



Study on: Youth and Palestinian Local Elections 2026: Between Participation, Representation, and Endorsement

A Reading of the Experience and Challenges Under Endorsement and Disparities in Voter Turnout Rates

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Introduction

The Palestinian local elections of 2026 constituted an important political and societal milestone in the context of the transformations experienced by Palestinian society, not only as a democratic entitlement related to the management of local bodies, but also as a space to test the relationship between youth and public work, political participation, and the extent to which the political and social system is capable of accommodating the aspirations of new generations and involving them in local decision-making.

These elections came amid complex political, economic, and social conditions, intertwining the effects of political division, declining trust in institutions, the widening gap between youth and traditional structures of political work, along with the restrictions imposed by the Israeli occupation on public life and local development.

Although Palestinian youth constitute the largest percentage of Palestinian society, according to data from (the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2025), Palestinian youth in the age group (18-29 years) number about 1.2 million young men and women; that is, 21% of the total population of Palestine. Their presence in local elections remained a subject of continuous questioning, whether at the level of participation in voting, candidacy, or access to decision-making positions within local bodies. Young men and women in the age group (18-30 years) constituted 31.5% of the total eligible voters in the 2026 Palestinian local council elections (Central Elections Commission, 2026).

The 2026 elections emerged as an experience worth studying, especially in light of the expansion of the phenomenon of Endorsement in a large number of local bodies, compared to the disparity in voter turnout rates in bodies that witnessed electoral competition, which raises issues related

to the nature of political participation, the limits of democratic representation, and the extent to which local elections can produce new youth elites that express societal aspirations.

The phenomenon of Endorsement, which included a wide number of local councils, raises fundamental questions about the nature of the local political culture, the role of families, traditional forces, and political organizations in shaping electoral lists, and the extent of their impact on youth opportunities to reach local leadership positions. The disparity in voter turnout rates between different regions also reveals the existence of social, economic, and political factors affecting voter behavior, and the level of citizens' confidence, especially youth, in the usefulness of the electoral process and its ability to bring about real change.

Objective of the Study

This study seeks to read the experience of youth in the Palestinian local elections of 2026 by analyzing patterns of participation and representation, exploring the impact of Endorsement on youth presence, along with studying the implications of disparities in voter turnout rates among different local bodies.

The paper also attempts to understand the structural and political challenges facing Palestinian youth in engaging in local work, and to explore opportunities for developing youth participation in a way that strengthens local democracy and ensures more just and effective representation of young generations within Palestinian local government institutions.

Problem Statement

Youth political participation is one of the basic indicators of the vitality of the democratic system and its ability to renew and continue, especially in societies where young age groups constitute a high percentage of the population, as is the case in Palestine. Despite the growing importance of youth in the public sphere, their political participation still faces many challenges related to the political, social, and economic structure, along with the continued dominance of traditional, familial, and organizational forces over local decision-making positions.

The Palestinian local elections of 2026 came amid a complex political context characterized by the continuation of the Palestinian division, the suspension of general elections, high unemployment rates and marginalization among youth, which made local elections the most prominent democratic space available to youth for political participation and expressing their aspirations. However, these elections at the same time witnessed a notable expansion of the phenomenon of Endorsement, where the results of a large number of local bodies were decided without direct electoral competition, along with a clear disparity in participation and voter turnout rates between different regions.

In this context, the study's problem emerges in the following main question:

“To what extent did the Palestinian local elections of 2026 succeed in enhancing youth political participation and empowering them to access local influence positions, in light of the expansion of the phenomenon of Endorsement and the disparity in voter participation rates?”

Importance of the Study

The importance of this study stems from the importance of the youth category in Palestinian society, as they are the largest demographic group and the most affected by political, economic, and social transformations. The study also gains importance from its examination of the

Palestinian local elections of 2026 as one of the most important democratic milestones that provided youth with an opportunity for political participation in the absence of general elections. The study contributes to understanding the reality of youth participation, analyzing the impact of the phenomenon of Endorsement on the democratic process, in addition to explaining the disparity in participation rates between different regions. It also helps in providing a scientific reading of the extent to which local councils can accommodate youth leadership and empower them to access influential positions and local decision-making.

The importance of the study also emerges in the possibility of benefiting from its results by decision-makers, local government institutions, civil society organizations, and researchers interested in youth and democracy issues, which contributes to developing policies and programs that enhance youth political participation in the future.

Study Objectives

This study aims to:

- Analyze the reality of youth participation in the Palestinian local elections of 2026.
- Analyze the political, social, and economic factors affecting youth participation.
- Study the impact of the phenomenon of Endorsement on the democratic process and the level of electoral competition among youth.
- Provide a comparative reading between models of active participation and bodies decided by Endorsement.
- Explore youth's view of local councils as a tool for change and local development.
- Derive recommendations that contribute to enhancing youth political participation in the future.

Study Questions

The study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What is the level of youth participation in the Palestinian local elections of 2026, in terms of candidacy and voting?
2. What is the impact of Endorsement on youth political participation?
3. Why did participation rates rise in some areas such as Qalqiliya and Awarta?
4. What factors limit electoral competition in a large number of local bodies?
5. How does Palestinian youth view local councils as a tool for change?
6. What challenges face youth and independent lists?
7. What factors limit youth participation?
8. What are the recommendations for improving youth participation?

Study Methodology

Descriptive Analytical Approach

The study relies on the descriptive analytical approach, aiming to analyze the reality of the Palestinian local elections of 2026, and study the nature of youth participation in light of the political, social, and economic context surrounding the electoral process.

This approach is based on describing and analyzing election results, participation and voter turnout rates, the extent of Endorsement, in addition to studying the impact of political and social factors on the level of youth participation and their representation within local bodies.

The study also relies on several research tools, including analyzing data and statistics issued by the Palestinian Central Elections Commission, benefiting from studies and literature related to youth political participation and local governance in Palestine, the report issued by Sharek Youth Forum as a local monitoring body accredited for the electoral process, in addition to an opinion poll conducted by Sharek Youth Forum among youth, and the results of a focus group held at the forum.

The study draft was also presented to a group of experts in electoral issues, and their recommendations regarding the structure, content, and recommendations of the study were taken into account.

Primary Numbers and Statistics (According to Central Elections Commission data)

- The local elections covered 420 local bodies.
- Actual voting took place in 183 local bodies, including (90) municipal councils and (93) village councils.
- Results were decided by Endorsement in 197 local bodies, including (42) municipal councils and (155) village councils.
- 40 local bodies did not hold elections due to lack of candidates, including (4) municipal councils and (36) village councils.
- Total eligible voters on election day reached (1,029,550) voters.
- The percentage of youth aged (18-30) of total voters reached (31.5%).
- The percentage of persons with disabilities of total voters reached (3.3%).
- Number of candidates in local bodies where voting took place: (5,131) candidates, including (3,622) male candidates and (1,509) female candidates.
- Percentage of youth aged (18-30) among candidates: (15%).
- Percentage of candidates with disabilities: (2%).
- Percentage of male winners by election in local bodies: (73.9%) compared to (26.1%) for females.
- Percentage of male winners by Endorsement in local bodies: (75.6%) compared to (24.4%) for females.
- Percentage of youth aged (18-30) of total winners in elections "voting + Endorsement": (8%).
- Percentage of youth aged (18-30) of total winners by voting: (8%).

- Percentage of youth aged (18-30) of total winners by Endorsement: (9%).

Section One:

The Political, Economic, and Social Context of the Palestinian Local Elections 2026

Section One: The Political Context of the Palestinian Local Elections 2026

Subsection One: The Continuation of Political Division and Increasing Occupation Restrictions and Their Impact on the Electoral Process

The local elections came amid difficult political conditions, especially in light of the increasing and ongoing restrictions imposed by the occupation authorities on the Palestinian people, including closures, military checkpoints, tightening restrictions on movement and travel, in addition to repeated incursions into Palestinian cities and towns and escalating attacks on citizens and community structures. These measures were directly reflected in the political and social environment surrounding the local elections, as they affected the ability of candidates and electoral lists to implement their campaigns and reach voters, and also limited freedom of movement and community organization related to the electoral process in some areas. In addition, the security and economic conditions resulting from occupation policies, along with the repercussions of the war on the Gaza Strip, contributed to reinforcing a state of instability and frustration among broad segments of citizens, especially youth, which was reflected in the electoral mood and the level of enthusiasm for political participation. Accordingly, the 2026 local elections were not held only in an internal political context related to the Palestinian division, but also within a repressive colonial reality that imposed additional restrictions on democratic practice and Palestinian public life.

