

Assessment of
April 2026 Municipal Elections
in the
Occupied Palestinian Territories

Final Report

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April 2026 Municipal Elections in the Occupied Palestinian Territories

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

CEC	Central Elections Commission
CERD	International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination
DFLP	Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICHR	Independent Commission for Human Rights
MoLG	Ministry of Local Government
MoI	Ministry of Interior
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
OPT	Occupied Palestinian Territories
PCBS	Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics
PFLP	Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine
PLC	Palestinian Legislative Council
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organization
PNC	Palestinian National Council
PPP	Palestinian People's Party
PPSF	Palestinian Popular Struggle Front
PSF	Palestinian Security Forces

Executive Summary

Palestinian local elections were held April 25, 2026, in an exceptionally difficult political, humanitarian, and economic climate shaped by the ongoing ramifications of the war in Gaza, escalating tensions in the West Bank, and a prolonged absence of national elections. Regional tensions and the war between Iran, the U.S., and Israel contributed to a volatile and insecure environment. The vote took place amid a sharp deterioration in human rights and security conditions. Restrictions on movement, settler violence, intimidation and arbitrary arrests, economic decline, election by acclamation and political monopoly in the West Bank heavily constrained the democratic process. The elections were noncompetitive in more than half of its constituencies. Coupled with the dire humanitarian and security conditions in the Gaza Strip, the democratic process was not fully realized across the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT).

Despite these challenges, the April local elections represented an effort to preserve the limited avenues for democratic participation in the OPT, as local elections remain the only recurring electoral process available there, other than trade unions and student council elections.

In Gaza, the humanitarian crisis and destruction resulting from the war created extraordinary operational challenges. Nonetheless, holding elections in the municipality of Deir al-Balah – the first in Gaza in two decades – represented a symbolic step toward reviving democratic processes and maintaining institutional links between Gaza and the West Bank.

Following an April 1, 2026, invitation from the Palestinian Central Elections Commission (CEC), The Carter Center conducted a remote assessment surrounding the April 25 electoral process for municipal and village council elections. The Center’s election assessment team consisted of two international experts working remotely, three national experts in the West Bank, and one in Gaza. Security constraints due to the ongoing conflict between the U.S., Israel, and Iran prevented international travel to the West Bank and Gaza and, therefore, prevented a formal international observation of the electoral process.

The Carter Center team assessed the electoral process against Palestine’s legal and election administration framework as well as its international commitments. National experts conducted field visits to Deir al-Balah municipality in Gaza and to electoral districts in the north and south of the West Bank, and around Ramallah. The team met with individuals and groups in the West Bank and Gaza in person and online, including CEC staff, Palestinian Authority officials, candidates from various lists and parties, and representatives of leading Palestinian civil society organizations. Given the small size of the team, the limited scope of the mission, and the remote nature of its international experts, The Carter Center did not formally observe the electoral process.

The political context surrounding the elections was marked by controversy about amendments introduced through Decree-Law No. 23 of 2025 Concerning Elections for Local Authorities. The law initially required candidates to affirm commitment to the “international obligations and international legitimacy resolutions” of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), a provision widely interpreted as obliging candidates to accept the framework of the Oslo Accords. Following intense criticism from many political parties and civil society groups, the clause was partially amended, but only during the electoral process itself.

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The revised amendment read: “An affirmation from the list’s candidates accepting nomination in the list, and their commitment to the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian People, its political and national program, and the relevant decisions of international legitimacy,” effectively removing the controversial term “international obligations,” while still mandating acceptance of the PLO’s platform and resolutions.¹

The amended language remained controversial and failed to fully address the criticism. Factions including Hamas, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), the Palestinian People’s Party (PPP), and the Palestinian Popular Struggle Front (PPSF) chose not to officially participate in the elections, although some individuals affiliated with those parties ran as independents. As a result, Fatah was the only political party to compete officially in the polls; it presented 67 candidate lists.

The late adoption and subsequent amendment of the municipal election law, Decree-Law No. 23 of 2025, undermined legal certainty and reduced the time available for voter education and institutional preparation. The law also introduced significant changes to the electoral system, replacing the previous closed-list proportional representation system with an open-list proportional system for municipal councils and a limited-vote majoritarian system for village councils, allowing voters to select up to five names from the municipal council lists, even if they are not in the order presented. While this electoral system expanded voter choice over political parties’ candidate-nomination rankings, it also complicated the voting process and may have contributed to a comparatively high rate of invalid ballots.

An open-list system creates increased competition within lists and favors prominent candidates who can run well-financed campaigns. The new voting system, and the calculation and allocation of seats, coupled with quota and double-quota categories for women and Christians in certain locations, made it difficult for some stakeholders to understand how votes translated into seats.

The widespread use of “acclamation” – with councils automatically appointed if only one list competes – significantly reduced electoral competition. Although elections were planned for 420 local authorities, polling ultimately was conducted in only 183 councils. Although appointment by acclamation has been criticized in previous elections, it continued and expanded to additional locations, including in Ramallah and Nablus – two of the West Bank’s largest municipalities –where candidates were elected uncontested through single-list arrangements.² This deprived hundreds of thousands of voters of an opportunity to cast ballots. The persistence of acclamation reflected the influence of political negotiations, family structures, and efforts to avoid competition, particularly by Fatah and influential local actors.

The CEC generally retained strong public confidence and demonstrated substantial operational capacity despite financial and logistical constraints. The CEC implemented broad voter education programs using traditional media, social media, outreach sessions, and

¹ The revised amendment was issued by presidential decree on Jan. 27, 2026, amending articles 16.2 and 19.1.

² A lack of political competition in some locations – mostly smaller towns – resulted in the election by acclamation of candidate lists in 185 locations in the West Bank in the 2021-2022 municipal elections. Elections were not held in Gaza at that time.

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accessibility initiatives, including Braille materials and sign-language content. However, the compressed electoral calendar and introduction of a new electoral system limited the effectiveness of these efforts. The elections were conducted amid a significant funding gap, with the CEC initially reporting a shortfall of approximately \$3.6 million, and later noting in its June 10 meeting that the funding gap had decreased to \$1.8 million due to cost savings.

The nomination process revealed organizational improvements in the CEC's election administration; however, serious concerns persist regarding political freedoms. The CEC introduced procedures that allowed candidates to correct deficiencies in their applications before final deadlines, reducing the number of rejected lists compared with previous elections. At the same time, the Carter Center election assessment team received multiple reports of intimidation, pressure, and interference by security services intended to discourage or prevent certain candidates from competing. Allegations included threats against candidates, withholding administrative documents required for nomination, and pressure to withdraw competing lists. Such practices undermined the right to stand for election and weakened confidence in the fairness of the process.

The campaign period lasted only 14 days and unfolded amid severe Israeli restrictions on movement in the West Bank, including increased checkpoints, road closures, and security barriers, also in response to the U.S., Israel, and Iran conflict. Campaign activity focused largely on issues related to local service delivery, such as waste management, electricity, and water provision. The limited role of political parties and the predominance of family and clan-based lists further localized the campaign environment. The Carter Center also received reports regarding continued campaigning during the legally mandated silence period, pressure against organizers of public debates, and the participation of public officials and security personnel in campaign activities, all of which raise concerns about the neutrality of state institutions.

Election day in the West Bank was generally calm, though national observers, who had access to all steps of the process, reported several irregularities. The Carter Center deployed a limited number of teams on election day. The Center was unable to conduct a comprehensive assessment of election-day processes; however, its observations were aligned with those of national observer groups. Campaigning continued around polling stations despite legal prohibitions, and the widespread practice of "assisted voting" under claims of illiteracy raised concerns regarding voter secrecy and undue influence. Crowding outside polling centers affected accessibility, particularly for women, elderly voters, and people with disabilities. Localized tensions and isolated incidents occurred in several governorates, while Israeli military activity in some areas also affected the electoral environment.

The elections in Deir al-Balah in Gaza faced extraordinary operational and humanitarian challenges. Due to the destruction of infrastructure and blockade conditions, the CEC relied on locally sourced materials, including locally manufactured ballot boxes and temporary polling centers constructed from prefabricated tents. While the CEC had planned to engage a private security company to secure the polls in Gaza, security arrangements became contentious after the authorities there assumed responsibility for election-day security. This appeared to contribute to voter apprehension. Although approximately 70,000 voters were eligible to cast a ballot, according to the CEC, turnout in Deir al-Balah reached only 22.8% – significantly below turnout in the West Bank (56%) – reflecting the possible impact of continued insecurity, humanitarian hardship, displacement, and weak political mobilization.

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Despite difficult conditions, observers indicated that the results broadly reflected voters' preferences, although overcrowding, accessibility limitations, and procedural irregularities were noted.

The tabulation process was completed relatively quickly, and preliminary results were published even earlier than legally required. The CEC's electronic tabulation system incorporated several verification stages, though technical errors, difficulties linked to calculating the different quotas, and software issues affected a small number of council tallies and required corrections after the initial publication of results. The technical errors appeared to be well managed and did not elicit comments from stakeholders. The assessment team noted that transparency during tabulation could be improved, particularly regarding public access to procedures.

The 2026 local council elections law provided voters, candidates, and list representatives with the right to challenge decisions of the CEC and election results before the Elections Court, which was established by Decree No. 7 of 2025. Following the announcement of preliminary results on April 26, the Elections Court received 60 appeals; it rejected 56 and upheld four. Of the rejected cases, 32 were dismissed on procedural grounds, primarily because they were not filed by an official list representative or a licensed lawyer.

One innovation was the extension of the right to challenge election results to voters, candidates, and list representatives, in line with a recommendation from the 2017 EU Election Expert Mission. Of the four successful appeals, three led to vote recounts, two of which changed the allocation of seats, while one confirmed the original outcome. In another case, a seat won by a deceased candidate was awarded to the next highest-polling candidate on the same list.

Women's participation increased numerically due to the expanded quota provisions under the new law. Women represented nearly 30% of all candidates (an increase from 27% in the 2021-22 elections) and won approximately 26% of seats.³ While the total number of women candidates and women elected to office increased, most women were elected through quotas rather than direct competition, and meaningful political influence remained limited by patriarchal social structures, clan dynamics, and the weak role of political parties.

Similarly, youth participation remained limited despite reforms lowering the minimum candidacy age from 25 to 23. Economic hardship, lack of political support structures, and entrenched leadership networks continued to restrict youth representation. Although youth were reportedly highly active as volunteers and observers, they remained significantly underrepresented among elected officials, and efforts to promote youth candidacy or leadership were not evident to the assessment team.

People with disabilities benefited from CEC efforts to provide accessible information and voting materials. Nevertheless, significant physical and procedural barriers remained, particularly regarding inaccessible polling stations and inconsistent provision of independent voting assistance.

³ In comparison, women won 22% of the seats in the first round and 19% of the seats in the second round of the 2021-22 municipal elections.

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Overall, the 2026 Palestinian local elections demonstrated both the resilience of its electoral institutions and the significant structural, political, and humanitarian constraints affecting democratic participation in Palestine. While the elections provided an important opportunity for limited political engagement under exceptionally difficult circumstances, serious concerns remain regarding political pluralism, legal stability, electoral competition, and the broader environment for fundamental rights and freedoms.

In Deir al-Balah, the newly elected council was established smoothly and began implementing an emergency service plan focused on maintaining essential infrastructure and services while engaging with humanitarian actors and international organizations to identify future needs.

Elsewhere in Gaza, the security and humanitarian situation deteriorated significantly following the elections. Israeli military control and movement restrictions expanded, reducing the area available for civilian life and further exacerbating shortages of food, water, medicine, electricity, and communications. These conditions pose serious challenges to governance and make the organization of future credible elections highly uncertain.

The postelection period also was marked by the Eighth General Congress of the Palestinian National Liberation Movement (Fatah) on May 14-16, 2026, during which President Mahmoud Abbas was reelected unanimously as party president. In his address, Abbas highlighted the successful conduct of the local elections and outlined plans for a new constitution, revised electoral legislation, and a sequence of future electoral processes, including elections to the Palestinian National Council (PNC), the parliament or Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC), and the presidency. However, ongoing conflict, movement restrictions, and the humanitarian situation pose major obstacles to implementing this electoral road map. As of the drafting of this report, Palestinian Authority officials reportedly are planning both PNC and PLC elections in late 2026 or early 2027. A referendum on an interim constitution may be postponed.

