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Palestinian 2026 Legislative Elections: Prospects and Impediments, Competing Forces, and Likely Outcome



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The following Policy Brief examines the prospects for holding Palestinian legislative elections scheduled for November 28, 2026, evaluating whether credible voting is feasible under existing severe political, territorial, and security constraints. The primary purpose of this Brief is to provide an assessment of the core structural impediments confronting the election—including West Bank territorial fragmentation, the Palestinian Authority's severe fiscal erosion, Gaza's devastation, and the political overlap with Israel's October 2026 elections. Furthermore, this Brief maps the five competing political forces and coalition dynamics shaping the campaign, analyzing public opinion data and electoral scenarios to determine whether voting under current conditions can produce a legislature with genuine governing legitimacy. Ultimately, it evaluates whether a pragmatic three-to-four-month postponement—shifting voting from November 2026 to early 2027—could provide the essential window required to navigate these obstacles, reconcile electoral frameworks, and establish a viable foundation for renewing Palestinian political legitimacy.

The Context: Political Deterioration, Territorial Fragmentation, and the Imperative of Renewal

The upcoming Palestinian legislative elections carry profound political weight, taking place twenty years after the last parliamentary elections in 2006 and more than three years after the October 7, 2023 attack and the ensuing Gaza war. These landmark developments have fundamentally altered the Palestinian domestic balance of power, shattered public confidence in existing political institutions, and rendered the renewal of democratic legitimacy more urgent than at any point in recent decades. Nevertheless, the post-October 7 landscape has introduced severe new obstacles that exacerbate the long-standing structural impediments that prevented voting over the past two decades.

In the West Bank, the political and security environment has underwent sharp deterioration. In January 2023, Israel's most right-wing and religious-nationalist coalition government in its history assumed power with an explicit governing agenda focused on expanding Israeli control over the West Bank and systematically weakening the Palestinian Authority (PA). The Israeli government executed a sustained policy of creeping *de facto* annexation alongside administrative coercion and territorial restrictions across the West Bank. Settlement expansion accelerated at an unprecedented pace: in 2023, Israeli authorities advanced 12,349 housing units in West Bank settlements—nearly three times the 4,427 units advanced in 2022 and the highest single-year figure recorded since the signing of the Oslo Accords.

Concurrently, state-backed settler violence escalated to historic highs. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) documented 1,432 settler attacks against Palestinians in

2024—the highest annual total recorded since systematic data collection began in 2006. This figure rose further in 2025, with OCHA recording over 1,800 attacks, representing an average of five violent incidents per day. By July 2026, more than 1,330 additional violent incidents had already been documented, averaging more than six incidents daily. Since January 2023, settler violence, combined with military access restrictions and demolition orders, has forcibly displaced over 6,200 Palestinians, concentrated primarily in vulnerable communities across Area C and Area B, destroying prospects for future peace.

Simultaneously, the PA has faced debilitating political, security, and financial constraints. Israel's dramatic escalation of clearance revenue deductions and withholdings has severely eroded the PA's financial capacity to pay civil service salaries, maintain basic public services, and exercise effective governance. In the first half of 2025, Israeli monthly deductions averaged over NIS 460 million, compared with approximately NIS 200 million per month prior to October 2023. Transfers were halted entirely beginning in May 2025, plunging the PA into an unprecedented fiscal crisis that has deeply compromised its practical governing capacity.

The PA's perceived inability to protect West Bank communities or respond effectively in Gaza has provoked widespread public indignation. The Palestinian public increasingly views the leadership in Ramallah as weak, ineffective, and disconnected from the population. Public demands for the resignation of President Mahmoud Abbas remain exceptionally high. According to August 2026 public opinion polling conducted by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (PSR), 79% of Palestinians demand President Abbas's resignation. When asked which political movement they supported, Fatah and Hamas received identical 24% support, while a decisive 44% declared that neither Fatah nor Hamas deserved to lead the Palestinian people. Hamas, which experienced a major surge in popularity post-October 7, lost substantial support over the following two years, returning to roughly its pre-war baseline. Consequently, the contemporary Palestinian political landscape is defined not by single-faction dominance, but by pervasive disillusionment with the political establishment and profound uncertainty regarding leadership alternatives.

