Political Participation Among Palestinians

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Abstract

The study addresses the political participation among Palestinians. Political participation was evaluated using an index of a 30-item scale based on the Political Participation Scale (PPS), which was originally developed in 1982, and was administrated to six hundred Palestinians in the West Bank, Palestine, during 2022. The sample population was selected via the stratified random selection method. Study findings revealed that more than half of the participants (56.6%) experienced a moderate level of political participation in the Palestinian occupied society. The study also indicated that being male, party affiliated, well-educated, youth, with religious commitment were all risk factors for experiencing a significantly higher level of political participation under the on-going Israeli occupation.

Keywords: Political participation, political socialization, elections, Palestine.

1. Introduction

Since the Israeli Occupation of Palestine in 1948, which controlled Palestine with the exception of the West Bank and Gaza Strip - whereby the West Bank was under the Jordanian rule and Gaza Strip was under the Egyptian rule - the Palestinian people have been unable to exercise their right to elections of any kind, whether it be presidential, parliamentary or local, and to consequently choose their leadership to represent them at all levels.

Historically, the first elections were held in 1923 when Palestine was under the rule of the British Mandate, which tried to control the Palestinian people by holding legislative elections comprising of twenty-three members, in which thirteen members were elected and ten members were appointed by the British ruler, who was known as the "High Commissioner". However, the Palestinian people boycotted these elections leading to their failure at the time (Abrash, 1998; Jabali, 2009; Casati, 2016).

This situation continued in Palestine until 1976, when elections were held in the West Bank on April 12th 1976 by order of the Israeli military authorities and under an amended version of the Jordanian

Municipal Elections Law of 1955. The voter turnout was 72.3% in favor of Palestine's Liberation Organization (PLO) supporters. Elections were held in 24 municipal councils. Through these municipal elections, the Israeli Occupation tried to find an alternative leadership to the PLO through producing heads of local bodies subject to the Israeli Occupation authorities. However, the results of the elections disappointed the hopes of the Israeli Occupation, as representatives of the PLO won the elections, which subsequently led to Israel expelling part of them, attempting to assassinate the other part, and dismissing those who remained from their positions as elected heads of local bodies (Banat, 2010; Casati, 2016).

The Palestinian people remained deprived of exercising their right to elections until 1996 when the Oslo Accords were signed in 1993, according to which the Palestinian Authority was established in 1994. The Oslo Accords stipulated that Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip would hold legislative, presidential and local elections. It is worthy to note that the population of the West Bank and Gaza Strip had reached nearly five million, and the number of Palestinian people in all places of their residence was about fifteen million. This meant that more than two-thirds of the Palestinian people could not participate in the election of a political leader to represent them (Jabali, 2009).

Subsequent to the Oslo Agreement and the establishment of the Palestinian Authority, the first presidential and parliamentary elections were held in 1996 where the Fatah movement won the elections and the Islamic movements boycotted the elections at the time. The elections were scheduled to be held every four years, but the outbreak of the second intifada in 2000 led to the inability of the Palestinians to hold elections until 2005 when the second presidential elections were held, which were won by Fatah movement and which were also boycotted by the Islamic movements. The second legislative elections were later held in 2006 in which Hamas participated and won (Banat, 2010).

In 2021, the Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas issued a decree to hold parliamentary elections, but the Israeli Occupation constituted the biggest obstacle to holding the presidential elections, and consequently postponing the elections because the Israeli Occupation did not allow them to take place in East Jerusalem. As for the local elections, they were held in 2004 and 2005. Local elections were then held in 2012 and 2017. Palestinians were also preparing to hold local elections in 2021.

2. Background

2.1 Political Socialization

Political participation is closely related to political socialization whereby political socialization is the process of preparing citizens so that they become qualified to participate in political life. The nature of both the political socialization and that of the political culture that citizens receive shall determine how citizens understand their political rights, foremost of which is the right to participate in political decision-making. Hence, political participation is seen such that the individual is a member of a group as well as a political citizen (Levine, 1963; Almod & Powell, 1966; Easton & Dennis, 1973; Abrash, 1998).

Before going into the topic of political participation, we must address the issue of political socialization.