Modest improvements in implementing the 2022 Carter Center assessment mission recommendations were made. Two recommendations were fully implemented: lowering the electoral threshold (from 8% to 5%) and imposing ceilings on campaign expenses. Two other recommendations were partially implemented: lowering candidacy age (from 25 to 23) and increasing the women's quota.

Conclusions and recommendations

- Strengthening the credibility and inclusiveness of Palestinian electoral processes requires coordinated action among national institutions, electoral authorities, political actors, and international stakeholders. Concerted efforts by these actors, including Israel and the international community, will be needed to ensure that conditions in the OPT are conducive to the exercise of Palestinian political rights.
- The Palestinian Authority should prioritize safeguarding the integrity of the electoral process by preventing interference in candidate nominations, upholding freedom of expression, and ensuring a secure environment that allows voters and candidates to participate without intimidation. Expanding local elections, including in Gaza where

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feasible, and ensuring adequate resources for the Central Elections Commission (CEC) also are critical to maintaining public confidence and increasing participation.

- The future legislative body should reinforce the electoral framework through inclusive, consultative reforms that align with international standards. Key priorities include maintaining legal stability ahead of elections, reducing barriers to candidacy – particularly for women and youth – enhancing transparency in campaign finance, and addressing gaps in representation through mechanisms such as by-elections and validation procedures in uncontested races.
- The CEC should focus on enhancing transparency, technical reliability, and accessibility. This includes publishing procedures in advance, improving the transparency of results by publishing online polling station-level results, and expanding measures to facilitate participation by people with disabilities. Increased voter education also will be beneficial to ensure public understanding and trust, particularly around newly introduced changes to the electoral system.
- Political parties have a key role to play in promoting inclusive participation, particularly by moving beyond quota compliance to institutionalize meaningful opportunities for women and young people.
- Finally, the international community should support conditions conducive to credible elections by enabling humanitarian access, facilitating the delivery of electoral materials, and ensuring freedom of movement and adequate resources for electoral operations, particularly in Gaza. Under international law, Israel is designated as an occupying power and has a responsibility to adhere to international humanitarian law. Israel should halt violations of the ceasefire and withdraw Israeli forces from the Gaza Strip, according to U.N. Security Council Resolution 2803.
- Across all efforts, stakeholders should reaffirm Palestinians' fundamental political rights, including participation in periodic, genuine elections, and support the conditions necessary for inclusive, credible, and widely accepted electoral outcomes.

Introduction

Following an April 1, 2026, invitation from the Palestinian Central Elections Commission (CEC), The Carter Center conducted a remote assessment surrounding the April 25 electoral process for municipal and village council elections. The Center's election assessment team consisted of two international experts working remotely and three national experts deployed in the West Bank and one national expert in Gaza. Security constraints due to the ongoing conflict between the U.S., Israel, and Iran prevented international travel to the Occupied Palestinian Territories and therefore, a formal international observation of the electoral process was not possible.

In lieu of a formal international observation mission, the assessment team examined the electoral process against Palestine's legal and election administration framework as well as its international commitments. The team assessed the legal framework for the elections; the campaign, candidate nominations, and the work of the CEC; participatory rights, including for women and youth; tabulation; and electoral dispute resolution.

Carter Center-affiliated national experts conducted field visits to Deir al-Balah municipality in Gaza as well as to electoral districts in the northern and southern West Bank and around Ramallah. The team started its work on April 10 and ended on May 28. The assessment members met with individuals and groups in the West Bank and Gaza in person and online, including CEC staff, Palestinian Authority officials, candidates from various lists and parties, and representatives of leading civil society organizations.

Given its small size, limited scope, and the remote nature of its international experts, the assessment team did not formally observe the electoral process or conduct a comprehensive assessment of election-day voting and counting processes. The Carter Center is unable to make a comprehensive assessment of all aspects of the electoral process.

General Background

The April 2026 local elections took place amid ongoing and profound repercussions of the war in Gaza, which left most of the Gaza Strip devastated, as well as the growing spillover effects of the conflict in the West Bank. This included the displacement of thousands of Palestinians, escalating violence against Palestinian communities, increased land confiscations, home demolitions, and settlement expansion, alongside continued Israeli violations of the October 2025 Gaza ceasefire and persistent impunity for abuses committed by settlers and Israeli security forces. Regional tensions and the war between Iran, the U.S., and Israel contributed to a volatile and insecure environment.

In its January 2026 thematic report, the U.N.'s Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) documented the drastic deterioration of the human rights situation in the occupied West Bank, marked by the expanded use of unlawful force, arbitrary detention, torture, restrictions on movement and media freedoms, and repression of civil society.⁴ The

⁴ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/thematic-reports/thematic-report-israels-discriminatory-administration-occupied-west-bank>

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report highlighted the “continuation and escalation of settler violence, often carried out with the acquiescence, support, or participation of Israeli security forces.”

At the same time, Israel’s ongoing war against Hezbollah in Lebanon and Iran contributed to heightened tensions, making these elections notable for taking place not only under the occupation but also amid ongoing regional conflicts of varying intensity and scope, whose impact on fundamental rights and freedoms cannot be overstated. According to the International Labour Organization, Israel has strangled the West Bank’s economy, notably by suspending clearance-tax revenue transfers, causing delays and cuts in public expenditures, including salaries for public staff. Unemployment rates were high in the West Bank (31.7% for men, 33.7% for women), GDP contracted by 17% in 2025, and the Palestinian Authority is facing one of its worst financial crises.⁵

In this context, the 2026 local elections reflected an effort to preserve Palestinians’ right to democratic political participation, including for voters in Gaza’s only municipality where elections were considered feasible. While Gaza had not witnessed elections for 20 years, and no legislative or presidential elections had been held in the Palestinian territories during the same period, local elections in the West Bank continued to take place with relative regularity, serving as the primary avenue for Palestinian citizens there to engage in public life. Municipal elections were last held in the West Bank in 2021-2022.

The organization of local elections in Gaza for the first time since the 2006 elections for the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC), even though confined to a single municipality, marked a symbolic step toward reviving democratic processes across Palestine and encouraging public participation in the OPT. The elections in Deir al-Balah were particularly significant as they demonstrated the possibility of restoring periodic electoral practices across the OPT and reaffirming the political and institutional connection between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.

Subnational elections, which usually focus on local concerns and access to services, often are regarded as less politically important than general elections. The stakes of the 2026 local elections exceeded local concerns; they were widely viewed as an indicator of a trajectory toward electoral processes anticipated later this year. This includes elections for the PLO’s national council (Palestinian National Council or PNC) in November 2026, and possibly the PLC⁶ and the presidency. The adoption of a new interim constitution for the State of Palestine and of electoral laws, including a long-anticipated Political Parties Law, also figure in the 2026 reform agenda.

⁵ <https://www.ilo.org/resource/news/ilo-warns-deepening-employment-and-livelihood-crisis-west-bank-due-two-year>

⁶ The PLC was dissolved in 2018 after 12 years of inactivity since the schism with Hamas.

Political Background

Commitment to PLO ‘International Obligations and Decisions of International Legitimacy’

In the run-up to the 2026 local elections, political controversy erupted over a new provision of Decree-Law No. 23 of 2025 concerning elections of local authority councils.⁷ The text, approved by the Office of the Palestinian President in the absence of a functioning legislature, reportedly failed to reflect consultations conducted prior to its adoption. These discussions with political stakeholders reportedly were already limited and inadequate. Moreover, the law introduced “an affirmation from the list’s candidates accepting nomination in the list, and their commitment to the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) program, its international obligations and the decisions of international legitimacy” in articles 16.2 and 19.1. This language was interpreted as requiring candidates to sign an attestation reaffirming their endorsement of the PLO’s political program and commitment to the Oslo framework. It was widely seen as an unacceptable condition.

The contentious provision requiring candidates to affirm their commitment to the “PLO international obligations and decisions of international legitimacy” was absent from both the previous local elections law and the draft law released for public debate and consultation. However, similar provisions have been introduced in previous electoral laws in Palestine, as well as the relatively recent decree-law drafted in preparation for potential PNC elections, which encompasses all Palestinian people, including those in the diaspora.

The general elections law (Law 1 of 2007 and its amendments), stipulates the following in Article 36: “The candidate for the position of President must meet the following requirements: To uphold the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people and the Declaration of Independence Document, in addition to the provisions of the Basic Law.”

President Abbas’s July 17, 2025, decree pertaining to the anticipated PNC election states, “The membership requirements must include the member’s commitment to the Palestine Liberation Organization’s program, its international obligations and the resolutions of international legitimacy.”⁸ The wording of this article is identical to that of the local elections decree-law prior to its amendment. Similar provisions, requiring mandatory adherence to the PLO’s political and national program, also appear in the new version of the PNC law approved by President Abbas on June 4, 2026, after its recent approval by the PLO executive committee.

Following a wave of objections from civil society organizations and political parties, as well as declarations of intent to boycott the elections by civil society and various political parties, the reference to “international obligations” was removed from the law through an amendment adopted on Jan. 27, 2026.⁹ Articles 16.2 and 19.1 of the decree-law now read: “An affirmation

⁷ Articles 16.2 and 19.1

⁸ Article 3. Presidential decree of July 17, 2025.

⁹ <https://www.ichr.ps/public/page/125025> Civil society organizations declared that they “will conduct a comprehensive assessment of their participation in all election-related activities, including monitoring, awareness-raising, training, and other programs supporting the electoral process.” (...) “The inclusion of this condition constitutes a fundamental infringement on

from the list's candidates accepting nomination in the list, and their commitment to the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian People, its political and national program, and the relevant decisions of international legitimacy." The controversial "international obligations" term, which was widely interpreted as referring to the Oslo agreements, was removed from the law. This change, however, took place after the electoral process had already begun – voter registration was completed on Jan. 24, 2026; any eligible voters who were not previously registered to vote and did not take action to register due to this controversy were effectively excluded from casting a ballot.

Despite this new amendment, the language remained controversial. Several political factions, including Hamas, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), the Palestinian People's Party (PPP), and the Palestinian Popular Struggle Front (PPSF), decided not to participate in the elections as parties. However, they did not prevent members affiliated with their movements from running as independent candidates, which many did. There was, therefore, only one political party officially competing in these elections: Fatah, with 67 lists. Some civil society organizations maintained their boycott of the elections as well and did not engage in anticipated observation or voter education activities.

International human rights law establishes that restrictions on candidacy grounded in political opinion are, as a rule, impermissible. Under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), any limitation on the right to stand for election must be reasonable, objective, and nondiscriminatory. Interpretations by the U.N. Human Rights Committee further clarify: "The right of persons to stand for election should not be limited unreasonably by requiring candidates to be members of parties or of specific parties." In the same paragraph, it reads: "Without prejudice to paragraph (1) of article 5 of the Covenant, political opinion may not be used as a ground to deprive any person of the right to stand for election."¹⁰

According to electoral stakeholders, the new provision was introduced unexpectedly and imposed at the last minute. It was not in the draft version of the law released for public dialogue in mid-April 2025 by the Ministry of Justice.¹¹ Subsequent efforts to soften the language in response to intense public backlash lacked transparency and were not carried out in a timely manner. The provision appeared aimed at excluding certain political factions, which is at odds with the ICCPR and Palestine's international commitments related to the right to stand as a candidate for public office.

Recommendation: *If similar provisions are included in future electoral laws, they should be subject to broad public consultations in advance, aiming to reach a consensus and respect Palestine's international commitments. The outcomes of those consultations should be duly reflected in the final legislation.*

the right to political participation as guaranteed by international human rights standards, particularly the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which the State of Palestine has acceded and is legally bound. The Covenant emphasizes that this right must not be restricted by ideological or political conditions that undermine the principles of pluralism and equal opportunity. This condition also contradicts the Declaration of Independence, which laid the foundations for freedom, democracy, and political pluralism, as well as the Palestinian Basic Law, which guarantees rights and freedoms, including the right to political participation."

¹⁰ Human Rights Committee, General Comment No. 25: The Right to Participate in Public Affairs, Voting Rights and the Right of Equal Access to Public Service (Art. 25), U.N. Doc. CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.7 (12 July 1996), para. 17.

¹¹ <https://econsultation.moj.pna.ps/consultation-details/85>

Scope of the Elections

The Palestinian cabinet initially called for elections in all governorates of the country; this was followed by another decision to postpone the elections in the southern governorates (the Gaza Strip) except for the Deir al-Balah municipality, bringing the total number of localities where elections were called to 421. However, polling took place in only 183 localities (including Deir al-Balah): 90 municipal councils and 93 village councils.¹² The widespread use of “winning by acclamation” – with councils automatically elected under the law if only one list registers – significantly reduced electoral competition in the West Bank. Elections for 197 local bodies were uncontested.

