



Canadians for Justice and Peace  
in the Middle East



# Module 3: Hamas, Democracy and the January 25, 2006 Palestinian Elections

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# Palestinian Elections

- January 25, 2006
- 77 percent voter turnout
- Hamas wins 42.9 percent of the vote
- Hamas' victory equates to 74 of 132 seats



*A Palestinian boy passes by a building covered with electoral posters of different electoral lists running for the Palestinian Legislative Elections in the West bank city of Nablus January 22, 2006.*



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# Democracy in Palestine

# Election Observer Comments

By all accounts, the January elections were expertly conducted and the results highly credible. There were no major allegations of fraud from any parties to the election:

- Jimmy Carter: The elections were “completely honest, completely fair, completely safe and without violence.”
- Participation was very high, and challenges faced in elections in January, 2005 were largely addressed.
- NDI/Carter Center: “The obvious pride and enthusiasm of Palestinians about the election process was evident throughout the voting districts.”
- “...This was reinforced by the professional and impartial performance of election officials.” (Central Election Commission)
- “Through the high turnout in these elections and in the 2005 presidential election, as well as the notable participation in five rounds of municipal elections over the last year, Palestinians have clearly demonstrated a commitment to democratic elections.”
- “It is now up to the elected leaders and representatives to construct genuinely democratic institutions and processes that will bring the peace and prosperity that the Palestinian people deserve, within a free and independent state.”

# Election Observer Notes:

- The legal framework for the elections complied very favourably with international standards.
- The adoption of a voluntary code of conduct by all political parties set an important precedent (see next slide)
- The election campaign proceeded relatively peacefully and allowed voters to obtain abundant information about the contestants.
- Except for restraints in East Jerusalem, the election process was open and highly competitive.
- A significant number of political party and candidate agents and a significant number of nonpartisan Palestinian election observers were present in the polls, providing transparency to the process and helping to ensure its integrity.
- Women played a large role in the election process as election officials, party and candidate agents and nonpartisan observers.

# Did you know?..

- All parties, including Hamas, signed a code of ethics prior to being allowed to participate in the elections. This code required all parties:
  - To commit to transparent and democratic principles
  - To disallow election-related violence
  - To exclude individuals engaged in, or advocating violence from becoming candidates
  - Note: In the end, no candidates were actually disallowed
- Of the 132 seats in the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) contested by 11 parties and independents groups
  - 66 seats are determined by proportional representation with closed national lists
  - 66 seats are divided among electoral districts across 16 Palestinian governorates
- Six seats were set aside for Christians
- Parties competing for the 66 proportional seats needed to list women as at least 20 percent of their candidates
- Canada had 79 election observers: 65 from the Canadian Government, 13 from Project Hope, and 1 from Canadian Voice of Women for Peace

# Influence Peddling by the US

- US Office of Transition Initiatives spent \$1.9 million to support Fatah in the lead-up to the January 25 elections, cleaning streets and staging soccer matches to make the government look abler and more beneficent. US officials complained to the Washington Post that Abbas was reluctant to claim credit for the projects.
- There is hard evidence that Fatah solicited this US support in 2005, and that the US was interested in helping specifically to oppose the rising Hamas election threat
- Subsequent to the elections, with Mahmoud Abbas still sitting as President of the PA, legislation moving through Congress suggests the US is considering moving humanitarian assistance and aid through Abbas' office.
- The US has also moved to restrict even non-PA-directed aid (e.g. private-sector projects) that might lead to perceptions within Palestine that the Hamas-led government is functioning effectively.



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# Interpreting the Election Results

# Possible Philosophical Reasons for Hamas' Victory: Government Corruption

- Impatience with the unaddressed corruption of the current regime:
- 71 percent of Palestinians indicated in polls that their primary concern in choosing candidates was corruption, or lack thereof.
- 64 percent of respondents in the poll indicated that they didn't think the previous Palestinian government was successful in fighting corruption.



A general view over Al Manara roundabout adorned with posters for the electoral campaign one day before the legislative elections, in the West Bank town of Ramallah January 24, 2006.

# Possible Philosophical Reasons for Hamas' Victory: Hope for a Better Life



October 5, 2005: In the West Bank city of al-Khalil (Hebron), Palestinian children carry food donated from "Takiet Ibrahim" the Islamic endowment authority 'Waqf' on the second day of Ramadan. About eight hundred Palestinians received donated food greatly needed in this community because of the economic deterioration caused from years of occupation and unrest.