Almond & Powell (1966) define it as "A citizen's acquisition of attitudes and values expected of him", while Levine (1963) defines it as "the individual's acquisition of behavioral predispositions that are consistent with the continuity of groups and political systems thereby performing the necessary functions to maintain the existence of such groups and systems". Finally, Greenstein & Sydney (1969) define it as "the formal, informal and unplanned indoctrination of knowledge, values, political behaviors as well as personal characteristics with political significance, at every stage of life through the various institutions of society". Looking at the multiplicity of definitions, one concludes that political socialization differs from one society to another. While it is rather forced and coercive in some societies, political socialization is acquired in others.

2.2 Definition Of Political Socialization

Means of political socialization can be divided into two categories in terms of methodological considerations, namely direct political socialization and indirect political socialization.

2.2.1 Indirect Political Socialization

It is called indirect because it does not declare political activity as its primary goal. Its main function is a social function, but in an indirect way it turns into institutions with political functions. These institutions are comprised of the family, educational institutions, comrades and colleagues alike.

1. The family as the first channel for social and political socialization: The family is considered the first and primary means where the child receives his/her political socialization, whereby the first period of the child's life, which is the first six years, is where the child acquires the values and ideals that will be reflected in his/her political behavior later.

2. Educational institutions: The child is followed up after the age of six, and after joining school, the student begins to receive political and cultural knowledge through systematic indoctrination. Through educational programs, the individual learns political information related to the state, its president and its political formations. At the university level, political socialization is reflected in political behavior; individuals begin to engage in a political struggle as a result of the information they heard or read such that they begin to demand the reform of the university system or the state's democratic system. Political parties may resort to attracting students to their ranks to use them against their political opponents. In a joint study between Easton & Dennis (1973) on the political socialization of children in American schools, it was reported that the integration of children with political phenomena passes through four stages:

The first stage is the politicization stage, which is the stage of feeling the political sphere.

The second stage is personalization, in which the child associates politics with certain individuals.

The third stage is the ideal of authority, in which the child begins to carry positive or negative value judgments about political authority, and he/she either loves it or hates it.

The fourth stage is the institution, in which the child moves from a state of personalizing power to linking it to institutions or political behaviors (Levine, 1963; Greenstein & Tarrow, 1969; Easton & Dennis, 1973; Abrash, 1998).

Educational institutions play an important role in developing students' patriotism, their respect for its system, how to be good citizens, and informing them of the most important national and global political issues. However, the dominance of some regimes over the education system results in a distorted political socialization that relies on traditional transferable socialization instead of a critical mental socialization.

1. Religious institutions, which include mosques, churches, other places of worship, and the people associated with them who employ religion in the political socialization process.

2. Comrades, colleagues and the public opinion: an individual is affected by the opinions of those around him, especially his colleagues at work or his friends. Colleagues or friends may have an influence on an individual's political opinion or on engaging in various political discussions resulting in certain ideals and political tendencies, whether it be with or against (Levine, 1963; Easton & Dennis, 1973; Abrash, 1998).

2.2.2 Direct Political Socialization

1. Media institutions: These include radio, television, auditorial press, written press, cinema...etc. At the present time, the media is of great importance when it comes to political socialization due to the influential position the media occupies in individuals. Hence, governments seek to control the media and recruit it to work for them; for this purpose, they employ many specialists to influence viewers. The expansion and spread of the different media platforms in our present days in addition to the attempt of various media channels, especially the official ones, has influenced political opinion and consequently the political socialization of individuals.

2. Political Parties: In order to understand the role of the political party in political socialization, one must resort to its definition. There are many definitions and meanings for political parties. We find the organizational approach of the "party" in Robert Michels (1959), Max Weber, and Maurice Duverger as cited in Scaff (1973), whereby Max Weber indicated that the term party is used to denote "organized social relations based on free affiliation such that the goal is to give party leaders power within the organizational group in order to achieve a specific goal or obtain financial benefits for the members" (Scaff 1973; Abrash, 1998: 5). While Maurice Duverger defines the party as follows: "The political party is not a single group, but a group of groups scattered across the territory of the state, such as party committees, delegates, party departments, and local groupings... Linked together by systems that coordinate among them" (Abrash, 1998: 10). As for the ideological approach, Lenin referred to it by stating that "without a program, the party, as a political organization, cannot maintain its general purpose every time it encounters unexpected circumstances" (Abrash, 1998: 11). The same approach from a liberal point of view is found in Edmund Burke, who defined political parties as "an organized group of people who have come together to work to achieve the interest of the nation by realizing the principles they embrace" (Abrash, 1998: 15). As for the functional approach, we find it in the works of

Raymond Aron, who defines the party as "a permanent organization that comprises a group of individuals who work together in order to exercise power, whether that power is working in succession or by maintaining power". This meaning is close to the definition of George Bordeaux which states that it is "an organized group of individuals with the same political vision who work to put their ideas into practice by working simultaneously to include the largest possible number of citizens in their ranks to assume power, or at least to influence the decisions of the ruling authority" (Scaff, 1973; Abrash, 1998).