In addition, no electoral lists or candidates were submitted for 40 localities – an improvement, however, as no lists were presented in 78 localities for the 2021-2022 elections. On May 5, 2026, the CEC sent a letter to the Ministry of Local Government (MoLG) proposing that elections be held later for those 40 local councils, as well as in other municipalities in Gaza. The MoLG raised the issue to the Cabinet, which formed a committee to examine whether to hold elections or make appointments to these offices in those communities. On June 2, the Cabinet decided to appoint acting committees to the 40 local councils in the West Bank, affecting approximately 56,425 voters. The decision stated that such committees will be appointed directly through coordination among the MoLG, the Ministry of Interior (MoI), and the governors of these localities.

Acclamation negatively affects the democratic process and undermines core electoral principles. It deprives citizens of their right to vote and allows clans, political movements, and parties to play a dominant role in promoting or imposing consensus-based electoral lists. In past elections, acclamation lists were mostly found in rural areas. However, in the 2026 elections, two densely populated cities, Ramallah and Nablus, each had a single list, and thus elections were not held. A total of 465,266 voters in the West Bank could not participate in the election because the results were decided by acclamation, the vast majority of whom were in municipalities (287,747), even though 155 village councils were decided by acclamation – more than those villages that held elections (87).

Recommendation: In further amendments to the municipal elections law, an article could be introduced to enable the conduct of by-elections in municipalities where no candidates or lists register during the nomination period.

Elections were not held in Jerusalem, as was also the case in previous rounds of municipal elections in 2004–2005, 2012, 2017, and 2021–2022, since East Jerusalem remains under Israeli occupation and the direct authority of a single Israeli municipal administration.

Legal Framework

A sound legal framework is essential for the effective administration of genuine democratic elections. The legal framework, which comprises the country’s domestic laws that govern all

¹² Polling in Beit Ummar was postponed.

aspects of the electoral process, should be consistent with domestic and international human rights obligations.

The legal framework for local government elections includes the Basic Law, the Oslo Accords that set the framework for elections, Decree-Law 23 of 2025 (which replaced Law 10 of 2005) Concerning the Elections of Local Authority Councils and its amendments, Law 1 of 2007 on general elections and its amendments (which addresses the formation and functioning of the CEC), and the various international and regional commitments of the PLO and the Palestinian Authority.

These latter commitments include applicable international treaty law, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; the ICCPR; the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women; the Convention on the Political Rights of Women; the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination; the Arab Charter on Human Rights; and the Declaration of Media Freedoms in the Arab World. The secondary legal framework consists of the CEC's rules, regulations, and instructions, and the CEC codes of conduct for political parties and international and domestic observers.

President Abbas issued Decree-Law 23 of 2025 concerning local authority elections on Nov. 19, 2025 – two months before the beginning of the electoral process. According to international best practices, the legal framework for elections should not be amended or changed less than one year before the elections.¹³ Altering electoral laws within a year of an election weakens legal certainty by making it difficult for candidates and voters to understand the process clearly and adjust to the new rules. The introduction of the new law did not provide the CEC enough time to adapt and carry out voter education activities or technical IT updates on the changes introduced – in particular, the open-list electoral system. Law 23 of 2025 was further amended on Jan. 15 and the CEC finalized the corresponding regulatory framework on Jan. 27, 2026 – one week after the start of voter registration.

Recommendation: *Refrain from amending the election law, including introducing a new electoral system, within one year before the elections.*

Among the new features of Law 23 of 2025 was doubling the financial deposit to 1,000 Jordanian dinars (US\$1,400)¹⁴ per list for municipal councils and 100 Jordanian dinars (US\$140) per candidate for village councils – a relatively high fee considering the current economic situation. In the previous law, this deposit was refundable if the list won at least one seat. In the new law, it is nonrefundable. International elections obligations require electoral deposits to be reasonable, proportionate, and to not restrict the right to stand for election.¹⁵

¹³ Venice Commission, Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters, CDL-AD (2002)023rev, Guideline II.2.b, and Interpretative Declaration on the Stability of Electoral Law, CDL-AD (2005)043: “The fundamental elements of electoral law ... should not be open to amendment less than one year before an election...”. While not a member state, the Palestinian National Authority holds cooperation status with the Venice Commission, as authorized by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe. (<https://www.coe.int/en/web/venice-commission/member-states>)

¹⁴ “Deposit of one thousand Jordanian Dinars (±1,400 USD) or its equivalent in legally circulated currency, nonrefundable, to the Commission's account, refundable in cases of withdrawal or rejection of candidacy.”

¹⁵ International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; U.N. Human Rights Committee, General Comment No. 25 (1996); Venice Commission, Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters (2002); and International IDEA, *International Electoral Standards* (2002).

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During the 2021-22 local elections, youth and women's groups reported to the Carter Center that they considered the deposit amount to be high, which could impose barriers to their full participation.

Recommendation: Lower the deposit amount to reflect the rising cost of living and facilitate broader participation, particularly by youth and women candidates.

In a welcome development, the new local elections law lowered the minimum age for candidates from 25 to 23. The Carter Center and other international and national organizations have consistently recommended lowering the candidacy age.¹⁶

The new law retained the “winning by acclamation” practice when only one list was presented to the CEC (Article 49.4) in a locality. This practice has often been criticized by international and national observers as undermining the democratic process by depriving voters of political participation.

Recommendation: Initiate a debate on the acclamation procedures, potentially by referendum, as suggested by the CEC and national observers in past elections. Consider holding an electoral validation exercise in instances in which only one list is submitted to the CEC.

Consistent with a Carter Center recommendation after the 2021-22 local elections, the new law gave the CEC the right to set a ceiling for campaign finance for the first time:¹⁷ “The CEC shall set instructions to determine the ceiling on election campaign spending, taking into account the size of the local authority, the number of voters, and the cost of living.”¹⁸ The law states in the same article, “The CEC may request that the financial statements be audited by a certified auditor or by submitting a legal declaration to that effect. It shall enable those who have [legal] interest to view them.”

There is no obligation for the financial reports to be made public, although that is good international practice. More than two-thirds of the countries in the world make the financial reports of political parties or candidates public.¹⁹ The publication of campaign finance reports following elections enhances transparency, accountability, and fairness in the electoral process. By enabling public scrutiny of campaign funding, such disclosure mechanisms deter illicit financial practices and reinforce compliance with legal frameworks.

Recommendation: Enshrine into law that the CEC is obligated to make campaign finance reports public.

¹⁶ The Center's election observation report from the 2022 local elections recommended lowering candidacy age to 21.

¹⁷ Carter Center 2021-22 assessment report of the local elections: “Imposing ceilings on the amount of money that a list can expend on a campaign.”

¹⁸ Law 23 of 2025, Article 32.3.

¹⁹ International IDEA database on political finance.

Electoral System and Quotas

Decree-Law 23 of 2025 Concerning the Elections of Local Authority Councils introduced two new electoral systems for:

- Open-list proportional representation for municipal councils, where voters can choose up to five candidates from a single list. (Voters can choose fewer than five candidates or choose the list without selecting any of its candidates, treating it as a closed list).²⁰
- Simple-majority limited vote for village councils, where voters can choose up to five candidates from those running for the nine seats in each council.²¹

Unlike the closed-list proportional representation system, in an open-list system voters are free to choose their preferred candidates and are not obliged to respect the candidate order on the list set by the party or the persons who compiled it. The open-list system, however, creates competition within the same list; it also favors prominent, strong candidates. Candidates met by the mission often cited the difficulty of building lists mixing well-known candidates with others who are not so likely to win a seat. One challenge associated with introducing this change was the need for extensive voter education efforts by the CEC; this was concerning, given that the electoral process began only two months after the law was adopted.

Despite CEC efforts on voter education, the short timeframe may explain the high percentage of invalid ballot papers (4% in the West Bank and 5% in Deir al-Balah in the Gaza Strip) in the April 2026 elections, an unusually high proportion compared with previous local council elections. In the first phase of the 2021 local elections, 3% of votes were invalid, and in the second phase, 2%. In 2017, 2.75% of votes were invalid, and in 2012, 1.4%. This also may explain the practice of abusing assisted voting under the provision of “illiterate” voting.²²

Under the previous law, only lists receiving at least 8% of valid votes in an electoral district were eligible to participate in seat allocation under the Sainte-Laguë formula.²³ The new law lowered this electoral threshold to 5%, in line with the Carter Center’s recommendation in its expert mission [observation report on the 2021-2022 local elections](#).²⁴

Women’s Quotas

Under the previous law, a minimum of two seats were allocated to women for most local councils (with nine, 11, or 13 seats), and three seats for 15-member councils. The new law raised the minimum number of seats allocated for women as follows:

- Two seats for nine-member councils
- Three seats for 11-member councils
- Four seats for 13- and 15-member councils

²⁰ Municipal councils are divided into three classes: Class A with 15 seats; B with 13 seats; and C with 11 seats (According to Cabinet resolution of Jan. 6, 2026).

²¹ Village councils have nine seats each.

²² Article 40.1 of Law 23 of 2025 Concerning the Elections of Local Authority Councils.

²³ Law No. 10 of 2005 on Elections to Local Councils, Article 51.

²⁴ [The Carter Center’s municipal elections final report 2021-2022](#).

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Local civil society groups have called for women to hold 30% of council positions; even the higher quotas introduced in the law still do not meet that target. The adoption of an open-list proportional representation system combined with a women's quota led to situations in which some women candidates were elected with fewer votes than their male counterparts.

Christian-Muslim Quotas

In addition to Decree-Law 23 of 2025, President Abbas issued Decree 1 of 2026, detailing the number of seats allocated to Christians and Muslims in 11 councils (eight municipal councils and three village councils). The decree stated that the mayors in nine councils shall be Christian. Historically, Christians have constituted the majority in these localities.

It was difficult for some electoral stakeholders to understand the calculations and allocation of seats, particularly when quotas for both women and religious minorities were applied.

Election Administration

Since its formation in 2002 as an independent electoral management body, the CEC administered the 2005 presidential elections, the 2006 PLC elections, and municipal elections in 2012, 2017, and 2021-22 (two phases), and the current 2026 local elections. The CEC is responsible for organizing all aspects of the electoral process, including the conduct of periodic voter registration, review of candidate nominations and candidate lists, design and printing of ballots, issuance and publication of regulations surrounding election-day processes, training of polling staff and election officials, and the conduct of election-day procedures, including counting, tabulation, and announcement of results.

Voter Registration

According to Law 23 of 2025, the right to vote shall be exercised by every person who meets the following conditions:

- To be Palestinian.
- To have completed 18 years of age on polling day.
- To have been resident within the boundaries of the local authority for a period not less than six months prior to the date of conducting the elections. The commission shall verify the validity of this residence and request what is necessary for its confirmation.
- His/her name must be included in the final voters list for the local authority where he/she shall exercise the right to vote.
- Not to have lost his/her legal capacity by virtue of a judicial ruling.

Palestine operates an active voter registration system, under which eligible voters are invited to register during a designated period each year. The CEC organized its first voter registration campaign in 2004. Since 2016, the CEC also has allowed citizens to register online year-round through its official website. The electoral assessment team did not receive any complaints about the accuracy or the inclusivity of voter registration.

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Voter registration for the local elections was carried out Jan. 20-24, 2026, and only in the West Bank, because the CEC's decision to hold the local elections in Gaza was issued on Jan. 19, one day before the launch of voter registration. The total number of registered voters in the West Bank came to roughly 1.5 million (51.4% men and 48.6% women). There were 106,000 new voters, including 88,000 youth. The total number of registered voters in the municipalities where elections were held in the West Bank was 959,101. Some 70,449 voters were registered in the municipality of Deir al-Balah in Gaza Strip.

CEC Voter Education and Information Campaigns

The CEC used various outreach methods to convey voter education and information messages during the preelection phase. According to the CEC, between December 2025 and February 2026, the CEC's social media platforms reached more than 8 million people, including 3 million women. From March 10 through April, the CEC's website reportedly had 2.8 million visits, and its Facebook page garnered 17.1 million views. The CEC's artificial intelligence tool, Nazih, processed 48,000 messages.

According to the CEC, it also held 40 field awareness sessions, reaching 1,300 participants; distributed flyers, including in Braille; and disseminated 1,600 radio spots and 60 TV spots. It used banners, road screens, and billboards to encourage voters to get out and vote. The CEC also printed 13,000 voter information posters on voting steps, highlighting the voters' right to select up to five candidates on each list under the newly introduced open-list electoral system. Despite these efforts, the number of invalid ballots increased from the 2021-2022 municipal elections, suggesting that additional time to conduct voter education may have been beneficial.

