

# Palestinian Municipal Elections

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**More than a million Palestinians in the West Bank and in Gaza's Deir al-Balah municipality will have an opportunity to vote on April 25** for members of local councils. The elections are taking place under inauspicious conditions: economic hardship, settler violence, an uncertain political horizon and, of course, in Gaza amidst unprecedented destruction. This explainer describes key features of the Palestinian municipal elections and their potential political significance.

## 1. What positions are being contested in the upcoming April 25 elections?

Depending on where they live, Palestinians will choose members of either village or municipal councils. Overall, [136 municipal councils and 284 village councils](#) will be formed as a result of the process. In 42 municipalities and 153 villages, only a single list of candidates was submitted; hence, the Palestine Central Election Commission (CEC) deemed the list approved by acclamation, obviating the need for elections in those jurisdictions on April 25. Once in place, the Councils will select a mayor.

Fatah submitted lists for virtually all municipalities. However, political parties that have [competed](#) in previous Palestinian elections, including Hamas, have not submitted lists due to internal disarray and, in some instances, objections to the existing legal framework. In several municipalities, Fatah-affiliated individuals who were not selected for the Fatah lists have joined together to submit independent lists.

## 2. What is the history of Palestinian municipal elections?

Following the Oslo Accords and the establishment of the Palestinian Authority (PA), a [local government law](#) was enacted in 1997. In 2004-05, local elections took place in some but not all West Bank and Gaza jurisdictions. Subsequent local elections took place only in the West Bank in 2012, 2017, and 2022; no national elections – presidential or legislative – have taken place since 2006.

## 3. Who is administering the elections?

The Central Election Commission (CEC) was formed in 2003 as part of a reform effort promoted both internally and by the international community. The CEC has a [reputation](#) for independence, competence, and innovativeness. The Commission has maintained voter registration lists, enhanced the credibility of the electoral process, and prepared for the scheduling of elections on relatively short notice. For the 2026 local elections, more than one million Palestinians were [included](#) on the voter registry in the West Bank and 70,000 in Deir al-Balah.

## 4. What legal changes were made prior to these elections?

Since the de facto dissolution of the Palestinian Legislative Council in 2007, all changes to the Local Government Election Law emanate from presidential decrees. For the 2026 elections, several notable changes have been adopted:

- **A new election system**, categorized as open list proportional representation, allows Palestinians voting in municipalities to indicate their preferences for up to five individual candidates from the lists submitted by parties, factions and independent groups. In previous elections, voters could only choose pre-determined lists. In villages, Palestinians will select up to five candidates from those competing and the nine highest vote recipients will be elected.
- **The quota for women serving on councils has been increased**; at least 20 percent of all councils are required to be women and the percentage must be maintained even when a woman resigns her seat. According to the CEC, 32 percent of the submitted municipal lists and 23 percent of the village council lists are women.
- **Most significant and controversial has been a decree requiring all candidates to sign a pledge** “to abide by the political and national program of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), recognized as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people.” This decree was criticized by some civil society organizations and political parties as compromising freedom of expression and was viewed as an effort to preclude candidates aligned with Hamas from participating in the elections.

## 5. What is the significance of the elections in Deir al-Balah in Gaza?

Local elections in Gaza have not taken place since 2005. Hamas, which took control of Gaza in 2007, has advocated for national elections to precede (or be held simultaneously with) local elections. Despite overall conditions in Gaza, including the physical destruction of PA offices and records, the PA decided to proceed with municipal elections in Deir al-Balah (located in central Gaza between Gaza City and Khan Younis); Deir al-Balah was spared some of the massive destruction that occurred in other parts of the Gaza Strip.

The CEC prepared a voter registry for Deir al-Balah, which includes the names of slightly more than 70,000 Palestinians. Four groups have submitted lists and are actively campaigning for office. Yet, the elections may be less a true political contest and more a controlled test of whether any form of local governance can function in present conditions. Whether prospective voters, who are stretched by daily survival concerns, will participate remains to be seen.

From the PA’s [perspective](#), conducting elections in one of Gaza’s municipalities reaffirms the PA’s continued relevance in Gaza’s affairs and presents a picture of unity between Gaza and the West Bank, notwithstanding efforts by Israel and the Board of Peace to marginalize its role. And from a local community perspective, if the elections in Deir al-Balah stabilize local services even slightly, it could encourage replication elsewhere, although scaling would require conditions that do not yet exist across Gaza.

## 6. What is the nature of campaigning?

The formal campaign period lasts 14 days. Candidates mobilize family and friends to campaign for them and rely on social media to introduce themselves and present their positions on specific issues.

The Al Wattan television network is organizing a series of debates in the major municipalities, featuring the leaders of the competing lists. The discussions focus on local issues like accountability and the delivery of services. Nonetheless, [some reports](#) suggest that “West Bank Palestinians are struggling to muster enthusiasm for their first ballot since the Gaza war, discouraged by limited political choice and the difficulty of voting” under conditions of occupation.

## **7. What role is Israel playing in these elections?**

The elections are being organized and administered by the Palestinians with little direct involvement by Israel. Israeli objections preclude the conduct of elections in the Israeli municipality of Jerusalem, although they are taking place for four village councils within the Palestinians’ Jerusalem governorate. Israeli movement restrictions impact (but do not preclude) the CEC’s ability to transfer materials to the local election administration and to provide direct oversight. And of course, the transfer of election materials to Gaza is subject to Israel’s restrictive access regime existing at the border crossings.

## **8. What do these elections tell us about the prospects for forthcoming national elections?**

Public opinion polls [consistently show](#) that Palestinians favor the scheduling of national elections as soon as feasible, even as they are skeptical that elections will in fact occur. For his part, PA President Mahmoud Abbas [promised](#) national elections within one year of a ceasefire coming into effect, which would mean on or before October 10, 2026. The CEC’s performance in the municipal elections will serve as a partial proof of concept for the administrative feasibility of national elections, particularly if they are credibly conducted in Deir al-Balah. Nonetheless, most analysts are skeptical that elections will occur within the timeframe proposed by Abbas for both administrative and political reasons.

National elections require much more coordination among the different regions of the Palestinian territories, which is problematic given current circumstances. As for the politics, Fatah remains internally divided and, until a resolution of Hamas’s political future is agreed upon, elections are likely to be deemed too risky. The [May 14 Fatah conference](#) may address the internal divisions, and the pledge required for participating in the local elections may be extended to national elections as a mechanism for excluding Hamas.