

Women's Representation in Local Government: New Evidence from the West Bank



المركز الفلسطيني
للبحوث
السياسية والمسحية
Palestinian Center for
POLICY and
SURVEY RESEARCH

In partnership with



Dr Khalil Shikaki
Skye Christensen

2023

Table of Contents

Executive Summary.....	3
Disclaimer.....	5
Acknowledgments.....	5
Background and Literature Review.....	6
Descriptive and substantive representation.....	9
Research Methodology.....	12
Findings.....	17
Nomination, Campaign, and Election.....	17
How often are they subjected to intimidation?.....	21
Women councilors are active: Women are nearly as likely as men to attend council meetings, and to help shape the agenda.....	23
Are women councilors being taken seriously?.....	26
Success at the council level.....	28
Women councilors have significant political aspirations.....	32
What makes a local women politician successful?.....	35
What do women politicians think about the quotas?.....	37
Conclusion.....	40
About the partners.....	43
United Nations Development Programme.....	43
Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research.....	44

Executive Summary

Within Palestinian institutions, Local Government in the West Bank is the sole remaining layer of government that has been subjected to the discipline of regular democratic elections administered by the Central Election Commission. These polls and the councils that they engender are therefore a rich source for understanding Palestinian political life.

Palestinian women are among the most underrepresented groups in Palestinian politics. Largely absent from the senior echelons, women nonetheless make up about one-fifth (21%) of local councilors. Most are elected with the support of quotas that ensure that a minimum number of women are both nominated and elected.

Qualitative studies and widespread belief have suggested that most of these councilors are mere ‘quota women’ acting as stand-ins or proxies for their families or political factions and exercising limited substantive influence over council affairs.

Since conventional wisdom on gender issues can sometimes be invalid, we set out to test these assumptions employing a robust quantitative and qualitative methodology. We spoke with a representative sample of councilors, stratified to ensure that we had geographical and rural/urban representation. We also selected a (smaller) representative sample of male council members to act as a baseline for our analysis.

We hope the findings contained in this report will contribute to a recalibration of perceptions related to the performance of women in local councils, and the potential for women's political participation in Palestine. There are gaps between men and women on the councils, but in general, these gaps appear small.

A significant majority of women councilors appear to be actively engaged in representing their constituents and building political careers. Women councilors attend council meetings, propose agenda topics, and are engaged in discussions. They are also highly likely to feel that their participation matters, to be proud of their councils, to feel supported by their colleagues, and positively evaluate council performance.

Equally importantly, most women councilors see themselves as credible politicians and plan to stand again in future elections.

That said, significant gaps remain. Women are 21% less likely than their male counterparts to attend council meetings, 10% less likely

to propose agenda topics, and 7% less likely to recall what was discussed in council meetings (a measure of engagement).

Some of the gaps also favored women: women are 7% more likely to find their colleagues supportive of their contribution during council meetings, 20% more likely to positively evaluate their council performance, and 18% more likely to intend to stand again in future elections.

This new evidence problematizes much conventional wisdom about women in local West-Bank politics. It suggests that far from being relegated to the sidelines most local women politicians have emerged as successful political operators with levels of engagement comparable to their male counterparts. This reinforces experience from other contexts suggesting that women's presence in democratic institutions has a positive impact on women's ability to influence policies, even under the limited sovereignty of the Palestinian Authority.

Disclaimer

The principal researchers for this work are Dr. Khalil Shikaki, Executive Director, PSP, and Skye Christensen, Chief Technical Advisor, UNDP/PAPP. The views expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations, the United Nations Development Programme, the PSR or the donors.

UNDP does not endorse any entity, brand, product or service.

Acknowledgments



The Democratization and Elections Project is made possible by the project donors: Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Germany, Ireland, and Spain.

The authors wish to thank the Central Election Commission for their collaboration on essential data for this research. We likewise wish to acknowledge the contribution of each of the respondents and key informants for participating in this critical research.

UNDP also wishes to thank UN Volunteer Júlia Mundim Pena (Brazil) for the design of this report.

Background and Literature Review

Elected Local Governance

Since its establishment in 1994, the Palestinian Authority has not held *periodic* elections for any office, including local governments. Israel held intermittent municipal elections in the West Bank between 1967 and 1994 and directly appointed some local governments. Upon its formation, the PA inherited a mixture of these elected and other appointed local bodies. The PA subsequently organized its first local council elections in 2004-2005 across both the West Bank and Gaza Strip. At the time of writing, these have been the last local elections to be held in the Gaza Strip. Following a series of cancellations, the PA held elections in the West Bank in 2012, 2017, and most recently in 2021/2022.

In the absence of periodic national elections, local government elections have taken on greater importance as the only semi-regular political elections for general governance institutions in Palestine since 2006. As one of the only potential drivers of democratic consolidation in the West Bank, the health and inclusivity of these local processes are doubly important.

One of the most crucial elements of local government in Palestine is kinship groups such as families and clans. Kinship groups are often the primary political institution at the local level, in some places more influential in list formation than political parties or professional organizations combined. Many analysts believe the role of clans and families is increasing.¹

¹ A complementary study of the heads of lists in the West Bank. PSR/UNDP. Forthcoming.

Key Timelines

2004-2005

First local elections in the West Bank / Gaza Strip under PA

2005

20% Gender quota introduced for local councils

2012

Second Local elections in the West Bank

2017

Third Local elections in the West Bank

2021-2022

Fourth Local elections in the West Bank

Gender gaps in political participation

Women are politically underrepresented in Palestine. While Palestinian women have a proud tradition of political activism, the leading Palestinian political institutions (PLO/Fatah, Hamas, etc.) have rarely prioritized women's empowerment within their own structures.²

In the most recent rounds of local government elections (2021/2022), women's voter turnout averaged about 50%, considerably less than male voters (66%). Analysis suggests that patriarchal cultural factors primarily account for the gap, and that voter turnout campaigns could target this gap in future elections.

² Jad, I. (2010). Palestinian women contesting power in chaos. *Ids Bulletin*, 41(5), 81-88.

Women themselves are less optimistic about democracy³, perhaps because they have rarely had equal opportunities to participate equally in politics. The latest survey data - collected by PSR in the 7th Wave of the Arab Barometer - found an 8 percentage-point gap between the sexes on the issue of support for democracy. This finding likely reflects a lack of agency rather than a preference for autocracy: Palestinian Women are more likely to indicate that “*For people like me, it doesn’t matter what kind of government we have.*”⁴

council elections. One reason is that women candidates are often placed as far down the lists as the quotas (which include some placement requirements) will allow and thus are less likely to be awarded a seat. While over half of women candidates in rural areas are elected, only about one in five are elected in the more competitive urban areas.⁸

Women rarely lead candidate lists: In the recent local elections, 98% of the lists were headed by men.⁹

The first round of local elections (2004-5) was conducted with a candidacy quota, and women candidates secured 17% of seats⁵. A 20% gender quota was introduced following this first round of local elections⁶. The quota is designed to stipulate the number of women that must not only be nominated but also elected. Women currently win about one-in-five local council seats.