The Palestinian local elections of 2026 were held amid the continuation of the Palestinian political division that began in 2007, which continues to cast its deep effects on the structure of the Palestinian political system and its various institutions. This division was directly reflected in the political environment surrounding the local elections, whether in terms of the nature of electoral competition, the level of citizens' trust in public institutions, or the form of political participation, especially among youth.

The continued suspension of legislative and presidential elections for years is one of the most prominent manifestations of the Palestinian political crisis, which gave local elections double importance as the most prominent democratic space for political participation and popular expression. However, this importance was accompanied by major challenges related to the state of political polarization and weak public trust in the ability of the electoral process to bring about real change in the structure of the political system or renew leadership elites. In contrast, the electoral experience reveals a genuine thirst among broad segments of Palestinian youth to practice the democratic process and the electoral right, especially in light of the continued absence of legislative and presidential elections for many years. Local elections have become for many youth one of the few spaces available for political expression and participation in public affairs, and an opportunity to test their democratic right and contribute to influencing issues related to their local communities. However, this aspiration was not uniform among all youth, as a state of hesitation or abstention emerged among some of them, linked to the feeling that local elections,

despite their importance, remain limited in impact in the absence of a comprehensive national democratic path. This situation sparked debate among youth circles about the usefulness of participation, where some youth saw that limiting themselves to local elections without conducting legislative and presidential elections might make them, according to some circulating expressions, akin to a political “painkiller” that does not address the essence of the crisis related to the disruption of Palestinian democratic life and the continued absence of comprehensive national representation.

Data from (the Palestinian Central Elections Commission, 2026) showed that the 2026 local elections covered 420 local bodies, actual voting took place in 183 of them, while results were decided by Endorsement in 197 local bodies, and elections could not be held in 40 other bodies for legal or procedural reasons (Palestinian Central Elections Commission, 2026). These figures reflect the magnitude of the transformations witnessed by the electoral process, where political and familial consensus played an increasing role at the expense of direct electoral competition. The political division also affected the nature of forming electoral lists, as some political forces tended to avoid direct competition in many areas for fear of deepening societal divisions or losing local influence, which reinforced the phenomenon of Endorsement and local consensus. In contrast, independent and youth lists emerged that tried to present an alternative discourse focusing on service and development issues away from traditional political polarization, but they faced challenges related to weak capabilities and the dominance of traditional structures over the local sphere.

On the other hand, the political division was reflected in the level of citizens’ trust in public institutions and the democratic process. According to the election results issued by the Central Elections Commission, the number of eligible voters reached about 1,029,550 voters, while the number of voters reached 512,510, with a general turnout rate of 53.44% in the bodies where voting took place (Palestinian Central Elections Commission, 2026). Although this rate reflects continued citizen interest in participating in local elections, it simultaneously reveals a state of hesitation and political abstention among segments of society, especially among youth.

In addition, the general political conditions, including the continued Israeli measures in the West Bank and the war on the Gaza Strip, contributed to reinforcing feelings of frustration and political instability, which was reflected in the general electoral mood, and on the nature of voters’ priorities, especially the youth category facing complex challenges related to unemployment, marginalization, and weak opportunities for political participation. Some youth also developed an awareness that major national issues, foremost among them ending the occupation and addressing the state of political division, represent more urgent priorities compared to local service issues, which affected their political priorities and their view of local elections and their limited ability to bring about broader change in the Palestinian reality.

Thus, it can be said that the continuation of political division constituted one of the main factors affecting the Palestinian local elections of 2026, whether in terms of the nature of electoral competition, the expansion of the phenomenon of Endorsement, or the level of political participation and trust in institutions. This reality also revealed an urgent need to rebuild Palestinian political life on more comprehensive democratic foundations, providing youth with broader opportunities for participation and access to influence and local decision-making positions.

Subsection Two: Economic and Social Conditions Surrounding the Elections

The Palestinian local elections of 2026 were held amid complex economic and social conditions that directly affected the electoral environment and the level of political participation, especially among youth. The elections coincided with the continued economic decline in the Palestinian territories, high unemployment and poverty rates, declining GDP, in addition to the repercussions of the war on the Gaza Strip and the ongoing Israeli measures in the West Bank, which was reflected in citizens' priorities and attitudes towards the electoral process.

The youth category is one of the most affected groups by difficult economic conditions, especially in light of limited job opportunities and high unemployment rates among graduates and youth. According to Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics data, the unemployment rate among Palestinian youth reached high levels compared to other age groups, which contributed to reinforcing feelings of frustration and marginalization among broad segments of them (Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2025). This was reflected in varying degrees on the level of youth engagement in the political and electoral process, where some of them tended to view local elections as a means to improve the service and development reality more than as a tool for comprehensive political change.

Social conditions also affected the nature of electoral competition in many local bodies, especially in villages and small towns, where families and clans played a pivotal role in shaping electoral lists and directing voting behavior. This social structure contributed to reinforcing local consensus and Endorsement at the expense of direct electoral competition, which was reflected in the nature of democratic participation and youth opportunities to access local decision-making positions.

According to Palestinian Central Elections Commission data, the number of electoral lists that ran in the 2026 local elections reached about 709 electoral lists, distributed among partisan, independent, and coalition lists, while the number of candidates reached 5,131 candidates, including 3,622 male candidates and 1,509 female candidates (Palestinian Central Elections Commission, 2026). The number of local bodies where elections took place reached 183 local bodies, compared to 197 bodies whose results were decided by Endorsement, which reflects the extent of the impact of social and political consensus on the electoral process.

The war on the Gaza Strip played a significant role in affecting the general atmosphere of the elections, whether psychologically, economically, or humanely. The war imposed major challenges on citizens, and reprioritized their concerns towards issues related to human security and basic needs, which was reflected in the electoral mood and the level of enthusiasm for political participation. Israeli measures in the West Bank, including checkpoints, closures, and repeated incursions, also affected movement, mobility, and the conduct of electoral campaigns in some areas.

From a social perspective, some local bodies witnessed independent youth initiatives that tried to transcend traditional divisions and present a discourse based on local development, competence, and public services, but these initiatives faced challenges related to weak funding, the dominance of families and traditional forces, in addition to limited political and organizational experience compared to lists supported by traditional forces.

The 2026 local elections also revealed a clear social disparity between different regions in terms of the level of participation and electoral competition. In some areas, social and familial ties

contributed to raising voter turnout rates, while other areas witnessed a decline in participation levels due to weak trust in local councils or the absence of actual competition due to Endorsement. Thus, the economic and social conditions surrounding the Palestinian local elections of 2026 constituted a major factor in determining the nature of political participation and the level of electoral competition, and also directly affected the presence of youth in the electoral process, whether in terms of candidacy, voting, or engagement in local and community work.

Section Two: Political Participation and Electoral Disparity

Subsection One: The Importance of Local Elections as a Space for Youth Political Participation

Palestinian local elections are among the most prominent democratic spaces available to youth for political participation and engagement in public affairs, especially in light of the absence of legislative and presidential elections for years. These elections have gained increasing importance as they are directly related to citizens' daily lives and their service and development needs, which made them closer to the youth category and more capable of attracting their interest and participation.

Youth constitute the largest percentage of Palestinian society, making their participation in local elections an essential element in strengthening local democracy and renewing political elites. Local bodies also represent one of the most important fields through which youth can exercise leadership and community roles, whether through running for local council membership, participating in electoral campaigns, or contributing to community initiatives related to local work. Central Elections Commission data reflects continued societal interest in participating in local elections despite existing political and economic challenges. The electoral process also revealed an increasing presence of independent lists and youth initiatives in a number of local bodies, especially in cities and areas that witnessed direct electoral competition.

The importance of local elections for Palestinian youth emerges from the fact that they provide practical opportunities to influence local decision-making, and contribute to addressing issues related to public services, development, infrastructure, and job opportunities. They also give youth a space to gain political and administrative experience, and enhance values of participation, accountability, and collective work, which contributes to building a generation more engaged in public life.

In the Palestinian context, local elections gain additional importance due to the limited channels of political participation elsewhere, as local councils have become for many youth one of the few platforms available for expressing opinion and participating in managing public affairs. This prompted a number of youth to form independent lists or join electoral campaigns that focused on issues of local development, transparency, and improving services, away from traditional political polarization.

Social media also played an important role in enhancing youth participation during the 2026 local elections, where youth used digital platforms in managing electoral campaigns, community mobilization, and communicating with voters, which reflects clear transformations in the tools of political participation and methods of societal influence.

Nevertheless, youth participation still faces many challenges, most notably weak financial capabilities, the dominance of families and traditional forces over list formation, in addition to the

impact of the phenomenon of Endorsement, which limited in many areas the opportunities for democratic competition and the rise of youth leadership. The continuation of political and economic crises also contributed to reinforcing a state of frustration and political abstention among some Palestinian youth.

