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Palestinian Elections Loom: Drivers, Context and Timing

Unit for Political Studies

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Unit for Political Studies

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On 9 July, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas issued a decree scheduling legislative elections for 28 November 2026 and deferring setting a date for presidential elections, expected to be held in the first quarter of 2027.¹ The decree was issued around a month after the passing of Decree-Law No. (10) of 2026, amending a 2007 decree-law on general elections.² The new legislation increases the number of members of the Palestinian Legislative Council or PLC (the legislative body of the Palestinian Authority), lowers the minimum age for candidates, and raises the quota of seats reserved for women, as well as obliging every candidate to recognise the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people and to adhere to its political and national programme and to relevant international resolutions.³

The prospect of new elections, after a hiatus of two decades, raises questions about the domestic motives for holding them, and degree to which they are connected to regional and international pressures for “reform” of the PA as part of arrangements for the phase following the war on Gaza. The move also has implications for the Palestinian cause more generally, given Israel’s ongoing policies of extermination and starvation in Gaza, its accelerating drive for expulsion, settlement and annexation in the West Bank, and its attempt to impose new political and security arrangements, at a time of Arab impotence.

Election Drivers

The 2005 Palestinian presidential elections and legislative polls the following year were the last two national Palestinian polls. They were followed by a schism in 2007 that has disrupted the electoral process ever since. Although Abbas issued a presidential decree on 15 January 2021 calling for presidential and legislative elections, once nominations had closed on 30 April that year, he made an about-turn, ordering their postponement “until the conditions for holding them are met in all the Palestinian territories, especially Jerusalem.”⁴ That decision was attributed, at the time, to fears that the president’s Fatah movement would lose ground to competing lists – as well as to lack of enthusiasm from the administration of then-US President Joe Biden, which feared that the polls would strengthen Hamas, in a repeat of the 2006 elections. The pretext that they could not be held in Jerusalem also raises the question of whether this has since changed – or will do in time for the forthcoming vote.

Growing international pressure on the PA to undertake “political and institutional reforms” within the framework of post-war arrangements over Gaza is one of the main reasons why elections are

1 “President issues a decree scheduling legislative elections for November 28,” *Palestine News and Information Agency (WAFA)*, 9/7/2026, accessed 3/8/2026 (in Arabic), at: <https://acr.ps/hBybHja>

2 Current General Elections Law, Central Elections Commission Palestine, June 2026, accessed 3/8/2026 at: <https://acr.ps/hBy1Ckk>

3 “Elections Commission Publishes Amendment to the General Elections Law,” press release, Central Elections Commission – Palestine, 22/6/2026, accessed 3/8/2026 (in Arabic), at: <https://acr.ps/hBybGFP>

4 “President Issues Decree Postponing General Elections,” *Palestine News and Information Agency (WAFA)*, 30/4/2021, accessed 3/8/2026 (in Arabic), at: <https://acr.ps/hBybH6y>.

back on the agenda. In November 2023, the Biden administration began to talk of a “a revitalized, reformed, revamped Palestinian Authority,” and linked its potential administration of the Gaza Strip to the implementation of a package of political, administrative, security, and financial reforms.⁵ This trend continued under Biden’s successor Donald Trump, whose plan for the “day after” the war on Gaza linked the return of the PA to administering the Strip to the completion of a specific package of reforms. In the interim, it was to be managed by a Palestinian technocratic committee operating under the supervision of Trump’s “Board of Peace” – officially established in early 2026.⁶ The European Union adopted the same approach, making the provision of urgent financial support of €400 million – in addition to its comprehensive support programme for 2025–2027, valued at €1.6 billion – conditional on progress on reforms, which it also views as a prerequisite for the PA playing a role in managing the Strip after the war.⁷

