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Palestinian Elections in the Post-War Phase: "Requirements for Democratic Preparation and the Role of Youth"



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Advancing Civil Peace and Conflict Resolution within the Gaza Strip



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**The views expressed in this paper do not necessarily reflect the views of
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Executive Summary

This paper assesses the prospects for holding Palestinian elections at the present juncture, against the backdrop of a political, security, and social environment rendered exceptionally complex by the continuation of the war and its repercussions, the deepening of internal political division, and the absence of national consensus on the architecture of the transitional phase. It argues that elections cannot be conceived apart from a broader political process aimed at reconstituting the Palestinian political system and consolidating its unity and institutions, such that the electoral process functions as an instrument for renewing political legitimacy rather than entrenching existing divisions.

The paper sets out three plausible scenarios: the holding of comprehensive elections, contingent on the emergence of political consensus and an improved operating environment; the postponement of elections pending the fulfilment of transitional-phase requirements; or recourse to partial, localized elections in selected areas. It further examines the implications of recent amendments to the electoral law -most notably those concerning the proportional-representation system and the reduction of the electoral threshold — for the expansion of political representation among women and youth.

The analysis indicates that the prevailing logistical and political constraints, particularly in the Gaza Strip, render the organization of comprehensive elections exceedingly difficult in light of extensive destruction, mass displacement, and restrictions on freedom of movement. Accordingly, the paper recommends prioritizing national consensus and inclusive dialogue, reinforcing civil peace, revisiting the electoral law to secure equitable representation, broadening the participation of youth and women, and cultivating a political and democratic environment capable of safeguarding the integrity and effectiveness of the electoral process.

Introduction

Any discussion of elections within the present Palestinian context is inherently multidimensional, intertwining political, security, and social considerations amid the ongoing repercussions of the war, the deepening of internal division, and the absence of institutional stability. The holding of elections is not merely a function of legal framework or political will; it presupposes a safe and stable environment that guarantees freedom of participation, the integrity of the electoral process, and citizens' unimpeded access to polling stations — conditions that render implementation, under prevailing circumstances, fraught with fundamental difficulty.

This paper interrogates the question of whether comprehensive Palestinian elections can realistically be held in the post-war phase, and, more specifically, whether such elections would constitute an entry point for rebuilding the political system and reinvigorating democratic participation, or whether they risk instead reproducing existing divisions and deepening prevailing political imbalances. It further examines the requirements of democratic preparation, the roles of relevant social actors — particularly youth and women — and offers an analysis of the principal logistical, political, and legal challenges likely to confront the electoral process.

Methodologically, the paper adopts a participatory, descriptive-analytical approach grounded in in-depth interviews with political and community actors, complemented by an analysis of the local context and the Deir al-Balah experience as a field case study. Its objective is to offer a realistic reading of the possible electoral scenarios - identifying both prospects for success and points of vulnerability - so as to inform recommendations conducive to a more inclusive and sustainable democratic process.

I. The Call for Elections and the Availability of a Suitable Political Environment

The call to hold elections at this stage represents a key entry point for restoring the democratic path and renewing political legitimacy, amid the transformations brought about by the war. Elections are not merely a constitutional requirement; they are a means of rebuilding trust between citizens and institutions, reinforcing the principle of peaceful transfer of power, and giving various political and social forces the opportunity to help shape the future of the Palestinian political system.