However, the continued presence of youth in local elections, whether through candidacy, voting, or community participation, reflects a growing awareness of the importance of local governance and its role in achieving gradual change within Palestinian society. It also indicates that Palestinian youth still see in local elections a possible space for influence and participation, despite the structural and political challenges surrounding the democratic process.

Subsection Two: Disparity in Participation Rates Between Regions

The Palestinian local elections of 2026 showed a clear disparity in participation and voter turnout rates between governorates and different local bodies, which reflects the impact of a group of political, social, and economic factors on voter behavior and the level of engagement in the electoral process. This disparity was notably evident between major cities on one hand, and villages and small towns on the other, in addition to noticeable differences between some governorates in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

Although the general turnout rate in bodies where voting took place reached 53.44% according to data from (the Palestinian Central Elections Commission, 2026), this rate conceals a clear disparity in participation levels between different local bodies, where some areas recorded high turnout compared to a noticeable decline in other areas.

Higher participation rates in some areas were linked to the nature and intensity of electoral competition, especially in local bodies that witnessed direct competition between familial, independent, or lists supported by political forces. In some areas, familial and tribal ties played an important role in raising voter turnout rates, as elections turned into a state of social mobilization that transcends traditional political character, as happened in a number of villages in Nablus, Qalqiliya, and Hebron governorates.

Qalqiliya governorate is among the governorates that recorded relatively high participation rates compared to some other governorates, which is related to the nature of local competition, the strength of familial and social presence, and the tribal and familial character that created significant competition in some bodies, reflected in the high participation rate, in addition to the limited phenomenon of Endorsement in some local bodies within the governorate. Urta town south of Nablus also emerged as a model for high electoral participation, as a result of intense local competition and a high level of community mobilization during the electoral process.

In contrast, some major cities witnessed lower participation rates compared to villages and small towns, which can be explained by several factors, most notably declining trust in public institutions, lack of awareness and knowledge about the electoral process, weak conviction in the ability of local councils to bring about tangible change, in addition to high rates of political abstention among youth in urban areas. The expansion of the phenomenon of Endorsement in a large number of local bodies also indirectly contributed to reducing the level of enthusiasm for political participation.

The results of 197 local bodies were decided by Endorsement, compared to actual voting taking place in only 183 bodies. While no list or individual ran in (40) local bodies, these figures reflect
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the extent of the impact of social and political consensus on the electoral scene, and also indicate that a wide percentage of citizens did not have the opportunity to participate effectively in voting due to results being decided in advance.

Table showing the distribution of local bodies according to the status of local elections in them 2026

Election Status	Number	Percentage
Local bodies where elections took place	183	43.6%
Local bodies that won by Endorsement	197	46.9%
Local bodies where no one ran	40	9.5%
Total	420	100.0%

Chart showing the distribution of local bodies according to the status of local elections in 2026

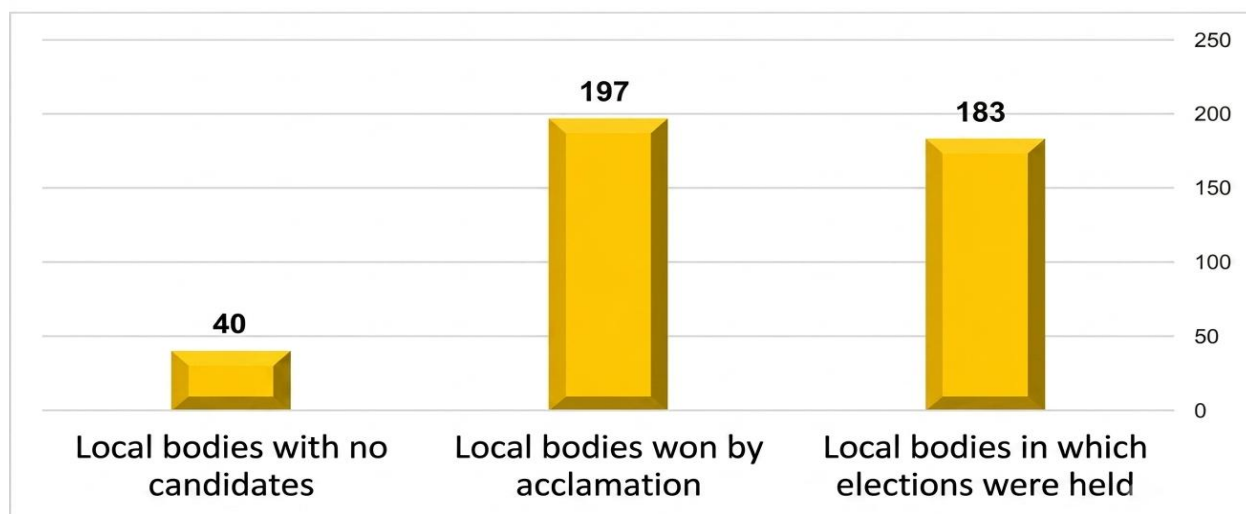
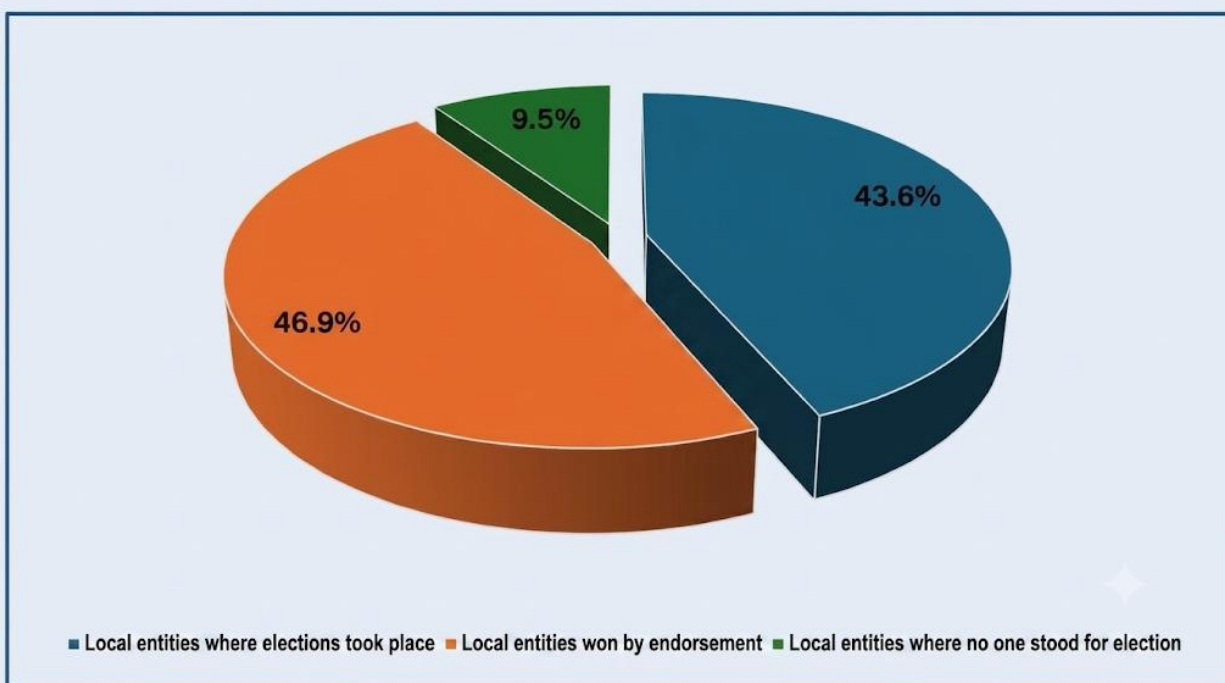


Chart showing percentages of local bodies according to the status of local elections in 2026



Participation rates were also affected by the general political and security context, especially in light of the continuation of political division, the repercussions of the war on the Gaza Strip, and Israeli measures in the West Bank, including checkpoints, closures, and repeated incursions. This was reflected in the general mood of citizens, and on the level of enthusiasm for political participation, especially among youth facing accumulated economic and social challenges.

From the perspective of youth participation, the disparity in voter turnout rates reveals a difference in the level of youth engagement in the electoral process between one area and another. In some areas, youth played an active role in electoral campaigns and managing advocacy and community mobilization, especially through social media, while some youth in other areas tended towards political abstention due to frustration from the lack of change and the continued dominance of traditional forces over local councils.

Thus, the disparity in participation rates in the Palestinian local elections of 2026 does not only reflect geographical or organizational differences, but also reveals structural challenges related to the nature of political culture, the level of trust in public life, and the extent to which local elections can stimulate popular participation, especially among youth.

