



Global Expertise. Local Solutions.
Sustainable Democracy.

Elections in Palestine

2017 Local Elections

Frequently Asked Questions

Middle East and North Africa

International Foundation for Electoral Systems

2011 Crystal Drive | Floor 10 | Arlington, VA 22202 | www.IFES.org

May 9, 2017

Frequently Asked Questions

- When is Election Day?..... 1
- Who are citizens voting for on Election Day? 1
- When did Palestinians last vote in local elections? 1
- What is the political environment? 1
- Which areas will hold elections?..... 2
- Who can vote in the local elections? 2
- How many registered voters are there? 2
- What form of voter ID will voters need to bring with them on Election Day? 2
- Which legal framework regulates elections?..... 3
- What is the electoral system for local elections? 3
- Are there reserved seats for women? What is the gender balance within the candidate list? 3
- Who is competing in these elections? 3
- What will ballots look like and how should they be marked? 4
- What is the election management body? What are its powers? 4
- What are the rules for campaigning? 4
- Is out-of-country voting allowed?..... 4
- How will voters with disabilities cast their ballots?..... 4
- What technology will be used?..... 5
- How many polling places are set up on Election Day? 5
- Will the election management body use a media center? 5
- Where is voting, counting and tabulation held?..... 5
- Who will observe during Election Day? How can they get accreditation? 5
- When will official results be announced? 6
- How will election disputes be adjudicated? 6
- How will Election Day security be ensured? 6
- Resources..... 7

Disclosure:
These FAQs reflect decisions made by the Palestinian elections authorities as of May 9, 2017, to the best of our knowledge. This document does not represent any IFES policy or technical recommendations.

When is Election Day?

Palestine will hold elections on May 13 for municipal and village councils. Security forces will vote in advance on May 11.

Who are citizens voting for on Election Day?

On May 13, voters will elect 3,849 members of local government councils (municipal and village councils) in the West Bank.¹ The other units of local government include governorates, joint services councils, project committees and refugee camps, but voters will not be electing governing bodies for these institutions.

When did Palestinians last vote in local elections?

Palestine held its first local government council elections under the established Palestinian Authority in 2005. However, because of political challenges, these elections were never finalized and were postponed indefinitely for over 100 councils.

In 2010, the Palestinian Authority's Council of Ministers (cabinet) called for a new round of local elections. Hamas, the *de facto* faction authority in Gaza, rejected the call and the election process proceeded only for councils in the West Bank. However, the largest Palestinian faction, Fatah, could not agree on its lists of candidates and pressured the Council of Ministers into cancelling elections.

Following a Supreme Court ruling against the cancellation, the Council of Ministers scheduled elections for July 2011, but these were also postponed to 2012, when elections were only held in the West Bank. Authorities in Gaza have continued to reject elections until a power-sharing political agreement is reached between Fatah and Hamas.

What is the political environment?

The councils elected in 2012 had a four-year mandate and following their expiration, the Council of Ministers called for a new round of elections. In August 2016, Hamas accepted to proceed with elections, but the process was halted again over whether the courts in Gaza had the authority to cancel candidates' lists, since the Palestinian Authority that rules the West Bank does not recognize Hamas' judicial authority in Gaza. After a four-month interruption, the cabinet called for elections in January 2017; this call was again rejected by Hamas, which said that polls should be organized as part of a broader power-sharing political agreement between Fatah and Hamas. Consequently, the Palestinian Authority's cabinet decided in February 2017 that elections would be held in the "northern provinces" (West Bank) and postponed indefinitely in the "southern provinces" (Gaza).

¹ These seats include Jerusalem. However, due to the restrictions imposed by Israel on Palestinians engaging in political activities in the city, the 280 seats allocated to Jerusalem may be voided.

Which areas will hold elections?

Palestine is *de facto* divided into three areas, divided geographically or by the Israeli-built wall: The West Bank, Gaza and Jerusalem. This year's elections will only be held in the West Bank. Hamas, which rules Gaza, rejected elections and will not allow polling on the coastal strip. Local elections in the city of Jerusalem are suspended indefinitely, since the Israeli authorities do not allow Palestinian political activities in the city. Nevertheless, some neighborhoods in Jerusalem such as Kufr Aqab and the Shuafat refugee camps, which are cut off from the city by the separation wall and settlement construction, may conduct elections.

