

Obstacles to Democratic Transition In Palestine Under Israeli Settlement



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Received date: 11/10/2023

Accepted date: 06/01/2024

Published date: 01/01/2024

Abstract:

The process of democratic transition in Palestine faced many repercussions that negatively affected it, and perhaps the most important of these repercussions is the Israeli settlement, which caused destructive effects on the components of the Palestinian democratic process, through the dimensions behind the settlement project as the Israeli settlement was not limited to confiscating land. It hit the security, political, geographical and demographic dimension of Palestine, hence this study came to analyze the obstacles to the Palestinian democratic transition under the Israeli settlement, through understanding the course of democratic transition in Palestine, and identifying settlement policies and their impact on the democratic transition process.

Key words: *Democratic transition; Israeli settlement; security dimensions; political dimensions; demographic dimensions.*

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INTRODUCTION

The topic of democratic transition has gained growing prominence among political thinkers, notably considering the transitions undergone by many countries around the world, which led the authoritarian regimes to collapse and be replaced by democratic regimes, this is what Samuel Huntington called The Third Wave of Democratization, and defined as a group of transitions from nondemocratic to democratic regimes, (Samuel Huntington, 73, 1993) following a chronological sequence and passing through multiple stages that are inseparable, starting with the elimination of authoritarian regimes then progressing through the transitional phase, and ultimately reaching the stage of democratic consolidation.

Regarding the nature of the relationship between democratic transition and settlement, the connection between democracy and settlement is a complex and diverse topic. Democracy is a type of rule in which citizens take part in the making of laws and policies. Democratic transition is an essential part of the democratic process, with its different political, social, and economic dimensions. Settlement is a process that involves the confiscation of land and the establishment of human, economic, and military settlements, with potential political, social, and environmental ramifications. Therefore, democratic transition is a process that requires an environment that ensures its smooth progression, however, settlement and especially Israeli settlement, represents a major obstacle to the process of democratic transition, as it violates international laws and customs that pertain to democratic transitions.

Within the Palestinian context, a significant focus on democracy emerged with the establishment of the Palestinian National Authority in 1994. This involved efforts to address various dimensions of political, economic, and socio-demographic democratic transition where political efficacy moved from the Palestine Liberation Organization to the Palestinian National Authority. On the political level, the foundations for a Palestinian democratic political system based on electoral legitimacy began to take shape, replacing revolutionary legitimacy. On the security level, the Palestinian Security Services system was established, to maintain the safety and security of citizens. As for the economic level, donors began to reinforce this political transition by supporting economic projects aimed at reinforcing the Palestinian economy. Demographically, the newly established Palestinian National Institutions worked on preserving the Palestinian identity with the objective of solidifying the citizens' connection to their homeland. The Palestinian Authority took significant steps towards reinforcing and consolidating democracy through various developmental projects, however, these steps were met with countermeasures aimed at thwarting the Palestinian democratic transition, with Israeli settlement standing as the foremost obstacle. (Azzam Shaath, 2015, 24)

The study problem:

The efforts of the Palestinian National Authority were met with many obstacles that hindered the completion of the Palestinian democratic transition process. Arguably, the most significant of these obstacles is Israeli settlement policies, which worked to impede the Palestinian democratic transition process through the underlying dimensions behind them. Based on this, this study is aimed at solving a main problem which is: **What are the obstacles to democratic transition in Palestine under Israeli settlement?**

From this, the following sub-questions arise:

- What is the reality of Israeli settlement policies in Palestine?
- What is the course and aspects of Palestinian democratic transition?
- To what extent do Israeli security policies impact the democratic transition process in Palestine?
- What is the impact of Israeli demographic policies on the democratic transition process in Palestine?
- What is the impact of Israeli economic dominance policies on the democratic transition process in Palestine?

Study Hypothesis:

The study is based on a main hypothesis, which is:

The chances of achieving democratic transition in Palestine are weak because of the growing Israeli settlement activities.

Study Methodology:

In our quest of finding answers for the study's questions, multiple methods have been employed, the historical method was employed to trace the course of Palestinian democratic transition, the researcher also used the analytical method to analyze Israeli settlement policies and their impact on the democratic transition process.