Section Two:

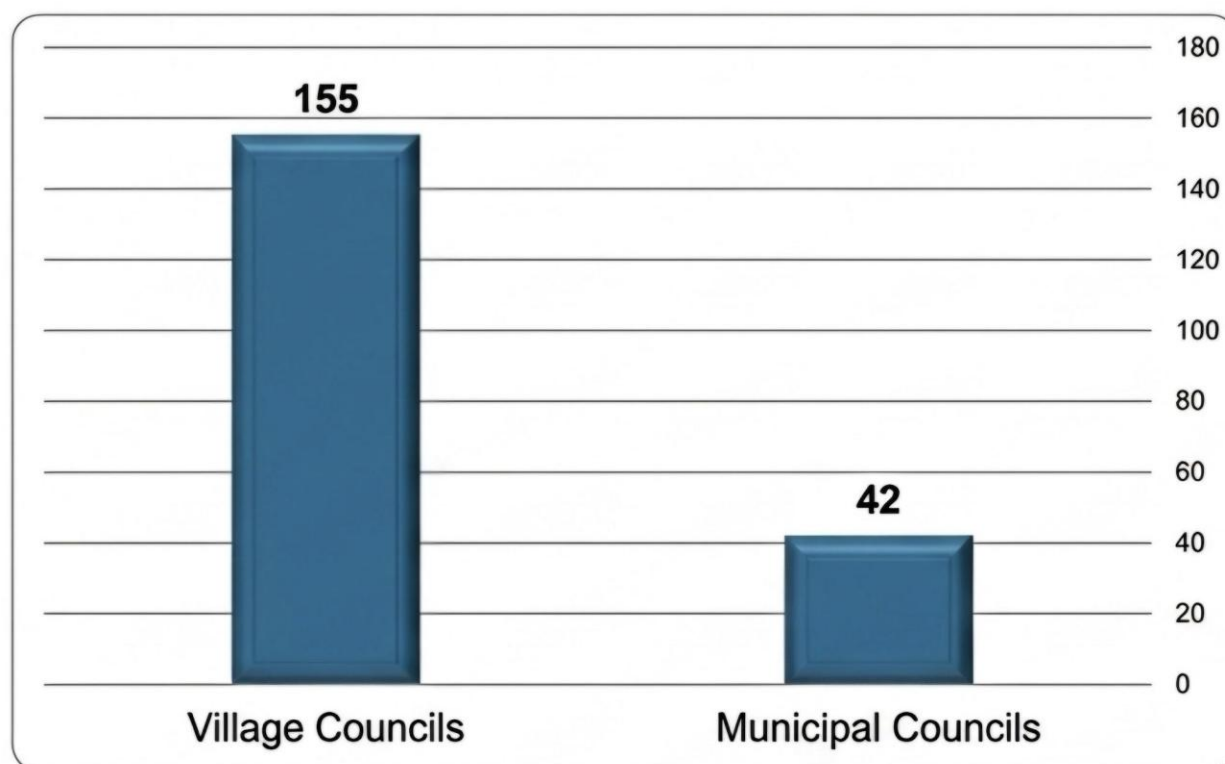
Endorsement and Youth Participation in the Palestinian Local Elections 2026

Section One: The Phenomenon of Endorsement and Its Impact on the Democratic Process

Subsection One: High Rates of Endorsement in a Large Number of Local Bodies

The phenomenon of Endorsement constituted one of the most prominent features that characterized the Palestinian local elections of 2026, where the results of a large number of local bodies were decided without resorting to direct voting (197) local bodies, as a result of the absence of competing lists or reaching prior consensus among political, familial, and social forces. This phenomenon reflected the nature of the transformations witnessed by Palestinian society, along with the impact of the traditional structure and political division on the course of the local democratic process.

Figure showing the numbers of local bodies decided by Endorsement and their classifications.



The phenomenon of Endorsement was linked to several political, social, and economic factors. At the political level, the continuation of the Palestinian division and declining trust in parties and political institutions contributed to reinforcing the trend towards local consensus rather than direct electoral competition. Some political and familial forces also preferred to avoid competition for fear of deepening societal divisions or losing local influence, especially in villages and small towns.

Socially, families and clans played a major role in forming consensus lists, where seats were distributed in many areas according to familial considerations or prior societal consensus, away from programmatic or political competition. This contributed to reducing the space for democratic competition, and turning the electoral process in some local bodies into a process of social consensus rather than actual electoral competition.

Economic conditions also played an important role in the high rates of Endorsement, as some lists preferred to avoid the financial costs of electoral campaigns in light of the economic crisis facing Palestinian society, especially with high unemployment and poverty rates and deteriorating living conditions.

Although Endorsement is sometimes presented as a means to maintain civil peace and reduce the intensity of local divisions, its expansion raises fundamental questions about its impact on democratic practice and the future of political participation, especially among youth. The absence of electoral competition reduces opportunities for public debate and societal accountability, and also limits voters' ability to choose between different programs and visions.

From the perspective of youth participation, Endorsement directly affected youth opportunities to access local decision-making positions. In many cases, the formation of consensus lists was subject to traditional, familial, and organizational power balances, which reduced opportunities for the emergence of new youth leadership or the effective integration of youth within local councils. The absence of electoral campaigns and direct competition also deprived youth of an important space for political mobilization and community participation. Nevertheless, the percentage of youth who won by endorsement (9%) was greater than the percentage of youth who won by voting (8%).

In contrast, some local actors believe that Endorsement may in some cases reflect the local community's ability to reach internal consensus that prevents divisions and maintains social stability, especially in small environments where social and familial relations are closely intertwined. However, the continued expansion of this pattern may lead in the long term to weakening democratic culture, and reducing opportunities for political alternation and renewal of local elites.

Thus, the high rates of Endorsement in the Palestinian local elections of 2026 reflect a complex situation combining the desire to maintain social cohesion on one hand, and the challenges related to declining democratic competition and weak political participation on the other, which calls for reconsidering policies and mechanisms that enhance popular participation, especially youth participation, within local government institutions.

The Phenomenon of Endorsement and Its Impact

The phenomenon of Endorsement constituted one of the most prominent features that characterized the Palestinian local elections of 2026, where the results of a large number of local bodies were decided without holding actual voting, as a result of the absence of competing lists or reaching prior consensus among social, political, and familial forces. According to the final results issued by the Palestinian Central Elections Commission, the number of local bodies that won by Endorsement reached 197 local bodies, compared to voting taking place in only 183 bodies, compared to (40) local bodies where elections did not take place, out of a total of 420 local bodies covered by the electoral process (Palestinian Central Elections Commission, 2026). These figures reflect the notable expansion of the phenomenon of Endorsement compared to direct electoral competition, which raises deep questions about the nature of the transformations witnessed by Palestinian local political life.

465,266 voters did not exercise their electoral right due to Endorsement, and the failure to hold local elections in 197 local bodies.

The highest governorates in Endorsement were Ramallah and Al-Bireh with (40) local bodies, including Ramallah Municipality.

First: Reasons for Endorsement

The phenomenon of Endorsement is linked to several intertwined political, social, and economic factors. Politically, the continuation of the Palestinian division and declining trust in parties and political institutions pushed many local forces towards consensus rather than direct electoral competition, especially in light of the absence of a national political horizon and the suspension of general elections for years.

Social and familial considerations also played a pivotal role in reinforcing Endorsement, especially in villages and small towns where social relations are based on familial and tribal ties. In many cases, families and local forces preferred to reach consensus lists to avoid societal divisions or internal conflicts that might result from electoral competition.

Economically, difficult economic conditions and the high costs of electoral campaigns contributed to reinforcing the trend towards Endorsement, as some lists preferred to avoid the financial burdens associated with advocacy and electoral organization, especially in light of high unemployment rates and deteriorating living conditions.

Second: The Tribal, Political, and Social Dimension of Endorsement

The phenomenon of Endorsement reflects the nature of the social and political structure in Palestinian society, where the family, clan, and traditional political organization still constitute influential elements in forming local lists and determining power balances within many local bodies. In a large number of areas, seats within consensus lists were distributed according to familial or regional considerations, ensuring the representation of major families or influential social forces, which sometimes led to the decline of programmatic considerations and professional competence in favor of social and political balances.

Some political forces also tended to support local consensus to avoid losing influence or entering into competitions that might lead to internal divisions, especially in light of the sensitive political conditions facing Palestinian society. Thus, Endorsement in some areas became a reflection of a state of “social management” of the electoral process more than being democratic competition based on different programs and visions.

Third: The Impact of Endorsement on Local Democracy

Although Endorsement is sometimes presented as a means to maintain civil peace and reduce the intensity of societal divisions, its expansion raises serious questions about its impact on local democracy and the future of political participation.