Adequate lead time for voter education is an essential component of democratic legitimacy and meaningful electoral participation.

CEC Funding Gap

During an electoral update meeting with international stakeholders on April 1, 2026, the CEC stated that the estimated budget for the 2026 local elections had initially been set at \$10.5 million in January 2026. Following revised cost estimates, savings measures, and a reduced number of voters due to the acclamation process, the budget was lowered to \$8 million by April 2026. Available funding from the Ministry of Finance and international donors totaled \$4.4 million, leaving a funding gap of \$3.6 million. The CEC mentioned in its June 10 meeting that the funding gap had decreased to \$1.8 million.

Recommendation: The Palestinian Authority should provide the CEC with stable and adequate resources necessary to operate in a professional and high-quality manner.

Nomination and Candidates

The candidate nomination period ran from Feb. 23 to March 1, 2026. The short timeframe, the lack of competing political parties, and the new electoral system each affected the process of building a list to compete for municipal councils and to nominate candidates to village councils. According to candidates and parties, municipal council lists were built locally, and

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candidates were included based on their capacity to attract local voters. The adoption of the new open-list system for municipalities and of the majoritarian system for villages rendered the ordering of candidates on electoral lists largely irrelevant, as the final selection of candidates was determined by voters rather than by the parties themselves.

Fatah, the only party formally competing, submitted 67 lists. In previous elections, the candidate nomination process caused internal divisions and led to dissident lists competing against the party's official lists.²⁵ The new system allowed the party to largely avoid internal divisions. Internal disputes during the elections were seen as a possible source of friction that threatened to undermine party unity and weaken Fatah's position ahead of its May 14 party conference. To avoid this, Fatah did not select candidates centrally but instead delegated the selection process to local officials to decide who would appear on each electoral list. The party supported its lists and candidates by paying the candidacy fees and providing ad hoc technical campaign support.

Fatah sought to present unified electoral lists and discourage competition, both from within its own ranks and from rivals, by building consensus lists where possible, so the list could win by acclamation. Fatah achieved this goal in two of the main municipalities of the West Bank: Nablus and Ramallah. Other nonpartisan lists, often family-based, also sought to reduce competition by attempting to dissuade rival lists from contesting the elections. This contributed to an atmosphere of pressure in many localities, and the Center's assessment team received reports of complaints, some of which were lodged officially with the CEC.

Accepted lists totaled 366, and included nearly 7000 candidates. The vast majority of the 321 lists that competed for the municipal councils registered as independents.²⁶ Many were clan- or family-based lists, or alliances between families. In some cases, the competition among lists was particularly intense, leading to several clashes.²⁷ As a whole, there were 5,131 candidates vying for office – 1,358 candidates for village council seats, and 3,773 for the municipal councils.

Following the seven-day nomination period, which was extended for an additional day, the CEC reviewed nomination files for municipal and village councils. A correction period of three days was introduced in the 2025 law to allow list representatives and candidates to complete their files if any documents were missing and to replace rejected candidates when necessary, thus avoiding rejection of an entire list. This measure helped prevent issues encountered in previous elections, when many lists waited until the final day of the nomination period to submit their candidacies, and some lists were rejected due to incomplete documentation and did not have sufficient time to correct deficiencies.

²⁵ The law was amended to prevent this: Article 18(2) of the law now states: "The Commission shall reject the registration application of an electoral list of a partisan entity if it is found that it has previously registered an electoral list or participated in forming a list in the same capacity in the same Council." This provision is consistent with a recommendation made by the Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD) and by the CEC in 2021.

²⁶ 88%. Source: CEC.

²⁷ For instance, in Hebron governorate, Beit Omar municipality, the election was postponed to avoid renewed clashes between families.

Appeals During the Nomination Phase

The CEC rejected the candidacies of 18 people from West Bank governorates and submitted written justifications to them and the Electoral Court. Nine of the 18 applicants appealed the CEC's decision to the Electoral Court, where their appeals also were rejected.

Infringements to the Right to Stand

The Carter Center's assessment team received reports of several cases in which candidates allegedly were threatened, intimidated, or otherwise prevented from running, including through the abuse of administrative authority (for instance, refusing to deliver the necessary fiscal receipt to the potential candidates to complete their applications).

- In Nablus municipality, two aspirants testified before the Elections Court that four candidates from their list (youth and independents) had been summoned by the Preventive Security and General Intelligence Services, which pressured them not to register their list with the CEC. Two candidates on the list were detained at the security headquarters for hours until the registration deadline had expired, preventing them from submitting their list to the CEC.
- An aspirant from the village of Yatta in Hebron governorate filed a complaint with the Independent Commission for Human Rights after the village council, under pressure from the General Intelligence Service, refused to grant him the required clearance certificate attesting that he had no outstanding fees, taxes, fines, or violations and was eligible to run for office.
- Potential candidates in the Ramallah district told the Carter Center assessment team they received threats from the Palestinian Security Forces (PSF) and from Fatah Organizational Structure affiliates to withdraw their lists, which they did. They did not file any complaints.
- The head of an independent list in Jenin governorate reported to the Carter Center assessment team that security officials had threatened some candidates on his list, demanding that they withdraw. Ultimately, they did not complain to the CEC, the Independent Commission for Human Rights (ICHR), or the Elections Court to "avoid problems and to preserve the civil peace in the city."
- A potential candidate for office in the Bethlehem district reported to the Carter Center that she was threatened by the PSF for seeking to form a separate list. She withdrew from that list and did not file any complaints out of fear.
- A potential candidate for office in the Hebron district informed The Carter Center that he had formed a list that would have competed against a Fatah list. He said that during the list formation, candidates received calls from the PSF, especially from members of the General Intelligence Service, who threatened them with dismissal from their jobs or suspension of promotions. The candidates did not file an official complaint.

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- The former mayor of Hebron, Tayseer Abu Sneneh, was arrested by the Israeli army in September 2025. He spent eight months in administrative detention and was released only two days before the local council elections. Many observers commented to the Center that he was arrested to prevent his candidacy in the April 2026 elections.

Recommendations: *The Palestinian Authority and Palestinian Security Forces should ensure that the human rights environment allows voters the freedom to choose their elected officials without harassment or intimidation.*

Stronger safeguards and accountability mechanisms – including investigation of alleged crimes and timely prosecution – should be established to prevent interference by state actors, including security forces, political actors, or administrative bodies, during the candidate nomination process.

The Campaign

Legal Framework for the Campaign

The law provides for an official campaign period of two weeks; it was conducted April 10-23, 2026. Several observers told the Center that this period was too short for candidates to adequately present their platforms, particularly given the introduction of a new electoral system. The day before the elections, as well as election day itself, is designated as a period of “campaign silence.” In practice, however, this requirement was not respected.

The 2025 election law introduced a new article stating that violations of any of its campaign-related legal rules are now punishable by imprisonment and/or a fine.²⁸ The application of this new article should be monitored closely in future elections.

The new law also gives the CEC the responsibility to set campaign expenditure ceilings based on the size of the local authority, voter population, and cost of living. The campaign expenditure ceilings range from 5,000 JOD (US\$7,050) for village councils to 160,000 JOD (US\$225,673) for municipal councils with more than 70,000 voters.²⁹ The Carter Center did not receive any feedback from candidates regarding the campaign finance thresholds and did not discuss with candidates the above ceilings or whether they limited campaign activities.

²⁸ Article 66.3 of Law 23 of 2025 Concerning the Elections of Local Authority Councils

²⁹ The breakdown of the expenditure ceiling is as follows:

For village council candidates, two JOD per registered voter in the local authority or 5,000 JOD (whichever is higher).

For municipal councils with 10,000 registered voters or less, two JOD per registered voter in the local authority or 10,000 JOD (whichever is higher).

For municipal councils with 10,001-20,000 registered voters, two JOD per registered voter in the local authority or 35,000 JOD (whichever is higher).

For municipal councils with 20,001-45,000 registered voters, two JOD per registered voter in the local authority or 75,000 JOD (whichever is higher).

For municipal councils with 45,001-70,000 registered voters, two JOD per registered voter in the local authority or 120,000 JOD (whichever is higher).

For municipal councils with more than 70,000 registered voters, the expenditure ceiling is 160,000 JOD.

Legal Framework for Campaigning in the Media and Social Media

The main laws governing the media sector are the Basic Law, the 1995 Press Law, the 2004 Council of Ministers Decision on the regulation and licensing of broadcast media, the Penal Code, and the CEC guidelines on media coverage of the local elections.

The Basic Law provides for freedom of expression and freedom of the media without censorship. However, it does not prohibit the passage of laws limiting freedom of expression. The Press and Publications Law of 1995 contains restrictive provisions on what can be published that weaken freedom of expression: It prohibits the publication of material that contradicts “national responsibility.”³⁰ Such norms are open to various interpretations and can be used to prevent the publication of articles. In addition, the Press Law contains burdensome licensing requirements for print media, financial requirements for publication, deposit requirements of each publication prior to distribution to the Ministry of Information, and hefty sanctions for breaches of its provisions, including jail terms.

Defamation is a criminal offense; libel and slander are punishable under the Penal Code by up to three years’ imprisonment.³¹ Local and international civil society organizations have long advocated for the decriminalization of libel to enhance media freedom. Current prison sentences contradict the principle of proportional sanctions envisaged by international standards.³²

The Election Law requires official media to offer equal and appropriate opportunities for all the electoral lists and candidates (Article 30 of Decree-Law 23 of 2025). There are no specific provisions in the law regarding fair and balanced coverage for private media. Despite this, a code of conduct for local and international media representatives issued by the CEC urges the media to adhere to basic standards, including a commitment to neutrality, objectivity, credibility, and accuracy in reporting.³³

The legal framework encompassing social media in Palestine is diffused across the Basic Law, the Election Law, the Penal Law, Law 23 of 2025 Concerning the Elections of Local Authority Councils, the Law by Decree (10) of 2018 on Cybercrime, and the Law by Decree (7) of 2020 on the State of Emergency. Most relevant provisions are designed for offline content, leading to ambiguity about the legislation’s applicability.³⁴ The legal framework explicitly targeting social media is far less substantive than that for traditional media.

Despite the guarantee of freedom of expression in the Basic Law and legally binding international commitments, sweeping legislative provisions unduly limit the legal exercise of freedom of expression online.³⁵ Relevant provisions are so broad that they could readily be

³⁰ Press and Publications Law No. 9 of 1995.

³¹ The Jordanian Criminal Law No. 16 of 1960 is enforced in the West Bank; the British Mandate Criminal Code Ordinance No. 74 of 1936 is valid in the Gaza Strip.

³² The U.N. Human Rights Committee General Comment No. 34 on Article 19 of the ICCPR states that “States parties should consider the decriminalization of defamation, and, in any case, the application of the criminal law should only be countenanced in the most serious of cases and imprisonment is never an appropriate penalty.” Available at: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/CCPR/Pages/CCPRIndex.aspx>.

³³ Code of conduct available at: https://www.elections.ps/Portals/0/Jou_%20Code%20of%20Conduct%20LE2026%20EN.pdf

³⁴ U.N. General Assembly Resolution 68/167.

³⁵ Article 19, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, acceded to on April 2, 2014. Article 19, Constitution of Palestine 2003 with amendments through 2005.

interpreted to proscribe political expression.³⁶ In addition, such provisions are practically inappropriate for the online environment, as the volume of such content will render any future attempt to implement this provision necessarily selective and open to accusations of bias.

Article 39 of the Decree-Law 10 of 2018 on Cybercrime grants authorities the power to block websites that post content that “may threaten national security, public order or public morals,” and has been invoked in the past to block websites following court decisions. The breadth of such terms as “public order” and especially “public morals” leaves the legislation open to restrictive interpretation in contravention of Palestine’s obligations under international standards and has been criticized by civil society groups. Furthermore, such wide-ranging measures risk generating self-censorship, which can limit the scope of debate in ways that are difficult to measure, both online and offline.

No cases were filed in the Elections Court regarding social media violations during the electoral period.