It is within this volatile internal environment that international and regional actors, seeking durable arrangements for postwar governance in Gaza, have pressed the PA to undergo institutional revitalization through democratic elections. Key Arab states and European governments view parliamentary and presidential elections as an essential mechanism to renew the PA's democratic mandate, generate fresh political leadership, and rebuild the basis for reunifying the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Consequently, the Palestinian leadership formally designated November 28, 2026, for legislative elections. However, this election date creates severe calendar friction: Israel's national parliamentary election is scheduled for October 27, 2026—exactly one month prior to the Palestinian vote. This leaves virtually no time for a new Israeli government to form and establish a policy toward Palestinian elections, particularly regarding voting in East Jerusalem, campaign activity, and security coordination in Gaza and Area C.

The central analytical question is therefore not merely whether the Central Elections Commission can technically execute voting on November 28, but whether elections conducted under current political, security, territorial, and institutional conditions can produce a parliament endowed with genuine representative legitimacy and practical authority.

Serious Impediments to a November 2026 Election

The prospects for holding credible Palestinian legislative elections on November 28, 2026, face five major structural impediments that make a temporary postponement almost inevitable. First, Israel's total military control over East Jerusalem, Area C, and major West Bank transit points creates severe uncertainty over whether Palestinian citizens in these areas will be permitted to register, campaign, and vote under acceptable electoral conditions. Historical Israeli interference in East Jerusalem voting, combined with the annexationist agenda of the current Israeli government, suggests that Israel may block electoral activity, confiscate materials, or arrest candidates, thereby denying geographic inclusivity.

Second, the PA lacks operational security and administrative presence across the Gaza Strip and in expanding regions of the West Bank. The physical destruction of public infrastructure in Gaza, the displacement of nearly 1.9 million residents, and the absence of a unified civil administration mean the PA cannot safeguard polling locations, protect personnel, ensure secret balloting, or enforce election results. Without administrative control, holding elections in Gaza risks producing widespread voting failure.

Third, the unresolved political and legal status of Hamas presents a major political contradiction. The lack of genuine Fatah-Hamas reconciliation leaves unanswered how an elected legislature would function if Hamas or a Hamas-backed list wins a significant share of seats. With international donors conditioning Gaza reconstruction aid on Hamas's exclusion from executive governance, an election producing strong Hamas representation could result in immediate international isolation without resolving the core territorial division.

Fourth, restrictive candidacy rules introduce serious legal barriers. Amendments to Palestinian electoral law require candidate lists and individual nominees to explicitly pledge adherence to the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) as the sole legitimate representative and endorse its political platform. This legal requirement risks excluding prominent political movements, independent factions, and anti-establishment coalitions that reject specific PLO agreements or maintain ideological divergences with official PLO leadership.

Fifth, compounding factors—including mass population displacement in Gaza, the PA's fiscal insolvency, unchecked settler violence, and unilateral modifications to election laws—severely erode public confidence in the electoral process, undermining the core purpose of establishing a legitimate governing authority.

These structural barriers are compounded by two critical timing risks. First, Israel's October 27, 2026 national election creates an intense domestic environment in Israel, where political parties may compete to demonstrate toughness by cracking down on Palestinian electoral activity. Second, holding parliamentary elections prior to presidential elections (expected in 2027) introduces constitutional instability, as a newly elected parliament would immediately challenge President Abbas's executive authority, potentially triggering constitutional deadlock.

Although the Central Elections Commission (CEC) has maintained technical readiness and published an official electoral timeline—including voter registry updating, candidate nominations opening September 26, campaigning beginning November 6, and polling on November 28—technical administration cannot overcome fundamental political impasses. In the absence of political consensus, the November 28 date functions as an unrealistic target rather than a viable operational schedule.