The absence of electoral competition limits opportunities for public debate and societal accountability, and reduces citizens' ability to choose between different programs and candidates. It also leads to weakening democratic culture, especially among youth, who need an electoral environment based on competition and pluralism to develop skills of political participation and public work. Endorsement also directly affected opportunities for renewing local elites, as it contributed to reinforcing the presence of traditional and familial forces within local councils, and limited the ability of youth and independent lists to access decision-making positions. On the other hand, Endorsement reduces electoral enthusiasm among citizens, as some voters feel that election results are decided in advance without the need to vote, which is reflected in the level of trust in the democratic process and political participation.

Thus, it can be said that Endorsement in the Palestinian local elections of 2026 carried two intertwined dimensions: on one hand, it represented a tool for social consensus and reducing local tensions, but on the other hand, it reflected a relative decline in the level of democratic competition, especially regarding the empowerment of youth and independent lists.

Subsection Two: The Impact of Endorsement on Youth Political Participation

The phenomenon of Endorsement directly affected the nature of youth political participation in the 2026 local elections, whether at the level of candidacy, participation in electoral campaigns, or opportunities to access local decision-making positions. With the expansion of the number of local bodies whose results were decided by Endorsement, the space for democratic competition, which is one of the most important tools that allow youth to engage in political life and gain organizational and leadership experience, shrank. Since the results of 197 local bodies were decided by Endorsement, this means that a wide percentage of Palestinian youth were effectively deprived of direct participation in voting or interaction with competitive electoral campaigns within their local communities, which was reflected in the level of political participation and community mobilization. Electoral competition is one of the most important means that allow youth to participate in public debate, interact with local issues, and develop political and organizational skills. However, the absence of this competition as a result of Endorsement led in many areas to reducing opportunities for youth to engage in public life, especially in local bodies that were subject to prior familial or organizational understandings that did not leave real space for youth or independent lists.

Endorsement also contributed to reinforcing the presence of traditional forces within local councils, whether through families, political organizations, or socially influential figures, which limited opportunities for renewing local elites and integrating new youth leadership. In many cases, consensus lists were formed according to social and organizational considerations more than relying on competence or electoral programs, which negatively affected the level of youth representation within local councils.

On the other hand, Endorsement affected political enthusiasm among youth, as some of them felt that election results were decided in advance through local consensus, which reinforced feelings of frustration and abstention from political participation among some of them. It is noted that this feeling was more evident in areas where electoral competition was completely absent, compared to areas that witnessed active electoral campaigns and direct competition between lists.

Nevertheless, the phenomenon of Endorsement did not prevent some youth initiatives from attempting to enter the electoral experience or participate in local work. A number of local bodies witnessed youth and independent lists that sought to present an alternative discourse focusing on local development, transparency, improving public services, and using social media as a tool to communicate with citizens and influence public opinion. However, these initiatives faced multiple challenges, most notably weak financial capabilities, the dominance of traditional structures, and the difficulty of penetrating existing social and familial understandings.

Endorsement also indirectly affected democratic culture among youth, as the absence of electoral competition reduces opportunities for public dialogue and societal accountability, and weakens

faith in the usefulness of political participation, especially among young generations seeking real tools for influence and change. In contrast, areas that witnessed actual electoral competition showed higher levels of youth interaction, whether through candidacy, voting, or managing electoral campaigns.

Thus, it can be said that the phenomenon of Endorsement in the Palestinian local elections of 2026 constituted a real challenge to expanding youth political participation, and contributed to limiting opportunities for democratic competition and renewing local elites. This phenomenon also revealed the need to develop a more open and pluralistic electoral environment, providing youth with broader opportunities for participation and access to influence and local decision-making positions.

Section Two: Youth and Elections

Subsection One: Field Study: Youth and the Future of Democratic Participation

In order to enrich the study with the opinions and attitudes of youth themselves, a field study was conducted targeting youth using multiple research tools, including questionnaires and focus groups. The results of the field study with youth were as follows:

First: Level of Participation and Interest in Elections

The results of the opinion poll conducted by the study among youth showed a high level of interest in the electoral process before the local elections were held. The results showed that about 70% of respondents were “interested” or “very interested” in following the elections and participating in their atmosphere, compared to only 30% who stated they were “not interested” or “not interested at all.” These results indicate that weak trust or political hesitation among some youth does not necessarily mean the absence of interest in public affairs or in the relationship with the democratic process, but rather often reflects a critical stance towards the general political context and the limits of its impact on the electoral process.

Nevertheless, the general turnout rate of 53.44% indicates the continued presence of popular participation, but it also reveals challenges related to the level of political trust and electoral abstention, especially among youth.

Second: Trust in Political Parties

The results of the opinion poll conducted by the study indicate weak youth trust in political parties, as 67.6% of youth indicated that weak trust in political parties and public institutions is one of the most prominent factors affecting their stance on political participation and local elections.

The results showed that 52% of respondents attributed the reasons for abstention or weak enthusiasm for electoral participation to the continuation of occupation, political division, and the general state of instability, which reflects the interconnection between the national political context and youth attitudes towards the democratic process and their level of belief in its ability to bring about tangible change.

Third: Familial and Tribal Pressures on Youth

The focus group results indicate that youth were subjected to familial pressures to vote for specific lists or candidates despite not being convinced of them, especially in villages and small towns, due to considerations of kinship and familial affiliation.

Fourth: Endorsement and Youth

Participants in the focus group indicated that Ramallah city moved towards Endorsement, which is completely unacceptable, as youth are eager for active participation in elections, as there should be youth in decision-making centers, as it is noted that many observers of the electoral process were from the youth category, so what prevents them from becoming candidates?"

Participants in the focus group indicated that Endorsement is a reversal of youth's right to participate in elections both in voting and candidacy.

Fifth: Readiness to Participate in Elections

The focus group results showed that most youth attributed their peers' reluctance to run for office to the feeling of lack of experience and weak readiness to engage in municipal work, while abstention from voting among some youth was linked to lack of knowledge and awareness related to the electoral process and its importance.

The questionnaire results showed that 7% of respondents indicated that weak confidence in their ability to make a difference through their votes constituted one of the reasons for hesitation or abstention from electoral participation.

Sixth: The Electoral System and Youth

Participants in the focus group agreed that local councils should not be based on singular youth or age-based representation, but on an integrative formula combining youth energy and the experience of older generations, to ensure more just and balanced representation within local decision-making positions.

Seventh: The Importance of Elections from the Youth Perspective

The focus group outputs indicated that Palestinian youth have come to view local elections as a tool to improve the service and living reality more than as a means for comprehensive political change, as a result of the absence of a political horizon and the continued state of stagnation and division. The weak presence of youth within traditional partisan frameworks also pushed some of them towards independent local work or community initiatives as alternatives to traditional political participation.

One respondent in the focus group indicated that "these elections are a form of resistance against the occupation and renewal of national identity, and they planted hope among youth for a better future."

Youth in the focus group also expressed their belief that the presence of youth in local councils is not limited to being an opportunity to inject new blood and ideas, but also extends to enhancing the councils' ability to keep pace with technological developments and use digital tools more effectively, by virtue of younger generations having greater experience in employing technology in work, communication, and service management.

The questionnaire results showed that 23% of respondents affirmed the importance of enhancing youth representation in local bodies.

Eighth: The Importance of Awareness and Education

Notably, the youth participating in the focus group and questionnaire emphasized the need to enhance awareness and political education programs related to elections and democratic participation rights, calling for a more effective role for civil society institutions in this field.

The questionnaire results showed that 39% of respondents considered that awareness and electoral education campaigns are among the most prominent means capable of enhancing youth participation. Participants also stressed that electoral awareness should not be limited to electoral seasons, but should begin from school stages and be built within an integrative and continuous approach that accompanies youth through their various educational and societal stages.

Ninth: Women and Elections

The youth participating in the focus group affirmed the importance of women's presence within local councils and their role in decision-making and community work, while one young woman indicated that the presence of women within lists and local councils constitutes an encouraging factor for her and other young women to participate and engage more in the electoral process and public work.

The youth participating in the focus group believed that the role of women, especially young women, is still limited in elections, especially at the level of candidacy.

Subsection Two: Analysis of Election Results and Youth Participation

The results of the Palestinian local elections of 2026 showed a set of important indicators related to the level of youth participation in the electoral process, whether at the level of candidacy, voting, or engagement in electoral campaigns and local work. These results reflected a complex reality combining an increasing youth desire for participation and change on one hand, and the continuation of structural and political challenges limiting opportunities for representation and influence on the other.

According to Palestinian Central Elections Commission data, the number of candidates in the 2026 local elections reached about 5,131 candidates within 709 electoral lists, distributed among independent, partisan, and coalition lists (Palestinian Central Elections Commission, 2026). Although there are no precise official detailed statistics on the percentage of youth within all electoral lists, the electoral scene showed a clear presence of a number of youth and independent lists, especially in cities and some municipalities that witnessed actual electoral competition.