Elections have been called for 391 councils: 116 municipal and 275 village councils. However, polling will be held only in 145 councils. In 181 councils, only a single electoral list is registered so the seats will be awarded without polling. In 65 councils, no list is registered, which means that the mandate of the current council will be extended until the next round of local elections.

Who can vote in the local elections?

According to the Local Elections law, the electorate is comprised of Palestinians who are 18 years old and registered on the voters list in localities where they have been residents for at least six months. The local elections law does not define who is considered a Palestinian. Instead, this definition is by virtue of the voter registration borrowed from the General Elections Law, since Palestine does not have a citizenship law. To be considered a Palestinian, one must be born (or his/her parents or grandparents) in historical Palestine as defined in the British Mandate era or married to a Palestinian and not be a citizen of Israel. While Jerusalemite Palestinians are eligible to vote, they will not have the opportunity to do so as Israel forbids Palestinian electoral activities in Jerusalem. Voting is also not organized for Palestinians in Israeli or Palestinian prisons.

How many registered voters are there?

The current 2017 voters list for the West Bank consists of 1,134,636 voters. However, the final voters list for local elections will not include voters from councils in the Jerusalem governorate since they are annexed by Israel. The final voter list will also not feature residents of refugee camps.

What form of voter ID will voters need to bring with them on Election Day?

Voters can vote with Palestinian-issued ID cards. Residents of areas in Jerusalem that are annexed by Israel can present an Israeli-issued ID. However, Israel does not allow Palestinians residing in Jerusalem to vote.

Which legal framework regulates elections?

Local elections are conducted under Law 5 of the 1996 Election Law for Local Councils (with amendments passed in 2004, 2005 and 2012). Additional presidential decrees and guidelines of the Central Election Commission complement the primary legal framework.

What is the electoral system for local elections?

The 2005 amendments to the 1996 Election Law for Local Councils replaced the block vote system with a closed proportional representation system. This means that instead of voting for individual candidates, voters will mark an electoral list of candidates. The ranking of the candidates on the list is set during the nomination period and it is not subject to voters' preferences. Voters can only vote for one list.

Only lists that win more than eight percent of total votes are eligible to receive seats in the local council. Distribution of seats will be determined by the [Sainte-Laguë formula](#), taking into consideration women and Christian quotas. The quota for seats reserved for Christians is assigned by presidential decree in 10 local councils in the West Bank.²

Are there reserved seats for women? What is the gender balance within the candidate list?

The women's quota is defined by the law. It ensures that at least two women are elected to councils with up to 13 seats and three women are elected to councils with up to 15 seats. The law also requires that all lists should include a woman among the first five candidates, and at least one woman should be among the remainder candidates on the list. According to the final lists of candidates, 26 percent of candidates are women, and two lists have women-only candidates while eight lists out of 536 were headed by women.

Who is competing in these elections?

The political parties Hamas, Islamic Jihad and Popular Front for Liberation of Palestine are boycotting elections. As in previous elections, Fatah, the main party representing the Palestinian Authority, is facing challenges registering unified lists across the West Bank and has registered unified lists in only 10 of the 27 largest local councils.³ The second largest faction which has registered lists is the Democratic Front for Liberation of Palestine (DFLP),⁴ a Marxist-Leninist secular party. The Palestinian National Initiative is

² The Christian quota is as follows: Ramallah and Bethlehem, eight out of a total 15 seats; Beit Sahour and Beit Jala 10 out of a total 13 seats; Birzeit, seven out of a total 13 seats; Al-Zababdah, seven out of a total 11 seats; Aboud and Ain Areek, five out of a total nine seats; Jifna, seven out of a total nine seats; Burqin, one out of a total 11 seats.

³ Which include over 7,000 voters.

⁴ DFLP registered lists in five of 27 largest councils.

the third main party running its own lists in some localities and has a left-to-center ideology. As a result, most of the councils will witness a petition between electoral lists which do not have a clear partisan affiliation.

What will ballots look like and how should they be marked?

Ballots will include only the name and logo of the electoral list. In case of coalition lists, only the name of the list will be on the ballot, without the logo. Voters may vote for only one list.

What is the election management body? What are its powers?

While elections are called by the Palestinian Authority's cabinet, they are held under complete authority of an independent electoral institution, the Central Elections Commission (CEC). The process is managed by the chief electoral officer and its headquarters staff who are located in Al Bireh near Ramallah. The CEC also has offices that manage field operations in each of the 10 West Bank governorates.