- Hope for a new government focused on improving lives:
- 93.8 percent of Palestinians wanted Hamas to give top priority to unemployment and economic development.
- As of December, 2005, 43 percent of Palestinians depended on institutional support (i.e. humanitarian aid) for their survival

# Possible Philosophical Reasons for Hamas' Victory: Other political reasons...

- Desperation in the face of an increasingly oppressive Israeli occupation
  - Continued aggressive Israeli colonial expansion
  - Continued construction of the Wall, despite the strong ICJ decision
- Disillusionment caused by Fatah's inability to win any concessions from the Israelis
- Cynicism with the diplomatic process and international mechanisms for change



*Ismail Haniya, Hamas chief candidate, casts his vote at a polling station during the Parliamentary elections in Gaza City January 25, 2006.*

# Political Movement in Palestine since Oslo

## Palestinian Authority (PA) Governance and Legitimacy (in percent)

	1996	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Support President	71	47	33	25	35	38	44
Adequate Quality of Democracy	43	21	21	16	19	23	35
Adequate Quality of Performance	64	44	40	32	37	23	41
Corruption a Major Problem	49	76	82	85	82	84	87

## Support for Fatah versus Islamists (in percent)

	1993	1996	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Fatah	41	55	37	28	28	26	28	39*
Islamists	23	13	17	26	25	30	32	34*

\* After Arafat's death

Source: Adapted from Khalil Shikaki, "Willing to Compromise, Palestinian Public Opinion and the Peace Process," Washington, USIP, Report 158, January 2006.

# Other Practical Reasons contributing to Fatah's Demise

- 80 Fatah candidates ran as independents, thus splitting the Fatah votes
- In many districts, Fatah was unable to hold primary elections to select candidates (because of infighting, and sometimes armed violence) Fatah candidates in these districts were subsequently hand-picked.
- Fracturing within the Fatah organization; old-generation / new-generation differences of perspective.
- Continuing re-adjustments following the death of Arafat in 2004.



January 25, 2006: A polling station in Ramallah on election day. International observers had nothing but praise for the Palestinian Central Election Commission and its professional and impartial hosting of the elections



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# What is Hamas, what does it represent?

# Hamas is a complex and evolving organization

- Hamas' was strongest initially in Gaza
- Hamas has a well-organized fundraising apparatus in Gaza, the West Bank, and Jordan, as well as with unofficial Saudi Arabian channels, and likely with Iran and other Gulf countries. Hamas budget estimated in the tens of millions of dollars.
- Hamas has a number of wings/branches that are often quite distinct and independent from one another:
  - Some militant, some political, some social and community
  - Some work secretly, others openly
  - Working through mosques and social service institutions, recruiting, fundraising, organizing activities, and distributing propaganda

# What are Hamas' Positions according to its founding Charter

- People often refer to the Hamas Charter, drafted in 1988, to define Hamas' position on issues:
  - The Charter specifies that Hamas is an Islamist movement seeking to establish an Islamic state in historic Palestine
  - The Charter views Palestine as a religious bequest to the Muslim world
  - The Charter states that peace processes are to be rejected – that they don't serve the interests of Islam or the Palestinians.
  - The Charter asks all Muslims to work for an Islamic Palestine
- Looking only to Hamas' Charter for guidance on their positions is insufficient.
- Similarly, pigeon-holing Hamas as either “militant” or “social” also presents a skewed picture.

# Signs of a rapidly changing Hamas

- There are many signs that since that time, Hamas' position has been softening:
  - In December, 2004, Hamas unilaterally began a 1 year truce with Israel, in exchange for Israel's hoped-for withdraw to the 1967 borders. To date, this truce has not been broken.
  - Hamas has on numerous occasions offered long-term "truces" (i.e. 10 years, 15 years, indefinite) if Israel would withdraw to the 1967 borders.
  - Its 2006 election platform ("manifesto") dropped its ideological opposition to Israel, stating simply that its goal was "the establishment of an independent state whose capital is Jerusalem."
  - "Peaceful means [to get back our lands and our freedom] will do if the world is willing to engage in a constructive and fair process in which we and the Israelis are treated as equals" PM Ismail Haniyeh, March 31, 2006
  - "Our conflict with you [the Israelis] is not religious, but political." "If you are willing to accept the principle of a long-term truce, we are prepared to negotiate the terms. Hamas is extending a hand of peace to those who are truly interested in a peace based on justice." Khalid Mish'al, January 31, 2006
  - Hamas' government program speaks of approaching international resolutions (e.g. UNSC 242) and peace agreements with Israel "responsibly" The program also promised to commence negotiations with Israel after Israel withdraws to the 1967 borders.

