



المؤسسة الفلسطينية للتمكين والتنمية المحلية  
The Palestinian Association for Empowerment and Local Development

**“The Impact of Declining Popularity of Political Parties on Their  
Mobilization and Influence in Palestine”**

**Written by: Mahmoud Tmezeh**

**2023**

**Introduction:**

Palestinian political parties and movements play a major role at both political and social levels. Politically, these parties and movements have historically represented and continue to represent the voices, demands, and rights of their members, as well as advocating for the Palestinian people's right to sovereignty and freedom. They also play a pivotal role in defending the rights of Palestinians, including the right to establish an independent Palestinian state.

On the social level, Palestinian parties and movements support their communities through development projects and social programs, working to preserve national identity and culture. Their influence is not limited to the local level; as they play a key role internationally, particularly by raising global awareness about the Palestinian issue and exposing the human rights violations committed by the Israeli occupation.

When political parties engage youth effectively, they foster increased political awareness and engagement. When parties highlight political issues and draw attention to specific challenges, this enables people to become more aware and better understand the issues they face, leading to greater participation in elections and other political activities. Parties also shape policy directions and influence government decisions.

In shaping society's identity and unity, political parties foster solidarity when their values resonate with the public. They highlight social issues and stimulate public dialogue that can drive social change and improve community conditions. These parties contribute to raising international awareness of political and social issues in Palestine, influencing international relations and enhancing Palestine's standing on the global stage in the pursuit of liberation from occupation.

**Problem Description:**

Several political parties and movements in Palestine are experiencing a decline in popularity and struggle to attract and engage the public, especially youth, which weakens their ability to garner support and effectively address political and social issues. Key reasons for this decline include youths' limited participation in party leadership structures and the lack of regular movement conferences.

**Objectives:**

1. Identify the reasons for the decline in the popularity of political parties and its impact on the Palestinian cause.
2. Enhance the role of political parties and movements in addressing social and political issues.
3. Increase youths' representation in the leadership structures of political parties and movements.

### **Youths' Participation in Leadership of Palestinian Political Parties and Movements:**

A 2022 study by the Palestinian Center for Policy Research and Strategic Studies- MASARAT highlighted the absence of youth representation in the leadership bodies of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and related unions. Youth participation in the National Council, Central Council, or Executive Committee- is virtually non-existent, with youth comprising just 1.4% of union membership (2.4% in southern and 0.9% in northern governorates). Even the Palestinian Higher Council for Youth and Sports under the PLO is predominantly led by older generations.

In political parties, youth representation is minimal. For instance, the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine's ninth general national conference, held in the Gaza Strip in early January 2022 reported 17% youth participation in its central leadership. The Fatah Movement's seventh general conference in 2016, held in Ramallah, elected no youth members to its top leadership bodies, including the Central Committee and Revolutionary Council. Similarly, the Palestinian People's Party's fourth general conference in March 2008 did not elect any youth to primary leadership, and the Popular Front's eighth conference in May 2022 elected a political bureau with no youth representation. Additionally, the National Struggle Front's Twelfth General Conference in 2021 elected no youth to its Central Committee.

### **Key Reasons for the Decline in Popularity and Influence of Political Parties:**

**Exclusionary Political Culture:** The noticeable lack of democratic values within the factional political culture results in reduced transparency and limited genuine public participation. This leads to an emphasis on tribal and familial affiliations, turning political engagement into personal interest rather than national focus, weakening parties' ability to garner broad support.

**Disruption of Democratic Processes:** Since the formation of the Palestinian Authority, the last legislative and presidential elections were held in 2006. Parties have not conducted elections to refresh their leadership or include youth, resulting in stagnation as leadership positions are filled by appointment rather than democratic selection.

**Impact of Occupation:** The occupation diverts parties from national priorities by keeping them occupied with marginal issues, preventing the development of a cohesive national strategy to address the occupation itself.

**Socioeconomic Challenges:** High rates of poverty and unemployment, and limited job opportunities, along with structural distortions in the labor market and a commodified education system, have weakened party support and increased political disengagement, especially among youth.

**Palestinian Political Division:** The division between Fatah and Hamas significantly hampers the cohesion and impact of political efforts, affecting parties' roles in national issues.

**Shift Due to International Agreements:** Agreements like the Oslo Accords have shifted national priorities, diminishing party involvement in democratic and social issues and causing frustration as they no longer reflect the minimum rights for Palestinians.

**Limited Financial Resources:** Insufficient funding affects parties' autonomy in decision-making and leads to increased dependence on central authorities, limiting their ability to act independently.

**Weak Communication between Parties and Youth:** Insufficient communication with youth and their limited involvement in the leadership structures of Palestinian movements and parties is a significant factor in the decline of party effectiveness. Without engaging youth and understanding their issues and needs, parties risk losing influence, as youth represent a new generation with distinct interests and concerns. If parties are unable to understand these issues and concerns, they will lose the trust and understanding of young people. This generation gap hampers the development of policies and programs that address youths' needs. In today's digital age, social media and digital platforms are central to young people's lives, yet parties fail to leverage these tools effectively for connection. Youth seek meaningful participation in political life and decision-making. The lack of opportunities leaves them feeling neglected and

excluded. Additionally, young people are missing leaders within these movements who inspire them and represent their hopes and aspirations.

### **The Impact of Political Parties' Popularity Decline:**

The impact of the decline in political parties' popularity and their weak ability to mobilize for the Palestinian community and the Palestinian cause can be summarized as the following:

- The decline of parties may lead to a loss of unity and national orientation, resulting in misalignment in goals and visions among different political factions.
- A weakened role for parties may lead to weak representation of societal groups, preventing some from effectively participating in the political sphere and expressing their needs.
- The weakening role of political parties may result in a lack of transparency in the political process, diminishing citizens' ability to monitor and evaluate the performance of political leaders.
- Without strong political structures capable of effectively representing the needs of all segments of society, social divisions may deepen, and gaps between different classes and social groups may widen.
- The decline in the role of parties may lead to increased political polarization, as people may turn to informal movements and groups to express their opinions, which will increase political differences.
- The weakening of parties may contribute to greater political instability, as electoral and decision-making processes become less organized and more vulnerable to being altered.

- The strengthening of tribalism as an alternative to political parties may undermine civil and societal peace, as youth increasingly rally around tribalism instead of engaging with political parties which are the foundation of a civil state.
- The decline in national and liberation movements weakens the Palestinian cause, as individuals begin seeking personal solutions to their problems, neglecting collective approaches to address shared challenges and aspirations.
- The encroachment of capital on political power results in the enactment of laws and policies that favor the wealthy, without considering their negative effects on vulnerable and marginalized segments of society.

**Recommendations:**

1. Listening to and understanding the needs and opinions of citizens, especially young people, is essential for restoring popularity.
2. Proposing social and economic programs that address the challenges citizens face, while building agendas and political programs based on their needs and aspirations, is essential.
3. Effective communication with citizens, sharing their ideas, and involving them in decision-making can significantly impact building popularity.
4. Investing in education and political awareness to increase citizens' understanding of the political process and its importance, while enhancing civic awareness, can support the popularity and mass mobilization of political parties.

5. Cooperation between different parties and collaborative efforts to address common issues can strengthen and increase the popularity of political parties.
6. Holding periodic meetings with party youth to listen to their concerns and ensuring that they have a voice in the political process are essential for effective engagement.
7. Cooperating with youth organizations and civil society is crucial for reaching a wider audience.