Study's division:

This study was divided into three parts:

First section: talks about the Israeli settlement: development and policies.

Second section: explores the efforts of the Palestinian Authority in the democratic transition process: courses and dimensions.

Third section: analyzes the policies of hard security and their means as obstacles to democratic transition in Palestine.

Fourth section: discusses demographic engineering policies and their means as obstacles to democratic transition in Palestine.

Fifth section: focuses on Israeli economic dominance policies and their means as obstacles to democratic transition in Palestine.

First section: Israeli settlement: development and policies

Observing the map of Israeli settlements in Palestinian territories, one can fully understand Israeli intentions towards these areas, the settlement measures and policies have left many repercussions on the future of the Palestinian state and the possibility of reinforcing Palestinian democratic transition, which started to fade away under the settlement policies and means, some of the most notable ones include: bypass roads, military checkpoints, the apartheid wall, and settling within Palestinian residential areas.

The Zionist migrations to the land of Palestine marked the true beginning of the project of the takeover of the land, resulting in the displacement of its original inhabitants. The Zionist movement employed several methods and means, seeking the support of colonial powers to achieve its goals and provide security and safety for the new settlers, it took control of the mountains, plains, and valleys, solidifying their authority over Palestine's primary groundwater reserves. It also worked on altering the demographic reality and creating a new one by forcing the indigenous people to migrate, mainly in religious areas like Jerusalem and Hebron. Furthermore, it established a new settlement reality that fragmented cities, separated them from each other, and hindered the establishment of an independent Palestinian state.

Here, we will explore the political obstacles posed by Israeli settlement to the process of democratic transition.

First subsection: Palestinian state and settlement: potential and obstacles

The Israeli settlement represents one of the most important controversial issues in negotiations between Palestinians and Israelis, Therefore, successive Israeli governments have resorted to postponing this issue in order to pursue their religious and historical aspirations, they imposed a de facto policy by creating a settlement reality that is difficult to undo realistically, causing destructive consequences across various aspects of Palestinian political, economic, and social life.

The Israeli governments worked on increasing settlement activity across the Palestinian territories, as part of pre-planned schemes with political, security, economic, and demographic objectives and dimensions. Therefore, all Palestinian cities became surrounded by colonial settlements and military checkpoints that restrict the movement of Palestinians, dividing the cities into small cantons that make geographic contiguity impossible, which makes developing and establishing

an independent Palestinian state and reinforcing the democratic process almost impossible. These settlement policies have hindered the possibility of conducting democratic elections in Palestine as a whole. This is due to the Israeli occupation's dominance over numerous Palestinian regions, as per the Oslo Agreement, giving the occupation full control over the regions that fall under (B.C) classification, instead of the settlements that encroached into cities and hindered development in Palestine, notable examples include the apartheid wall that isolated Palestinian homes from each other. Homes of siblings became separated, divided by an apartheid wall, as if each of them was in a different country. (Mohsen Ramadan, 2008, 61)

By examining the reality of the settlement and its impact on the establishment of the Palestinian state, it is evident that there are three types of settlement divisions:

- Colonial settlements in the region of Al Aghwar (eastern border): this section encompasses 28 settlements, with two main objectives, one related to security and the other to economics. From a security perspective, these settlements serve as the first line of defense against any potential Arab threat from the east, whether originating from Jordan or neighboring Arab countries. Economically, this region is distinguished by its water resources and fertile lands, making it a vital source of agriculture in Palestine with a diverse range of crops. Therefore, the occupation's control over these areas and the increase of settlement activities therein result in the Palestinian economy being closely tied to the Israeli economy, exerting significant influence over a crucial sector, which is the agricultural sector. (Mohammed Al-Samhour, 57, 2011)
- Colonial Settlements on mountain tops: the occupation took control over the highland areas in Palestine from north to south, and worked on increasing settlements and building colonial settlements on mountain tops, until the number of these settlements reached 31, these have a security dimension considering that they serve as primary checkpoints to counter any Palestinian popular movement. Therefore, these settlements manipulate and facilitate the Israeli military control over Palestinian cities by employing electronic monitoring systems and drones, this facilitates and secures the Israeli occupation's incursions into Palestinian cities, thereby diminishing the Palestinian authorities' capacity for self-governance and ensuring security for the Palestinian population.
- Colonial settlements located between the territories occupied in 1948 and those occupied in 1967, totaling 48 settlements, these are security demarcations between Palestinians and Israelis. They have both security and economic dimensions. From a security perspective, they function as outposts to counter any Palestinian threats such as popular uprisings. Economically, these settlements pose a real threat to the future of the Palestinian state due to their

ongoing expansion which is based on confiscating nearby lands, and often justifying that under security pretexts.