Beyond international pressures, the PA’s fragility – and failure to address the pivotal events facing the Palestinian cause since October 2023 in an adequate manner – have also served to drive calls for Palestinian elections as a means to renew its legitimacy. The results of an opinion poll conducted by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (PCPSR) in September 2024 reflect the extent of the collapse of public confidence in the PA. Only 22 percent of respondents expressed satisfaction with the authority’s performance, while satisfaction with that of the president stood at 18 percent; some 81 percent expressed their dissatisfaction. The results also revealed limited confidence in the government of Prime Minister Mohammad Mustafa—appointed by President Abbas in March 2024 as part of the series of reforms initiated by the PA. Some 69 percent of Palestinians believed that the new administration would not succeed in implementing reforms where the government of former Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh had failed.⁸ Over the past two years, the PA has initiated a series of political and institutional adjustments, including creating the position of Deputy Head of the Authority and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), with Hussein al-Sheikh as its first incumbent, as well as holding local council elections, convening the Fatah movement’s eighth congress after a years-long hiatus, setting a date for elections to the Palestinian National Council or PNC (which acts as a parliament representing all Palestinians except those who are citizens of Israel) and approving its electoral system, and setting about drafting an interim Palestinian constitution.

Legal Amendments and Election-Rigging Fears

The amendments Abbas introduced to the General Elections Law, published in the Official Gazette on 18 June 2026, ushered in a new phase in the organization of Palestinian elections. The new

⁵ Matthew Miller, “Department Press Briefing – December 13, 2023,” United States Department of State, 13/12/2023, accessed on 3/8/2026, at: <https://acr.ps/hBybGKk>.

⁶ “Trump’s Plan to End the War in Gaza,” *Al Jazeera Net*, 30/9/2025, accessed 3/8/2026 (in Arabic), at: <https://acr.ps/hBybHpa>.

⁷ “Commission Announces Multiannual Programme for Palestinian Recovery and Resilience Worth up to €1.6 Billion,” press release, European Commission, 14/4/2025, accessed on 3/8/2026, at: <https://acr.ps/hBybHb3>.

⁸ “Public Opinion Poll No. (93): Press Release,” press release, Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, 3-7/9/2024, accessed on 3/8/2026 (in Arabic), at: <https://acr.ps/hBybGtd>.

decree-law reformulates several provisions of the 2007 General Elections Law, establishing a legal framework distinct from that set for the 2021 elections. The amendment increases the number of seats in the PLC from 132 to 200, thereby broadening the base of representation to accommodate a larger number of power centres and local figures, while affording Fatah's official list greater leeway to manage its internal balances. Furthermore, the amendment supports a trend toward designating PLC members as representatives of the "domestic" constituency within the PNC, reducing the need for separate national council elections within the Palestinian territories—while maintaining the diaspora elections scheduled for November 2026 – particularly given potential international reservations over holding PNC elections domestically, in light of the fact that only the PA (and by extension the PLC) have international recognition. Nevertheless, this arrangement remains subject to review, should the need arise for reconsideration of arrangements for combining the leadership of the PA and the PLO.

The amendment lowers the electoral threshold required for blocs and parties to win seats from two to just one percent of the vote, thereby expanding opportunities for smaller lists to enter the legislative body. However, it also increases the likelihood that the vote is fragmented and affords local and clan-based lists greater chances of securing parliamentary representation, at a time when Palestinian parties and factions are facing declining public support, and most are unable to forge stable electoral alliances. The amendment also lowers the minimum age for candidacy from 28 to 23 years and increases women's representation by mandating the inclusion of at least one woman in every three candidates on party electoral lists. Although these two measures possess a reformist dimension in legal terms, they will be implemented within a political environment still governed by traditional power dynamics, which limits opportunities for young or female candidates to compete on a level playing field. Furthermore, the amendment introduces a new requirement obliging every candidate to recognise the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, as well as committing to its political and national programme and relevant international resolutions. This condition establishes a binding political framework for all electoral lists prior to the elections, granting the PA greater power to regulate the boundaries of the electoral process. Consequently, the participation of certain political forces becomes contingent on their prior acceptance of these obligations.

