

The Lack of Political Participation of Palestinian Youth and its Impact on Civil Peace

Introduction:

The political participation of youth is considered to be one of the most important issues preoccupying the Arab world, especially in Palestinian society. Empowering youth and providing them with the skills needed to engage in the political sphere, enables them to participate in the decision-making processes, which is considered an essential indicator of society's ability to restore its governing structures on the one hand and to cope with the ever-changing development processes and modernization on the other hand.

Empowering youth is a prerequisite for achieving sustainable development within Palestinian society, and this conditional relationship is significant due to the following reasons:

1. The large percentage of youth that constitute Palestinian society.
2. The high unemployment rates and increase in violence among Palestinian youth, which stems from the lack of opportunities provided to them.
3. The overall global changes that have been attributed to economic, social and cultural globalization, in which youth must play an essential role in leading and developing their societies.
4. The nature of the Palestinian cause and the Palestinian Liberation project, which urges the Palestinian youth to play their distinctive role in order to achieve progress within their societies.

For many years, researchers and activists have attempted to find the root causes behind the lack of political participation of Palestinian youth in the political sphere and the absence of their participation in the decision-making and development processes. They have highlighted the necessity to clearly identify the needs of youth and to reflect them in public policies.

The uniqueness of the Palestinian situation lies in the complexity of the analysis of the political participation of youth. It is only logical that with the growing role of the Palestinian Authority and the increasing number of civil society institutions that we are currently witnessing, the participation of youth in the political sphere should also rise. In reality, the level of political participation of Palestinian youth in Palestinian life has recently declined, compared to their participation during the first Intifada.

In fact, this weakening of the role of youth in the political and decision-making processes has directly and negatively impacted the civil peace within Palestinian society. Therefore, this paper addresses this issue through focusing on two main factors:

1. Obstacles that hinder youth from being politically active within the Palestinian society.
2. Transitioning leadership roles and positions in political parties and governing structures, based on personal relationship instead of actual experience and qualifications, in addition to other non-traditional obstacles that arose with the establishment of PNA which we are still witnessing today, including the incomplete technocracy, the new role of civil society institutions and the changes in the structure of the Palestinian political and economic systems.

As for the second part, the lack of political participation of youth causes various repercussions in Palestinian society, such as the lack of trust in the Palestinian parties, absence of voluntary work amongst youth, weakness in the status of civil peace and identity crises.

Conclusions:

1. The participation of the youth in political decision-making processes is a national priority, as youth constitute a large segment of the Palestinian society; therefore, they contribute to the achievement of civil peace.
2. The necessity to develop alternative tools for use of the Palestinian Authority in order to strengthen its legal jurisdiction over its territory, specifically in Area 'C' and Jerusalem.
3. The lack of available open and safe spaces for youth within the Palestinian society has created violence; therefore, political parties must come up with alternative and innovative tools within their national strategies that would enhance the political engagement and participation of youth in political the decision-making processes.
4. The act of defending public freedoms and protecting the democratic process has been solely regarded as the role of civil society institutions, which contributed to the lack of participation of youth in public work. Therefore, it is the responsibility of civil society institutions to properly integrate youth, along with political parties and official institutions, in this work as the lack of youth engagement in decision-making processes has led to the emergence of many negative phenomena in Palestinian

society, especially amongst the youth, such as political aggression and high levels of crime.

5. The absence of political participation of Palestinian youth in the decision-making processes has also resulted in them steering towards their sub-identities (family, party, etc.) over one national identity.
6. Females are more affected by the lack of political participation than males, which will negatively affect the females' representation in future political systems.

Recommendations:

The Palestinian Authority:

1. Shall provide youth leaders with open spaces and opportunities to express their interests and needs.
2. Shall change the conditions of candidacy of the Election Law (reduce the age of candidacy to the age of 24 years), as it hinders youth from obtaining leading roles and from being active participants in political decision-making processes.
3. To eradicate the restrictions set on freedoms.
4. Eliminate favoritism in regards to the employment process within the public sector.

Civil Society Institutions:

1. Shall raise awareness on public issues and hold advocacy campaigns.
2. Shall establish youth empowerment programs that not only provide theoretical training but also employ practical shadowing programs.
3. Shall train and empower Palestinian youth to enable them to form election lists and to become active political leaders, within complementary programs aimed at establishing youth leadership bodies.
4. Shall focus on institutionalizing programs that promote and maintain civil peace.

Educational Institutions:

1. Shall increase the number of courses related to youth political awareness.
2. Shall provide more public and safe spaces for youth.
3. Shall encourage the activities of unions in Palestinian universities, particularly those related to student councils.