Therefore, settlement divisions were not mere coincidences but rather part of well-thought-out plans intended to thwart the establishment of a sovereign Palestinian state within its 1967 borders. This has gained unanimous Palestinian national consensus. They also aim to displace the indigenous population from their land and prevent any development in the Palestinian cities whether on the political level, such as reinforcing the democratic process and exercising their legitimate political rights, by preventing communication between cities due to settlements and military outposts, or even on the economic level by confiscating lands, especially agricultural ones and controlling the Palestinian groundwater. These settlement policies seek to impose realities that ultimately lead to: (Riad El- Aila, 2010, 907)

- Shifting the demographic balance in favor of settlers in many Palestinian areas, especially in Jerusalem.
- Blocking the path to any settlement initiative due to the imposition of the de facto settlement policy.

Second subsection: settlement confronting the right of return and self-determination for the Palestinian people

As a result of the 1948 war, which was called Al-Nakbah (Palestinian catastrophe), and the 1967 war, known as Al-Naksah (the set back), millions of Palestinians were displaced, and they still live in refugee camps in the diaspora. On the other hand, the occupying authorities worked on facilitating Jewish immigration into Palestine, gathering millions of Jews from European countries, mainly from Eastern Europe, they also worked on building hundreds of settlements to accommodate them, thus blocking the return of Palestinians to their land. (Ahmad Fayyad, 2010, 7)

The right of return is one of the rights guaranteed by international customs and laws, affirming the Palestinian people's entitlement to return to their land, however, the settlement policies have imposed a de facto reality that makes it difficult for Palestinian refugees who were displaced from their land to return. The issue of the right of return was postponed to final status negotiations, where successive Israeli governments enacted numerous laws and regulations that hindered the realization of the Palestinian people's right of return. This was achieved by attracting Jewish immigrants from various countries worldwide and establishing settlements for them, aiming to prevent any opportunity for the return of Palestinian refugees. In order to get rid of the Palestinian right of return and due to the de facto reality imposed by the Israeli settlement, former U.S. President Donald Trump introduced what came to be known as the Trump Peace Plan in which he presented a solution to the right of return by offering the opportunity to

construct a city for Palestinian refugees in the Sinai Desert, alongside providing them with financial compensation.

Therefore, all settlement measures and policies constitute a violation of Palestinian political rights, the rights established by international laws and customs. Hence, settlement policies constitute a clear and genuine violation of international customs and laws that must be ceased.

Third subsection: Settlements within Arab residential communities (within the territories occupied in 1948)

The Israeli occupation implements a different type of settlement policy, which involves seizing Arab homes and displacing their Arab inhabitants, especially in the cities of Jerusalem and Hebron. This policy, the practice of which has been increasing daily, has put many Palestinian homes in the vicinity of Al-Aqsa Mosque at risk of confiscation by religious settler associations aiming at expelling Arab residents and replacing them with settlers to establish a demographic majority of Jewish people in the area, in order to preserve the Zionist scheme that calls for retaining Greater Jerusalem which obstructs the possibility of Jerusalem becoming the capital of Palestine in the future. This policy also imposes a de facto reality making any discussions about Jerusalem in negotiations impossible. (Nur ad-Din Masalha, 2004, 129)

Realistically, successive Israeli governments were able to achieve their goals, seizing many Arab homes and establishing a demographic majority of Jewish people in these areas, and they still refuse to include Jerusalem in their negotiations with the Palestinians, causing the negotiations between the two parties to fail.