The Israeli Factor

Holding elections is clearly intended to bolster the PA's domestic and international legitimacy. However, this process is unfolding within a political and security environment that Israel has been actively reshaping since the start of its genocidal war on Gaza, with the aim of tightening its grip over the entire territory of Palestine. Statements by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu rejecting any PA role in Gaza and opposing the establishment of a Palestinian state, alongside Finance Minister

Bezael Smotrich's threats against the PA and his efforts to undermine it politically and financially,⁹ reflect an Israeli vision of redefining the function of the PA, which was originally established under the 1993 Oslo Accords.

Concerning the West Bank, the Israeli occupation authorities viewed the events of October 2023 as an opportunity to implement their agenda of decisively "resolving the conflict," through the combination of accelerating annexation, settlement expansion, and systematic expulsion of the population, to impose facts on the ground aimed at paving the way to declaring Israeli sovereignty. This approach is starkly visible in the increasingly rapid colonization of the territory – most notably the signing of a contract on 14 July, valued at 8.5 billion shekels or \$2.3 billion, to build an additional 12,000 new settlement housing units.¹⁰ This was accompanied by unprecedentedly strict restrictions on freedom of movement: international organizations have documented the establishment of nearly 1,000 military checkpoints and gates within the West Bank since October 2023,¹¹ alongside tightened restrictions on Palestinian movement both in and out of the West Bank via the Karameh Border Crossing with Jordan.¹² The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) recorded 1,828 settler attacks in 2025, the highest figure since it began keeping records in 2006; this escalating wave of violence led to the displacement of 118 Palestinian communities between 2023 and 2025, while agricultural and pastoral settlement outposts seized control of over a million dunams of West Bank land.¹³ Furthermore, the Israeli army displaced more than 32,000 Palestinians from the Jenin, Tulkarm, and Nur Shams camps starting in early 2025. On 26 July 2026, Israeli Defence Minister Israel Katz announced plans to expand this model to other villages, towns, and camps across the West Bank.¹⁴ The PA has done little of note to confront these unprecedented measures in the West Bank, nor to resist the expansion of settlements or the rise in settler pogroms against Palestinian towns and villages.

This trajectory is compounded by financial and economic pressures undermining the PA's ability to function. Israel is now withholding as much as \$6 billion in tax revenues owed to the PA.¹⁵ Meanwhile, a salary crisis affecting nearly 200,000 public sector employees has persisted since the outbreak of the war. These measures undermine the political and institutional environment necessary for

9 "Smotrich Calls for Annexation of the West Bank and Threatens the [Palestinian] Authority with 'Annihilation,'" *Al Jazeera Net*, 3/9/2025, accessed 8 March 2026 (in Arabic), at: <https://acr.ps/hBybGTW>.

10 "Netanyahu's Government Revealed to Have Allocated 8.5 Billion Shekels for Settlement Infrastructure," *Al-Ayyam*, 15/7/2026, accessed 3/8/2026 (in Arabic), at: <https://acr.ps/hBybHkF>.

11 "The Occupation Strangles the West Bank with 898 Military Checkpoints," *Al Jazeera Net*, 22 January 2025, accessed 3/8/2026 (in Arabic), at: <https://acr.ps/hBybGHk>.

12 Samer Khweira and Anwar Al-Ziyadat, "Al-Karameh Border Crossing... A Nightmare for Palestinian and Jordanian Travelers," *Al-Araby Al-Jadeed*, 2/7/2026, accessed 3/8/2026 (in Arabic), at: <https://acr.ps/hBybH83>.

13 "By the Numbers: A Record Surge in Settlement Expansion and Settler Violence in the West Bank," *Al Jazeera Net*, 21/7/2026, accessed 3/8/2026 (in Arabic), at: <https://acr.ps/hBybGul>.

14 Beirut Hammoud, "Netanyahu Threatens West Bank with Escalation... and Katz Hints that Villages and Towns could be Depopulated, Like the Refugee Camps," *Al-Araby Al-Jadeed*, 26/7/2026, accessed 3/8/2026 (in Arabic), at: <https://acr.ps/hBybGVr>.