What are the rules for campaigning?

The official campaign period starts on April 29 following the publication of the electoral lists. The campaign ends on May 11. During the 24 hours before polling, candidates are not allowed to campaign. While the Central Election Commission (CEC) has the legal mandate to monitor both campaign spending and breaches in campaign rules, it does not have enforcement powers beyond retaining the 500 Jordanian Dinar (approximately 700 USD) that each list must deposit to run for elections.

Campaigning is not allowed in mosques or churches, near hospitals or other governmental premises. Candidates may not use vehicles that belong to government institutions during their campaigning. Incitement is forbidden, as is campaigning by religious preachers.

The CEC, in cooperation with Palestine TV, will arrange an electoral program during which each list of candidates will have an opportunity to broadcast a promotional video. Article 29 of the local election law stipulates that official media should provide equal opportunities to all lists.

Is out-of-country voting allowed?

There is no out-of-country voting for Palestinians living abroad.

How will voters with disabilities cast their ballots?

Polling centers will be equipped with ramps for people with mobile disabilities. In cooperation with the Palestinian General Union of People with Disability, the Central Election Commission (CEC) identified 15 polling centers where it will pilot special procedures, including the use of braille templates for the

visually impaired. In addition, the CEC website is equipped with accessible features for visually impaired voters.

What technology will be used?

Voters can check their registration online and the Central Election Commission is using advanced information technologies for management of the voters list, registration of candidates and delimitation of electoral districts. However, there are no automated voting or automated voter verification systems in the polling stations.

How many polling places are set up on Election Day?

According to the Central Election Commission (CEC), an estimated 461 polling centers will be set up. The CEC confirmed that an estimated 170 polling supervisors and 7,500 poll workers will be operating on Election Day with an average of three to four poll workers per polling station based on whether a polling center is comprised of only one station or more.

Will the election management body use a media center?

The Central Election Commission (CEC) will set up a Media Center, as it has in every previous election. The center will be open from May 9 to May 14. The Media Center will be the focal point of communication between the CEC, journalists and the public regarding the parliamentary elections. The Media Center will be located at Gloria Hall, Istiklal Garden in Al Bireh.

Accredited media, observers, agents, CEC staff, and guests of the CEC will be allowed to visit the Media Center. Visitors must show accreditation cards to gain access and can apply for accreditation through the CEC.

Through the Media Center, the CEC will be able to provide timely information concerning the electoral process and announce election results.

Where is voting, counting and tabulation held?

Voting is conducted in polling stations and voters can only vote in person. Counting will be held in the same polling stations, immediately after the close of the polls. Results of the polling stations will be tabulated first in the polling center and then transmitted to the CEC's district office.

Who will observe during Election Day? How can they get accreditation?

Elections can be observed by journalists, Palestinian organizations, up to two representatives of electoral lists per constituency and international observers. In March 2017, the Central Election

Commission (CEC) called for applications to observe elections. The application is a simple process and the CEC is accrediting observers with very few restrictions.

When will official results be announced?

Polling stations open at 7 a.m. and close at 7 p.m. on Election Day. Preliminary elections results will be announced by the Central Election Commission on May 14. The complete results will be published on May 16. These results are subject to the appeal process, which ends on May 24.

How will election disputes be adjudicated?

Electoral disputes in local elections are processed in several phases and at several levels. The Election Law for Local Councils provides a framework for challenges and appeals in three stages of the electoral process: registration of voters, registration of candidates and election results. All the disputes are first sent to the Central Election Commission for review. In the past, in the case that the CEC rejected the complaint, plaintiffs could appeal to the Court of First Instance, which adjudicated all appeals within five days. However, in January 2017, the president issued a decree establishing specialized courts for disputes in local elections; these courts will be adjudicating electoral cases for the first time. The three electoral courts in the West Bank will be based in Ramallah, Nablus and Bethlehem.

How will Election Day security be ensured?

Security of the electoral process is ensured by Palestinian police, to the extent possible. Deployment of the police is challenging because of the movement restrictions imposed by Israeli military forces, including areas of the West Bank that are not accessible to the Palestinian police or because the location of Israeli settlements restricts the use of some roads by Palestinians.

Resources

- [Central Election Commission: Electoral laws and administrative regulations](#)
- [Central Election Commission: Electoral schedule and key deadlines](#)