Male candidates are about one-third more likely to be elected than women candidates in local

³The Weekly: Quantifying the Gender Gap in PA Politics. UNDP/PAPP. 2023.

⁴The Weekly: Quantifying the Gender Gap in PA Politics. UNDP/PAPP. 2023.

⁵Data compiled from NDI observer reports.

⁶Jad, I. (2010). Palestinian women contesting power in chaos. *Ids Bulletin*, 41(5), 81-88.

⁷In the 2021/2022 local elections, women won 814 out of 3858 council seats (~21.1%). Source: CEC.

⁸Analysis of CEC data by UNDP. Women candidate success rate in rural areas was 55% and 23.9% in urban areas.

⁹In the 2021/2022 elections, There were 11 women-headed lists out of a total of 809 lists.

Descriptive and substantive representation

Does the number of women elected to local councils matter in terms of policy?

Research on women's political participation broadly makes a distinction between *descriptive* and *substantive* representation. Descriptive representation, the number or proportion of women elected to office or serving in government, is understood to be causally linked to substantive representation, the effects of women's presence in elected office. A significant body of research has found that the number of women elected to office has implications that are not only symbolic: A greater ratio of women to men seems to have implications for policy and mobilization of women constituents.¹⁰ While the research suggests that this link is empirical, the relationship between the two is highly context-specific and non-linear.¹¹

¹⁰ Beckwith, K. (2007). Numbers and Newness: The Descriptive and Substantive Representation of Women. *Canadian Journal of Political Science / Revue Canadienne de Science Politique*, 40(1), 27–49. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25166063>

¹¹ Wängnerud, L. (2009). Women in parliaments: Descriptive and substantive representation. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 12, 51-69.

In Palestine, the dominant narrative on women in local government is summed up in the quip that ‘women make tea, men make decisions.’¹² The local council gender quota is often characterized as tokenistic or allowing underqualified women to succeed in place of more qualified or experienced candidates. The patriarchal nature of local culture and religion is said to prevent women from having policy influence.¹³ Below are selected quotes from a few experts we spoke to.

“

“The choice of women in the lists varies by region. For example, men fill lists in the countryside and choose the women they want by talking to husbands or fathers, and these are the ones who actually work in elected councils.”

Musa Abu Hadid, former mayor

“

“To date, the role of women in local politics remains limited and ineffective. Although there are more than 20% of female members on elected councils, performance is lower than expected.”

Basim Hadaydeh, Ministry of Local government

¹² Taylor, E. (2019). Beyond the numbers: Implications of the Palestinian Women Election Quota for women in local government.

¹³ See for instance: MIFTAH. (2017). [A Study of the Obstacles which Hinder the Equal Representation of Women and the Youth inside the various bodies of the Palestinian Liberation Organization \(PLO\) and Limit their Access to Decision-Making Positions.](#)



“What I hear is that there are individual cases of women who have emerged and have a big role, for example the Deputy Mayor in Hebron, but overall, it must be recognized that women’s role is still limited and that women often just a number to satisfy the requirements of the quota system.”

Ammar Al Duwaik, Palestinian Independent Commission for Human Rights

This narrative is reinforced by qualitative studies using methodologies based on case studies and key informant interviews which identify that elected women have largely been prevented from delivering substantive representation.¹⁴ To date, we are not aware of any empirical work that measures the performance of elected women in local councils in the West Bank or Gaza Strip.

¹⁴ See: Taylor, E. (2019). Beyond the numbers: Implications of the Palestinian Women Election Quota for women in local government, and MIFTAH. (2017). A Study of the Obstacles which Hinder the Equal Representation of Women and the Youth inside the various bodies of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) and Limit their Access to Decision-Making Positions.

Research Methodology

We conducted this research to study the relationship between the descriptive and substantive representation of women in local government in Palestine. Our objective was to surface original insights about this link that will help stakeholders to understand and define problems, as well as evidence future interventions and advocacy in democratic governance programming. This should help stakeholders evaluate proposals for programming such as training of women councilors, or advocacy such as quota or electoral system reforms.

Our principal interest is in understanding to *what extent gender quotas produce substantive representation at the local level in Palestine.* Either the quotas are functioning predictably to create descriptive representation (# of women elected) but are largely not delivering substantive representation (the extent to which elected women councilors deliver on issues) or the inverse is true.

Survey of councilors

We couldn't compare councils with more women to those with fewer women since there is limited variation between council.¹⁵ Instead, we've focused our analysis on the performance of women councilors as a group and compared them to their male colleagues. This approach allows us to measure council inputs (deliberation & engagement in policymaking), but it doesn't allow us to measure outputs (public goods provision, budget delivery, corruption, public satisfaction, etc.) We assume better inputs in the form of council engagement likely produce better outputs in terms of projects and governance at the local level.

A sample of 400 local elections representatives was generated using simple random selection. The total list of names included all representatives of electoral lists in all West Bank governorates in the last two rounds of local elections (2021-2022). This list was

provided by the Central Election Commission at the request of the UNDP. The list contained the names and phone numbers of the legal representatives of the lists (known as agents). We called each of the selected representatives and asked them to provide the names of a selected female and male winner from each electoral list. The goal was to collect the names and phone numbers of 100 winners: 66 women and 34 men. This process yielded 150 winners, all of which were called. Those who did not answer were called later that day or in the following days for a total of three attempted calls. In total, 104 winners (66 women and 38 men) were interviewed over the phone by three data collectors. This sample includes about 8% of the total women elected to local councils.

In addition to the limitation in how we measure impact, there are two additional limitations of this methodology: sampling errors and response bias.

¹⁵ See for instance: Chattopadhyay, R., & Duflo, E. (2004). Women as policy makers: Evidence from a randomized policy experiment in India. *Econometrica*, 72(5), 1409-1443.

1. Sampling errors. Our sample of men and women councilors may deviate from the overall universe because of some selection effects introduced during the methodology. This includes the process of getting the numbers of the councilors, as well as the response rates. If underperforming councilors are less likely to answer their phones or speak to our researchers, then our results will correspondingly overstate the overall performance of councilors.