All definitions demonstrate that political parties have a function of accessing power or influencing those in power. In view of that, political parties work to collect, unify and mitigate popular demands thereby making them acceptable to the political system, or by stimulating the opposition parties to sway public opinion against those in power. In general, it can be said that political parties participate in political socialization through the following:

1. Influencing public opinion.
2. Formation of political culture.
3. Political education.
4. Social integration, especially in the democratic countries (Levine, 1963; Almod & Powell, 1966; Easton & Dennis, 1973; Abrash, 1998).

2.3 Political Participation

The lack of consensus on the concept of politics, whether it is the science of the state or the science of power, has resulted in the diversity and multiplicity of definitions of political participation. Samuel Huntington and Joan Nelson define political participation as "the activity carried out by certain citizens with the intention of influencing the government decision-making process" (Abrash, 1998: 13). Whereas Michael McCluskey reported that "It refers to the voluntary activities through which members of society contribute directly or indirectly to the selection of rulers and the formation of public policy" (McCluskey *et al.,* 2004: 24). Wiener came with a more flexible definition: "Every successful or unsuccessful voluntary action, organized or unorganised, interim or continuous, presupposes resorting to legitimate or illegitimate means, with the aim of influencing political choices, managing public affairs, or choosing rulers and at all levels of government whether it be local or national" (Huntington & Nelson, 1977; McCluskey *et al.,* 2004).

Myron Wiener's (1971) definition is considered the most comprehensive and the most expansive, and it does not consider any political action to be political participation. So, for a political action to be considered as political participation, this action must have an impact on the general policy of the state. Although it is possible for an individual to have political or partisan tendencies, it does not necessarily reflect on political participation. Voluntary participation is required for political participation. Political participation must be the result of the will and conviction of the individual, and not be coercive. For example, compulsory recruitment is not considered political participation. Political participation is also an interactive bilateral relationship between the political home front on the one hand, and the political system on the other hand. Political participation of citizens expresses personal freedom and its completeness, and through it the citizen unloads psychological and emotional charges towards political matters through an actual practice that makes them feel influenced by the course of political life. Political participation for the political system has a functional character that gives it a democratic character; it legitimizes political decisions, strengthens the popular base on which the political system is based and contributes to reducing the possibilities of resorting to violence in order to disrupt the political system.

Furthermore, Berelson (1952) lists several characteristics of the political participant:

1. Interest, discussion, motivation: Political participation must stem from an interest in the individual such that he/she participates in the ongoing political discussions in addition to having a motive for this participation.
2. Knowledge: Political participation must be based on the individual's knowledge of general political matters, in addition to his/her familiarity with political data at the national level. It also requires knowledge of regional and international political matters that affect national politics.
3. Principle: Political participation of the individual should be based on a principle so that it is not based on benefit or harm, or the extent to which individual personal interests are achieved.
4. Adulthood: The individual must be a sane adult in order to be able to distinguish between matters well, and thus build his/her political participation on understanding and awareness. Hence, political systems require reaching the age of majority in order to participate in elections (Berelson, 1952; Scaff, 1973; Abrash, 1998).

2.3.1 Levels Of Political Participation

Political participation varies between societies, and within the same society, depending on the time period and the current regime. Political participation may range from aspiring to hold high positions to being satisfied with casting one's electoral vote, and it may differ between men and women, young people and seniors.

