

PALESTINIAN ELECTIONS: PARTIES, POLLING, AND IMPLICATIONS FOR U.S. POLICY

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APRIL 23, 2021

BACKGROUND

The Palestinian political scene has been in a state of crisis since its most recent legislative election in 2006. Due to political infighting and waning popularity, the ruling Fatah party fared poorly and lost that election to the terrorist group Hamas. Because the Palestinian government was officially controlled by a terrorist group, the United States and other countries [severed](#) aid to the Palestinian government. Despite attempts by both sides to defuse the situation, tensions boiled over with a June 2007 battle that ended with Hamas violently ejecting Fatah from Gaza. Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas [dismissed](#) the Hamas-led government and has ruled the Palestinians in the West Bank ever since. Fatah has engaged in several attempts to reconcile with Hamas and has even announced elections before, but none came to fruition.

In September 2020, Fatah and Hamas [agreed](#) to hold parliamentary elections, which are scheduled for May 22, followed by presidential [elections](#) on July 21. The conditions are ripe for a repeat of the disastrous 2006 elections. More than two-thirds of Palestinians want Abbas to [resign](#), Fatah's base is divided among rival camps, and Hamas is maintaining a united front. There is a very real prospect that Hamas could win the elections again or, at the very least, take control of a large portion of the Palestinian parliament.

Still, elections could be delayed to allow for guardrails to prevent Hamas' participation in the Palestinian government, particularly if the issue of East Jerusalem voting is not resolved. The Jewish state sees Palestinian voting in the eastern portion of Israel's capital as a challenge to its sovereignty, while the Palestinians are adamant that elections cannot take place without it. According to former U.S. Ambassador to Israel [Martin Indyk](#), the Israeli and Palestinian Fatah leaderships discussed using the East Jerusalem issue to prevent a Hamas victory in 2006 but were ultimately rebuffed by President George W. Bush. Nabil Shaath, a senior advisor to Abbas, recently said that elections will "very likely" be [postponed](#) if the East Jerusalem voting issue is not resolved.

THE ELECTIONS

Thirty-six parties [submitted](#) lists to the Palestinian Central Elections Commission. The most recent [polling](#) found support for Fatah to be at 43 percent, compared to 30 percent for Hamas. Depending on who else runs, support for Fatah could be as low as 32 percent. The most popular Palestinian leaders were jailed Fatah militant Marwan

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Barghouti, Fatah's Abbas, and Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh, with 48 percent, 29 percent, and 19 percent of the vote, respectively. A [report](#) found that the logos of 11 of the parties contain maps that erase Israel.

U.S. LAW

In response to Hamas' electoral victory, Congress passed the [Palestinian Anti-Terrorism Act \(PATA\) of 2006](#), which became law that December. PATA prohibits U.S. assistance to the Palestinian Authority (PA) unless the White House certifies that "no ministry, agency, or instrumentality of the Palestinian Authority is effectively controlled by Hamas." However, the law allows funding if the PA acknowledges Israel's right to exist and adheres to previous agreements and understandings with the United States, and if Hamas stops operating as a terrorist group, cooperates with Israel's security services, halts anti-American and anti-Israel incitement, and ensures democracy and financial transparency. Furthermore, by including Hamas or other members of designated Foreign Terrorist Organizations as part of the government, PA officials could face exposure to [criminal prosecution](#) or [civil litigation](#) in U.S. courts for providing material support to terrorists, among other possible measures.

THE PARTIES

Fatah: Fatah, a secular nationalist party, has dominated the Palestinian political scene, particularly the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), since the 1960s. Abbas is currently the chairman of Fatah and the PLO as well as the president of the PA. First on Fatah's electoral list is Abbas loyalist and deputy Fatah head [Mahmoud Alloul](#), with former military commander and current Palestinian [sports](#) chief Jibril Rajoub in its fourth spot. [Qadura Fares](#), a veteran Palestinian politician, close confidant of Marwan Barghouti, and head of the Palestinian Prisoners Club, earned the seventh spot.

Jerusalem Is Our Promise: The Hamas list, headed by [Khalil al-Haya](#), contains numerous individuals [arrested](#) for terrorist activities or for involvement with Hamas. In his capacity as a Hamas leader, Haya has [threatened](#) violence against Israel. Candidate Mushir al-Masri, a Hamas spokesperson, has made [several](#) statements [inciting](#) violence against Israel. During the 2014 Hamas-Israel conflict, Masri [encouraged](#) civilians to stay in their homes to serve as human shields and [conducted](#) interviews from Shifa Hospital in Gaza, using the healthcare facility as cover for Hamas activities.

Nizar Awadallah, who narrowly lost to Yahya Sinwar in the March 2021 election to head Hamas in Gaza, is [fifth](#) on the list. Abdel Khaliq al-Natsheh was [arrested](#) for funneling money to Hamas' al-Qassam Brigades, the terror group's armed wing, [reportedly](#) serving as an intermediary between Hamas suicide bombers and Hamas terror cells. Candidate [Nael Barghouti](#) is the longest-serving inmate in Israeli prison, arrested in 1978 for his role in [murdering](#) a bus driver. [Jamal Abu al-Hija](#) is a senior al-Qassam Brigades [leader](#) and has been in jail since 2002 for carrying out numerous terrorist attacks against Israelis. Hija's Hamas units in Jenin [provided](#) explosive-packed belts to residents willing to use them against Israeli soldiers in April 2002 during the Second Intifada. Adnan Asfour has served as a [spokesman](#) for Hamas and has spent several years in Israeli jail.