2. Response bias. We anticipate that councilors would be more likely to positively falsify their performance than negatively: i.e., they would be more likely to tell us that they went to meetings, actively participated, etc. To reduce response bias, we structured our research instrument around specific verifiable responses (*what time was the last meeting held?*) rather than general questions (*how often do you attend meetings?*)

Key informants

We also selected five key informants using a positive-outlier approach – aimed at selecting the five most successful women in the sample. We scored each of the 66 women councilors in the sample algorithmically based on the instrument and subjectively to identify the top five in terms of performance. We interviewed these councilors in a second more detailed interview using a longer open-ended instrument. We refer to these in this report as the key informants.

The key informants came from different types of localities, urban and rural, and included one mayor. The research aimed at obtaining insights into the arc of their political careers. For this purpose, many of the questions sought to gain information that would allow us to understand and tell their stories. We also sought their assessment as

well as their reflections one or two years after the elections. A total of 15 questions were asked of which 10 sought to compile information, while 4 represented assessment and one provided the council women with the opportunity to reflect on their decisions and experience. The full instrument is attached.

National poll

We also conducted a special poll among a representative sample of Palestinians on 7-10 December 2022. In this poll, we sought to quantify public support for women in local government. The total size of the sample was 1200 adults interviewed face-to-face in 120 randomly selected population locations. The margin of error is +/-3%.

While the originals were drafted in English each was implemented in Arabic.

Objective	Surface original insights about the local electoral process that will help stakeholders to define problems, as well as evidence future interventions and advocacy in democratic governance programming.
Research question	To what extent are the gender quotas producing descriptive and substantive representation in the 2021/2022 electoral cycle?
Hypothesis	Quotas are functioning predictably to create descriptive representation (# of women elected) but are largely not delivering substantive representation (the extent to which elected women councilors deliver on issues of a particular group).
Null hypothesis	Most (>0.5) elected women councilors are delivering substantive representation.
Unit of analysis	Elected councilors.
Method of analysis	Compare the performance of elected women councilors against their male colleagues (comparison of means).
Universe of cases	All elected councilors.
Sample	A representative sample of elected councilors 104 winners (66 women and 38 men).
Stratification	Gender, governorate, rural/urban.
Method of data collection	Phone interviews + key informant interviews of 5 positive outliers.

Findings

In the sections below we summarize the key findings from our study. Question by question detailed findings are available from PSR.

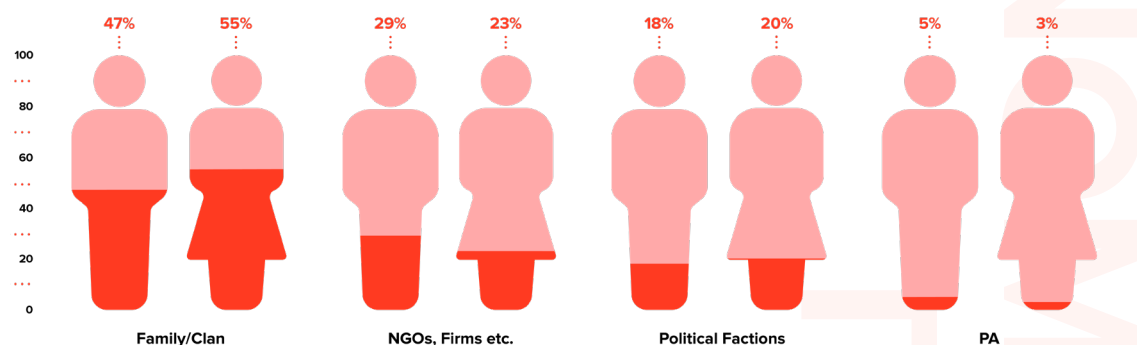
Nomination, Campaign, and Election

Before unpacking the evidence on substantive representation, we want to describe how our respondents got here. How were they nominated, who backed them, and what challenges did they face in terms of getting elected?

Most of the councilors in our sample entered local electoral politics with the backing of kinship groups (clans, see Fig. 1) Much smaller proportions emerged with the support of societal forces or political factions. When we asked our key informants about the way they were nominated, the

Figure 1 · Is the family behind you?

Most instrumental backers, as reported by successful candidates



Data: Survey of random sample of 104 local councilors from the West Bank. Question: "Who in your view from the following list is the most instrumental in helping you win the election because of their encouragement or support?" PCPSR/UNDP 2023.

responses were appropriately varied: One was asked to join the list by independents, while another received support from societal forces who thought she would be an asset to the townspeople. A fifth was asked to lead the list by the men and women in her clan.

“

“The family, especially its men, wanted to form an electoral list and they asked me to lead it, and I accepted.”

Sayeij, Mayor, Birzeit

“

“Because of my presence and my active role in the previous council, I received offers from more than one list to join it, which allowed me to choose the list that I thought had the greatest ability to accomplish the required work.”

Thaljayah, Council member, Bethlehem

“

“I was nominated by the people of the town, the societal forces, as they came to me and convinced me to stand.”

Khoury, council member, Jifna, Ramallah

Even though two of our key informants were nominated by the ruling party (Fatah), support from political parties doesn't appear to be a significant indicator of success. Not one of the leading women we interviewed had received support from political parties – indeed the ruling faction (Fatah) had encouraged various parts of the movement to compete against each other.

“

“I am a Fatah movement activist. However, the movement did not interfere in the electoral process and allowed its members to participate in different lists because the movement realized that any victory for any list would be its victory.”

Rayan, council member, Jericho

There is sometimes a perception that women are absent from the campaign. We asked candidates about their involvement in the election campaign, such as door-to-door visits or participation in meetings and other election-related events. All council women indicated that they have indeed participated in both meetings and visits to families. This applied in all environments: in major cities, such as Bethlehem, in big towns, such as Birzeit, and in small villages where people know each other well.

“

“My list held public meetings for the people of the town. I joined meetings with women and worked to convince people to vote for the best.”

Thaljayah, Council member, Bethlehem

“

“I campaigned with my colleagues on the list, including visits to homes and meetings with representatives of the different groups and key components of the city. I was also involved in liaison with the press and the media.”

Rayan, council member, Jericho

Some successful women politicians pay for their campaigns using personal or family resources. Others didn't need to contribute.

“

“Spending was assigned to each person on the list, each contributing to the joint election campaign, and that responsibility was distributed equally.”

Sayeij, Mayor, Birzeit

“

“I did not contribute financially to the electoral process, and the head of the list took over the task as he collected what was necessary to finance the electoral campaign and did not ask me personally to contribute to that.”

Rayan, council member, Jericho

How often are they subjected to intimidation?