As for the city of Hebron, it has been subjected to this type of settlement aimed at displacing its indigenous population and converting the old town nearby the sanctuary of Abraham into settlement outposts. Moreover, Israeli authorities went on to build several Zionist religious schools in the area. (Jawad Al-Hamad, 2009)

Second section: The Palestinian Authority's Efforts in the Democratic Transition Process: Courses and Dimensions.

Since its establishment, the Palestinian National Authority has worked to reinforce the principle of democracy, with its various political, economic, and demographic dimensions. Here, we will explore the course of democratic transition in its different dimensions.

First subsection: on the political level. Particularly regarding security, security services and a police force were established to provide security for Palestinian citizens and enable them to exercise their rights and fulfill their duties in accordance with Palestinian law. To safeguard these rights, Palestinian institutions

were established to guarantee them, such as the Legislative Council, which was tasked with enacting laws and regulations that regulate various aspects of Palestinian life. Additionally, attention has been given to governance matters and its requirements, this manifested in the consolidation of political and societal pluralism, the independence of legislative and judicial bodies from the executive branch, and the conduction of elections for the public to fulfill the demands of the democratic transition. Here, we will track the course of the Palestinian democratic transition through three important stages: electoral process, political pluralism and the separation of powers.

1- Electoral process:

The concept of democratic elections holds a prominent position in democratic systems considering that it serves the function of expressing the principle that the people are the source of power. On the Palestinian level, the presidential and legislative elections held on January 20th, 1996, are the first elections in the history of the Palestinian political system, which took place in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem under local and international supervision and oversight. (Democracy Report in Palestine, 1996)

As for the second presidential elections, they were held after the death of President Yasser Arafat on January 9th, 2005. After the presidential elections, preparations were made for the second legislative elections, which were held on January 25th, 2006. And for the first time, the Hamas movement participated in these elections where it secured a majority of parliamentary seats, the situation on the ground shifted to having two powers and authorities, resulting in internal conflicts, geographical divisions, and power struggles. (Jamil Hilal, 2008, 57)

In October 2012, the Palestinian Authority held municipal elections in the West Bank, excluding the Gaza Strip, which were boycotted by the Hamas movement, this negatively impacted the situation deepening the political conflict and strengthening the state of division. Additionally, the Israeli occupation prevented holding the elections in East Jerusalem which caused the electoral process to become one of the controversial issues that hinder the Palestinian democratic transition.

2- Political pluralism:

On the Palestinian level, there is a political pluralism that has been affirmed in the political programs of political organizations, there are official texts that confirm the existence of a pluralistic democratic society, as emphasized by the Palestinian National Covenant, but despite of this pluralism, this system still faces many problems, most notably: (Mohammed Abu Matar, 2015, 50)

- The role of institutions in decision-making, especially within legislative institutions, has diminished.

- Decision-making being restricted to political faction leaders, who have exerted control over the political system through their influence within their respective factions.
- The absence of resorting to regulatory controls has led to internal conflict.
- The spread of managing disagreements through splitting, which has eliminated the possibility of a democratic solution to the political process.

3- The separation of powers:

The separation of powers principle represents one of the most important principles upon which democratic political systems rely in regulating the relationship between the three branches of government, aiming at preventing interference between these branches and preserving the independence of each one. Regarding the Palestinian experience, the issue of separating powers goes beyond the simple concept of establishing a balanced relationship among the three branches, which can be easily tested in any political system, This is due to the fact that the Palestinian situation encompasses two distinct governmental experiences: the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian National Authority. Despite the fact that the Palestinian National Authority is an extension of the organization, the dispute was demonstrated when the Palestinian National Authority established some ministries, something that falls within the exclusive jurisdiction of the organization. This led to a situation of overlapping powers, and there was no complete separation between the three branches. The executive branch dominated over the legislative and judicial branches.

Second subsection: on the economic level

Since the establishment of the Palestinian National Authority in 1994, the Palestinian people have had an official developmental administration with a vested interest in initiating a development process, the Palestinian National Authority assumed ownership of this administration by virtue of the Oslo accords where donor countries provided assistance to the Palestinian Authority with the aim of supporting the development of the Palestinian economy and promoting economic growth, but since the establishment, the Palestinian economy is facing several obstacles that hindered the governmental efforts from consolidating the economic development, These obstacles include the division of Palestinian territories into Areas A, B, and C by virtue of the Oslo accords which has hindered economic development since the establishment of the administration. In addition to the Israeli occupation controlling all crossings and Palestinian borders, thus, the remaining economic development projects outlined by Palestinian governments have remained as theoretical projects and were not implemented on the ground.