Karl Deutsch (1961) identified three levels of political participation:

1. The first level: which is the highest includes activists in political work. Karl Deutsch has set six conditions such that if three of which are met, an individual is considered to belong to this category. Those conditions are:
    A. Membership of a political organization.
    B. Donating to a political organization or a general election candidate.
    C. Attending political meetings periodically.
    D. Participation in electoral campaigns.
    E. Sending messages on political issues to the executive or parliamentary authority or to the press.
    F. Political talk with people outside the individual's usual narrow circle.
2. The second level: it includes those interested in political activity, particularly those who vote in the elections, and who generally follow what is happening in the political arena.
3. The third level: it includes those who participate in political work on a seasonal basis, or who participate in times of crisis when their interests are threatened (Deutsch, 1961; Abrash, 1998).

2.3.2 Reasons For Abstaining From Political Participation

Political participation is one of the rights of the individual guaranteed by the constitution in democratic countries, but some individuals do not tend to practice this right and tend to stay away from political life. The reasons for abstaining from political participation can be summarized as follows:

1. An influence of a political socialization the individual received and was reinforced which led to distancing him/her from political life. This particular socialization is present in the Arab society.

2. Fear of politics and power and their consequences: This is due to the weakness of the individual's personality and his/her fear of bearing responsibility, or due to an incident that the individual was exposed to as a result of previous political participation such as beating, imprisonment or payment of a fine.

3. The sense of futility and absurdity of political participation: This is when nominal democracy prevails the political system, or when a certain group takes over the government in such a way that elections become rather nominal and unfair, and even political parties become part of this game.

4. Ignorance and illiteracy: An individual's ignorance of the political system and a citizen's lack of awareness of what is going on, and consequently his/her inability to differentiate between conflicting political programs, generates a feeling that he/she has no role in political life and that it is more beneficial to confine to oneself and search for other feasible matters.

5. Dissatisfaction with the entire existing political system: Since citizens, including those who belong to opposing political forces, view that political life - whether it be the ruling political regime or even opposition forces - operates according to one political system and that political participation may legitimize this status quo.

6. Weak patriotism and the absence of a sense of responsibility among some segments of society, especially the rich class: This is because they believe that political participation is a waste of time and is for the poor and the middle classes who seek to improve their living conditions. Accordingly, citizens of the rich class are financially satisfied, and they do not care about who governs, and so they do not participate in political life unless they feel that their interests are threatened.

7. There is a decline in political participation in the developed and politically stable countries, where the individual tends to the existing political system and does not participate in the elections. The individual tends to rely on the media, and on the legal and social institutions that monitor the political system and hold it accountable when departing from the democratic rules of society. In these societies, citizens enjoy all their rights unlike citizens in developing countries where citizens strive to improve their living conditions by means of political participation, which sometimes resorts to violence, revolutions and coups (Berelson, 1952; Deutsch, 1961; Scaff, 1973; Huntington & Nelson, 1977; Abrash, 1998).

2.3.3 Motives Of Political Participation

The main motives and reasons for political participation are:

1. Psychological motives: Political participation provides individuals with reassurance and self-confidence, whereby the participant seeks to prove his/her existence and asserts oneself as a person with free will who is able to participate in decision-making as relating to an important political objective.

2. Participation as an expression of political awareness: Many of the political participants consider that political participation is a national duty that a citizen should not neglect. They believe that just as a citizen has rights, he/she also has certain duties towards society, and these duties include political participation.

3. Political participation as a tool to express demands: The demands may be of a union, or a political or social nature, whereby the participant believes that through political participation, such as participating in elections or opinion polls, he/she can achieve these demands.

4. Political participation with religious or ethnic motives: This type is evident in national movements or religious groups, where members of these groups find in political participation an effective tool to show their ideals and principles. These groups adopt special channels for political socialization, and their participation often takes a violent and conflicting nature with the political system.

5. Political participation for fear of ruling authorities: This type of participation is found in third world countries, where citizens resort to participating in elections or in political activities called for by the ruling authority for fear that the authority will learn of their non-participation, and consequently, enacts punishment so they are pushed to participate out of fear.

6. Political participation in pursuit of a better tenure or position: Some believe that working with political authority and its institutions is a profitable and a comfortable work that fulfills their ambitions, so they engage in political work in order to reach a high position, whether in their jobs or at the party level.

7. Political participation as a defense policy against an expected danger: Although the citizen may be politically indifferent, he/she is forced to participate as a result of a danger to which

the nation is exposed, and the citizen feels the need to intervene in order to ward off this danger.