President Mahmoud Abbas issued a presidential decree setting Saturday, November 28, as the date for legislative elections — the first such elections since 2006 — as part of reforms demanded by the international community.¹

The call gained new momentum following Abbas's announcement that the period following the Eighth General Conference of Fatah would see the completion of democratic milestones, including preparations for general presidential and legislative elections alongside work on the constitution, the political parties law, and the general elections law. He also described 2026 as "the year of democracy," within a vision aimed at reactivating elected institutions and renewing political legitimacy.²

However, available evidence suggests that the political and social environment remains not fully prepared for comprehensive Palestinian elections, given the continuing war and the widespread destruction and displacement it has caused, alongside persistent political division, declining trust in official institutions and political parties, and damage to the infrastructure needed to manage the electoral process. These factors pose fundamental challenges to providing a safe and fair environment that guarantees equal participation for all citizens.³

Researcher "Tayseer Mheisen" argues that the Palestinian political and social environment remains unprepared for comprehensive national elections, given the ongoing war and its humanitarian repercussions - including widespread displacement and infrastructure destruction - alongside continued political division and the absence of a clear national vision for managing the transitional phase. He stresses that these conditions do not reflect a rejection of democracy, but rather the absence of the objective conditions necessary for free and fair elections capable of renewing

¹"Mahmoud Abbas Sets November 28 as Date for Palestinian Legislative Elections," France 24, July 9, 2026, available at: <https://goo.su/DiCC1GB>

²"President Issues Decisions on Palestinian National Council Elections," Palestinian News and Information Agency (WAFA), July 19, 2025, available at: <https://goo.su/BNavK9e>

³Interview: Khitam Abu Awda, researcher in social sciences, Gaza, Palestine (July 6, 2026).

political legitimacy and ensuring participation by all citizens in a safe, stable environment.⁴ Researcher Imad Abu Rahma similarly states that the call for elections "does not come within the framework of an inclusive national consensus aimed at formulating a political program to address current challenges," but is instead viewed as an attempt by influential actors within the political system to entrench their dominance and exclude opposition forces - citing as evidence the exclusionary amendments introduced to the electoral law.⁵

This call comes at a time when the Palestinian political system faces exceptional challenges arising from the war, political division, and the complexities of reconstruction — making elections not merely a constitutional requirement, but an entry point for rebuilding political legitimacy, strengthening trust in institutions, and involving various political and social forces in shaping the coming phase. Yet the success of this call remains contingent on achieving national consensus and ensuring a political and security environment that allows for free and fair elections across all Palestinian territories.

There is concern that holding elections under current conditions could entrench the political realities produced by the war, rather than serving as an entry point for rebuilding national unity and restoring democratic legitimacy. Priority at this stage should therefore be given to restoring a minimum degree of unity within the political system and building a consensual framework for managing the transitional phase before proceeding with any electoral process — ensuring that elections serve to strengthen national unity and political stability rather than further deepen existing division.⁶

Youth stand out as the group most capable of driving change, given their large share of Palestinian society and the energy and tools they possess to influence public life. However, their contribution should not be limited to voting; it should extend to running as candidates, shaping policy, monitoring the electoral process, and participating in national dialogue and the formulation of future visions. This requires creating a political and legislative environment that ensures equal opportunity, strengthens youth representation on electoral lists and in decision-making positions, and promotes a culture of democratic participation and youth-led initiatives - contributing to a more inclusive and responsive political system.⁷

These elections undoubtedly face a range of political, security, and logistical challenges, compounded by the absence of even a minimum degree of national consensus. Nevertheless, they remain a genuine opportunity to break the current impasse - provided they are approached with an inclusive national logic that broadens the base of political and social representation, opening the door for various sectors, groups, and political forces to participate in shaping the Legislative Council and the National Council, thereby reinforcing pluralism and restoring the principle of national partnership within the Palestinian political system.

⁴Interview: researcher and writer on development, humanitarian affairs, and public policy issues, Gaza, Palestine (July 8, 2026).

⁵Interview: Imad Abu Rahma, researcher in political affairs, Gaza, Palestine (July 9, 2026).

⁶Interview: Tayseer Mheisen, researcher and writer on development, humanitarian affairs, and public policy issues, Gaza, Palestine (July 8, 2026).

⁷Interview: Samia al-Ghusein, researcher in public law and academic, Gaza, Palestine (July 9, 2026).