15 Qais Abu Samra, "Ramallah: Israel Moves to 'Write Off' \$6 Billion in Withheld Tax Funds," *Anadolu Agency*, 29/7/2026, accessed 3/8/2026 (in Arabic), at: <https://acr.ps/hBybHma>.

holding elections. Should the polls take place, they would unfold within a reality being reshaped by Israel on the ground, serving its aim of establishing an authority that performs municipal functions and maintains the status quo without posing a political challenge.

In the Gaza Strip, the announcement of elections comes amidst arrangements for the “day after” the war and efforts to determine the nature of the entity that will administer the Strip and oversee its reconstruction. This process continues to face major obstacles due to Israel’s ongoing bombardment and blockade of the territory, as well as its insistence on remaining in the areas of Gaza that it controls. Even following Trump’s 31 July announcement of a roadmap for completing the second phase of the ceasefire,¹⁶ and the announcement by Hamas three weeks earlier that it was dissolving its governmental emergency committee to prepare to transfer administrative duties to the “National Committee for the Administration of Gaza,” Israel has not changed its stance. It has persistently refused to withdraw from the Strip, and conditioned any withdrawal on the territory being demilitarised, contrary to the proposal reached by mediators in Cairo.¹⁷

Israeli National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir attacked the draft agreement, deeming it unacceptable to Israel.¹⁸ Consistent with this position, Israel has refrained from fulfilling its obligations since implementation began on Phase 1 of the ceasefire deal, and continues to expand its military control over the Strip. In late May, Netanyahu announced that his government’s goal is to expand Israel’s control from approximately 60 percent of the Strip’s territory, at the time of writing, to 70 percent – up from the roughly 53 percent it held when the ceasefire agreement was signed in October 2025. Since Israel’s Security Cabinet agreed on 26 July to the deployment in Gaza of an international stabilization force affiliated with the “Board of Peace,” Israel has been attempting to consolidate its military presence in the areas it controls, by restricting the force’s operations to beyond the “Yellow Line” zone and establishing a base for it near the city of Rafah, laying the groundwork for what it terms a “Humanitarian City” – an area subject to separate security and administrative arrangements.¹⁹

Nevertheless, the PA is hoping that regional and international pressures will ultimately allow it to take over administration of the Strip, thereby enabling it to spearhead the reconstruction process as the Palestinian partner with whom donors can engage. This expectation is backed up by most of the Arab and international initiatives proposed over the last two years regarding the post-war phase, including UN Security Council Resolution 2803, which emphasized the importance of empowering the Authority to play a leading role in reconstruction once the Palestinian Authority “has completed

16 Mohamed Al-Badiwi, “The Full Text of the Terms for the Second Phase of the Gaza Agreement,” *Al-Araby Al-Jadeed*, 31/7/2026, accessed 3/8/2026 (in Arabic), at: <https://acr.ps/hBybGIP>.

17 Itamar Eichner, “Israel Pushes Back on Gaza Deal Reports: Insists on Removal of all Weapons from Gaza before Withdrawal,” *Ynet Global*, 30/7/2026, accessed on 3/8/2026, at: <https://acr.ps/hBybGxl>.

18 Khaled Youssef, “Ben-Gvir Attacks Draft Gaza Agreement and Incites Continued Assassinations and Displacement,” *Anadolu Agency*, 31/7/2026, accessed 3/8/2026 (in Arabic), at: <https://acr.ps/hBybH9y>.

19 Zein Khalil, “Israeli Cabinet Approves Entry of ‘International Stabilization Force’ into Gaza,” *Anadolu Agency*, 26/7/2026, accessed 3/8/2026 (in Arabic), at: <https://acr.ps/hBybGwd>.

its reform program.”²⁰ Consequently, holding elections becomes less a matter of fulfilling Palestinian national imperatives than one of responding to an international need to identify a Palestinian entity that can carry out the security and political obligations required to reorganize the Gaza Strip’s affairs after the war.