8. Political participation as a manifestation of family or tribal solidarity: Here the citizen may be politically inclined, or perhaps he/she may not belong to any political party and is not politically involved, but he/she is forced to participate in elections, for example, in order to elect a member of the family to ensure their success. This participation is considered conditional or temporary (Berelson, 1952; Deutsch, 1961; Weiner, 1971; Scaff, 1973; Abrash, 1998; Casati, 2016).

2.3.4 Forms Of Political Participation

There are different forms of political participation which can be divided into the following:

1. Institutional participation, organized participation, and independent or unilateral participation:

   A. Institutional or official participation is the participation at the level of state institutions carried out by officials in their fixed political functions, such as the head of state, ministers, media officials or any person involved in the political system.

   B. Organized participation is participation within the framework of existing institutions where these institutions constitute the link between the citizen and the political system, such that the institutions collect and integrate individual demands and turn them into general political demands. Among these institutions are political parties and unions.

   C. Independent or unilateral participation is the citizen's participation in a personal and individual capacity. Here the citizen enjoys absolute freedom whether he/she wants to participate or not. The same applies to the degree of their participation. In some countries, individual or unilateral participation is preferred, and in other countries, such as the West, institutional or organized political participation is preferred.

2. Situational participation and continuous permanent participation:

   A. Situational participation refers to the individual's one-time participation, or participation in certain occasions. For instance, the individual would participate in the elections and would then return to a stage of latency and non-participation.

   B. Permanent or continuous participation is more important despite the fact that the number of participants in it is less. It includes those involved in political parties,

pressure groups, trade unions, women's associations...etc (Berelson, 1952; Deutsch, 1961; Weiner, 1971; Scaff, 1973; Huntington & Nelson, 1977; Abrash, 1998; Casati, 2016).

2.3.5 Modes of Political Participation

A citizen exercises his/her right through these modes of political participation to influence political decisions or to be one of the political decision-makers. This means that his/her participation is institutional. Participation can, therefore, be limited to the following channels:

1. Participation by voting in elections. Voting in elections is the most important aspect of political participation through which the people can choose who represents them. Accordingly, the vote of the individual is considered his/her individual share. As for the total votes, they express the will of the nation as a whole.

2. Participation by popular referendum is a referendum by the people on a specific procedure or matter that affects the nation that the government or the political system intends to implement.

3. Participation through popular objection. In some political systems, the constitution gives its citizen the right to object to some laws issued during a certain period of time and to submit them to a popular referendum.

4. Participation by popular suggestion. Some constitutions grant individuals the right to propose a law or an ideal that can be a law, and to present it to the formal bodies stipulated in the constitution.

5. Political participation by requesting re-elections. Whereby the constitution grants citizens the right to object to the elections of some public institutions, or the elections of some representatives or public officials, if the integrity of the elections or any doubts about the constitutionality or legality of the elections are challenged.

6. Political participation by resorting to means of pressure, which is namely, participation through strikes, demonstrations or civil disobedience to achieve legitimate demands. Such a situation is resorted to if other legitimate channels are no longer available.

7. Political participation through pressure groups. This is resorted to in the event that the official channels for participation are not feasible and are ineffective, so a group of people resort to creating a pressure group that exerts direct pressure on the head of state or the

legislative body in order to make decisions or reverse decisions that are in the interest of this group or community.

8. Participation through civil society institutions, such as women's associations, trade unions, student unions, and religious associations which are considered important modes for political participation due to their role in forming the public opinion. Governments account for these groups before making any decision as the participation of these groups is effective in the pre-election stages where everyone seeks to win them over or to neutralize them. These institutions also have a continuous role through monitoring the performance of the government and its decisions and their impact on its citizens.

9. Participation through political parties. Parties are considered the basis of the political system. They collect the opinions of citizens within one collective opinion. Political parties form the link between citizens and the existing political system. Political parties have an important political role during the elections by setting political programs and trying to attract the public to those political programmes. Moreover, political parties have a continuous role outside the elections period; they participate in political life in an attempt to attract individuals to belong to their parties on a continuous basis and encourage them to participate in politics (Berelson, 1952; Deutsch, 1961; Weiner, 1971; Scaff, 1973; Huntington & Nelson, 1977; Abrash, 1998; Casati, 2016).