Third subsection: on the socio-demographic level

The Palestinian National Authority worked within the available means and resources, under the supervision of the occupation, it contributed in preserving the Palestinian Identity through programs that support Palestinian citizens and help them solidify their connection to their homeland, it also established a system related to internal affairs working to regulate the social affairs of citizens and provide them with various services within the available means and resources despite the restrictions imposed by the occupation, as we will discuss in the upcoming parts of this study.

Third section: hard security policies as an obstacle to Palestinian democratic transition

Security represents the primary cornerstone in the process of democratic transition, as a matter of fact, safety and security create a conducive environment for the entire democratic process. Security is a vital need for citizens and living in a state of stability is their natural right, Palestinian citizens lack even the minimum levels of security and safety due to the colonial settlements surrounding Palestinian cities, and this is because of the aggressive practices of settlers towards both the land and the people, manifesting in seizing Palestinian lands, assaulting farmers, uprooting and burning trees, and even stealing agricultural crops. (Ziad Abu Amr, 109, 1995)

Moreover, the settlement policies of the occupation have supported the right of the settlers to be armed in order to provide security for these settlements, this has created a security concern for Palestinians due to the widespread presence of settlers on roads adjacent to Palestinian cities and their use of weapons in a provocative manner. The settlers have committed several massacres, including the one that occurred with the Dwabsha family in Nablus when the settlers invaded the village of Duma and set fire to the homes and their residents and burned the Ibrahimi mosque in Hebron.

This is what settler policies aim to achieve by spreading terror and fear among Palestinians, forcing them to abandon their land. As a result, Palestinian citizens lack the security that constitutes a fundamental pillar of the democratic process.

Fourth section: demographic engineering policies and their means as obstacles to democratic transition in Palestine

The Israeli settlement project is based on a fundamental cornerstone which is the reinforcement of Jewish migration into Palestine representing a success to this project, vice versa, any emigration of settlers from Palestine represents a loss for this project. In order to ensure the success of the settlement project, successive Israeli governments have worked on resolving the demographic conflict through well-thought-out plans and programs, including: (Ibrahim Abu Lughod, 135, 2010)

Firstly: using several means to place pressure and exert violence on Palestinians to displace them from their land, it is a practical application of their primary principle which the settlement project is based on, and that is "a land without a people for a people without a land"

Secondly: Encouraging Jewish migration from different countries of the world to Palestine, providing the migrants with material and financial incentives and job opportunities, as the settlement project relies on demographic growth through Jewish migration, whereas the natural increase of population plays a secondary role in Shifting the demographic balance in favor of Israel.

Furthermore, the demographic challenge went beyond population growth, it extended to attacking the Palestinian identity, the settlement policies worked on altering the identity of Palestinian cities by establishing settler communities that bear the names of nearby Palestinian cities while imparting an Israeli character to these designations. For instance: the Palestinian village of Soofin as opposed to the Israeli settlement of Tasooftin, the Palestinian village of Kafr Saba that has been depopulated since 1948 as opposed to the Israeli settlement of Kafar Saba. The size of the settlements surpasses that of Palestinian cities, and the expansion of these settlements extends beyond the areas designated for the growth and development of Palestinian communities. (Yusuf Ibrahim, 7, 2003)

However, the success or failure of these settlement projects depend on the nature of Palestinian resistance methods, and how much it can impact the settlers' ability to stay in their locations. Palestinians did not hesitate to employ all available means to resist these projects, aiming to strengthen their resilience on their land and expel these occupying settlers.

Fifth section: Israeli economic dominance policies and their means as obstacles to democratic transition in Palestine

The Israeli settlement contributed to the destruction of Palestinian economy through various means, settlement policies have made the Palestinian economy dependent on them in every aspect. They seized land, looted its resources such as water and natural gas, and established economic factories, utilizing Palestinian labor in these factories. The democratic transition process necessitates political development that can harness these resources which is what weakened the Palestinian economy.