II. The Deir al-Balah Experience: A Local Model in a Complex Context

The Deir al-Balah experience highlighted the importance of local initiatives in strengthening community participation and dialogue among different segments of society, particularly under the exceptional conditions facing Gaza. It demonstrated that local communities are capable of producing effective models of consultation, accountability, and participation in decision-making - provided safe spaces for dialogue exist, along with genuine partnerships between official and civil institutions, and active participation by youth and women. The experience also underscored the pivotal role of youth initiatives in stimulating community engagement and fostering a culture of dialogue and cooperation. It can serve as a foundation for developing more inclusive local governance models, strengthening trust between citizens and institutions, and supporting future democratic processes.⁸

In an unprecedented development, municipal elections were held in Deir al-Balah in central Gaza inside tents set up as polling stations, due to the extensive destruction and lack of infrastructure caused by the ongoing war. These were the city's first local elections in roughly 22 years, and saw notable voter turnout from the early morning hours, with citizens lining up outside polling stations despite difficult humanitarian conditions. The process unfolded in a complex security and humanitarian context marked by the war's repercussions, amid extensive destruction of transportation and infrastructure that forced some voters to reach polling stations on foot over long distances. Nevertheless, no injuries were reported during the first hours of voting, reflecting citizens' determination to exercise their electoral right despite the exceptional circumstances.⁹ The elections demonstrated that Palestinian society retains the capacity to organize a democratic process even under exceptional conditions, with displacement tents transformed into polling centers and voting conducted with a reasonable degree of smoothness and integrity — confirming that the renewal of legitimacy should be grounded in popular will and democratic elections, not in arrangements or bodies created outside the framework of direct popular choice.¹⁰

The Deir al-Balah elections marked an important milestone in breaking the deadlock that had accompanied the electoral process in Gaza, following the failure of all previous attempts to hold elections - whether local in 2017 or legislative in 2021. At the same time, the experience revealed the limits of popular participation and a general sense of frustration, alongside major logistical challenges stemming from widespread destruction, internal displacement, and shifting residency patterns.¹¹ Despite the difficult circumstances surrounding it, the experience carried significance beyond its local scope, reflecting an attempt to reconnect Palestinian political geography and reinforce a unified political space, and expressing Palestinian society's commitment to democratic participation and its rejection of institutional vacuum. It also carried important symbolic weight,

⁸Interview: Khitam Abu Awda, researcher in social sciences, Gaza, Palestine (July 6, 2026).

⁹Report: "Inside Tents... Deir al-Balah Witnesses Gaza's First Local Elections in 22 Years," Anadolu Agency, Ankara (April 25, 2026), available at: <https://goo.su/0b2oL4J>

¹⁰Interview: Basel Abu Jarai, researcher in development and human rights, Gaza, Palestine (July 6, 2026).

¹¹Interview: Mohammed al-Talbani, researcher in constitutional law, Gaza, Palestine (July 5, 2026).

reflecting insistence on exercising a minimum degree of popular sovereignty even in less-than-ideal contexts - elections here carrying a political message affirming the continued presence of community will.¹²

Four local lists ran in the Deir al-Balah municipal council elections in April 2026. The process unfolded in an atmosphere of relative calm, with reduced participation by Palestinian factions, allowing broader space for competition among local lists with a more service-oriented and social character than political - reflecting Palestinian society's capacity to manage its own affairs and adapt to exceptional conditions through community initiatives and local leadership.¹³

The experience showed that reduced partisan polarization created broader space for competition among local lists and expanded participation by the local community, particularly groups not previously engaged in political activity - demonstrating the potential to strengthen civic and community participation at the local level despite the exceptional conditions facing Gaza.