Research UNDP funded in 2022 by the Bisan Center documented instances of women being subjected to psychological violence intended to deter them from standing for office.¹⁶ The intimidation they documented was perpetrated to a large extent by Palestinian security forces and intelligence.¹⁷

In this present study, we set out to corroborate these findings and quantify the extent of the problem: We wanted to understand how common intimidation is (frequency) and to what extent it is gendered (differential effects between men and women). We were also interested in identifying the most common perpetrators, and to what extent the intimidation is successful (i.e. that the victims withdraw, resign from office, etc.). We detail the full findings in a separate forthcoming report.

Roughly two-in-ten successful women candidates and one-in-ten successful male candidates

report being subjected to intimidation to withdraw from the local elections (see Figure 2).

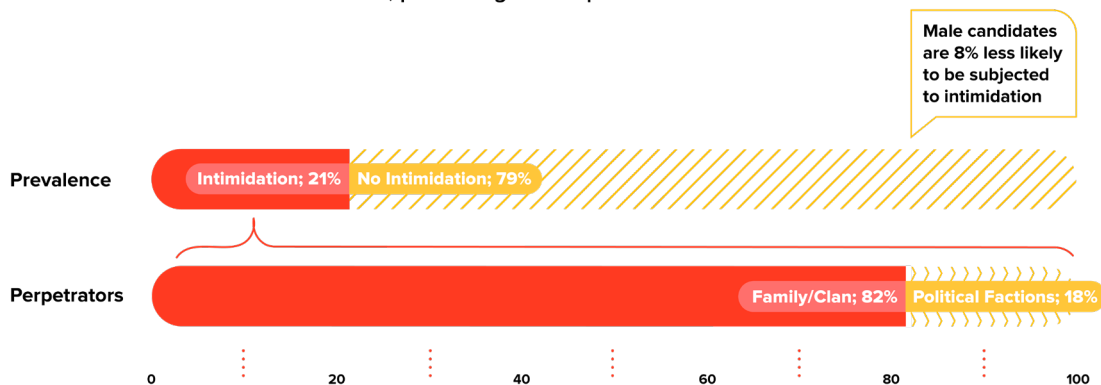
Contrary to the previous findings, our data suggest that most pressure originates from clans rather than state institutions (at least for those who take up office). Political factions appear to be the second most common source of pressure.

¹⁶ Bisan Center for Research and Development. 2022. Unpublished.

¹⁷ For a full typology of violence against women in politics please see. [Guidance Note: Preventing Violence Against Women in Politics](#). UN Women, 2021. New York, July 2021.

Figure 2 · A minority of female councilors reported intimidation, chiefly from kinship groups.

Presence and source of intimidation, percentage of respondents.



Data: Survey of random sample of 66 electoral female councilors across the West Bank. Question: “Have you personally been subjected to pressure to withdraw your candidacy or list from the electoral process? If yes, please specify the source of the pressure: familv/clan. PA officials or securitv services. or political factions?” PCPSR/UNDP 2023.

Cognizant that focusing only on successful candidates could skew our findings, we asked a series of questions to a separate nationally representative sample of lists including unsuccessful lists.

About half the respondents in this second sample reported that they heard of or were aware of intimidation in the electoral process (whether against candidates in their own lists or other lists). This second sample also corroborated that pressure came primarily from kinship groups, followed by political parties and PA officials, and security services. The vast majority of respondents reported that the pressure was ineffective.¹⁸

¹⁸ This data will be published by UNDP/PSR in a forthcoming report on intimidation and list formation.

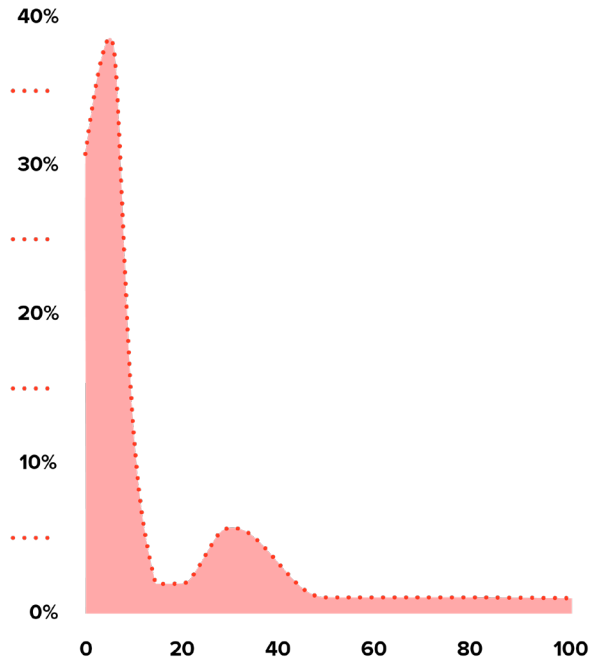
Women councilors are active: Women are nearly as likely as men to attend council meetings, and to help shape the agenda

Some analysis of local government in the West Bank has focused on the authoritarian approach of some mayors, who bypass or ignore the council to implement their policy. Since few mayors are women, this could dramatically undermine the ability of elected women council members to influence policy and deliver substantive representation. We measured this in two ways – measuring how active the council was and capturing perceptions of satisfaction by the councilors themselves (next section).

We found that most councils are active, at least in terms of meetings, and that both men and women members are attending these meetings regularly. A significant majority of the councilors in our sample, regardless of gender, reported attending local council meetings during the week before the interview. Only a small minority (about 5%) were not aware of meetings being held.

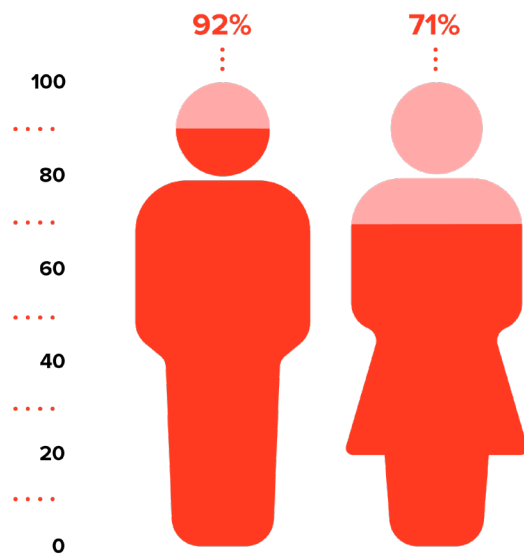
Figure 3 · Most councils are meeting frequently...

Days since last council meeting, percentage of responses.



But women councillors are 21% less likely to attend.