Youth also played an important role in managing electoral campaigns and using social media as a tool for mobilization and influence, as digital platforms emerged as an essential space for communicating with voters, presenting electoral programs, and organizing media campaigns, especially among young age groups. This reflects a gradual transformation in the tools of political participation and methods of electoral work within Palestinian society.

In contrast, the election results revealed the continued limited representation of youth within local councils compared to their demographic size in Palestinian society. This is linked to several factors, most notably the dominance of traditional and familial forces over list formation, weak financial capabilities of youth lists, in addition to the impact of Endorsement, which decided the results of 197 local bodies without direct electoral competition (Palestinian Central Elections Commission, 2026).

The phenomenon of Endorsement clearly affected youth opportunities to experience a genuine electoral contest, as the absence of competition in a large number of local bodies reduced the space for political participation and societal dialogue, and limited opportunities for the emergence of new youth leadership. Some local and familial understandings were also built according to traditional power balances, which led to the exclusion of a number of youth initiatives or reducing their presence within electoral lists.

On the other hand, some areas showed different models of active youth participation, especially in local bodies that witnessed high electoral competition. In these areas, youth participated more in electoral campaigns, whether through candidacy, community mobilization, or media work, and the level of political interaction and public debate on local and development issues increased.

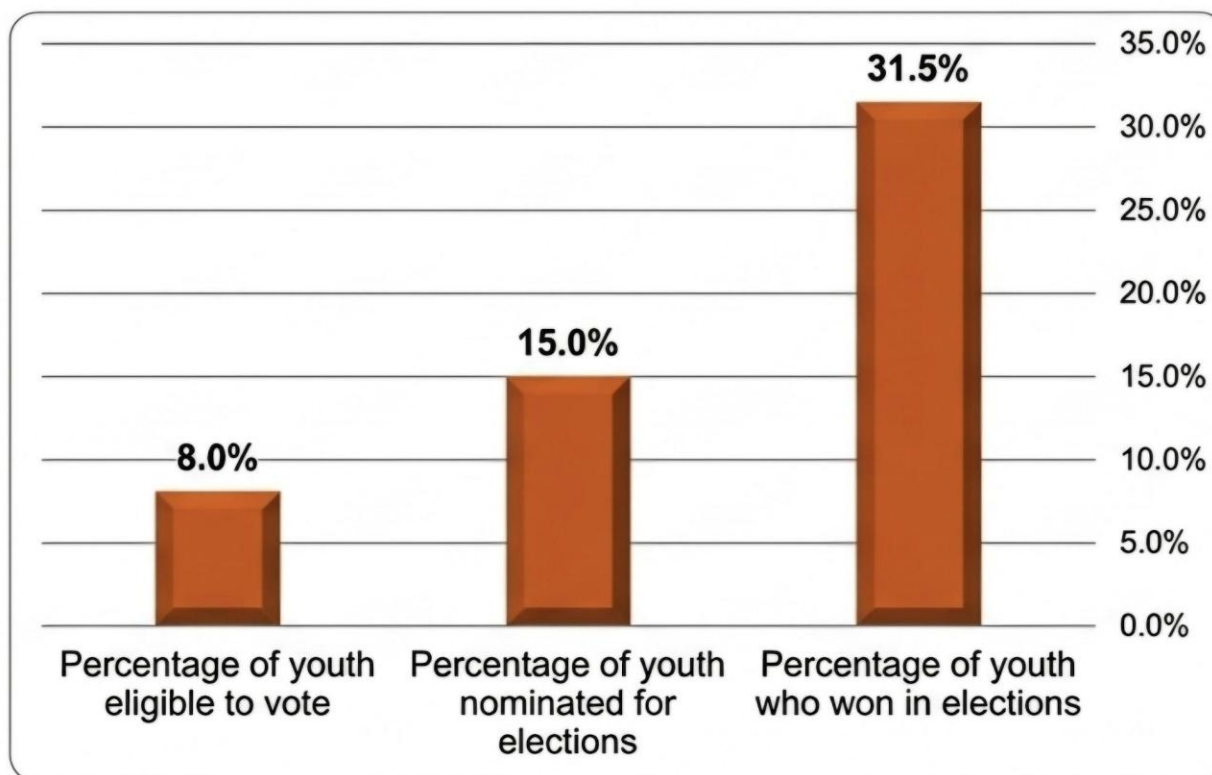
The elections also revealed a disparity in youth attitudes towards local councils, where some youth view local bodies as a tool capable of bringing about direct change in services and local development, while others believe that the weak powers of local councils and the continuation of political and economic crises reduce their ability to achieve substantial change.

In addition, many challenges faced youth and independent lists during the elections, most notably weak funding, lack of organizational experience, and difficulty competing with lists supported by families or traditional political forces. Youth also faced challenges related to weak societal confidence in their ability to manage and lead compared to traditional figures with social and political presence.

Despite these challenges, the Palestinian local elections of 2026 revealed youth energies seeking to engage in public work and develop new forms of political and community participation. They also showed that Palestinian youth still see in local governance a possible space for influence and change, especially in light of the absence of broader national political paths for democratic participation. Notably, youth, whether in the focus group or through questionnaire results, clearly expressed their desire to have youth candidates representing them within local councils and reflecting their priorities and challenges.

Thus, the results of the 2026 local elections reflect a transitional state in the relationship of Palestinian youth with political work, combining the continuation of traditional constraints on one hand, and the emergence of increasing youth attempts to reshape the local sphere and participate in decision-making on the other, which makes politically empowering youth an essential necessity for strengthening the future of local democracy in Palestine.

Comparative figure of youth percentages (18-30) of eligible voters / candidates / winners in elections

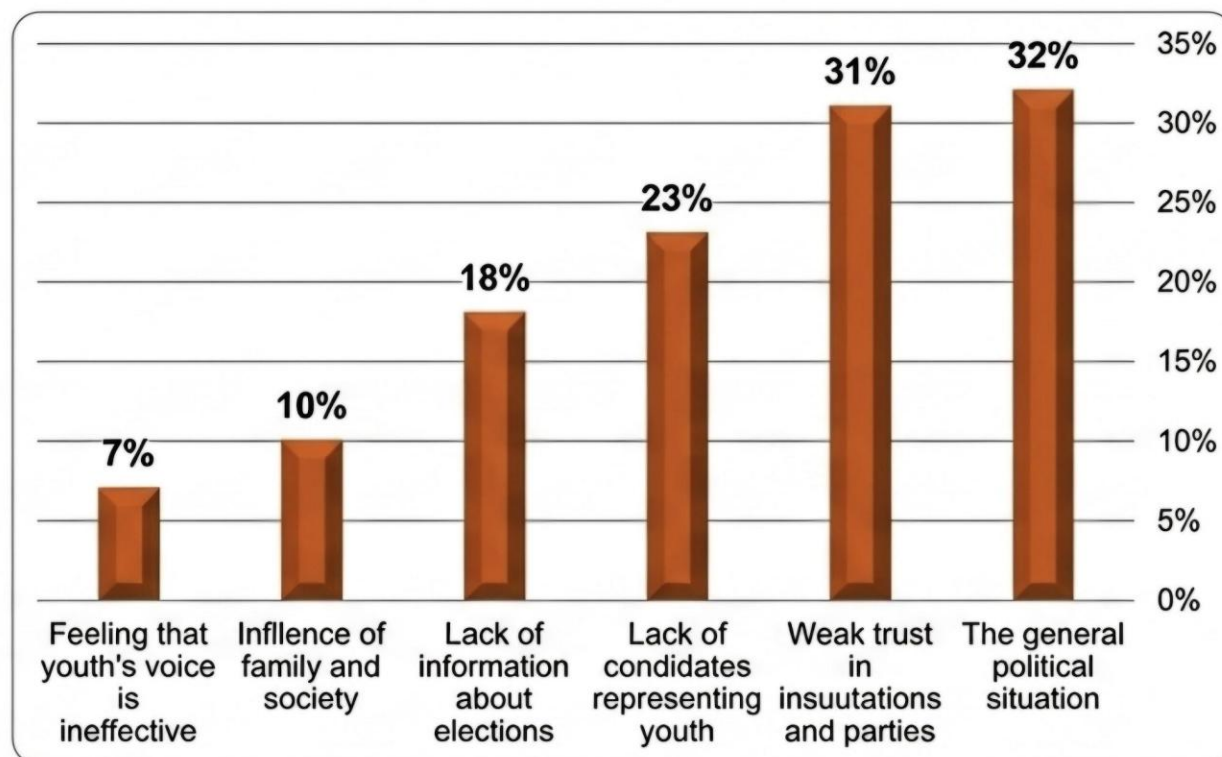


It is noted from the above figure that half the percentage of youth eligible to vote actually ran for elections (noting that the candidacy age starts from 23 years), while 8% of them won, i.e., about a quarter of the percentage representing youth, which indicates that youth presence is still generally weak in elected bodies, despite their high percentage of the number of voters.