III. The Electoral Law and Opportunities for Expanding Women's and Youth Participation

On June 18, 2026, President Mahmoud Abbas issued Decree-Law No. 10 of 2026 amending Decree-Law No. 1 of 2007 on General Elections. The amendment increases the number of Legislative Council seats to 200, lowers the minimum candidacy age to 23, raises the required proportion of female representation, and sets a minimum of 20 candidates per electoral list. It also requires each candidate to commit to the amended Basic Law, the decree-law and its amendments, and to the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, along with its political program and relevant resolutions of international legitimacy.¹⁴

The amendment also gradually lowered the electoral threshold — from 2% in the 2006 elections, to 1.5% in the 2007 amendment, and now to 1%, expanding opportunities for small and independent lists and reshaping the map of political representation on a relatively more open basis. The new law also strengthened women's political participation by maintaining a quota of one woman for every three candidates on each list, potentially raising women's representation to around 30% in the House of Representatives and the National Council, while lowering the candidacy age from 28 to 23, a positive step expanding the pool of youth candidates.¹⁵

The current legal framework offers relatively expanded opportunities for the representation of women and youth; however, the challenge lies not in the quantitative dimension of representation, but in the substance of participation itself. The electoral process operates within a legal and political system that may limit opportunities for broad, effective participation, with implications for prospects of political change, expanding freedoms, ending division, and rebuilding the political

¹²Mansour Abu Kareem, "The Deir al-Balah Local Elections: Between Procedural Challenges and the Importance of the National Dimension," Amad Media, Cairo (April 12, 2026), available at: <https://goo.su/dBpyFBx>

¹³Interview: Tayseer Mheisen, researcher and writer on development, humanitarian affairs, and public policy issues, Gaza, Palestine (July 8, 2026).

¹⁴"Elections Committee Publishes Amendment to the General Elections Law," Central Elections Commission, Ramallah (June 22, 2026), available at: <https://goo.su/E7NzZ3>

¹⁵Interview: Mohammed al-Talbani, researcher in constitutional law, Gaza, Palestine (July 5, 2026).

system on more inclusive and equitable foundations.¹⁶ Youth make up more than 40% of Palestinian society, making them a fundamental pillar for the success of any electoral process and for advancing democratic transition, with an active role to play through voting, community awareness, election monitoring, volunteer work, and contributing to campaign management and policy initiatives.¹⁷

Although the current law provides some mechanisms to strengthen political participation — such as the list system and the women's quota - these do not necessarily guarantee effective, influential participation by women or youth in decision-making positions. The core challenge is whether these legal tools translate into genuine representation within elected institutions; the problem extends beyond the legal dimension to political and cultural factors, as candidate selection is often governed by internal power balances within factions and parties rather than criteria of competence or fair representation.¹⁸ There is therefore a need to further develop the electoral law to ensure fairer and more effective representation of women and youth, through strengthening quotas or adopting mechanisms guaranteeing their placement in higher positions on electoral lists.¹⁹

Youth represent the most important force for the success of the electoral process, through strengthening popular participation, spreading electoral awareness, and contributing to monitoring and volunteer work. Yet declining trust in institutions, along with difficult economic and political conditions, may push some of them toward disengagement.²⁰ Allowing youth to run as candidates does not necessarily translate into real chances of winning, particularly under the closed-list system, which depends heavily on candidates' placement on the list - a matter largely controlled by parties and political forces.²¹ Activating a genuine youth role - extending beyond voting to candidacy, policy formulation, and election monitoring - requires legal and institutional reforms that guarantee fair representation and expand their presence in decision-making positions, helping renew the political elite, particularly during the post-war reconstruction phase.

IV. Logistical and Political Challenges Facing the Electoral Process

The success of the democratic process depends on political consensus, guaranteed public freedoms, judicial independence, the integrity of election administration, and respect for results, along with broad community participation. Conversely, the main factors behind failure include continued division, weak trust between political forces, the ongoing war and its repercussions, and the absence of a clear vision for the transitional phase - all of which hinder free and fair elections and limit the effectiveness of their outcomes.²² Deteriorating economic and living conditions, the continued blockade and resulting restrictions on importing materials and equipment needed for the electoral process, along with continued displacement and the conversion of many schools and

¹⁶Interview: Imad Abu Rahma, researcher in political affairs, Gaza, Palestine (July 9, 2026).