Meeting attendance by gender.



Data: Survey of random sample of 104 electoral councillors across the West Bank. Questions: “What was the date of the last council meeting? Did you attend the council meeting on [response]?” PCPSR/UNDP 2023.

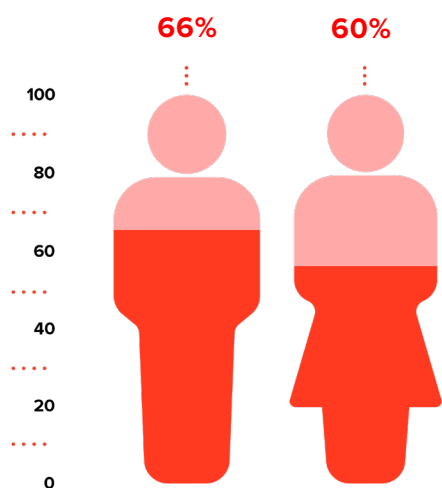
One of the principal concerns raised in the literature was that meetings were held at a time or a location that doesn't work for women councilors, and this was contributing to their underperformance. Our research found that most meetings are indeed held in the evening, but almost all of them take place in an official location: the council building or city hall.

The literature and conventional wisdom suggest that women councilors elected on quotas

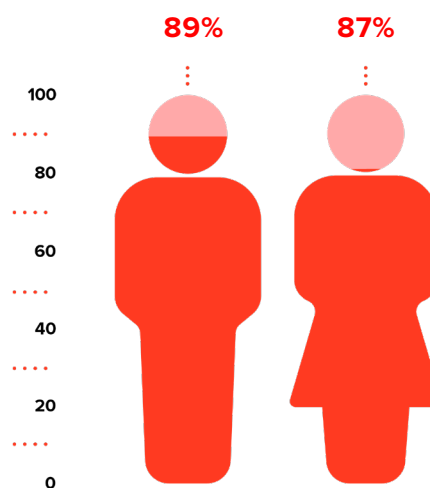
end up being limited to the secretarial and administrative work of the council. To evaluate their substantive engagement, we asked our sample if they were aware of the agenda of the meetings in advance, what they contributed in terms of the agenda, and to quantify their specific impact. We also measured the recall of agendas of the most recent meeting. These questions were asked in a specific way to avoid response bias as much as possible.

Figure 4 • Male and female councilors report similar levels of input; demonstrate comparable ability to recall previous meeting agendas.

Agenda inputs, percentage of responses.



Agenda recall by gender, percentage of responses.



Data: Data: Survey of random sample of 104 electoral councilors across the West Bank. Questions: "Did you propose any items to be discussed in that meeting? What was one agenda item discussed in that meeting?" PCPSR/UNDP 2023.

The results were quite positive. Women councilors are actively engaging actively in council business.

- Women were nearly as likely as their male counterparts (87% vs 89%) to be able to recall at least one agenda item from the most recent meeting.
- Women were also nearly as likely as men (60% vs 66%) to report that they had proposed an agenda item that was discussed in the most recent meeting.

These are very positive findings that suggest that most councils are active and that women are substantively involved.

Are women councilors being taken seriously?

Even if women actively step up to their duties as councilors, some conventional wisdom suggests that male council members are nonetheless ignoring or undermining their women colleagues. To evaluate this, we set out to measure men-women collegial relations against men-men. We did this by asking how supportive both sexes found their fellow (mostly male) council members. We also asked to what extent council members are proud of the work of the council – we assumed that a member who is being ignored/sidelined would be less likely to be pleased with the overall work of the council. Lastly, we asked them if they thought they were having an impact.

The results in Figure 5 are quite positive. Most councilors, regardless of gender, view their colleagues as supportive and are proud of the work of their council. Unexpectedly, women councilors reported their colleagues to be more supportive than male councilors did.

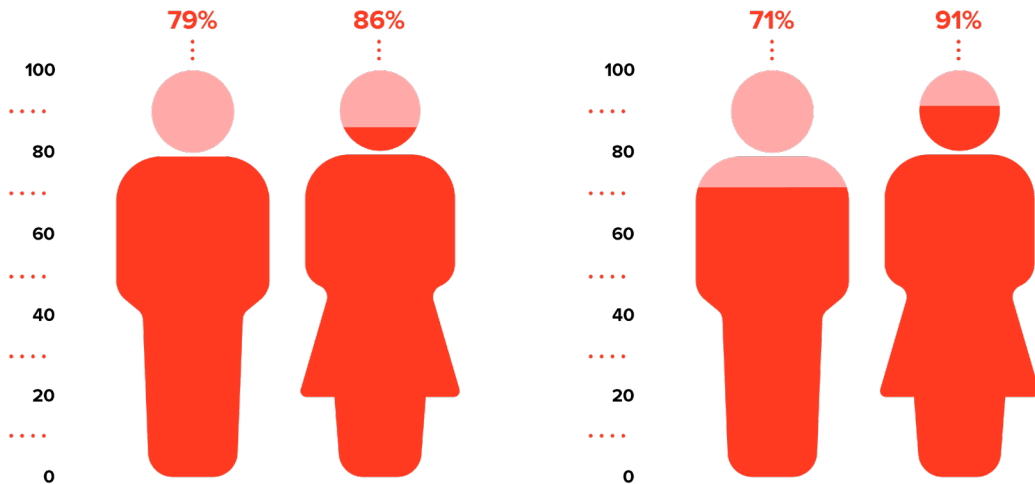
Figure 5 · Women councilors are...

· **7% more likely to find their colleagues supportive.**

· **20% more positive in evaluating council performance.**

Perception of **collegial support**.

Positive perception of **council performance**.



Data: Survey of random sample of 104 electoral councilors across the West Bank. Questions: “How would you characterize your colleague’s response to your contribution during the council meeting discussions? How would you evaluate the performance of the local council of which you are a member?” PCPSR/UNDP 2023.

When asked to characterize their colleagues’ responses to their contribution during the council meeting discussion, 86% of the women said they are either very supportive (42%) or somewhat supportive (44%). Among the men, 79% said they are either very supportive (47%) or somewhat supportive (32%).

“

“My biggest success is the gaining of the trust of the public and colleagues and the satisfaction of the people with my performance in the municipal council.”

Rayan, council member, Jericho

Similarly, most councilors are proud of the work of the council, and again women were more likely than men to positively evaluate their council performance. Asked to evaluate the performance of their local council, 91% of the women said it was very good (41%) or somewhat good (50%), and 71% of the men said it was very good (39%) or somewhat good (32%).