Furthermore, the settlement worked to fragment Palestinian territories by establishing military checkpoints, restricting movement, separating West Bank governorates from the Gaza Strip, preventing the import and export of goods to Palestinian areas, closing border crossings, and controlling them by the occupation and preventing the movement of Palestinian commercial trucks between governorates. Additionally, the Palestinian Authority was denied customs revenue, and industrial and commercial areas along the seam zones were frozen, this

resulted in the disruption of productive forces, causing the unemployment rate to rise above 60% and an increase in poverty levels, with consequential negative impacts on the future of the independent Palestinian state.

Conclusion

Based on the above, we can see that the Israeli settlement is based on settlement policies consisting of well-thought-out programs and plans, targeting all aspects of Palestinian life, including political, security, demographic, and economic aspects. Consequently, these settlement policies have created numerous obstacles to the democratic transition process in Palestine. This has been achieved through the huge number and severity of implications it had on the pillars of the democratic transition. The settlement has affected the components of the Palestinian democratic transition and worked to thwart it. It has strengthened its security control over the land, divided Palestinian geography into separate regions, impeded communication between them by establishing military checkpoints, and violated the fundamental pillar of the democratic process, which is security. The settlement policies have undermined the right to live in security and safety due to the actions of settlers.

On the demographic level, settlement policies are based on displacing Palestinians from their land, using various means, including sticks and carrots. They used power to displace people from their lands, and offered financial compensation to encourage Palestinians to abandon their residential areas, particularly in regions of religious importance like Jerusalem and Hebron. Additionally, the denial of the right of return for Palestinian refugees represents a demographic challenge to the Palestinian demographic future in light of Israeli policies that seek to displace Palestinians from their land and gather settlers from different parts of the world in settlements established on Palestinian lands.

On the economic level, settlement policies worked on plundering fundamental resources, which are the cornerstone of the development process, such as water, natural gas, and agricultural lands. The Israeli entity has also deepened the Palestinian economy's dependence on the Israeli economy by providing employment opportunities for Palestinian workers within the occupied territories. Additionally, the occupation's control over all crossings and Palestinian borders has resulted in the Palestinian economy's inability to achieve independence.

These settlement policies work to eliminate any opportunity for the establishment of an independent Palestinian state built on democratic foundations. As a result, the Palestinian democratic transition process faces destructive repercussions caused by the settlement eroding the foundations of this transition.

Therefore, the researcher arrived at the following conclusions:

1. The settlement project relies on two main dimensions: security dimension and political dimension. On the security level, settlements represent the first line of defense for the occupying state, on the political level, these settlements aim to divide the land and exclude the idea of establishing an independent Palestinian state, thereby undermining any prospects for a democratic transition in Palestinian territories.
2. The settlement project aims to displace Palestinians from their land and deprive them of their basic rights, they confiscated the land, plundered its resources and fragmented geographical, social and political unity through all kinds of settlement practices such as checkpoints, apartheid wall and settlement outposts.
3. The impact of Israeli settlement cannot be measured by the size of regions it controls but rather by the destructive repercussions it has had on the on the components of the democratic process and its role in impeding the actual development of Palestinian democracy on the ground.
4. The Israeli settlement destroys the dream of establishing an independent Palestinian state with its capital in Jerusalem through settlement policies aimed at creating a new reality that becomes a de facto during negotiations, which is impossible to change.

In light of the previous conclusions, the researcher recommends:

1. Developing a Palestinian strategy that highlights Israeli settlement violations of international law and presenting them to international institutions to expose the effects of settlements on the future of the Palestinian state.
2. Reinforcing Palestinian national unity to confront the settlement project and fostering a cohesive Palestinian community wherever it exists, claiming its rights on international forums, with the most important of these rights being the right of return for Palestinian refugees.
3. Developing a Palestinian strategy to confront the most important impediments to democratic development, which have been undermined by settlements, including land confiscation and the plundering of resources, most notably, water.
4. Reinforcing Palestinian presence on their land to confront settlement projects by executing comprehensive development plans, initiating projects, and attracting Palestinian capital from abroad to support the Palestinian economy in the pursuit of economic independence from the Israeli entity.

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