with various political, social, cultural, and economic situation and interests.

The Development Studies Programme aspires that the outcome of this contribution would lay the foundation for a comprehensive study on Palestinian public opinion that takes into consideration the factors and variables which shape and direct Palestinian attitudes and opinions. A rich space for understanding and analyzing the public attitudes, their changing dynamics, and the influencing factors can be attained through comparative studies of public opinion poll surveys and opinion leaders’ surveys. Such comparative analysis gives insight into the future direction of decisions made by political and social authorities.  It also gives insight into how the interests of opinion leaders are articulated and gain legitimacy in the eyes of the public.

**Third Section: Methodology of Field Work and the Sample Design:**

The sample frame and design relied on purposive sampling (names, addresses and occupation of respondents were identified in advance). Each questionnaire was put in a separate and closed envelope. The sample was classified upon place of residency and was distributed to researchers for field work in the different districts in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. For accuracy of data collection, it was reaffirmed that researchers (although well-trained in field work techniques) make an appointment with each respondent on the telephone and personally visit the respondent to complete the questionnaire in the same session. Another option was to hand the questionnaire to selected respondents and pick up the completed document within a maximum of two days. Confidentiality of information was highly respected; questionnaires were placed in closed envelopes with no signs or references to the person who completed the survey questionnaire.

The classification of opinion leaders is as follows:

1. Political elite: political parties and factions, legislative council, politicians and ministers;
2. Social elite: local organizations, charitable societies, kinship, university staff, educated people (artists), mayors, unions, and women organizations;
3. Economic elite: private sector managers, owners of significant investments and capital;
4. Cultural and Academic elite: thinkers and media leaders, writers, educated people, and religious leaders, such as Imams, priests, and Muftis.

The above classifications were made only for the sake of selecting the sample; such classifications are not always clear in the social stratification of the Palestinian society. For example, there is high potential for the same individual to be a leader, a member of a political party, have significant tribal or kinship affiliation, and conduct significant economic activity in society. This situation is popular in most societies. However, developed societies have clearer classification where different groups develop and interweave joint interests, values and approaches based on class division (politically, and more specifically, economic in nature).

A preliminary list of individuals and organizations in all Palestinian districts was identified by the field researchers. Researchers followed clear and specific criteria in the identification process. This criteria is consistent with the definition of the concept of 'opinion elite' and its classifications. In addition, the survey team at the Development Studies Programme consulted senior and credible researchers to review the sample target respondents and the classifications. After the identification of a sample population in accordance to the above mentioned classifications, a second sampling process was conducted. The sample population was classified into social and economic categories, and a systematic probability sampling was done in accordance with scientific principles. As a result, the representation of the sample targets is as follows:

1- Palestinian Universities and Colleges

2- Legislative Council

3- PNA Ministries

4- Palestinian Municipalities

5- Writers and local Media

6- Syndicates and Trade Unions

7- Chambers of Commerce.

8- Banks, Insurance and Investment companies.

9- Political parties and social activists

10- Civil society organizations divided according to sectors (agriculture, human rights, health, education, research, and environment).

11- Religious Organizations

12- PLO Organs (Executive Committee, Palestinian National Council, Central Council)

13- Women Organizations

14- Youth Organizations

15- Independent thinkers and writers

Upon the completion of the field work and the finalization of the results, it appeared that:

* Eighty-five percent of the sample is male, which reflects the reality of the leaders in in public decision-making positions.
* Seventy-seven percent of the sample lives in an urban area, which reflects the fact that public opinion leaders are more likely to live in an urban area or city despite their origins in a village or refugee camp; this compares with 15 percent of the respondents from villages and 8 percent from a refugee camp.
* It’s also important to point out that 77 percent of the sample is over forty years old and 41 percent are fifty or above, while only 3 percent of the sample is between the ages of 20 – 29 years old.
* As for the economic situation of target respondents, the salaries of half the sample exceed 5000 NIS per month, whereas 39 percent declared that their income is between 2500-5000 NIS.
* In addition, 83 percent of the sample has a Bachelor Degree or above.
* The sample is distributed among three sectors; 36 percent belong to the civil society sector, 35 percent to the governmental sector and 29 percent are active in the private sector.
* The political affiliations of the sample are as follows: 64 percent express their support to specific political parties, and 36 percent express their political attitudes and affiliations as independent. The sample was distributed as follows: 30 percent support Fatah, 13 percent support Hamas, 8 percent support the Popular Front, 3 percent support Al-Mubadara, 3 percent support the Democratic Front, 2 percent support the Third Way and the Peoples Party, and 1 percent support the Fida Party, Islamic Jihad and other lists.
* Thirty-six percent of the sample (those who identified themselves as independents) perceive themselves in the lines of a broad political spectrum, encompassing Marxist, Islamic, Democratic, liberal and/or National thoughts and approaches.

It must be noted that the representation of the opinion leader sample’s political affiliation does not reflect broader support for each party in general public opinion polls (see table).

**Table of Sample Distribution:**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Area | Percentage | Residency | Percentage | Social status | Percentage |
| West Bank | 63.5 | City | 76.7 | Unmarried | 6.9 |
| Gaza Strip | 36.5 | Village/town | 15.1 | Married | 90.2 |
| Gender | Percentage | Refugee camp | 8.2 | Other | 2.9 |
| Male | 84.8 | Religiosity | Percentage | Residency before 1994 | Percentage |
| Female | 15.2 | Religious | 33.5 | West Bank and Gaza Strip | 84.2 |
| Governorate | Percentage | Religious to some extent | 43.4 | Outside Palestine | 15.8 |
| Jenin | 2.9 | Not religious | 23.1 | Educational level | Percentage |
| Tubas | 1.9 | Refuge status | Percentage | Literate -illiterate | 0.2 |
| Tulkarem | 2.7 | Refugee | 46.6 | Elementary | 1 |
| Nablus | 8.3 | Non-refugee | 53.4 | Preparatory | 1.4 |
| Qalqilya | 2.9 | Age | Percentage | High school | 5.4 |
| Salfeet | 1.9 | 20-29 | 2.7 | Diploma | 8.9 |
| Jericho | 2.5 | 30-40 | 20.7 | BA and above | 83.2 |
| Ramallah | 14.8 | 41-50 | 35.7 | Monthly income in NIS | Percentage |
| Jerusalem | 6.3 | 51 and above | 40.9 | Less than 1700 | 3.1 |
| Bethlehem | 7.7 | Employment Status | Percentage | 1700-2500 | 7.7 |
| Hebron | 11.5 | Employed | 27.0 | 2501-5000 | 38.9 |
| Gaza- North | 3.3 | Unemployed | 73.0 | 5001-10.000 | 38.9 |
| Gaza City | 24.4 |  |  | Above 10.000 | 4.11 |
| Der El Balah | 2.1 |  |  |  |  |
| KhanYounes | 5.6 |  |  |  |  |
| Rafah | 1.2 |  |  |  |  |

Finally, the Development Studies Programme looks forward to elaborating on the methodology of opinion leader surveys in the future. As this is the first experience with this type of survey research in the Palestinian Territories, the Programme will consider all feedback from experts upon the release of the results to help analyze this experience addressing public opinion leaders.