Success at the council level

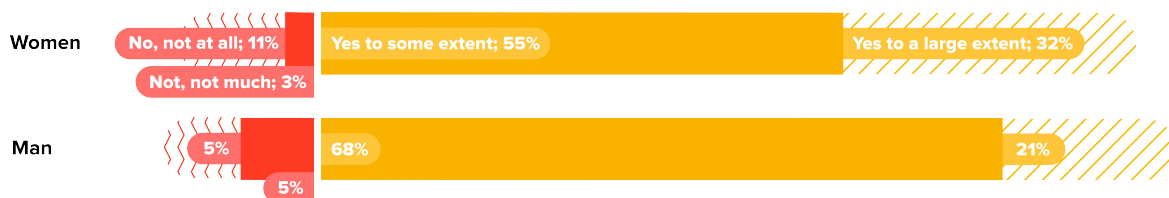
While both men and women are generally proud of their achievements, men are more certain than women that they have an impact on their council’s decisions.

Against the final question ‘*Would you say that your participation in meetings of the council has had an impact on the decision made by the council?*’ Women were somewhat less positive than men about their impact. It’s difficult to discern if this is a difference in perception

(gendered differences in perceptions of self-importance) or a valid difference (men’s inputs are given greater weight in decisions).

Figure 6 • Women councillors are somewhat less sanguine about their impact.

Perception that own participation has had an impact, percentage of respondents.

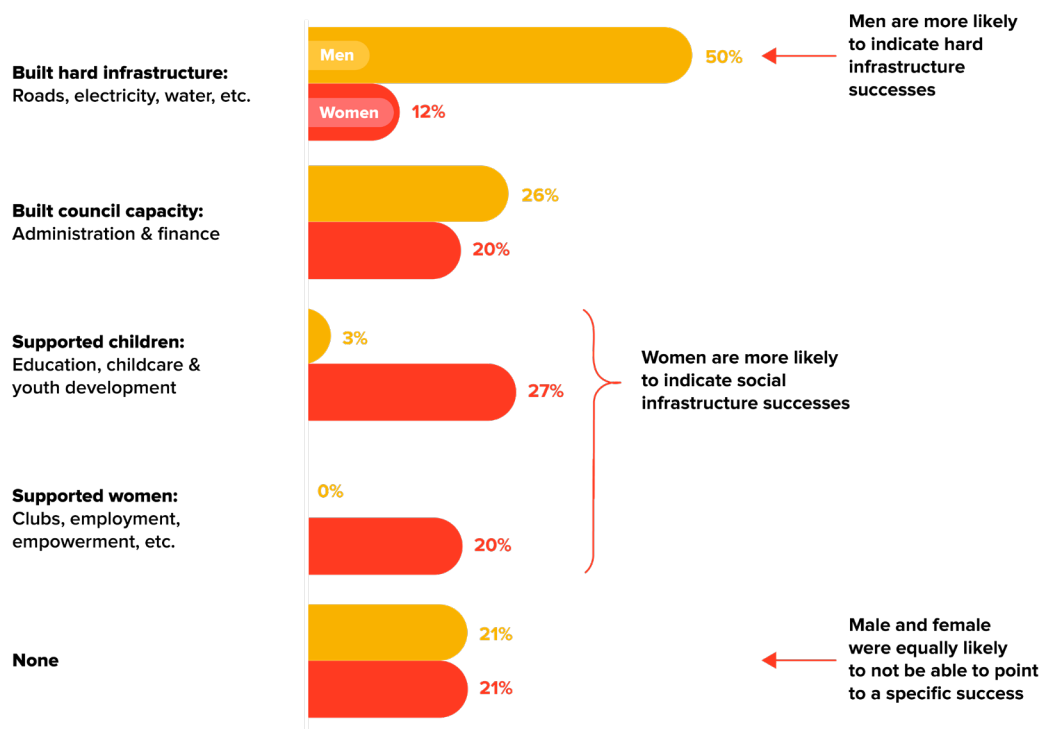


Data: Survey of random sample of 104 local councillors across the West Bank. Question: “Based on the record so far, would you say that your participation in the meetings of the council have an impact of the decisions made by the council?” PCPSR/UNDP 2023.

To unpack this further, we asked councillors an open-ended question about what their most important achievements were. As you can see from the chart below, women were much more likely to point to social infrastructure achievements while men were more likely to point to changes to the built environment.

Figure 7 • Male and female councillors point to different successes.

Most significant successes, by gender.



Data: Survey of random sample of 104 local councillors across the West Bank. Question: “What was your most important achievement as council member?” PCPSR/UNDP 2023.

What explains these divergences?

These divergences suggest differential preferences and/or different roles and levels of power in the council.

We know from other research that women and men have distinct policy preferences. For instance, a large-scale experiment in India found that local women leaders invested more in projects directly relevant to the needs of rural women (water, fuel, and roads), while male leaders invested more in education.¹⁹ Notably, these preferences are different than we found in our sample.

While differential preferences may explain some of these differences, the differential power structures are potentially a more likely contributor. There are different roles within the council such as Mayor and treasurer with greater influence over resource allocation decisions. Since men are more likely to occupy these positions, they will be more likely to attribute large-budget projects to their influence.

Notably, amongst high-performing women councilors we spoke to (our key informants) successes are more comparable to the male control group. When asked about their significant successes, most of this list gave a list of concrete achievements such as building roads and other infrastructure, rehabilitating school buildings, and solving problems in areas of service delivery like water. They nonetheless also indicated social infrastructural projects like rehabilitating schools and promoting social activities.

This suggests that the distinctions in the type of success men and women have achieved on the council are not exclusively due to distinct policy preferences.

¹⁹ Chattopadhyay, R., & Duflo, E. (2004). Women as policy makers: Evidence from a randomized policy experiment in India. *Econometrica*, 72(5), 1409-1443.

“

“The most important successes were the completion of the construction of the main street of the town, including infrastructure services in which five companies participated from water, electricity, telecommunications, fiber, sewage and others. We did this on our own initiative and at a cost from the municipality. We have also carried out several other projects such as a children’s park, opening internal streets including for a marginalized area, institutionalizing the municipality with job descriptions for all employees, and developing cooperation relations with neighboring municipalities.”

Sayeij, Mayor, Birzeit

“

“The most important achievement for me and the local council is to meet the needs of education in terms of rehabilitation of educational facilities and the needs of schools for counselors. We provided all the support we could to the schools according to our own capabilities. This comes on top of providing all other services to the people of the town.”