Nevertheless, it remains likely that Israel will disrupt the electoral process, either by preventing the elections entirely or by restricting them to specific parts of the Palestinian territories, through the exclusion of Jerusalem and efforts to exclude the Gaza Strip too. This looks increasingly likely with the approach of Israeli general elections, scheduled for October 2026: the current government may view a hardline stance against the PA as a means to bolster its standing among its own constituency. This aligns with its declared positions advocating for undermining, or even dissolving, the PA, in favour of local or clan-based administrative arrangements.

Palestinian Division Over the Elections

Beyond regional and international calculations concerning the elections, and Israel’s framing of the polls within arrangements for the “day after” the war, signs are emerging within the Palestinian arena that the elections could trigger a new political crisis, either by reviving existing divisions or by paving the way for new forms of conflict over legitimacy and power. This is reflected in the positions of several Palestinian factions. On 28 June, Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, the Palestinian National Initiative, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), the PFLP–General Command and the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine urged Abbas to convene an urgent meeting of heads of the factions and to launch a comprehensive national dialogue prior to the elections, emphasizing that the process of rebuilding national institutions must be grounded in consensus and national cooperation.²¹ The Civil Coalition for Elections adopted a similar approach, calling for simultaneous presidential and legislative elections in the West Bank, Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip. It also rejected moves to treat the elections as partial arrangements or as an administrative procedure, opposed new conditions restricting the right to run for office, and demanded a broad national dialogue prior to the electoral process, in order to prepare the necessary political and legal environment.²²

Internal divisions within Fatah reinforce these concerns. The movement’s eighth conference deepened organizational rifts and revealed intense competition for positions of influence within its leadership, suggesting that the legislative elections might be contested by multiple competing Fatah lists. This revived memories of the circumstances that prompted President Abbas to postpone the 2021 elections – specifically, the growing likelihood that the official list would lose to rival lists from

²⁰ United Nations, Security Council, *Resolution 2803 (2025) Adopted by the Security Council at its 10046th Meeting, on 17 November 2025* (New York: 17/11/2025), accessed on 3/8/2026, at: <https://acr.ps/hBybGYr>.

²¹ “Palestinian factions demand an urgent meeting with President Mahmoud Abbas and a U-turn on the election mechanism,” *Al Jazeera Net*, 28/6/2026, accessed 3/8/2026 (in Arabic), at: <https://acr.ps/hBybGWW>.

²² “Press release issued by the Civil Coalition for Elections: Presidential and legislative elections on the same day; no democracy with exclusion,” press release, *Al-Haq*, 4/7/2026, accessed 3/8/2026 (in Arabic), at: <https://acr.ps/hBybHnF>.

within the movement. Conversely, were the elections not to be held, or were legislative elections held in the absence of other electoral measures – whether due to internal considerations, external pressures, or Israeli interference – this would reignite the struggle over legitimacy and representation within the Palestinian political landscape.

Conclusion

The announcement that Palestinian legislative elections will be held in November comes amidst mounting regional and international pressure to establish post-war arrangements for Gaza. Although the PA has implemented a series of reforms over the past two years, this decree represents its most significant step. It redraws the rules of political competition, defines the structure of the institutions that will manage the coming phase, and reshapes the balance of power within the institutions of both the PA and the PLO. While regional and international actors have pushed for these reforms as a step toward reviving the political process, Israel continues to impose new political and security realities in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. In practice, this transforms these reforms into administrative and technical arrangements focused on managing public services and the Palestinian population after the war, rather than serving as a gateway to rebuilding the Palestinian political system and establishing an independent state. Key national issues, and the need for national unity in the face of the challenges and complexities of the post-genocide era, remain beyond the scope of these reforms. In the absence of a comprehensive Palestinian national dialogue to define the objectives and parameters of these elections, the likelihood of new political divisions will only grow, even as Israel imposes new political and geographic realities on the ground.