To sum up, a huge number of theoretical studies addressed the political participation in the Palestinian society. However, a very limited number of studies in the Palestinian occupied society have highlighted the political participation empirically. In a recent study, Casati (2016) argues that, while Najah University undergraduates maintain a strong nationalist discourse, they have come to conceptualize 'politics' as negative, at once ineffective and dangerous, in addition to the pessimism vis-à-vis the political field, which leads them to abandon traditional sites of participation and to adopt a cynical yet ultimately political approach to consumption in an attempt to 'change air' and 'just live'.

Salama (2013) indicated that Palestinians had a moderate level of political participation, and moderate motivations, mainly, "Everyone has the right to express his or her opinion".

Finally, Jabali (2009) concluded that in the Palestinian society, which is characterized as a conservative and a male-dominated one, women are expected to redouble their efforts to be incorporated and integrated into the decision-making process as well as development.

3. Purpose and Scope

This study aims to explore the political participation among Palestinians. The study is considered the first of its kind, to the author's knowledge, and one of the leading studies that addresses the political participation among Palestinians, where empirical studies of such an important topic since the Palestinian disunity in 2007 is scarce.

4. Definition of Terms

4.1 Political socialization: Political socialization is the process of preparing citizens so that they become qualified to participate in political life (Greenstein & Sydney, 1969; Weiner, 1971; Abrash, 1998).

4.2 Political participation: Political participation is the activity carried out by certain citizens with the intention of influencing the government decision-making process (Weiner, 1971; Huntington & Nelson, 1977; Abrash, 1998).

5. Hypotheses

The study proposed the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis #1: There are no statistically significant differences at $\alpha \leq 0.05$ in political participation among Palestinians according to gender, marital status, educational level, work status, party and fraction affiliation.

Hypothesis #2: There is no statistically significant correlation at $\alpha \leq 0.05$ between age, religion commitment and political participation among Palestinians.

6. Methodology And Design

6.1 Approach

The current study adopted a quantitative approach using a questionnaire that is appropriate to the exploratory nature of the research.

6.2 Population and Sampling

The target population consisted of Palestinians, who are 18 years of age or above in the West Bank during the year 2021, which included 781,864 individuals (394,730 males to 387,134 females) (Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2022).

The sample was composed of 600 participants stratifiedly selected, according to their gender. The sample size was calculated using the sampling web of http://www.surveysystem.com/sscalc.htm, the sample size calculator with a margin error of 4.

6.3 Instrumentation

Political participation among Palestinians was evaluated using an index of a 30-item scale, developed by the researcher based on the Political Participation Scale (PPS), which was originally developed by Yatani (1982), taking into consideration the cultural appropriateness in the Palestinian society. A 5-point Likert scale (ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree) was used to assess the political participation among the sampled population through an online survey that was launched on March 15, 2022, and the data were collected for a period of two months. The sampling survey instrument sought socio-economic background information about the participants, which included age, gender, marital status, educational level, religion commitment, work status, party and faction affiliation.

6.3.1 Instrument Validity

The validation of the instrument proceeded in two distinct phases. The initial phase involved a small focus group session (N=10); while the second phase involved the implementation of a pilot study (N=30) to validate the survey using exploratory factor analysis. Factor loading for all items exceeded 0.70 (0.73 to 0.87), which indicated that these items were suitable in assessing every item of the political participation among Palestinians.

6.3.2 Instrument Reliability

The reliability was tested using Cronbach's Alpha and Guttman Split-Half Coefficients to ascertain the reliability and consistency of the survey. Cronbach's Alpha and Guttman Split-Half Coefficients for the survey instrument were 0.84 and 0.82, respectively, indicating very good reliability and consistency.

6.4 Sample Socio-demographic Characteristics

The demographic breakdown parameters of the participants were age, gender, marital status, educational level, religion commitment, work status, party and faction affiliation. In total, 600 Palestinians participated in the sample study. Respondents were between 18 and 65 years of age (M 37.74, SD 11.20); and almost (70.5%) were married. Males represented 50.5% of the participants, while the remaining 49.5% were females. The majority of the respondents were well-educated, nearly 74.4% had a college or undergraduate degree; and more than half (52.5%) were religiously committed. The majority (65.7%) were working, and had no party affiliation (85.5%).