Legal Framework for Campaign Finance

Law 23 of 2025 Concerning the Elections of Local Authority Councils introduced several changes to the nomination and campaign fees. Among them:

- A candidacy deposit of 1,000 JOD (US\$1,400) for municipal council lists and 100 JOD (US\$140) for individual candidates for village councils. This deposit is refundable if a list withdraws within the allowed timeframe or if its nomination is rejected by the CEC. Previously, the deposit was 500 JOD and was refundable if the list won at least one seat on the council.
- An electoral campaign deposit of 1,000 JOD (US\$1,400) for municipal council lists and 200 JOD (\$280) for individual candidates. This deposit is refundable only if the list or candidate removes all campaign materials and submits their financial reports within one month after the elections. Under the previous law, this deposit was 500 JOD (US\$700) per list.

A potential female candidate met by the Carter Center mentioned that she wanted to form an all-female list, but she couldn’t because neither she nor the other members of the proposed list could afford the candidacy and campaign deposits.

Conduct of the Electoral Campaign

The relatively short, 14-day campaign took place in a context where freedom of movement was seriously limited by road blockades, checkpoints, road gates, earth mounds, and other barriers. As of December 2025, the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) documented 925 movement obstacles that permanently or intermittently restricted the movement of 3.4 million Palestinians across the West Bank.³⁷ These obstacles hindered candidates’ ability to conduct door-to-door campaigns, limited the CEC’s capacity to deploy

³⁶ For example, Article 66 of the 2007 General Election Law prohibits “humiliation” and the “insulting of any of the other candidates,” both of which are highly subjective and not commensurate with international standards on freedom of expression.

³⁷ <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/movement-and-access-west-bank-april-2026>.

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voter education materials and staff, and restricted journalists' ability to cover the campaign period.

The campaign focused primarily on local issues such as waste, energy, and water management. The near absence of political parties – with only Fatah officially contesting – and the prominence of candidate lists representing families or clans also reinforced the campaign's focus on local issues.

The assessment team could not assess the entire campaign period; however, it received reports from several candidates on their strategies: small gatherings and family mobilization, and the use of posters and social media, including to relay CEC voter information. A few debates were organized locally by civil society organizations and by Al-Watan network. However, the network ultimately was prevented from holding debates for an additional 20 local councils after receiving threats of violence. The Al-Watan director stated that he and the executive director were threatened with death if the network continued to sponsor electoral debates.³⁸ He filed a complaint with the attorney general and with the Independent Commission for Human Rights.

Recommendation: *To ensure that freedom of expression is upheld during elections, interference with the media and freedom of the press must not be tolerated, even when isolated, as it constitutes a serious infringement on fundamental freedoms and is detrimental to a genuinely free and fair electoral campaign.*

The election assessment team received reports from candidates who were subjected to raids, interrogations, and threats aimed at forcing their withdrawal and discouraging participation.³⁹ Local observation groups also reported witnessing the participation of official figures and public officials, some in official security uniforms, at electoral rallies and political gatherings. This constitutes a clear violation of the principle of neutrality of official institutions as stipulated by law, which requires all state institutions to maintain full neutrality throughout all stages of the electoral process.⁴⁰

³⁸ In the village of Beit Liqya, representatives of one list refused to participate in the debate and pressured al Watan not to engage in dialogue with the opposing list. When they insisted on engaging in dialogue with the opposing list, the al Watan staff received a death threat from a member of the security forces. In the village of Beit Hanina, representatives of one of the lists refused to participate in a debate and pressured al Watan not to engage in dialogue with the opposing list. When they insisted on interviewing the opposing list representatives, a journalist from al Watan, Khaled Faqih, received a call from the secretary of the Fatah movement in the village who allegedly threatened to kill him.

³⁹ It was reported to the Carter Center that Atef Awawdeh, a candidate in Deir Samet of south Hebron, was arrested two days before the elections and detained for eight hours. During his detention, the Israeli captain responsible for the southern area allegedly demanded that the candidate withdraw from the elections and stop campaigning, threatening to kill him, imprison him for life, or destroy his house if he refused. He nevertheless continued in the elections after contacting the Palestinian Security Forces who told him to continue his campaign. His list won two seats, while a second list won four seats and a third list won five seats. The day after the elections, the candidate was arrested again for 16 hours. He stated that he was asked to resign from the municipal council or he would be transferred to a desert prison, killed, or his home would be demolished. Upon his release, he resigned from the council and informed the media as well as a U.N. human rights representative. Subsequently, Israeli forces arrested the candidate who had won the second highest number of votes on his list, and he remained in detention until the date this report was written.

⁴⁰ Law 23 of 2025, Article 8.

Election Day in the West Bank

Given its remote status and limited presence in the OPT, the Carter Center election assessment team did not undertake a comprehensive and systematic observation of election day; however, it gathered a limited number of observations. The municipal elections held in the West Bank on April 25, 2026, were observed by 2,483 local observers from 69 civil society organizations. Some 740 accredited journalists from 113 media organizations (including 14 international media organizations) covered the elections. The CEC invited 105 international guests to monitor the elections. On election day, the Carter Center deployed three teams, which visited 29 polling stations. The teams also observed the counting and tabulation process at the CEC's tabulation center in Ramallah.

The main findings of the local observation groups (The Civil Commission for Election Monitoring – Reform), which align with the Carter Center's limited assessment, include:

- Despite the campaign “silence” period that should have prevailed after April 23 at midnight, campaigning continued in front of, around, and even inside polling centers in multiple forms, including photos, shirts, cars, banners, and candidacy cards.
- Campaign materials were not fully removed from the surroundings of most polling centers.
- The practice known as “political illiteracy” (claiming illiteracy to receive assistance for voting) was observed in large numbers in many centers across different governorates. Interlocutors cited the new electoral open-list system as a reason for this practice.
- The prohibition on voters' bringing mobile phones into polling centers was not implemented systematically.
- Crowding outside polling centers made it difficult for voters, especially women, the elderly, and people with disabilities, to enter.⁴¹
- Security personnel were present in accordance with the law and the agreed mechanism; however, there were some exceptions, including some who prevented observers from entering certain polling stations before 7 a.m.
- In general, calm prevailed in most areas, and the process proceeded smoothly.
- Incidents and tensions occurred between lists, candidates, or families, particularly in Hebron, Jenin, Ramallah, and Nablus.
- Cases were recorded of Israeli security forces entering villages in the Ramallah and al-Bireh governorate (such as in Sinjil, where a checkpoint was set up inside the town for two hours, as well as in Abwein and Mazari al-Nubani).
- According to the governor of Hebron, there were 18 checkpoints and 138 closed gates throughout the district. In Nablus as well, Israeli forces completely closed the village of Madama prior to election day, to the extent that it prevented the CEC teams from delivering electoral kits to the polling stations there.

The voter turnout rate was just 56% in the West Bank, compared with a combined 58.19% across both phases of the 2021-22 local elections. The percentage of invalid ballots reached 4%, the highest rate compared with all previous local elections.

⁴¹ In Palestine, polling stations are mixed-gender; if there was overcrowding at the entrance, women were observed stepping back, presumably to avoid being in close contact with men.

Elections in Gaza

The humanitarian situation and security conditions in Gaza do not support freedom of movement, assembly, speech, security of the person, or other fundamental rights necessary for the conduct of democratic elections. From a logistical standpoint alone, it would be highly challenging to conduct the electoral processes needed to conduct credible polls for the vast majority of Gaza's population.

The U.N. Human Rights Council's Independent Commission of Inquiry (on the occupied Palestinian territory) in September 2025 concluded that Israel "has committed acts of genocide" in Gaza, finding that four of the five criteria under the Genocide Convention (killing, serious harm, conditions of life, and preventing births) were met. The nearly three-year war has led to the destruction of most of the infrastructure in the Gaza Strip and has been marked by violations of ceasefire agreements by Israeli forces, the use of indiscriminate violence, and continued airstrikes.

Gaza and Gazan families are displaced, staying in overcrowded tents or severely damaged buildings due to the lack of safe alternatives. Basic services are poor, access to clean water is unstable, and waste is largely left untreated, creating serious public health risks. Security conditions also remain volatile, with frequent incidents including strikes and exchanges of fire occurring in residential areas and near humanitarian facilities. The spread of rodents and insects is driving a growing public health crisis, with increasing cases of skin infections and other diseases reported among displaced families.⁴²

On Jan. 19, 2026, the CEC decided to hold local elections in one municipality in the Gaza Strip. Deir al-Balah was selected because it was among the few areas not completely devastated by ongoing Israeli attacks. However, holding elections there posed enormous challenges, which the CEC addressed with ad hoc solutions at all stages of the process.

Voter Registration in Gaza

Gaza's voter registry was last updated in 2021; the civil registry was used to identify additional eligible voters in Deir al-Balah municipality, bringing the total number of eligible voters to 70,449.

Nomination of Candidates and Lists

The CEC decided to take certain measures to facilitate the nomination process in Gaza due to the extraordinary social and economic conditions there. The campaign deposit fees of 1,000 JOD (US\$1,400) were waived. They also exempted the lists from obtaining clearance certificates proving that candidates had paid all fees, taxes, fines, and violations due to the municipal council of Deir al-Balah.

⁴² <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/humanitarian-situation-report-7-may-2026#gaza-strip>.

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Four independent lists presented their nominations to compete for the 15 seats of Deir al-Balah's municipal council. The four lists were accepted, and there were no appeals against the lists in the Gaza elections court.

Election Administration and Logistics

Due to the almost total blockade of the Gaza Strip, the CEC could not send standard election materials from the headquarters in Ramallah. The CEC regional office in Gaza thus organized the elections, depending only on existing materials within the Strip. Twelve polling centers, including 100 polling stations, were prepared for election day – three centers located in local NGO offices and nine built with prefabricated tents. More than 100 ballot boxes were manufactured locally, and all ballot papers were printed on-site.

Securing the elections proved contentious. Initially, the CEC had reached an agreement with a private security company to protect the voting and counting processes on election day. However, the Gaza Ministry of Interior later decided to take over security responsibilities, arguing that it was “in charge of security in the Gaza Strip.” This became a factor contributing to low voter turnout, as many voters avoided approaching polling centers out of fear of being targeted alongside MOI security personnel. Israeli strikes on April 24, 2026 – the day before election day – reportedly killed at least 12 people, including six police officers.

Election Day in Deir al-Balah

For security reasons, the Carter Center did not deploy the national expert based in Gaza to Deir al-Balah on election day. However, the assessment team liaised with the CEC in Gaza and with national observers.

The CEC hired and trained 675 polling staff, and accredited 325 local observers, 200 list agents, and more than 150 journalists. Voters were allowed to cast their ballots at any of the 12 polling centers; polling staff used a mobile phone application to prevent double voting. To give voters more opportunity to vote, the CEC extended polling hours by an hour, until 6 p.m. Despite this accommodation, the total number of ballots cast was 16,081 out of 70,449 eligible voters, for a turnout rate of 22.8%. There were 848 invalid ballots (5%) – slightly more than the national average of 4%. There were 156 blank ballots.

In discussions with the Carter Center, electoral stakeholders in Gaza Strip suggested several possible reasons to explain why voter turnout was low, including:

- Worsening humanitarian conditions, including shortages of food, water, and medicine, as well as the deterioration of livelihoods, which forced many people to prioritize meeting their basic needs over participating in the elections.
- The fragile security environment and ongoing daily attacks, which fostered fear and instability. Many citizens were particularly concerned about being targeted because of the presence of Interior Ministry personnel near polling centers.
- Many individuals who lost their identification documents during the war were effectively deprived of their right to vote. Eligible voters who presented paper copies of their IDs or photographs stored on their phones were not permitted to cast a ballot.
- The voter education campaign was brief and failed to reach all eligible voters.

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- The absence of political parties from the process, which reduced political mobilization and weakened incentives for public participation.

Local observation groups (The Civil Commission for Election Monitoring, Al Dameer Association for Human Rights, and the Hemaya Center for Human Rights)⁴³ noted that the final election results largely reflected the free will of the voters, despite some documented irregularities, including:

- Each of the 12 polling centers contained several polling stations; nine centers utilized prefabricated fiberglass tents measuring 6 by 6 meters to house the polling stations. In this limited space, two tables accommodated four CEC staff members, while the ballot box was placed in the center alongside five chairs designated for observers and agents, and four voting booths with inadequate spacing between them. This arrangement occasionally resulted in overcrowding.
- Some polling centers lacked dedicated restroom facilities, while one center had sewage water flowing at its entrance.
- Some centers were not adequately accessible for elderly voters or people with disabilities. In addition, promotional and electoral slogans were displayed by candidates and list agents inside some centers.
- Electoral campaigning continued inside certain polling stations and through social media platforms during the voting process.
- Observers documented attempts by some voters to photograph their ballot papers, despite instructions from the CEC to polling staff that it was not allowed.
- There was a noticeable delay in the operation of the electronic system used to prevent multiple voting at the start of election day, disrupting the process during its initial hours.

