

Avoidance of Political Activism Among Palestinian Youth in the West Bank

What Factors Influence the Types of Activism that Young People Engage with?

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Methods

I conducted one month of fieldwork at an educational Center in Hebron, West Bank. During that time I collected 48 questionnaires and conducted 9 interviews at the Educational Center and at Hebron University. The target group was young, educated Palestinians from middle class families between the age of 18-34 years old.

Findings

Environmental

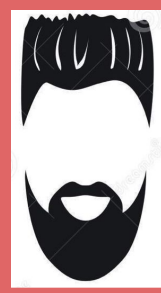
Politics:

- ❑ Participants were reluctant to mention participation in political activism as it is perceived as synonymous with violence.
- ❑ Participants were reluctant to participate in political peace activism as it symbolises acceptance of Israeli occupation (normalisation).

Violence:

[Have you experienced discrimination?]

"It's much, unfortunately, unacceptable in our society. [...] If I am part of an organisation that is interested in peace, it means that I accept normalisation [...] People are scared of participation in normalisation."



"Because I don't remember, probably not. [...] She could just walk through, but they had to search my bag, check my ID. That was like the only situation I can think of [...] And once they attacked our house during midnight [...] they just said it was for security reasons."



From the questionnaires:

- ❑ 35 % had experienced discrimination.
- ❑ 50 % had experienced violence from the Israeli.

Allen (2008) argues that violence became normal, part of everyday life after intifada in 2002. The fact that there is a higher number of participants who recall violence from Israeli than discriminating events, suggests that violence is still to some extent normal.

Educational Opportunities

- ❑ Favourable choice of activism is non political volunteer work.

Education:

Intellectual resistance: According to several interviewees, university is a place where political activism is visible everywhere, and if someone does not want to take part in politics, one needs to actively avoid it. Some interviewees mention that they were active in politics at university, however, not before or after university.

Youth Initiatives:

60 % had taken part in an activist group and the same number felt it is empowering. Based on the points mentioned below the activism they practice seem to be non-political. From the interviews and questionnaires the favourable choice of activism practised seem to be helping the local community through volunteering at NGOs. According to Norman (2009) political goals are often prioritized over individual voices, this could be one of the reasons why youth avoid politics altogether.

Main reasons for participating in an activist group:

- ★ Developing as a person
- ★ Helping
- ★ Empowering others

Limitation & Opportunities

- ❑ There is a lack of future optimism, however, the young seems to avoid violence practise.

Marginalisation & Empowerment:

50 % of the questionnaire participants do not trust the Palestinian authority. From the interviews, five participants do not trust them or trust their limitations. Oosterom (2018) argues that in some occasions when youth lack trust in governmental institutions, informal youth actions such as helping the local community are practiced, this mirrors my own results.

Future prospects & Hopelessness:

70 % of Hebron university students believed it is harder to find jobs because they are Palestinians. The interviewees highlighted that they believe it is hard to find jobs and expressed that they were lucky to have a job. 80 % have a desire to move to another country which correlates with the lack of work opportunities.

Future optimism seem to be lacking among the participants as 50 % do not wish for a peace agreement and over 70 % wish for a singular Palestinian state. According to Helsing (2006), lack of future optimism and marginalisation often leads to an increase in violence, however, the results suggest that young people dislike violence practise. As of that, I would argue that NGOs function as an alternative space where one can feel empowered and important for the local community without needing to deal with the political situation.

Taboo of participation in peaceful and violent political activism...

Themes:

- Palestinian Youth
- Organisation
- Activism

Conclusion

From my research I will conclude that all the factors combined suggest that young middle-class Palestinians actively choose to avoid political activism because of the danger and taboo of political engagement, as well as the lack of future prospects and trust in governmental institutions. Instead the findings suggest that these factors influence youth to practise local non-political activism, by helping the local community through volunteering in an NGO.

Acknowledgements

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Future prospects

Concerning future research on this specific area, I would like to highlight the importance of gaining a better understanding of the taboo of political peace activism locally in Palestine, as I believe this is a major limitation of gaining peace within Palestine and Israel.

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