Competing Electoral Forces

If Palestinian legislative elections take place as scheduled or following a short postponement, the political contest will center on five distinct political forces. The precise formation of candidate lists will depend on complex inter-factional negotiations among official Fatah leaders, Fatah dissidents, Hamas and its potential coalition partners, leftist parties, and civil society groups. PSR's August 2026 polling provides robust data to evaluate the comparative strength and structural dynamics of these five forces.

The first competitor is the official Fatah list, controlled by President Mahmoud Abbas and the established party hierarchy. Despite widespread public dissatisfaction with Abbas, official Fatah retains substantial institutional advantages, including patronage networks, party discipline, and administrative experience. PSR polling places baseline support for Fatah at 24%, rising to 32% among likely voters in a scenario utilizing the traditional lists from the 2006 election. The official leadership may attempt to bolster its appeal by recruiting youth leaders, civil society figures, and respected independents. However, official Fatah's candidate list will be severely handicapped by voter frustration with perceived PA corruption, security coordination, and economic stagnation.

The second major competitor is a Barghouti-centered Fatah dissident list, led by or affiliated with imprisoned Fatah leader Marwan Barghouti and prominent figures such as Qaddoura Fares. Polling consistently demonstrates that Barghouti is the single most popular political figure in the Palestinian territories. When tested as a potential successor to President Abbas, Barghouti receives 39% support, far outpacing Khalil al-Hayya (16%), Mohammed Dahlan (15%), and Mustafa Barghouti (6%). In a direct presidential matchup, Barghouti wins 54% among likely voters. Crucially for the legislative race, PSR scenario polling reveals that when Barghouti's list runs separately against an official Fatah list, Barghouti's list captures 33% of the vote, compared to just 14% for the official Fatah ticket. A separate Barghouti list would effectively split the traditional Fatah electorate, representing the greatest threat to official Fatah's parliamentary dominance.

The third and potentially most decisive force is a broad anti-Abbas national opposition coalition centered on Hamas but extending significantly beyond it. Recent diplomatic reports from Cairo indicate ongoing negotiations between Hamas, Mohammed Dahlan's Democratic Reform Bloc, Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), Nasser al-Qudwa's political movement, and independent figures. Hamas leaders have indicated a strategy of participating through a unified national list rather than running an explicit Hamas ticket. By nominating independent technocrats, respected national figures, and non-partisan candidates, Hamas seeks to broaden its electoral reach and shield the list from international sanctions. The potential alignment between Hamas and Dahlan—former bitter rivals during the 2007 civil conflict who have collaborated on Gaza humanitarian relief over the past three years—could unite significant constituencies across Gaza and the West Bank.

The fourth political force consists of third-party leftist lists, including Palestinian National Initiative (Mubadara), PFLP, Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), and Palestinian People's Party (PPP). These parties generally decline formal alignment with either official Fatah or the Hamas-Dahlan coalition due to ideological and programmatic differences. PSR polling indicates that leftist third parties collectively command 18% support among likely voters, representing a significant swing bloc.

The fifth force comprises independent and civil-society lists. Although President Abbas's recent electoral amendments maintained a low 1% electoral threshold, independent lists face severe structural

hurdles, including local fragmentation, lack of national brand recognition, and limited financial resources. As a consequence, independent tickets are unlikely to convert local support into a substantial parliamentary presence.

Institutional rules established by President Abbas's August 2026 electoral amendment directly shape these competitive dynamics. The amendment restored the Palestinian Legislative Council to 132 seats under full proportional representation, retained a low 1% threshold, lowered candidate eligibility age to 23, and enforced gender quotas. While these parameters lower barriers for emerging political groups, the requirement to build comprehensive national lists creates compelling incentives for broad tactical alliances.

Likely Outcome of the Elections

Empirical evidence from recent polling indicates that the upcoming legislative election will not replicate the bipolar Fatah-Hamas structure of the 2006 election, in which the two major factions captured 85% of total votes. Instead, the election will produce a highly fragmented parliament, with the final balance of power dictated by internal Fatah splits and opposition coalition building.