¹⁷Interview: Khitam Abu Awda, researcher in social sciences, Gaza, Palestine (July 6, 2026).

¹⁸Interview: Tayseer Mheisen, researcher and writer on development, humanitarian affairs, and public policy issues, Gaza, Palestine (July 8, 2026).

¹⁹Interview: Khitam Abu Awda, researcher in social sciences, Gaza, Palestine (July 6, 2026).

²⁰Interview: Nahedh Hammad, researcher in political affairs, Gaza, Palestine (July 7, 2026).

²¹Interview: Mohammed al-Talbani, researcher in constitutional law, Gaza, Palestine (July 5, 2026).

²²Interview: Samia al-Ghusein, researcher in public law and academic, Gaza, Palestine (July 9, 2026).

public facilities into shelters, further limit the availability of sites for voter registration and polling, compounding the logistical challenges of organizing comprehensive elections.²³

Logistical challenges pose a major obstacle to holding elections, particularly in Gaza, where extensive infrastructure destruction has created serious difficulties in managing the electoral process. These include continued displacement, difficulty updating the voter registry accurately, challenges in identifying polling locations within shelters or destroyed areas, and challenges related to ensuring the safety of voters and election staff, guaranteeing freedom of movement, and the timely delivery of electoral materials.²⁴ On the political level, the main challenges include continued Palestinian division and the absence of consensus on the nature of the transitional phase, in addition to uncertainty over the war's outcome and the absence of a shared vision for the political system required after the war. Elections, in this sense, should be the culmination of a comprehensive consensual political process, not its starting point.²⁵

If the electoral process is not linked to comprehensive national mobilization addressing major challenges, and is not built on political consensus aimed at rebuilding the political system, it risks being understood as an attempt to legitimize the status quo and perpetuate the dominance of the current leadership - limiting real prospects for change and potentially increasing voter abstention.²⁶ The absence of a clear vision for managing the post-war transitional phase also raises questions about who will oversee the elections, how results will be implemented, and how a peaceful transfer of power will be guaranteed - making the success of any electoral process contingent on political consensus and a clear institutional framework.²⁷

Several key challenges continue to obstruct Palestinian elections, most notably the ongoing war on Gaza, political division, and the absence of national consensus, alongside security challenges in the West Bank, the difficulty of holding elections in Jerusalem, and the continued absence of unified institutions between the West Bank and Gaza. The lack of a clear vision for the transitional phase further limits prospects for organizing comprehensive elections that enjoy the acceptance of all parties and guarantee the integrity of the process and the legitimacy of its results.

V. Scenarios for Holding Elections According to Political and Security Developments

Three main scenarios can be envisioned for holding Palestinian elections in the coming phase, given the interplay of political, security, and legal factors, and the link between the electoral process and the broader path of internal settlement and rebuilding the Palestinian political system.

Scenario One: Holding the Full Electoral Process

This scenario involves holding comprehensive general elections at both the legislative and presidential levels, led by the Palestinian leadership toward organizing legislative elections next

²³Interview: Basel Abu Jarai, researcher in development and human rights, Gaza, Palestine (July 6, 2026).

²⁴Interview: Tayseer Mheisen, researcher and writer on development, humanitarian affairs, and public policy issues, Gaza, Palestine (July 8, 2026).

²⁵Interview: Azzam Sha'at, researcher in political affairs, Gaza, Palestine (July 6, 2026).

²⁶Interview: Imad Abu Rahma, researcher in political affairs, Gaza, Palestine (July 9, 2026).

²⁷Interview: Raed Halas, consultant and researcher in human development, Gaza, Palestine (July 7, 2026).

November and presidential elections early the following year — in response to external pressure, to renew political legitimacy, and to ensure an orderly transfer of power.