# Hamas and Peace in the Middle East

- Hamas' historic ideology presents challenges to an evolving position: “ Hamas will find it difficult to abandon its strategic and religiously determined goal of an Islamic state in all of historic Palestine ”
- However, Hamas seems to be looking for a peace based on a withdrawal by Israel to the 1967 borders, given the numerous statements by several of its leaders over a period of approximately 18 months:
  - Note that officially, Hamas has still not recognized the 1988 Algiers Communiqué, where the PLO recognized UNSC 242 as a basis for a two-state solution
  - Nevertheless, Hamas' expectations align well with existing UN resolutions on Middle East peace (e.g. 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002))
  - Also remember that in 2002, the Arab League offered Israel a similar proposal based on a withdrawal to the 1967 borders

# How do the Palestinian feel about Hamas

Polls before and after the elections indicate:

- Palestinians want calm and stability like any other people. A pre-election poll indicated that 83 percent of Palestinians believed it was in their interest to maintain calm with Israel.
- Most Palestinians don't agree with Hamas' ideology on Israel. In a poll released on January 30, 2006, almost 75 percent of Palestinians wanted Hamas to drop its call in its charter for the destruction of Israel.
- Palestinians want peace with Israel. 84 percent of Palestinians (and 77 percent of Hamas voters) supported a peace agreement with Israel.



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# Protecting Palestinian Democracy

# Dealing with the Election Result: Philosophically

- Hamas won “fair and square”
  - Elections were judged fair, no allegations of fraud
  - Election participation was good
  - Hamas won a strong/decisive victory
- Hamas’ support in the electorate is based on:
  - Its promise to provide a new beginning (vis-à-vis corruption, opportunities, new faces/policies, etc.)
  - Not on its traditional radical positions regarding Israel, the diplomatic process, and previous agreements
- Broad research is clear that democracy flourishes best:
  - in an environment absent the threat of violence
  - in conjunction with respect for human rights
- The PLC alone – strongly controlled by Hamas – can dissolve the cabinet, so the government is not likely to fold soon
- Historically, meddling from outside almost always counter-productive

# Practically Dealing with the Election Result: Elections and State-building

- The ability to hold a future election in Palestine must not be compromised:
  - Canada and the international community cannot let the situation destabilize to the point where future elections are no longer possible
  - The Palestinian Elections Commission (CEC) must be shielded, and able to retain the practical know-how that will enable future credible elections
- Similarly, Canadian and international support for democracy, and state-building institutions (e.g. courts, judicial procedure and training, etc.) should not be undermined, as these are critical for the long-term stability sought by all
- Most broadly, Canada and the international community must not do anything which triggers anarchy on the ground

# Practically Dealing with the Election Result: The Middle East Context

Historically, many leaders in Israel/Palestine have had their roots in radical movements:

- The Israeli Likud party – which ascended to power in Israel in 1977, and had its roots in terror during the British Mandate period – was at first met with great apprehension by the international community.
  - Israeli prime ministers Menachem Begin and Yitzhak Shamir both served actively in Jewish terrorist groups prior to 1948
- Yassir Arafat and the PLO were long dismissed because of their ideology by the West before becoming partner to the 1993 Oslo Accords
- Yitzhak Rabin, the Israeli PM partner to the 1993 Oslo Accords was highly acclaimed for his military accomplishments

# Practically Dealing with the Election Result: Encouraging movement

- Canadian non-communication and/or non-negotiation with Hamas prevents the fostering of progress
  - In other words, it's the opposite of “constructive engagement”
- Working with Hamas will ultimately help it to tone down its rhetoric, and see the value of doing so
- Hamas needs to be guided as it transitions:
  - From a radical movement, to a mainstream movement
  - From an opposition bloc, to a governing bloc
- Hamas needs to be encouraged to maintain its unilateral truce, and develop other confidence-building measures



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# End of Module