

The Drivers and Potential Implications of Palestine National Council Elections

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On 2/2/2026, Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmud ‘Abbas issued a presidential decree calling for elections to the Palestine National Council (PNC) on 1/11/2026, wherever feasible, both in Palestine and across the diaspora. The elections are to be held under a system of full proportional representation and supervised entirely by the Central Elections Commission. ‘Abbas described 2026 as the “year of elections.” This political insight examines the context of the decree, the motivations behind it, and its implications for the Palestinian political landscape.

First: The Conduct of the PA and Fatah Leadership

The presidential decree should be understood within the context of a series of interconnected measures. On 18/8/2025, the PA president issued a decree establishing a committee to draft a temporary constitution aimed at facilitating the transition “from authority to state.”

A presidential statement issued on 3/10/2025 announced that the Palestinian Election Law and related legislation would be amended in accordance with the temporary constitution. It further stipulated that “no party, political force, or individual may stand for election unless they commit to the political program and the international and legal obligations of the Palestine Liberation Organization [PLO].” Article 79 of the draft constitution provides that the “president may appoint a vice president, assign them duties as deemed appropriate, dismiss them from office, or accept their resignation.” Article 84 authorizes “the president, following consultation with the prime minister and the speaker of parliament, to dissolve parliament.” On 5/2/2026, Mahmud ‘Abbas received the draft constitution and, on 9/2/2026, issued a decision to publish it and make it available to the public and relevant institutions for review and comment over a 60-day period.

The local elections held on 25/4/2026 were the first conducted under the new constitutional amendments. They took place across the West Bank (WB) governorates and were limited to Deir al-Balah in the Gaza Strip (GS), while



occupied Jerusalem was excluded. Fatah dominated most municipal and village councils, largely due to the exclusion of Hamas and several other Palestinian opposition factions, whose participation was conditioned on accepting international resolutions recognizing Israel and the Oslo Accords.

Ten years after the Seventh General Conference of Fatah, the Eighth Conference convened on 14/5/2026, with participation from members in the WB, GS, Beirut and Cairo via videoconferencing, marking the second stage of constitutional amendments. The conference unanimously re-elected Mahmud ‘Abbas as head of the movement and selected Hussein al-Sheikh as his deputy. It also reflected a clear consolidation of the security-oriented bloc within the PA in the Central Committee. Yasir ‘Abbas, the son of the PA president, was elected to represent the Lebanon region, signaling an emerging trend toward dynastic succession in the Palestinian context. At the same time, several veteran leaders were sidelined, including former committee member ‘Abbas Zaki, while the faction of the expelled leader Muhammad Dahlan was excluded from participation. Several Fatah figures also criticized the results, arguing that Mahmud ‘Abbas and his supporters had monopolized the selection of General Conference delegates in order to control the outcome.

Second: The PA’s Motivations for Concluding the PNC Electoral File

Several factors appear to be driving the PA leadership toward holding PNC elections on 1/11/2026, as a third milestone in the constitutional amendments process. Chief among them are:

1. The leadership’s effort to renew its political and organizational legitimacy in response to international pressure for institutional reform, thereby sustaining its role, improving prospects for Israeli acceptance, and potentially positioning itself for a future role in administering GS.
2. The need to address declining public confidence, as reflected in recent neutral polling. A survey published by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research on 28/10/2025 indicated continued declines in support for Fatah, the PA, and Mahmud ‘Abbas. It found that 80% of respondents in WB and GS called for Mahmud ‘Abbas’s resignation from the PA presidency. In addition, 35% supported Hamas compared to 24% for Fatah, while 44% said they would vote for Hamas in general elections, compared to 30% for Fatah and 10% for other factions.
3. Consolidating the dominance of Fatah leadership and the PA over Palestinian institutions and decision-making, while marginalizing factions that reject the Oslo Accords and security coordination and excluding them from the official

political sphere, thereby blocking calls for national consensus and the democratic reconstruction of the PLO and national institutions.

Third: The Possible Position of Opposition Palestinian Forces

National factions face difficult choices amid the PA's accelerated response to international pressure to reform and restructure itself in line with Israeli and international conditions. They may either boycott the elections and call for a broader boycott, particularly in light of the stringent requirements concerning recognition of Israel, the Oslo Accords, and security coordination; or they may abandon their principled positions and participate directly to thwart efforts to exclude them from the formal political arena; or they may opt for non-participation without calling for a boycott; or, alternatively, they may boycott while encouraging independent national figures and non-affiliated lists to run.

It is likely that the positions of opposition Palestinian forces will oscillate between a quiet boycott of the elections without mobilizing public opposition, and support for select lists and figures to contest them. There are no strong indications of readiness to enter into direct political confrontation or escalation with Fatah and the PA under current conditions, while overt participation appears largely untenable in light of the PA's stringent requirement, which contradicts their foundational positions and, according to a poll by the National Center for Surveys and Research in October 2025, is opposed by 63% of Palestinians.

Fourth: Potential Implications of Holding Elections Without National Consensus

A set of potential consequences arises from the PA leadership's insistence on unilaterally proceeding with PNC elections, including:

1. Undermining prospects for national reconciliation and consensus, as well as for the democratic reconstruction of the PLO and the revitalization of national institutions, while entrenching political and geographic division within the Palestinian arena.
2. Strengthening external influence and further subjecting Palestinian national decision-making to Israeli, regional and international pressures and priorities.
3. Deepening the marginalization of the PLO and effectively subsuming it within the institutional framework of the PA.
4. Consolidating Fatah and PA dominance over Palestinian decision-making and national institutions, while excluding political opponents from the official political sphere.



5. Reducing the Palestine issue and people to the areas where elections can be conducted, while marginalizing the Palestinian diaspora and limiting its representation in a way that does not reflect its demographic weight or historical role in the Palestinian struggle.
6. Excluding Jerusalem from the electoral process, consistent with the justification previously used by the PA leadership to cancel the legislative elections scheduled for 22/5/2021.
7. Marginalizing GS under conditions that make elections in most of its areas unfeasible due to Israeli military control over large parts of the territory, as occurred in local elections that were effectively limited to Deir al-Balah.

Conclusion

In light of the serious implications of the PA presidency's unilateral management of Palestinian political arrangements, its responsiveness to external pressures, its exclusion of factions committed to resistance and national fundamentals, and its marginalization of the Palestinian diaspora, the Palestinian scene is moving toward greater political closure and a weakening of the internal front. This comes at a time when the Palestine issue, and even the PA itself, faces some of the most serious existential threats aimed at resolving it in line with the Israeli vision.

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