This scenario is considered the most significant and normatively preferable, as it presupposes elections held after achieving political consensus and improved security conditions, ensuring comprehensive participation by all Palestinians and strengthening the legitimacy of elected institutions.²⁸ However, its realization remains contingent on a minimum degree of national consensus, political will among all Palestinian parties, and regional and international support to ensure elections proceed despite existing challenges.

Scenario Two: Postponing the Elections

Continued political and logistical challenges - chief among them the war and the absence of national consensus - could lead to postponing legislative and presidential elections until the requirements of the transitional phase are met. Researcher Imad Abu Rahma believes that the electoral path currently on the table is built on a legal and political vision that could reproduce the dominance of one political party and the exclusion of opposition forces, within a context shaped by internal balances and external pressures.²⁹ Political and security challenges could disrupt the democratic path, as occurred in 2021, when legislative elections were postponed after Israel refused to allow voting in Jerusalem - reflecting how the electoral process remains tied to political and security factors beyond Palestinian control alone.

Scenario Three: Partial Elections

This scenario involves holding partial or local elections in some areas when organizing comprehensive elections proves impossible, building on the repetition of local experiences such as Deir al-Balah to ensure a minimum continuity of democratic practice. However, it carries risks of entrenching division, fragmenting political representation, and creating disparities in legitimacy between regions — potentially undermining the unity of the Palestinian political system. Continued division, weak institutional trust, the absence of legal guarantees, and non-compliance with election results could all weaken the legitimacy of the democratic process and undermine its sustainability.³⁰

Conclusion

The paper concludes that the holding of Palestinian elections at the present stage remains contingent upon a complex constellation of political, security, social, and legal factors, which together render the achievement of comprehensive and fair elections a formidable challenge amid the continuing war, the deepening of division, and the absence of national consensus on the shape of the transitional phase. Within this context, it is evident that elections cannot be viewed in isolation from a broader political process aimed at reconstituting the Palestinian political system and consolidating its unity and institutions.

²⁸Interview: Nahedh Hammad, researcher in political affairs, Gaza, Palestine (July 7, 2026).

²⁹Interview: Imad Abu Rahma, researcher in political affairs, Gaza, Palestine (July 9, 2026).

³⁰Interview: Nahedh Hammad, researcher in political affairs, Gaza, Palestine (July 7, 2026).

The paper affirms that any Palestinian electoral process should be situated within a comprehensive, consensual political process - one grounded in clear arrangements that secure a safe environment, achieve a minimum threshold of national consensus, and carry out the requisite institutional and legal reforms. Notwithstanding the considerable challenges confronting elections, they remain a genuine opportunity to rebuild political legitimacy and overcome the prevailing impasse, provided they are approached through an inclusive national logic that broadens the base of political and social representation and strengthens the participation of diverse constituencies - particularly youth and women - within the Legislative Council and the National Council. Such an approach would reinforce political pluralism, restore the principle of national partnership, and transform elections from a mere procedural requirement into a genuine entry point for rebuilding the Palestinian political system on more inclusive and representative foundations.

Recommendations

- Achieve national consensus before holding any electoral process, through launching a comprehensive national dialogue aimed at agreeing on the objectives and functions of the electoral process and ensuring respect for its results, within a unifying national vision and a clear plan to address current political challenges.
- Provide an integrated political path aimed at creating a suitable electoral environment that strengthens the effective participation of youth and women, through reviewing the electoral law, developing mechanisms for candidate selection within lists, and implementing political education and awareness programs to ensure their meaningful representation and influence in rebuilding the political system.
- Strengthen civil peace by rejecting hate speech and incitement, reinforcing respect for political pluralism, and involving civil society institutions and community leaders in mediation and conflict-resolution efforts.
- Provide a suitable political and security environment, while strengthening community initiatives and building an inclusive national discourse that reduces political polarization and restores trust in the democratic process.