6.5 Data Analysis

The questionnaire items were rated on a 1–5 Likert scale (1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree) whereby the highest score indicated a high level of political participation. Descriptive statistics gauged the level of political participation among the sampled population. The following statistical techniques were measured: Regression, T.test, One-way analysis of variance, Tukey test, Cronbach's Alpha, Guttman Split-Half Coefficients and Factor Analysis using SPSS.

7. Findings

The mean score of the political participation among Palestinians as reported by the sampled participants was moderate (M 2.83, SD 0.33). More than half of the participants (56.6%) had a moderate level of political participation.

Furthermore, the findings identified that the indicators of political participation among Palestinians ranked in a descending order as follows: "What matters for political entities is the number of votes and not the ideas of the electorate" (M 4.46, SD 0.82); "Every person has the right to express his political ideas even if most people have different views" (M 4.45, SD 0.83); "I am pessimistic about the future of political life in our Palestinian society" (M 4.02, SD 1.03); "Generally speaking, Legislative Council members quickly lose touch with people" (M 4.02, SD 0.95).

The participants indicated that "A good politician is good whether his name is Mohammad or Hanna" (M 3.99, SD 1.30); however, they argued that "I feel the distance between me and the politicians in our Palestinian society" (M 3.90, SD 1.14); "It is difficult to be a member of a group

with multiple political ideas" (M 3.60, SD 1.15); "Staying away from politics can relax your mind and conscience" (M 3.55; SD 1.20); since "Politics is so complicated in our Palestinian society that a person like me cannot understand what is really happening" (M 3.48; SD 1.36); and "I think that we are politically pushed to a field where we have no choice" (M 3.37; SD 1.19).

The study explored the demographic breakdown over the political participation with the aim of identifying any differences. Findings showed that marital status and work status do not indicate any statistically significant differences. However, it was found that age, religion commitment, gender, educational level and party affiliation were significant variables. In relation to gender, the differences were in favor of the males (M 2.91, SD 0.38) compared to (M 2.76, SD 0.27) for the females: the T.test value was (5.260, P=0.000). As for the party affiliation, the differences were in favor of participants with party affiliation (M 2.99, SD 0.35) compared to (M 2.81, SD 0.33) for those who had no party affiliation: the T.test value was (4.678, P=0.000). With regards to the educational level, the differences favored the well-educated participants (M 2.90, SD 0.35): F value was (18.852, P=0.000).

Finally, the study findings indicated that there was a statistically significant inverse correlation between age and political participation among Palestinians, the Beta-value was (-0.132, P=0.015). However, there was a statistically significant positive correlation between religion commitment, and political participation among Palestinians, the Beta-value was (0.211, P=0.000).

8. Discussion

Findings indicated that Palestinians had a moderate level of political participation. This result is considered neutral in the Palestinian society. Since 2006 until the writing of this article, no presidential or parliamentary elections were held due to the obstacles imposed on the Palestinian people by the occupation, in addition to the Palestinian division that also contributed to the postponement of the aforementioned elections.

In this regards, Khalidi (2009) indicated that since even before the death of Yasser Arafat in 2004, the Palestinian political system has been undergoing an intense crisis. This is a crisis of objectives and methods, a crisis of confidence and legitimacy, indeed a crisis which may prove to be existential in nature for the Palestinian people. The profound split between the two leading Palestinian political

movements, Fateh and Hamas (and increasingly within the former), has seriously exacerbated this crisis.

Furthermore, another major contributing factor has been the striking absence of realism and clarity as to their objectives on the part of all the Palestinian factions. This crisis takes place against the somber background of a tightening stranglehold of Israel's 55-year-old occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and of the interference and pressures of external powers that have been fishing in Palestinian waters (Khalidi, 2009).

The study results showed that, Palestinian males scored a higher level of political participation compared to females. Patriarchal ideology is deeply rooted in the Palestinian society, where the notions of father and brother are prevalent. The Palestinian culture seeks to direct males towards an affirmation of masculine qualities like manhood, chivalry, bravery, gallantry, daring and stamina. On the other hand, it stresses directing females towards feminism, decency, decorum, virginity, love of children, home economics and stability (Barakat, 1993; Muhawi & Kana'na, 2001; Banat & Rimawi, 2014; Banat, 2010, 2012, 2014, 2015, 2019a, 2019b; Banat & Dayyeh, 2019; Banat et al., 2021); it consequently follows that they would likely experience a higher level of political participation.