In their meetings with the Carter Center's national expert in Gaza, the following recommendations were offered by the CEC, civil society, and political parties:

- Any local or international body calling for elections must first work to end the occupation, stop the genocide, and provide a truly safe and human environment that facilitates and supports the exercise of people's fundamental rights to participate in civic affairs and political processes.
- Israeli armed forces should withdraw from the "yellow zone" as a key condition for creating a suitable and secure environment that would allow future elections to be conducted in accordance with international standards (in particular, fundamental freedoms and right to life to be respected).
- Improvements should be made in the humanitarian situation (food, water, medicine, and shelter) so the right to life is ensured.
- All political parties should have the possibility to participate to ensure a genuine competition. Genuine international guarantees should be provided to respect the election results and protect civilians.
- Adequate time and resources should be allocated to carry out a comprehensive voter registration update as well as voter education campaigns.

⁴³ Local [observer report](#)

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- Sites suitable for use as polling centers should be mapped out in advance and, if necessary, outfitted with prefabricated tents.
- Polling stations should have suitable water, electricity, communications, and internet facilities.
- Polling stations should be provided with all necessary election materials, including ballot boxes, seals, ballot papers, and indelible ink.
- Polling station staff members should go through intensive training on electoral procedures (voting, counting and results).

Based on input and analysis from local stakeholders, the Carter Center also offers the following recommendations:

Hold local council elections in other municipalities (wherever possible) in the Gaza Strip to revive democratic processes and encourage public participation.

Halt violations of the ceasefire and withdraw Israeli forces from Gaza Strip according to U.N. Security Council Resolution 2803.

Ensure that efforts to hold general elections in the Gaza Strip are accompanied by prioritizing a safe and humane environment for the exercise of political rights, including improved access to essential humanitarian needs (food, water, electricity, medicine, and shelter) to strengthen the credibility of the process.

Ensure adequate security of the person, including at polling locations, to enable voters to cast their ballots free from fear and fully participate in the elections.

The international community, including Israel, also should take steps to allow access and ensure that the CEC is able to deliver electoral materials and supplies to the Gaza Strip in a timely manner to facilitate the technical administration of the polls.

Tabulation and Results

The CEC issued preliminary, partial results even earlier than required by law. In the Palestinian local elections framework, the provision dealing with the publication of preliminary results is found in Article 47 of Decree-Law No. 23 of 2025 Concerning the Elections of Local Authority Councils stating: (1) “The Commission shall receive the counting protocols from the polling station committees for each Local Authority Council and commence the aggregation of results within twenty-four hours from the time of closing the polls, in the presence of agents of electoral lists, candidates, and accredited observers and journalists. The CEC may extend this window for an additional twenty-four hours if required by technical necessities.” (2) “Thereafter, the Commission shall publish the preliminary results of the elections in the Local Authority Councils where it aggregated the counting protocols specific to their stations, including the number of votes obtained by each list and each candidate therein, and the number of votes for candidates for Village Councils.” This was achieved by the CEC.

Preliminary partial results – for municipalities only – were presented at a well-attended April 26 press conference co-chaired by the prime minister, underscoring the perceived importance

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of these local elections. The announced results were incomplete and did not include the full aggregation of results from Hebron, the most populous governorate. Importantly, the results for Deir al-Balah in Gaza had been fully processed and were published first. By the end of the day, the CEC announced that all results had been processed and made searchable on its website. The published results did not include polling-station-level data but did provide information on the number of votes each candidate received, as well as the winners and those who were not successful.

On election day, the CEC reported on its Facebook page a 53.4% turnout in the West Bank.⁴⁴ The following day, this percentage was increased to 56% in the West Bank, likely because of:

- Delayed reporting from large governorates, especially Hebron
- The inclusion of ballots cast after the official closing time by voters who were already queued inside polling stations
- The reconciliation of late-entered polling-station protocols

This also explains why Deir al-Balah's turnout figures (22.6%) were available earlier and remained stable: It involved only one municipality, whereas the West Bank tabulation covered many local authorities and polling centers processed at different speeds.⁴⁵

Out of the 67 official Fatah lists for the municipal councils, 28 lists were won by acclamation (since no other lists were presented to the CEC) and 39 faced competition. In these 39 races, Fatah candidates won 268 seats, representing 56.5% of the 474 seats available. In 25 of the 39 councils, the party won more than half the seats, thus taking control of the council. It is unknown how many seats other political parties and factions that boycotted the elections secured through "independent" candidates since they did not explicitly register as affiliated with their party.

The law does not specify how the tabulation process is to be conducted, and there are no published CEC regulations on the matter. The law provides for the presence of observers during the tabulation process, and the Carter Center assessment team was able to attend the tabulation. However, the space and process itself was not designed to facilitate transparency or observation.⁴⁶

Over the years, the CEC had developed its own IT system for tabulation and had to update it quickly to accommodate the new electoral system. There was time to conduct only one test, in the same week of the elections, which is not recommended.

In practice, tabulation is conducted in three steps:⁴⁷

1. After the counting is completed, the polling staff prepares and signs the counting protocols together with the list representatives. Polling center officers then enter polling-station data into the CEC's internal electronic system using secure credentials.

⁴⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/CECPalestine/>

⁴⁵ 15,962 voters had cast their vote, out of 70,449 registered voters.

⁴⁶ Article 47.1. The election assessment team noted that no other organization or candidate or list agent was present at the CEC tabulation center.

⁴⁷ See graph in Annex 1.

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2. The paper-based counting protocols are subsequently transferred to district offices, scanned, and uploaded to the CEC headquarters server.
3. At the CEC headquarters in Ramallah, the scanned protocols undergo a second round of data entry by paid volunteers working in shifts. The electronic system compares both entries, automatically validating matching data and flagging discrepancies for correction based on the received scanned protocols. An additional electronic audit verifies voter numbers, candidate votes, and compliance with legal requirements, while identifying logistical or numerical inconsistencies requiring manual review.

Once discrepancies are resolved, the protocols are finalized and the allocation of seats is calculated, including the application of women's and religious quotas. If official complaints or objections are attached to the protocols, they are forwarded to the Electoral Procedures Department at the CEC for processing.

A limited number of IT system errors, described by the CEC as minor, affected the tabulation. The CEC corrected the results for a few councils the day after the election. The Carter Center was unable to obtain precise information regarding the extent and the reasons for these errors, and most appeared to have been corrected promptly.⁴⁸

The assessment team received several reports, including:

- Errors related to the calculation of the new 5% threshold for a list to obtain a seat (the system had applied the former 8% threshold).
- Data entry errors due to the complexity and length of the results protocols and staff fatigue.
- An IT "bug" affecting the results of seven councils.

It is noteworthy that the IT system does not retain a record of these errors once they have been corrected.

Recommendations: *The CEC should conduct an independent postelection audit of its IT system for tabulation and adjust as necessary.*

The CEC should publish its procedures for tabulation.

The CEC should facilitate credible observation of the data entry process for tabulation by observers and party agents. This could include projection screens or any other system chosen by the CEC that enables observers and party agents to follow the process without interfering with data entry operations.

The CEC should be allowed enough time before an election to adjust its IT system to the currently applicable electoral system and test it to allow corrections as needed, well in advance of election day.

The CEC should publish polling-station level results and gender-disaggregated turnout data on its website.

⁴⁸ <https://www.elections.ps/TabId/1083/ArtMID/9183/ArticleID/5309/Press-Release-by-the-Central-Elections-Commission.aspx>

Women's Participation

Women's political representation increased in the 2026 Palestinian local elections, largely because the quotas for women's seats were increased. However, substantive political empowerment and meaningful participation of women remained limited due to the prevailing family and clan dynamics, the broader social context, and the reduced presence of political parties in the process.

The increase in women's representation in the 2026 local elections is largely attributed to the quota system introduced under Electoral Law 23 of 2025, which established an electoral framework of mixed proportional representation (municipal councils) and majoritarian (village council). The open-list system adopted for the municipal councils generally favors well-known candidates with stronger financial resources and established local support networks, making it less favorable to women candidates.

To compensate for this dynamic, the law allocated reserved seats for women based on municipal and village council size: four seats in councils with 13 or 15 members, three seats in councils with 11 members, and two seats in councils with nine members. In some cases, electoral lists included more women than the legal minimum.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, most lists complied with the minimum quota requirement only, indicating that the quota functioned as a perceived ceiling for women's representation rather than a minimum threshold intended to promote wider political participation.

Women voters constituted 48.4% of registered voters in the West Bank.⁵⁰ Women candidates represented 29.4% of all candidates (32% in municipal councils and 23% in village councils). Women won 25.6% of seats overall – a total of 495, including 293 seats through the women's quota. The remaining 202 seats were won outright by women candidates.⁵¹ In Deir al-Balah, of 17 women candidates, four won seats.

Women headed only eight electoral lists in the West Bank and none in Deir al-Balah. Under the open-list system, however, list leadership has limited practical significance, as preferential votes determine candidate ranking and, ultimately, the selection of council chairpersons unless otherwise agreed among list members. Through meetings held by the assessment team with different candidates, it was clear that women had little to no chance of being selected as heads of local authorities. Alliances and agreements between lists generally were formed without considering women as equal partners for leadership positions, and in some cases, women reported being explicitly excluded from such arrangements.

Because many political parties, except Fatah, boycotted the process, list formation was dependent largely on family ties, social influence, and financial capacity, significantly limiting women's opportunities to run. Without party support, women lost political backing, faced economic barriers to covering candidacy and campaign costs, and were less likely to secure leadership positions that parties had previously helped negotiate. Youth participation,

⁴⁹ For example, in Rawabi, whose municipal council was elected by acclamation, four women were on the list for 11 seats, despite the minimum legal requirement being three women.

⁵⁰ This is likely due to the conservative values of some small communities that reject the idea of women's participation in any public affairs, including elections.

⁵¹ Postelection report by the Social and Economic Policies Monitor.

including young women, also remained limited due to the lack of party training and support, despite some candidacies driven by lower financial obligations.

Several lists' representatives told the Center that the elections were further characterized by the dominance of family and clan structures, with even Fatah relying on them, resulting in women often being included to meet formal requirements rather than for substantive political roles. This unsupportive environment was compounded by a short electoral timeframe, limited awareness-raising, and weak capacity-building efforts for women candidates. In addition, pressure, intimidation, and threats in some areas – particularly where uncontested lists emerged – disproportionately affected women and discouraged their participation.

Women's participation in the electoral campaigns was limited, as male candidates dominated the electoral lists and publicity due to a combination of political, social, cultural, and organizational factors. The quota system led to the assumption that women's representation already was secured, disincentivizing investment in their campaigns. The family- and clan-based electoral structure, reinforced by patriarchal norms, meant male relatives and local leaders often led the campaigns, while women's roles were largely symbolic or supportive.

In conservative areas, public visibility of women remained socially constrained, and the weak presence of political parties further reduced opportunities for women, as parties typically provide more structured capacity-building and secure platforms for campaigning. Consequently, women often were perceived as merely “completing the list” rather than as independent candidates, with limited visibility in public campaigning compared with male candidates. Some adapted by conducting outreach in women-only gatherings such as *diwan* meetings.

While fewer women used personal photographs in campaign materials than in previous elections, a new trend emerged in which some candidates used AI-generated images of their faces instead.

A number of female candidates succeeded through direct voter support and personal electoral support, including candidates in Hizma, Jenin, Salfit, Al-Bireh, Battir, and Hebron. In the city of Hebron, every female candidate on the official Fatah list won through direct election, making it one of only three municipalities in which women achieved the required level of representation without the need to apply the quota mechanism. This suggests that women's electoral success remains possible when female candidates receive stronger positioning within the party list, local and family support, or stronger public visibility and outreach.

Despite the increase in women's representation under the new electoral law, the electoral outcomes highlighted their limited electoral success outside of the quota. In many municipalities, only one woman was elected outright, while others gained seats via the quota system. According to the Palestinian observation network, Al Marsad, in 35 of the 90 municipal councils, no women won seats outright, without the quota mechanism.⁵²

⁵² https://www.almarsad.ps/index.php/uc_files/download/app_files/custom-fields/file/new_m_01jpg_3_2pdf_17787587583465873624205.pdf?vsig=ac0f639cf53a4e89fc82cab993899206

Recommendation: Political parties should institutionalize internal mechanisms aimed at promoting women's participation beyond mere compliance with quota requirements,

Youth Participation

Youth ages 18-29 constitute 22% of the Palestinian population, yet they remain significantly underrepresented in political and decision-making structures.⁵³ According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), the representation of youth and women in decision-making positions is less than 1%.⁵⁴ This underrepresentation is shaped by intersecting political, economic, and social factors, including the Israeli occupation and its restrictions, patriarchal social norms, limited economic opportunities, the weakened role of political parties, and the decline of community mobilization structures that historically supported youth leadership.