Yasser Mansour, a former member of the Palestinian parliament, has been [arrested](#) numerous times since 1991 for Hamas activity. [Tawfiq Abu Naim](#), a close confidant of Yahya Sinwar, was the director general of Hamas' Internal Security Forces from December 2015 until recently, when he [resigned](#) in preparation for the elections. The Palestinian Central Elections Committee [rejected](#) the candidacy of Hassan Salameh not because the former al-Qassam Brigades commander is serving 46 consecutive life sentences plus 30 years for directing three mass-casualty attacks in Israel, but because his name does not appear on the commission's final voter registry.

Freedom: [Nasser al-Qudwa](#), a nephew of deceased Palestinian President Yasser Arafat and a former ambassador, heads the Freedom Party. Second on the list is Fadwa Barghouti, the wife of imprisoned Palestinian leader Marwan Barghouti. Abbas dismissed Qudwa from Fatah following Qudwa's announcement that he planned to run on a separate list in the Palestinian elections. Barghouti is serving multiple life sentences for masterminding the Second Intifada and remains an extremely popular figure among Palestinians.

Future: Mohammad Dahlan's [Future](#) party is headed by former Gazan Fatah leader and Dahlan loyalist [Samir Masharawi](#), followed by Jerusalemite academic and former head of Al-Quds University Sari Nusseibeh. [Nusseibeh](#) was involved in the 1991 Madrid talks that led to the Oslo Accords. Dahlan was Fatah's security chief in Gaza before Hamas defeated his forces in 2007. Dahlan was convicted on reportedly fabricated [corruption](#) charges a decade ago. Since then, Dahlan has grown close to the UAE leadership and has influenced the Palestinian polity through his clout in the Gulf. Notably, individuals convicted of crimes cannot serve in government, making it unlikely that Dahlan will serve in the next government.

Together We Can: Palestinian economist and former pro-reform technocrat Salam Fayyad has presented this list along with [Wael al-Hussaina](#), a Gazan dentist who has headed efforts to reconcile Fatah and Hamas. Fayyad was credited with uprooting corruption within the PA, an accomplishment that caused friction with PA leaders, particularly Abbas.

Pulse of the People: The Marxist Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) has formed this list. The PFLP is recognized as a terrorist group by the United States, Israel, and several other countries. Ahmed Saadat and Khalida Jarrar, the PFLP's top two candidates, are in Israeli custody for supporting terrorism.

AMERICANS KILLED BY HAMAS

The terrorist group Hamas, projected to win the second-most seats in the upcoming elections, has killed at least [25](#) American citizens.

- December 1993: Palestinian [terrorists](#) killed Yitzhak Weinstock in a [drive-by shooting](#). According to Israeli officials, Hamas leader Mohammed Deif organized the attack, reportedly in retaliation for the killing of Hamas leader [Imad Akel](#). Hamas claimed [responsibility](#) for the attack.
- October 1994: Hamas terrorists dressed up as Jews and picked up [U.S. citizen](#) Nachshon Wachsman, who was hitchhiking at the Bnei Atarot Junction. Deif reportedly also planned the abduction and murder of Wachsman. Hamas terrorists executed Wachsman as Israel was carrying out a rescue operation.
- August 1995: Joan Davenny, who grew up in San Francisco and taught in [Connecticut](#), was [killed](#) by shrapnel from a Hamas suicide bombing on a bus in Jerusalem.
- February 1996: Sara Duker of Teaneck, New Jersey; Matthew Eisenfeld of West Hartford, Connecticut; and Ira Weinstein of New York City were killed in a Hamas suicide bombing on a bus in Jerusalem. Hamas claimed [responsibility](#) for the attack.
- May 1996: Seventeen-year-old David Boim was [shot to death](#) by [Hamas](#) terrorists while waiting for a bus in the West Bank.
- July 1997: Leah Stern was killed amid consecutive [Hamas](#) suicide [bombings](#) at the Mahane Yehuda Market in Jerusalem.

- September 1997: Fourteen-year-old Yael Botwin from Claremont, California, was killed in a [triple suicide bombing](#) in Jerusalem executed by a Hamas offshoot.
- August 2001: Judith L. Greenbaum, who was five months pregnant, and 15-year-old Malka Roth were [killed](#) in a suicide bombing at a crowded Sbarro pizzeria in Jerusalem. [Hamas](#) claimed responsibility for the attack.
- July 2002: Janis Ruth Coulter, Marla Bennet, David Gritz, Benjamin Blutstein, and Dina Carter were all killed when a bomb [exploded](#) at a crowded cafeteria on Hebrew University's Mount Scopus campus. Hamas claimed responsibility for the attack.
- June 2014: Sixteen-year-old Naftali Fraenkel was [abducted and killed](#) by terrorists affiliated with Hamas. Hamas leader Saleh Arouri claimed [responsibility](#) for the attack.
- July 2014: [Max Steinberg](#) and Nissim Sean Carmeli [died](#) while fighting against Hamas during Operation Protective Edge.
- October 2014: Three-month-old Chaya Zissel Braun died in a vehicular assault in Jerusalem. The attacker previously served time in prison for Hamas [terrorist activities](#).
- October 2015: Eitam Henkin, an American citizen, was driving his family when a [Hamas cell](#) opened fire on his car, killing him and his wife.
- May 2019: [Pinchas Menachem Prezuazman](#) was killed in a [Hamas](#) rocket strike.