The findings revealed that well-educated participants scored a higher level of political participation compared to less-educated ones. Firjani (1998: 3) holds that the benefits of higher education in the development of under-developed societies is much higher than the anticipated economic calculations, given that higher education plays a significant role in developing a higher level of human capital in society. Institutions of higher learning lay the foundation for the cognitive revolution of knowledge and sophisticated abilities - higher levels of human capital, which is the underlying requirement for progress in this century.

Education is highly valued among Palestinians, but it also provides them with a fuller awareness of the political system and the political participation. Palestinians consider education an important mechanism by which to develop their potential, interact with others to advocate their just cause and defend it on international arena, would increase their political participation (Banat & Rimawi, 2014; Banat, 2019c).

Furthermore, the study findings indicated that party affiliated participants scored a higher level of political participation compared to those who were unaffiliated. Sense of community is based upon the interaction and contact between community members. Political and social participation take place within a community context, where people engage in social activities in many formal and informal social networks. Forms of participation are determined by issues arising within a community, a place, and include its culture, norms, values, and institutions (Cicognani *et al.,* 2007). Considering the degree of involvement in social activities, results of descriptive studies conducted in several nations in the last 20 years have provided a fairly consistent picture of increasing apathy toward traditional politics among youth, but also showed evidence of interest in a range of no mainstream forms of civil involvement, including voluntary activity (Verba *et al.,* 1995; Youniss *et al.,* 2002; Cicognani *et al.,* 2007). Additionally, the study of Cornolti *et al.* (2005) concluded that the most popular ways of being politically active are participation in public meetings dealing with political and social issues.

Additionally, an inverse relationship was found between age and political participation among Palestinians. According to Hughey *et al.* (1999), community participation enhances the sense of community. Community participation offers young people the opportunity to cultivate social ties with persons other than their family and peers within different social settings, and through this, helps them gain a sense of connectedness and belonging as well as to strengthen their social identity and identification processes.

During adolescence, young people express a strong need to belong to a group. The latter helps them take distance from their parents and find their own identities. Moreover, young people develop a strong sense of belonging by creating links with their friends. This emotional experience reinforces their identification with the group. Certainly, when the child feels accepted and esteemed by his/her peers, he/she confirms his/her identity, and his/her trust to others increases. He/she looks for the occasions or situations where he/she is in a group, because he/she feels confident, and knows that he/she will be recognized (Abdelkader & Bouslama, 2014).

Finally, a positive relationship was found between religion commitment, and political participation. This result could be linked to the fact that religion commitments in the Palestinian family occupy a large space in its social, intellectual and emotional life. It is normal that the religious creed is

respected by all members of the Palestinian society. This is due to the concentrated efforts which the parents exert in bringing up their children (Banat, 2010, 2019d).

In fact, religion as a mediator can influence mental procedures and the evaluation of daily events. Thus, some researchers believe that confronting stress and social situations are facilitated via religious beliefs as a source of comfort (Mahoney *et al.,* 2001; Yeganeh & Shaikh mahmoodi, 2013). Additionally, religious orientation improves mental health and provides a suitable condition for answering basic questions of humans such as identity, and choosing a certain life style in order to attain perfection contributing to adjustment and psychological well-being. In short, religious commitment increases the level of self confidence, adjustment and self-esteem, which are basic factors of mental health and psychological well-being that would increase their community participation, in general, and political participation, in particular (Allport, 1950, 1963; Banat, 2019d).

Besides, the victory of religious Islamic movements in the Palestinian elections in 2006, and their continued victory in the municipal elections, and the student union councils in Palestinian universities, strongly contributed to their entry into the Palestinian political system, and increased the political participation of Palestinians in general, and the religious movements in particular.

9. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study confirmed the value of political participation in the Palestinian occupied society. Approximately, more than half of the participants scored moderate level on the political participation scale. Age, religious commitment, gender, educational level and party affiliation were significant associated factors with political participation. Palestinians are pessimistic about the future of the political life in the Palestinian occupied society. Taking into consideration that political actions are a waste of time, it is difficult to be a member of a group with multiple political ideas, and what matters for politicians is the number of votes and not their ideas. Further studies are essential to expand the understanding of the political participation in the Palestinian occupied society. The study results emphasized given the concept of political socialization the utmost importance in the curriculum and the different media outlet under the on-going Israeli occupation.

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