Although Palestinian youth traditionally have played active roles in national and social movements, many have become increasingly disengaged from formal political participation. Young people often are viewed primarily as an electoral mobilization force rather than as potential leaders, particularly within local councils. The prolonged absence of national elections and meaningful political change has further deepened this disengagement. Indeed, most Palestinians under the age of 38 – about 37% of the population – have never participated in a general Palestinian election.

Following demands from political parties, civil society organizations, and human rights institutions, the government introduced a positive reform by lowering the candidacy age to 23 in the electoral law.⁵⁵ While this reform represented an important step, it was implemented in a political environment that still lacked meaningful support for youth candidacy. Patriarchal social structures, combined with the limited participation of political parties in the elections, continued to favor older candidates and individuals with stronger economic means and social influence.

As a direct result of the reform, 178 candidates between the ages of 23 and 25 became eligible to run, representing about 3.5% of all candidates. Nevertheless, youth candidacy remained limited. The percentage of elected candidates ages 23-24 reached only 1%, while those ages 25-30 accounted for 7% of elected representatives, compared with 26% of winners age 50 and older. Political parties made limited efforts to actively encourage or support young candidates.

Economic barriers also significantly restricted youth participation. Registration fees payable to the CEC, together with campaign-related expenses, discouraged many young people from running, particularly amid difficult economic conditions and high unemployment rates. For the fourth quarter of 2024, unemployment rates in the Gaza Strip had risen to 68%, according to the PCBS. Unemployment rates among individuals participating in the labor force in the West Bank rose to approximately 28% in the fourth quarter of 2025.⁵⁶

⁵³ Source: Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, population in 2023-2024.

⁵⁴ Source: Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics; the term “decision-making positions” typically refers to senior leadership and managerial roles in public institutions and governance structures.

⁵⁵ Article 21 of Election Law 23/2025 lowered age requirements from 25 to 23.

⁵⁶ <https://www.pcbs.gov.ps/media/ruapsnvd/internationalworkersday2026a.pdf>

In contrast, youth participation was highly visible in voting, election observation, campaigning, mobilization, and voter education. Political parties, families, and even civil society organizations largely relied on youth as supporters and volunteers rather than promoting them as candidates. In meetings with youth organizations, political factions, and grassroots groups, interlocutors emphasized the number of youth volunteers, observers, and trainees involved in electoral activities, while little evidence existed of organized initiatives to encourage youth candidacy or leadership.

The widespread reliance on appointing consensus lists to office by acclamation rather than competitive electoral processes also reinforced the dominance of traditional elites and older generations. Consensus-building mechanisms typically are controlled by influential families, established local leaders, and politically or economically powerful actors, limiting opportunities for youth to compete for elected office and access decision-making positions. As a result, these practices contribute to the continued reproduction of traditional leadership structures at the expense of generational renewal.

More broadly, youth participation in local councils and representative institutions continues to face structural barriers linked to the prolonged dominance of older generations in leadership positions. In the absence of regular electoral turnover and general elections, many local leaders and council members have retained office for extended periods – in some cases for more than 12 years. Similar patterns are evident within political parties and professional unions. These dynamics continue to undermine political renewal and limit meaningful youth participation in decision-making.

Recommendations: Leaders of all parties and factions should make an active effort to engage young people in the election process, including those who have never had an opportunity to vote in a national election (anyone between the ages of 18 and 38).

Parties and factions should provide political space and new opportunities for younger voters to become involved in political affairs. Youth also should be allowed and encouraged to play an active role in internal party/faction deliberations and to be included as candidates in realistic slots to be elected.

Participation of People with Disabilities

The participation of people with disabilities in political and electoral processes in Palestine is protected under both international and domestic legal frameworks. Most notably, Article 29 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which the State of Palestine ratified in 2014, guarantees the right of individuals with disabilities to vote, stand for elections, hold public office, and participate fully in political and public life on an equal basis with others. These protections are reinforced by Article 25 of the ICCPR, the Palestinian Basic Law, and the Palestinian Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities No. 4 of 1999.

In line with these legal commitments, the CEC emphasized that ensuring the participation of people with disabilities was a key priority in the 2026 local elections. In a statement published Feb. 8, 2026, the commission stated that its voter education and outreach efforts sought to promote equal participation and accessibility by providing inclusive communication tools and

accessible electoral materials, including simplified content, sign-language videos, and Braille materials.

Despite positive institutional commitments to enhance the inclusion of people with disabilities, several practical and structural barriers continued to affect their participation throughout the electoral cycle.

People with disabilities faced notable accessibility challenges at certain polling stations during election day. Some polling centers in the West Bank were physically inaccessible, as polling stations were located on upper floors without adequate ramps or elevators. In some cases, reliance on personal help or informal assistance was required to facilitate access to polling stations and the voting process, potentially compromising the confidentiality of the vote. While the CEC has introduced accessibility measures such as Braille materials and sign language support in some contexts, the availability of such arrangements remains uneven, and there is limited consistency in the provision of accessible voting tools and on-site assistance. In Deir al-Balah municipality in Gaza strip, local observers noted that some centers were not suitable for elderly voters or people with disabilities.

A total of 128 candidates with disabilities ran for office, representing approximately 2% of all candidates. Among them, 67 had physical or mobility-related disabilities, 56 had visual impairments, and five had multiple disabilities. In addition, voters with disabilities accounted for approximately 3.3% of eligible voters, indicating a measurable level of electoral engagement despite persistent structural barriers.

Recommendations: *The CEC should ensure the availability of accessible polling stations and adequate ballot papers as part of the official voting materials.*

The CEC should adopt adequate procedures to enable people with disabilities to vote independently without relying on accompanying individuals.

Election Dispute Resolution

Effective, clear, and fair procedures for electoral dispute resolution are an essential part of a well-functioning electoral process and fundamental to ensuring that all other human rights are enjoyed.⁵⁷

The legal framework of local council elections allows voters, candidates, and list representatives to appeal decisions of the CEC in the Elections Court.⁵⁸ The Elections Court, for the local council elections was established by President Abbas in Decree 7 of 2025, and is

⁵⁷ ICCPR, art. 2(3), “Each State Party to the present covenant undertakes: (a) to ensure that any person whose rights or freedoms are herein recognized as violated shall have an effective remedy, notwithstanding that the violation has been committed by persons acting in an official capacity; (b) to ensure that any person claiming such a remedy shall have his right thereto determined by competent judicial, administrative or legislative authorities, or by any other competent authority provided for by the legal system of the State, and to develop the possibilities of judicial remedy; (c) to ensure that the competent authorities shall enforce such remedies when granted.”

⁵⁸ Article 55 of the Law 23 of 2025 states: Each voter, or candidate, or list’s representative has the right to contest the announced election results before a competent court within one week from the announcement of the results. The court shall issue its decision within five working days from the date the claim is submitted to it and shall inform the Central Elections Commission of its decisions to implement them accordingly.

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composed of four chambers: one for the North, one for the Center, one for the South of the West Bank, and one covering the Gaza Strip.

The 2025 law broadened those with standing to appeal the results in Article 55(1), which states: “Every voter, candidate, or list representative has the right to challenge the announced election results before the competent court within seven days from the date of announcing the results.”

The inclusion of a representative for each electoral list reflects a recommendation made by the 2017 European Union election expert mission, which suggested that “the nomination procedure could be amended so each candidate of the list gives a power of attorney to its agent so that he or she can represent the list and each of its candidates in court.”

A total of 60 appeals were presented to the Elections Court following the CEC’s announcement of preliminary results on April 26, 2026. The court rejected 56 of the 60 appeals – 32 in form, 21 in substance, and three plaintiffs withdrew their appeals. The 32 appeals rejected in form were dismissed because they were not presented by the official representative of the list or a practicing lawyer.

Four appeals were accepted by the court:

- The Elections Court ordered a vote recount in two cases, which changed the electoral results and the distribution of seats in both instances.
- In one case, the court ordered a vote recount, but it did not affect the results.
- In one case, a candidate who had passed away a few days before election day appeared on the ballot and received enough votes to win a seat. The court awarded the seat to the candidate who received the next-highest number of votes.

Recommendation: The CEC should conduct additional voter education for voters, candidates and political parties about the procedures for filing appeals and the individuals authorized to submit appeals before the Elections Court.

Postelectoral Developments

The publication of the local election results in April did not lead to the establishment of all local councils. Family and clan disagreements resurfaced in some areas where winning lists have a plurality of the vote. In such cases, members of the new council must reach a consensus on who will be elected mayor, delaying their appointment. For this reason, many civil society organizations suggested that the mayor and deputy mayor should be elected separately, directly by the voters.

It is important that the will of the people, as expressed through credible and completed elections, ultimately leads to the establishment of the elected body to preserve the credibility of the electoral process.

Role of the Ministry of Local Government

The MoLG can appoint candidates to complete lists if the number of candidates does not meet the number of council seats allocated. The law states: “In the event that the number of candidates in the lists for a Municipal Council or candidates for a Village Council does not meet the allocated number of council seats, the candidates shall be declared winners by acclamation, and the Ministry of Local Government shall appoint the remaining members, taking into account women and Muslim-Christian representation.”⁵⁹

The MoLG indicated that there were 39 village councils with an incomplete number of candidates on the lists.

According to Article 56 of Law 23 of 2025, there are binding legal timeframes for the municipal or village councils to hold their first meeting after the announcement of final results:

- The council shall hold its first meeting within 10 days from the date of announcing the final election results.
- If it is not possible to hold the meeting with the attendance of two-thirds of the members, the eldest member shall call for another meeting within a period not exceeding four days from the date of the first meeting.

If the council does not hold its first meeting within the above-mentioned timeframes, the MoLG will invite the council to hold its first meeting.⁶⁰ However, the law does not foresee a timeframe for the MoLG to invite the council to do so.

Recommendation: The law could include a timeframe for the MoLG to invite the council to hold its first meeting, as stipulated by the law for the council to plan its meeting.

The assessment team received reports that by May 18, 2026, only 60% of the councils had been formed.

Postelectoral Developments in the Gaza Strip

In Deir al-Balah, the postelectoral process went smoothly, and a mayor was elected in accordance with the law. The elected council began operating by continuing an emergency service plan focused on maintaining essential services: road repairs, waste removal, maintenance and securing of water lines, rehabilitation of sewage networks, support for small-scale youth and women’s projects, and meetings with displaced people to listen to their needs.

Also, there was communication with international organizations and institutions and the municipality, including the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, in addition to other international bodies that requested access to the council’s plans and future needs.

⁵⁹ Article 49 (5-a) of Law 23 of 2025 Concerning the Elections of Local Authority Councils.

⁶⁰ Through the Director of the Local Government Directorate in the Governorate.

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However, in the Gaza Strip, the already dire security situation worsened quickly after the elections, in violation of the October 2025 ceasefire agreement. According to a situation report by the U.N. Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) in March, under the ceasefire arrangements, 55-58% of the total area of Gaza Strip was under the control of the Israeli army.⁶¹ A so-called “yellow line” separated the areas of Israeli military occupation to the East and South, from the areas where civilians are presumed to reside in the West. By the end of April 2026, an additional area of about 11% of the Gaza Strip was put under the control of the Israeli army (the “orange line”). Thus, the total area under direct military control or influence, or with restricted movement, is approximately 64% of the Gaza Strip. The estimated area available for civilian life is approximately 36% of the Strip.⁶²

Bombardment of the Gaza Strip and the sharp ongoing shortages of food, drinking water, medication, electricity, and communication resources are the manifestations of the catastrophic humanitarian and security conditions prevailing across the Gaza Strip. The current circumstances are not only un conducive to the holding of broader future credible elections there but also pose an imminent threat to the lives and well-being of the more than 2 million Palestinians living under siege.

Eighth General Conference of Fatah

Of political relevance, the aftermath of the elections was marked by the long overdue Eighth General Conference of Fatah (May 14-16), held simultaneously in Ramallah, Cairo, and Gaza, during which Mahmoud Abbas was reelected by unanimous acclamation as president of the party. Elections to the Fatah Central Committee (18 members) and Fatah Revolutionary Council (80 members) also were organized.