Table showing reasons for youth abstention from participating in local elections whether by candidacy or voting, their percentages, and descending order

Reason for Abstention	Percentage %
General political situation	32%
Weak trust in institutions and parties	31%
Lack of candidates representing youth	23%
Lack of information about elections	18%
Family and community influence	10%
Feeling that youth voice is not influential	7%

Reasons for youth abstention from participating in local elections whether by candidacy or voting, their percentages, and descending order



General Reading of Election Results

The results of the Palestinian local elections of 2026 reveal a set of important political and social indicators related to the nature of democratic participation and the future of youth engagement in Palestinian public life. Despite the complex political and economic conditions in which the elections were held, the electoral process showed continued interest among broad segments of society, especially youth, in participating in local affairs and engaging in issues related to services and local development.

The elections also showed a clear disparity in participation rates between different regions, as voter turnout rates rose in some villages and towns that witnessed intense electoral competition and strong social and familial presence, while they declined in some major cities and areas where competition was absent or trust in local councils declined. This disparity reveals a direct relationship between the level of electoral competition and the degree of political enthusiasm and popular participation. The results also showed a trend towards Endorsement in local bodies, including major bodies such as Ramallah and Nablus.

From the perspective of youth participation, the results show that Palestinian youth are more present in electoral campaigns, media work, and community initiatives, especially through the use of social media and digital platforms. However, this presence was not equally reflected in the level

of representation within local councils, as opportunities for youth to reach decision-making positions remain limited compared to their demographic size and societal role.

The results also showed that youth and independent lists faced significant challenges, most notably weak financial capabilities, lack of experience, the dominance of families and traditional organizations, and the impact of Endorsement, which reduced opportunities for electoral competition in a large number of local bodies. Nevertheless, the emergence of independent youth initiatives in some areas reflects gradual transformations in youth political awareness, and an increasing desire to develop new forms of political participation and local work.

The results also reveal that some Palestinian youth have come to view local councils as a tool for local change, improving services, and community development more than as an arena for traditional political conflict. This reflects a shift in youth priorities, especially in light of economic and social crises, high unemployment rates, and marginalization.

Overall, the Palestinian local elections of 2026 reflect a transitional state in Palestinian political life, combining the continuation of traditional constraints on one hand, and the emergence of youth and societal attempts to revitalize democratic participation on the other. The results also confirm that the future of local democracy in Palestine is directly linked to the ability of the political system and local society to enhance youth participation, and reduce the obstacles that limit their access to influence and decision-making positions.

Challenges and Opportunities After the 2026 Local Elections

First: Challenges

1.Weak Political Trust

Weak political trust is one of the most prominent challenges that affected Palestinian youth participation in the 2026 local elections, especially in light of the continuation of the Palestinian political division, the suspension of legislative and presidential elections for many years, in addition to the escalating restrictions of the Israeli occupation and the constraints and political and security instability it imposes. This reality as a whole contributed to reinforcing feelings of frustration among broad segments of youth towards the political process, and declining conviction in the ability of official institutions to bring about real change in the political and social reality.

Although local elections constituted one of the democratic spaces available for participation, the expansion of the phenomenon of Endorsement reinforced among some youth the feeling that democratic competition had become limited and that election results were often decided through prior consensus rather than the ballot box (Palestinian Central Elections Commission, 2026).

The continuation of political and economic crises, along with the absence of a national political horizon, also contributed to declining political enthusiasm among some youth, especially in areas that witnessed weak electoral competition or clear dominance of traditional and familial forces over the formation of electoral lists.

2.Lack of Resources and Capabilities

Youth and independent lists faced major challenges related to weak financial and organizational capabilities compared to lists supported by families or traditional political forces. Electoral campaigns required financial, media, and logistical resources that are difficult for many youth to provide, especially in light of high unemployment rates and difficult economic conditions.

According to Palestinian Central Elections Commission data, the number of electoral lists participating in the 2026 local elections reached about 709 electoral lists (Palestinian Central Elections Commission, 2026), which reflects the extent of competition in some areas, but also reveals a clear disparity in capabilities between different lists.

Weak funding also affected youth's ability to reach voters and organize electoral campaigns effectively, especially in areas that rely heavily on traditional social and familial presence. In addition, some youth initiatives faced difficulties related to lack of organizational and administrative experience compared to lists with long political experience.

3.Dominance of Families and Traditional Organizations

The local elections showed the continued strong presence of families and traditional political organizations in forming electoral lists and controlling the balances of competition within many local bodies, especially in villages and small towns. This dominance contributed to reducing opportunities for the emergence of new youth leadership, and limited the ability of independent lists to compete on an equal footing.

Familial and social consensus also played an important role in expanding the phenomenon of Endorsement, where in many areas lists were formed according to social and organizational considerations more than relying on electoral programs or competencies. This was directly reflected in the nature of representation within local councils, and on the level of democratic renewal.

This reality is linked to the nature of the Palestinian social structure, which still gives the family and traditional political organization an influential role in public life, which makes penetrating this scene a real challenge for youth and independent lists.

4.Limited Real Youth Representation

Despite the clear presence of youth in electoral campaigns, volunteer work, and media, their actual representation within local councils remained limited compared to their demographic size in Palestinian society. Only 178 young men and women benefited from the reduction in the candidacy age, and this is due to a set of factors, most notably the dominance of traditional forces, weak political and financial support for youth lists, in addition to the impact of Endorsement, which limited opportunities for electoral competition in a large number of local bodies.

Youth participation often concentrated on supportive roles in electoral campaigns, such as digital media and community mobilization, more than their access to actual decision-making positions within local councils. This reflects a gap between the formal political participation of youth and their actual empowerment within local government institutions.

Second: Opportunities

1.The Rise of Youth Initiatives

Despite the challenges, the Palestinian local elections of 2026 revealed the existence of independent youth initiatives that attempted to present new models of political participation and local work, especially in some cities and towns that witnessed actual electoral competition. These initiatives focused on issues of local development, transparency, improving public services, and community work, away from traditional political polarization.

This presence reflects an increasing desire among Palestinian youth to engage in public life and bring about local change, and also indicates a gradual development in the political awareness of

new generations, who are seeking tools closer to the needs of the local community and its daily issues.

2.The Digital Space and Social Media and Technology

The digital space has become one of the most important tools used by youth during the local elections, whether in electoral campaigns, community mobilization, or communicating with voters. Social media helped give youth a wider space to express their opinions and present their electoral programs, especially in light of limited financial resources and traditional media.

Digital platforms also contributed to enhancing political interaction and public debate, and providing greater opportunities for youth lists to reach audiences and influence local public opinion. This reflects a clear transformation in the tools of political participation, as digital media has become an alternative space for youth to compensate for weak presence within traditional political structures.

The technological dimension also emerged as one of the factors that can enhance the effectiveness of youth participation within local bodies, as a number of youth indicated that younger generations possessing advanced digital and technological skills provides greater opportunities to develop the mechanisms of local council work, whether through improving communication with citizens, or employing digital tools in service management and enhancing transparency and responsiveness to community needs.

3.Municipal Work as an Entry Point for Local Change

Local bodies represent for Palestinian youth one of the most important spaces available for political participation and direct influence on local community issues. The nature of municipal work related to services and local development gives youth a real opportunity to contribute to improving the reality of their communities, and gaining administrative and political experience.

Local governance also constitutes an important entry point for building new youth leadership capable of engaging in broader levels of political and institutional work in the future, especially in light of the absence of comprehensive national democratic paths. Therefore, local elections can constitute a starting point for enhancing youth political participation, and gradually rebuilding trust in public life and local institutions.

Study Results Related to Youth Participation in Elections

Youth participation in the Palestinian local elections of 2026 constituted one of the most prominent indicators of the nature of the relationship between youth and local political life, especially in light of the continuation of political and economic crises facing Palestinian society. The electoral process showed a notable presence of youth in the fields of candidacy, managing electoral campaigns, media and digital work, despite the continuation of challenges that limit their access to local decision-making positions.

First: Volume of Youth Candidacy

The 2026 local elections showed increasing interest by youth in participating in local work and running within electoral lists, whether through independent, partisan, or coalition lists. According to Palestinian Central Elections Commission data, the number of candidates in the local elections reached about 5,131 candidates, where the percentage of youth (aged 23-30) reached (15%) of the total candidates (Palestinian Central Elections Commission, 2026).