Hajjaj, council member, Farkha, Salfit



“My biggest success is the gaining of the trust of the public and colleagues and the satisfaction of the people with my performance in the municipal council. Municipality transactions are dealt with immediately and there is no delay after the municipality session. We have succeeded in solving the water problem in the city of Jericho, as we drilled the wells we need. We aspire to expand the scope of the municipality’s work to include things that are not usually within municipal services, such as providing scholarships for students, the advancement of women and the promotion of cultural activities.”

Rayan, council member, Jericho

Women councilors have significant political aspirations

In addition to measuring Women’s substantive representation in Local Government in Palestine, we are interested in the implications for national politics including future legislative elections and other leadership fora.

Research suggests that patriarchal discrimination doesn’t solely explain the leadership gaps between men and women. Instead, research has found that men tend to

exhibit greater leadership aspirations than women and that these gaps are persistent.²⁰ This ‘aspiration gap’ varies by context as well as by age. It is important to understand as it has policy and programming implications for anyone aiming to increase women’s political participation.

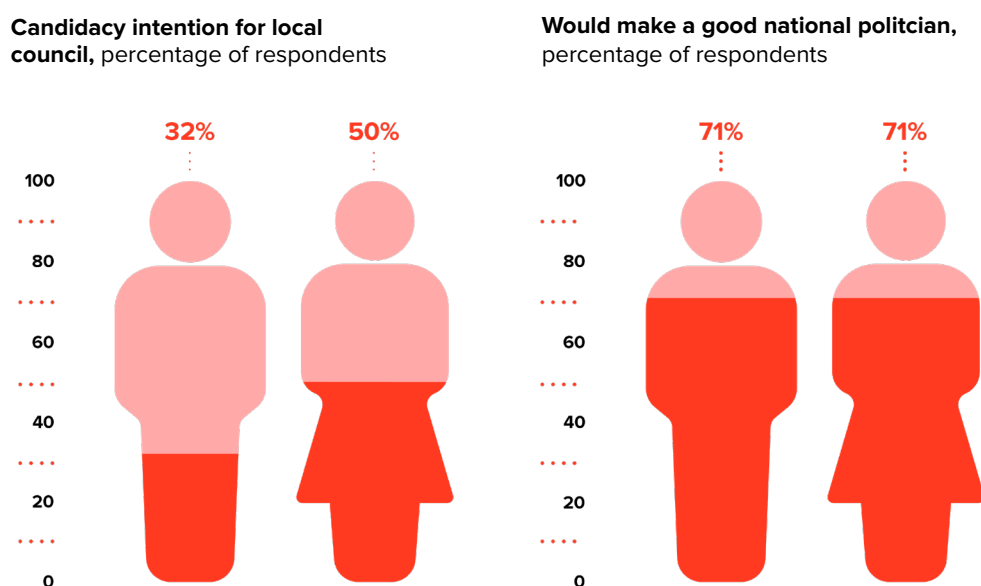
Our research design didn’t allow us to comprehensively measure

²⁰ See for instance: Ekaterina Netchaeva, Leah D. Sheppard, Tatiana Balushkina, A meta-analytic review of the gender difference in leadership aspirations, *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, Volume 137, 2022, 103744, ISSN 0001-8791, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2022.103744>.

aspiration amongst the general population, but it does allow us to assess gender gaps amongst the population of elected councilors, a population that is particularly interesting to the extent that national politicians emerge from local government.

To measure this, we asked councilors to indicate their (self-assessed) suitability for national leadership. We also asked councilors if they planned to stand again for the local council.

Figure 8 • Women councilors are more likely to intend to stand again, and equally likely to see themselves as credible national politicians.



Data: Survey of random sample of 104 electoral councilors across the West Bank. Questions: “Do you plan to stand for election in the next local government elections? Do you believe you would make a good national politician?” PCPSR/UNDP 2023.

While we would have expected to see a gap between men and women on the national ambition metric, to our surprise we found no evidence of an aspiration gap. Both men and women appear to be equally likely to see themselves as credible national politicians. This reinforces other findings in this study that far from being mere ‘quota

women,' the women elected with the help of the local government quotas see themselves as serious politicians. Despite the challenges that these councilors face, they appear to want to continue to serve in these positions.

Women are more likely than men to plan to stand again in future local elections. We are unclear how to interpret this finding: Does it mean that more men are planning to 'exit up' to more senior positions, that they had less positive experiences in local government, that they have other plans, or are merely waiting to be asked - or something else?

We also asked our key informants about their sources of encouragement to stand for office. Family support was identified as the main encouragement. This suggests that family and clan leadership may

“

“The decision to compete and enter the list was my personal decision, but my husband was supportive of that decision. We reviewed the risks, problems, and opportunity to serve the public and he shared my opinion regarding the value of participation, and so did the rest of the family.”

Rayan, council member, Jericho

“

“I draw support and backing from myself first and from the extended family that supported me unreservedly in 2017 when the men in the family made a decision that did not give me my right. So, I challenged those men and forced them to put me on the list.”

Thaljayah, Council member, Bethlehem

constitute the principal gatekeepers for women’s candidacy.²¹ This requires further exploration, but it may have practical policy implications for working with these gatekeepers in advance of future rounds of local government elections.

What makes a local women politician successful?

We asked our key informants why they were successful. The responses varied, but one thing was highlighted more than the others: willingness to take the initiative, impose herself in the workplace, and show persistence.

“

“Success requires boldness and this is what women lack in our society Women are also not encouraged by society because it is a patriarchal society. Even among women, the bias for men is evident. I succeed because I have the audacity to challenge all these difficulties. Political work is difficult because men work to thwart the efforts of women who enter politics.”

Rayan, council member, Jericho

“

“Success depends on the individual and not on those around her. Women must impose themselves in their workplace and be persistent. Women cannot succeed if they reach their position because of support from outside parties. Women should work to strengthen themselves and develop them, and they should take advantage of the opportunity if given to them.”

Thaljayah, Council member, Bethlehem

²¹ See for instance: Cheema, A., Khan, S., Liaqat, A., & Mohmand, S. K. (2023). Canvassing the gatekeepers: A field experiment to increase women voters’ turnout in Pakistan. *American Political Science Review*, 117(1), 1-21.

Does capacity-building help to build the careers of successful women councilors?

Training courses for women politicians such as campaign training, capacity building, and leadership academies are among the most popular interventions by institutions interested in supporting women's political participation.²² UNDP's programming has regularly supported these initiatives, including in advance of the most recent rounds of local elections. Comparative evidence for the efficacy of these initiatives is limited.

If these interventions are highly successful at helping women build successful careers in politics, we might expect to find their beneficiaries and alumni among our positive outliers. We asked these five women if they had benefited from any of such support. All but one indicated that they did not receive any such training or capacity building. Instead, they stressed the experience they gained by working or volunteering.