During his opening address to the conference, President Abbas highlighted the success of the local elections, and established a tentative roadmap for future elections, reiterating an intention to hold PNC elections in November 2026, followed by general elections and presidential elections. He also stated that the new constitution “is ready, but how we present it and to whom do we present it, that is the issue. Whether it means a referendum, or (through) certain institutions.” President Abbas also stated that a new general election law and a political parties law were “ready.”

These steps would pave the way for three electoral processes in the near future, beginning potentially with elections to the Palestinian National Council of the PLO, then parliamentary or Palestinian Legislative Council elections under the Palestinian Authority, and finally the presidency.⁶³ President Abbas declared 2026 “to be the year of democracy.”

As of the drafting of this report, Palestinian Authority officials reportedly are planning both PNC and PLC elections in late 2026 or early 2027. A referendum on an interim constitution may be postponed.

⁶¹ [UNRWA Situation Report #213](#) on the Humanitarian Crisis in the Gaza Strip and the Occupied West Bank, Including East Jerusalem.

⁶² [Reuters, "Israeli maps outline expanded zone of military control in Gaza" \(29 April 2026\)](#) - [UNRWA Situation Report No. 221 \(13 May 2026\)](#)

⁶³ This also includes the complexity surrounding diaspora voting for the 150 representatives allocated to it. PNC elections are tentatively anticipated for November 2026.

Given the current security conditions, escalating settler violence, Israeli military operations in Gaza, and increased restrictions on movement, organizing four large-scale, national, electoral processes in such an ongoing conflict environment would be extremely challenging – not only for the CEC, but also for political factions, candidates, and ultimately voters seeking to cast their ballots freely.

Conclusions

The April 25, 2026, Palestinian local elections were held in an exceptionally difficult political, humanitarian, and economic climate shaped by the ongoing ramifications of the Gaza war, escalating tensions in the West Bank, a prolonged absence of national elections, and regional tensions stemming from the conflict between Iran, the U.S., and Israel. Restrictions on movement, settler violence, intimidation, arbitrary arrests, economic decline, election by acclamation, and political monopoly in the West Bank heavily constrained the democratic process, rendering elections noncompetitive in more than half of the constituencies. Dire humanitarian and security conditions in Gaza further limited participation, resulting in the democratic process not being fully realized across the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

Despite these challenges, the elections represented an effort to preserve the limited avenues for democratic participation, as local elections remain the only recurring electoral process available to most Palestinians in the OPT. While they provided an important opportunity for limited political engagement, serious concerns remain regarding political pluralism, legal stability, electoral competition, and the broader environment for fundamental rights and freedoms. Concerted efforts will be needed from the Palestinian Authority, political leaders and parties, and the international community to help ensure that conditions in the OPT are more conducive to the exercise of Palestinian political rights. Taking these steps will help support inclusive participation, democratic renewal, the rebuilding of Gaza, Palestinian statehood, and a sustainable peace process between Israel and Palestine.

Recommendations

To the Palestinian Authority:

- Establish stronger safeguards and accountability mechanisms during the candidate nomination process – including investigation of alleged crimes and timely prosecution – to prevent interference by state actors, including security forces, political actors, or administrative bodies.
- Ensure that freedom of expression is upheld and respected during elections, including preventing threats to media outlets, candidates, and other electoral actors.
- Conduct local council elections in other Gaza municipalities, whenever possible, to revive democratic processes and encourage public participation.
- Prioritize the provision of stable and adequate resources necessary for the Central Elections Commission to conduct electoral operations in a professional and high-quality manner.
- Ensure adequate security for all Palestinians, including at polling locations, to enable voters to fully participate in the elections and cast their ballots free from fear.
- Palestinian security forces should ensure that the human rights environment allows Palestinians the freedom to choose their elected officials without harassment or intimidation.

To the Legislative Authority:

- Candidate nomination requirements should be subject to broad prior consultations, aiming at reaching a consensus and respect of Palestine's international commitments. The outcomes of the consultations should be duly reflected in final legislation.
- Introduce policy enabling the conduct of by-elections in municipalities where no candidates or lists came forward during the nomination period.
- Refrain from amending the election law or making major changes to the electoral system within one year before elections are held.
- Lower the amount of the financial deposit for candidacy, taking into account the cost of living, to encourage the participation of youth and of women in the elections as candidates.
- Initiate deliberations about the “acclamation” procedure, potentially conducting a referendum on this process, as suggested by the Central Elections Commission and national observers in past elections.
- Amend the law to require the Ministry of Local Government to invite appointed councils to hold their first meetings within a specific timeframe.
- Amend the electoral law to require the CEC to publicize campaign finance reports.
- Amend the municipal elections law to require an electoral validation exercise in instances in which only one list is submitted to the CEC to compete in a specific constituency.

To the Central Elections Commission:

- Conduct an independent postelection audit of the CEC's tabulation IT system.
- Publish tabulation procedures prior to election day.
- Include screens or any other system chosen by the CEC during the tabulation process, enabling observers to follow the process without interfering with data entry operations.
- Adjust the IT system to the electoral system currently applicable and test it well before the elections to allow corrections as needed.
- Publish results per polling station on the CEC's website, disaggregating the data by age and gender.
- Strengthen the participation of people with disabilities by increasing the number of accessible polling stations and adequate ballot papers.
- Adjust procedures to enable people with disabilities to vote independently without relying on support from others.
- Increase voter education campaigns to educate voters on the procedures and the individuals authorized to file appeals to the Elections Court.

To the Political Parties:

- Institutionalize internal mechanisms aimed at promoting women's participation beyond mere compliance with quota requirements

To the International Community and the State of Israel:

- Halt violations of the ceasefire and withdraw Israeli forces from Gaza Strip according to U.N. Security Council Resolution 2803.
- Ensure that efforts to hold general elections in the Gaza Strip are accompanied by prioritizing a safe and humane environment for the exercise of political rights, including improved access to essential humanitarian needs (food, water, electricity, medicine, and shelter) to strengthen the credibility of the process.
- Take steps to ensure that the CEC is able to deliver electoral materials and supplies to the Gaza Strip in a timely manner to facilitate and ensure the technical administration of the polls.
- Ensure that the Palestinian Authority and the CEC have access to stable and adequate resources, and the freedom of movement, access, and logistical support to conduct credible electoral operations in a professional and high-quality manner.

Beyond these recommendations, The Carter Center would like to reaffirm some earlier recommendations that are not part of this report:

- The right of Palestinians to stand as candidates, the right to participate in the civic affairs of their country, and the right to periodic democratic elections should be respected. All stakeholders, including the Palestinian Authority, political parties, and the international community, should support steps to (a) conduct elections, including presidential and legislative, to provide the Palestinian people with the opportunity to express their political choices freely; and (b) to accept the results of a credible exercise.

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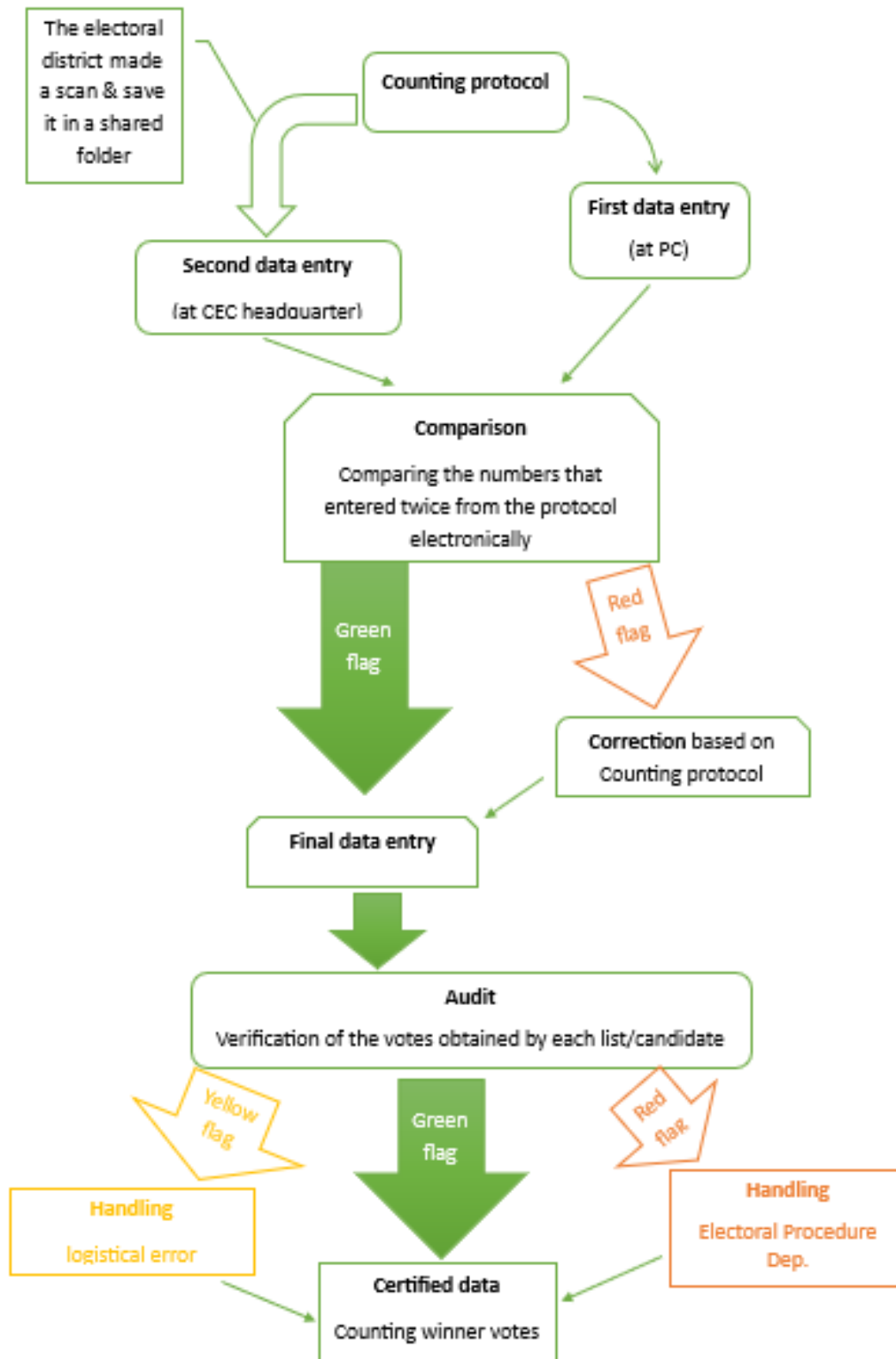
- Leaders of all parties and factions should make an active effort to engage young people in the election process, including those who have never had an opportunity to vote in a national election (ages 18-38). Parties and factions should provide political space and new opportunities for younger voters to become involved in political affairs. Youth also should be allowed and encouraged to play an active role in internal party/faction deliberations and to be included as candidates in realistic slots to be elected.
- The Palestinian Authority should immediately take steps to ensure the creation of an environment conducive to competitive, inclusive, and genuine democratic elections. This includes full protection of Palestinians' rights to freedom of assembly, expression, and personal security.
- Seek clear confirmation from Israel that it will allow Palestinian voters to cast ballots in their respective post offices in East Jerusalem and facilitate the inclusive conduct of national polls, as per Israel's obligations under the Oslo Accords.
- Representatives of the international community, particularly the U.S. government, should support Palestinian leaders in these efforts and should engage with both Palestinian and Israeli authorities to clarify steps to conduct elections.

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The findings, analysis, views, and recommendations included in this report and other statements do not represent the official position of the UNDP, the UN, or of any of the U.N. Member States that are part of its Executive Board.

Annexes

Annex 1: The Tabulation Process



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Annex 2: Number of Voters in Localities with an Acclamation List

Governorate	# of Municipalities	# of Villages	# of Voters
Jerusalem	15	6	66,554
Jenin	3	33	49,072
Tulkarm	2	13	19,273
Tubas		6	2,062
Nablus	4	21	136,728
Qalqilya	2	6	11,611
Salfit	1	3	8,031
Ramallah and al-Bireh	7	33	87,422
Jericho		4	2,845
Bethlehem	4	17	34,987
Hebron	4	13	46,681
Total			465,266

Elections Postponed

Governorate	Municipality	# of Villages	# of Voters
Hebron	Beit Omar		10,515

Source: CEC

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