PSR's August 2026 poll results illustrate the baseline electoral balance. In a baseline scenario testing the traditional 2006 list framework, Fatah receives 32% among likely voters, Hamas receives 29%, third parties combine for 18%, and 21% remain undecided. This represents a dramatic reversal from polling conducted ten months earlier, when Hamas led Fatah 44% to 30%. Hamas lost 15 percentage points as its post-October 7 popularity surge receded, while Fatah gained two points. Overall identification with Hamas fell from 35% to 24%, aligning with Fatah's 24%. Public conviction that Hamas is most deserving of representing the Palestinian people fell from 41% to 28%, while 44% stated that neither major party deserved leadership.

Scenario testing conducted by PSR demonstrates how candidate list configurations alter these baseline numbers. When a separate Barghouti list competes, it secures 33% of the vote, reducing official Fatah to 14%. In a scenario testing a standalone Dahlan list, Dahlan captures 17% against 16% for official Fatah. A combined national and Islamic opposition list draws 22%, matching official Fatah's 22% in that specific setup. These scenario findings prove that official Fatah's voting base is extremely vulnerable to fragmentation if credible dissident or opposition lists enter the race.

The emerging Hamas-Dahlan opposition coalition represents a critical electoral variable. If Hamas, Dahlan, Qudwa, PIJ, and independent figures successfully register a unified electoral list, the coalition could consolidate individually small voting blocs into a dominant parliamentary force. While polling figures cannot be added linearly due to voter shifts once formal platforms emerge, PSR data confirms that an anti-Abbas opposition coalition starts with a solid base of at least one-fifth of the electorate.

The Barghouti factor remains equally consequential. If Marwan Barghouti runs on an independent ticket, he will draw heavily from Fatah's traditional base as well as voters who reject both Abbas and Hamas, producing a three- or four-way parliamentary split where no list approaches a governing majority. Conversely, an alliance between Barghouti and the official Fatah leadership would consolidate Fatah's base and dramatically alter the arithmetic.

Voter turnout, projected by PSR at roughly two-thirds of eligible voters, will play a decisive role. Lower turnout disproportionately benefits established party networks like official Fatah and Hamas, whereas higher turnout among disillusioned voters will boost independent, third-party, and opposition lists.

In summary, official Fatah cannot secure a parliamentary majority unless opposition forces remain deeply divided. If opposition movements coalesce into a unified list while Fatah splits between Abbas and Barghouti, the election will yield a highly fragmented legislature where no single party commands control, making post-election governing coalitions complex and uncertain.

Conclusion: The Case for a Three-to-Four-Month Postponement

A limited three-to-four-month postponement of Palestinian national elections—shifting polling from November 2026 to early 2027—is not a retreat from democratic accountability, but an essential step to ensure meaningful, credible, and effective voting. The structural obstacles confronting the election are deep and cannot be resolved under the current compressed timetable.

First, timing relative to Israeli politics is crucial. Postponing polling allows the PA to assess the outcome of Israel's October 2026 national election and engage a newly formed Israeli government on vital operational arrangements, including voter access in East Jerusalem, campaign freedoms in Area C, and security procedures in Gaza.

Second, ground realities in Gaza make a November vote logistically impossible. Without functioning civil administration, restored voter registries, or population stabilization, elections in Gaza would fail basic international standards. A brief postponement provides essential time to rebuild basic electoral infrastructure and prevent the disenfranchisement of Gaza's electorate.

Third, the current electoral framework lacks broad national consensus. Major political factions have rejected the unilaterally amended election law, while severe internal Fatah fragmentation threatens to produce a dysfunctional parliament. Postponement offers a window for inclusive inter-factional dialogue to establish agreed electoral rules and enable party consolidation.

Fourth, conducting parliamentary elections in isolation risks triggering a major constitutional crisis, as a newly elected legislature would immediately challenge the legitimacy of President Abbas and demand presidential elections. By committing to simultaneous legislative and presidential elections in early 2027, the Palestinian leadership can frame the delay as a principled, strategic initiative toward comprehensive democratic renewal.

In sum, postponement is justified by logistical realities, legal legitimacy, and strategic prudence. It transforms a tactical delay into a coherent strategy to ensure that Palestinian elections produce a legitimate, representative, and effective governing authority.

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