²² See for instance: Krook, M.L. and Norris, P. (2014), Gender Equality in Elected Office. Political Studies, 62: 2-20. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9248.12116>

“

“I never participated in any training courses, but I gained work experience, which allowed me to build on my work and previous experience as a community activist.”

Rayan, council member, Jericho

One of our key informants did participate in a leadership course.

“

“Yes, I participated in courses including one on leadership, and I am active in other centers where I take many courses and gain the required skills.”

Khoury, council member, Jifna, Ramallah

This isn't a finding per se, since the group is so small, but it enriches our broader understanding of the relative importance of constraints on women's political participation in local government.

What do women politicians think about the quotas?

Most of the council women expressed the view that the quota system, while not ideal, is necessary. Some expressed that it is not ideal either because women deserve an equal number of seats in the local councils, in the view of some, or because the vote might be based on considerations other than qualifications. Most respondents noted that it is necessary to have

such quotas because society is controlled by men, and they would not allow women to reach the level of decision-making in the absence of such quotas.

“

“I am a feminist but inside I reject the quota. I see it as necessary in our current environment where women are accepted only if they are imposed on society. In this context, 20% is never enough; there should be parity, i.e. half of the seats should be for women.”

Thaljayah, Council member, Bethlehem

“

“The quota system is the main way to protect women’s rights in this conservative society. This system is effective in forcing men to give women a place on lists. The electoral system should give women the same number of seats, at least for the first five seats on the list.”

Rayan, council member, Jericho

“

“Quotas have played a big role because the society we live in is patriarchal and does not give opportunities to women. The quota gives women access to decision-making in the village and the country.”

Hajjaj, council member, Farkha, Salfit

We have made a recommendation to explore the feasibility of ratcheting up the gender quota.

Would the public like to see more women in politics?

While international norms suggest that “temporary special measures aimed at accelerating de facto equality before men and women shall not be considered discrimination,” (CEDAW Art. 4) public support of the objective is important for the local legitimacy of the quota.

In the case of Palestine, there is significant support for the objective of having a greater portion of women in politics. In a previous study we asked a nationally representative sample of the general population, to what extent they agreed with the statement “*I believe having more women elected to the local council and municipalities could improve local government.*” 45% of the population either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement (33% disagreed)²³. This indicates that a plurality supports the objective of the quota.

Figure 9 • 45% of the population believes more women in local government would improve governance.



Percentage of respondents responding to: “*I believe having more women elected to the local council and municipalities could improve local government.*”

Data: Survey of 1200 adults interviewed face-to-face in 120 randomly selected locations across the West Bank and Gaza Strip in December 2022. Margin of error is +/-3%. UNDP/Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, 2022.

²³ Survey of 1200 adults interviewed face-to-face in 120 randomly selected locations across the West Bank and Gaza Strip in December 2022.

Conclusion

The findings of this research problematize conventional wisdom about women in local West-Bank politics. This new evidence suggests that far from being relegated to the sidelines most local women politicians have emerged as political operators with levels of engagement comparable to their male counterparts. This suggests that comparative models linking descriptive representation to substantive are mirrored in the West Bank, even under the limited sovereignty of the Palestinian Authority.

Gaps remain, but they are small: a small but significant minority of elected women councilors lag their male colleagues in engagement and consequently have few successes too.

One of the reasons that previous studies on women's empowerment in office have

diverged from our findings may be a result of learning over time. More iterations of a quota allow for the quality of candidates to improve and normalize day-to-day interactions and power exertion within the council. One would expect to find less and less difference between men and women candidates/ members over time. This is now the third application of a quota in the West Bank, and likely, future iterations will organically help to close the remaining gaps in terms of engagement and capacity.

This new evidence suggests that the quota system is working. This appears to have earned it a degree of grudging support from its immediate beneficiaries. Most of the council women we interviewed in detail expressed the view that the quota system, while not ideal, is necessary given the patriarchal nature of society and the control enjoyed

by men over Palestinian political life. **Raising the target of the quota is our primary recommendation.**

Given the preeminent role that kinship groups (clans and families) play in nomination, list formation, and campaigning, these entities should be the focus of engagement and reform work at the local level. As the primary gatekeepers to political office, they largely determine the diversity and inclusivity of local political processes and outcomes. **Engaging with these crucial actors is our second recommendation.**

It is also unacceptable that as many as two out of ten women who made it to be councilors were subjected to pressure or intimidation, most of which is by kinship groups. **Our third recommendation is focused on efforts to eliminate intimidation from the political sphere.**

Though significant investments have been made in building women leadership candidacy, there needs to be further evaluation to determine if these projects are working. This is an area for further research.

The density of original findings in this study suggests that more research on local politics in the West Bank using more empirical methods could be fruitful.

Key Recommendations

- 1.** Amend the Local Elections Law (Art 17.1-2) to increase the target of the quota.
 - 2.** Encourage local leaders - especially clan leaders - to nominate a higher number of women in electable positions on their lists.
 - 3.** Undertake efforts to reduce the incidents of intimidation of women candidates, particularly at the nomination phase of the electoral cycle.
-

About the partners

United Nations Development Programme

UNDP is the leading United Nations organization fighting to end the injustice of poverty, inequality, and climate change. Working with our broad network of experts and partners in 170 countries, we help nations to build integrated, lasting solutions for people and planet.

UNDP's Programme of Assistance to the Palestinian People (PAPP) derives its mandate from the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 33/147 of 20 December 1978. Called upon by United Nations Member States in that year, UNDP was requested "to improve the economic and social conditions of the Palestinian people by identifying their social and economic needs and by establishing concrete projects to that end". UNDP/PAPP is a responsive development agency that works together with the Palestinian people to fulfill their aspiration for sustainable human development based on self-determination, equality, and freedom.

Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research

PSR is an independent nonprofit institution and think tank of policy analysis and academic research. PSR was founded to advance scholarship and knowledge on immediate issues of concern to Palestinians in three areas: domestic politics and government, strategic analysis and foreign policy, and public opinion polls and survey research. PSR research units conduct and organize four types of activities: research and policy analysis, empirical surveys and public opinion polls, task forces and study groups, and meetings and conferences. The units focus on current public policy issues with a special reliance on empirical research as a tool to advance scholarship and understanding.

PSR is dedicated to promoting objective and nonpartisan research and analysis and to encouraging a better understanding of the Palestinian domestic and international environment in an atmosphere of free debate and exchange of ideas. PSR is registered as a nonprofit institution in the Palestinian Ministry of Justice.