The electoral scene showed a clear presence of youth in a number of municipalities and local bodies, especially in areas that witnessed direct electoral competition. Independent youth

initiatives also emerged that tried to present an electoral discourse based on local development, transparency, and improving public services.

This presence reflects an increasing desire among Palestinian youth to engage in public life, especially in light of the absence of national general elections, which made local elections one of the most important channels available for political participation and local influence.

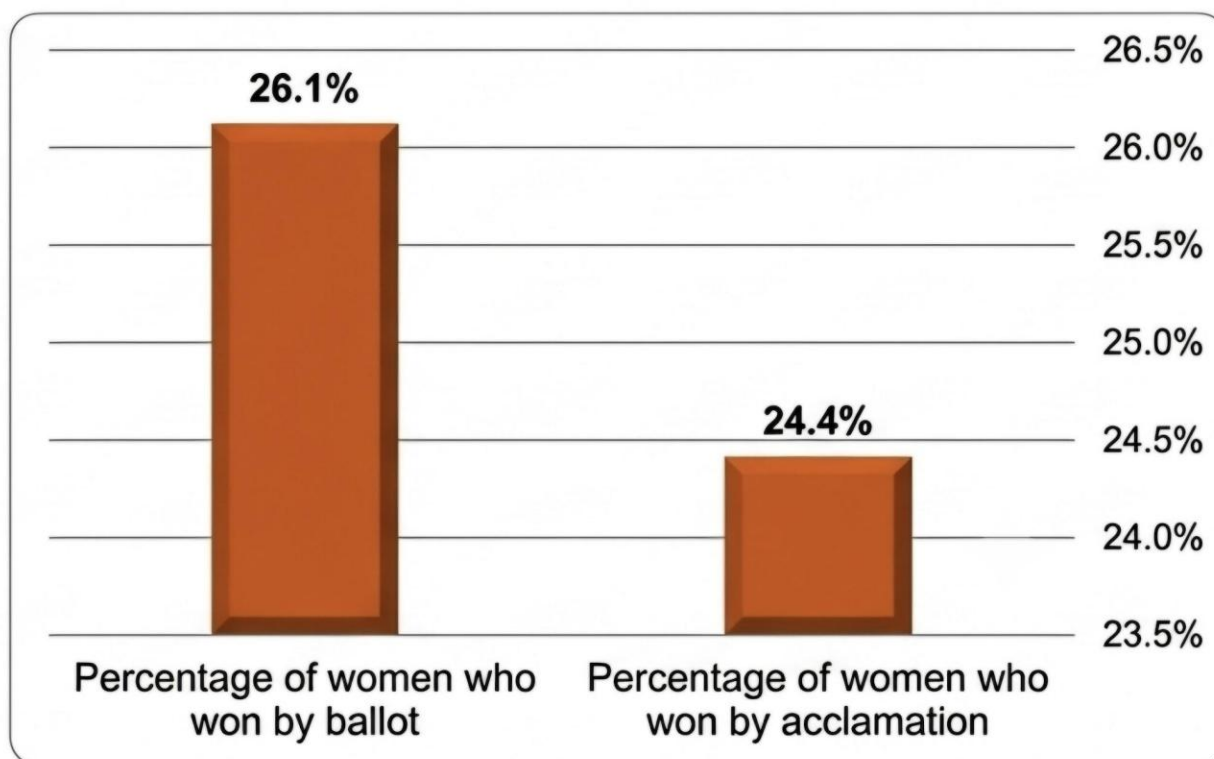
Second: Participation of Young Women

The Palestinian local elections witnessed the continued presence of women within electoral lists, including young women, although this presence remained below the hoped-for level of representation compared to the size of Palestinian women and their societal role. According to Palestinian Central Elections Commission data, the number of female candidates in the 2026 local elections reached about 1,509 female candidates out of 5,131 candidates, i.e., about 29.4% of the total candidates (Palestinian Central Elections Commission, 2026).

Although the women's quota system contributed to enhancing women's participation within local councils, young women faced additional challenges related to social and cultural factors, weak financial and political support, in addition to the dominance of traditional and familial forces over the formation of electoral lists.

Some local experiences also showed an active presence of young women in electoral campaigns, community work, and digital media, especially in major cities, where young women played an important role in managing electoral campaigns and shaping the media discourse of youth and independent lists.

Figure showing the percentage of women winners in the 2026 local elections



By comparing the percentage of women winners in the local elections of their first phase 2021, and the second phase 2022, it is noted that the percentage of women winners of the total winners by voting and Endorsement was 21%. While it rose to about (25%) in the 2026 local elections.

Third: Presence of Youth Lists

During the 2026 local elections, a number of youth and independent lists emerged that tried to present a different model of political participation, based on competence, local development, and distancing from traditional political polarization. These lists appeared more clearly in some cities and towns that witnessed actual electoral competition, where their programs focused on issues of public services, transparency, job opportunities, and community participation.

Despite the limited chances of some of these lists winning, their presence reflects gradual transformations in the political awareness of Palestinian youth, and attempts to develop new forms of local political work away from traditional frameworks.

However, youth lists faced major challenges, most notably weak financial and organizational capabilities, the impact of Endorsement, and the dominance of families and traditional organizations over the electoral scene. Some lists also faced difficulty in penetrating the traditional social structure, especially in villages and small towns where familial and tribal considerations largely control.

Fourth: The Role of Social Media and Digital Campaigns

Social media played a pivotal role in the Palestinian local elections of 2026, especially in light of the wide presence of youth in the digital space. Youth and independent lists used digital platforms as a primary means to communicate with voters, present electoral programs, organize media campaigns, and mobilize communities.

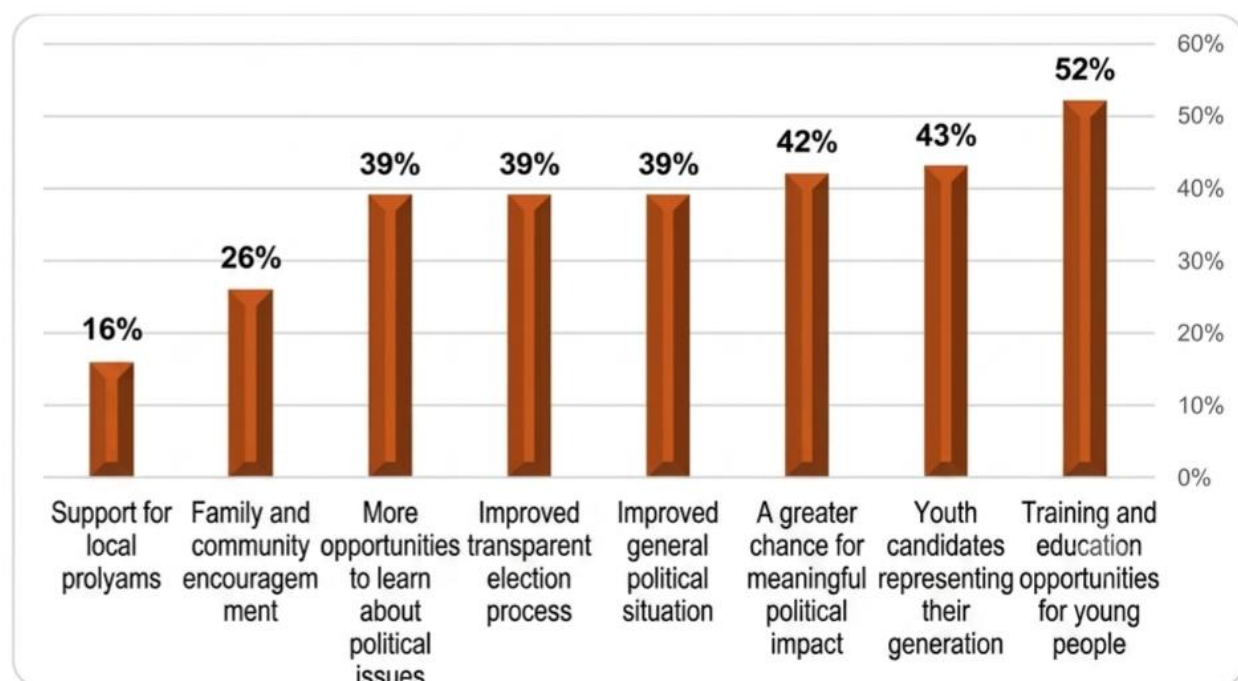
Social media provided an alternative space for youth to compensate for weak financial resources and traditional media, and also contributed to enhancing political interaction and public debate on local and development issues. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok emerged as essential tools in managing electoral campaigns and reaching young voter groups.

Digital campaigns also contributed to highlighting new issues within the electoral discourse, such as transparency, local governance, sustainable development, and youth opportunities, which reflects a gradual development in the tools of political participation and methods of societal influence.

Nevertheless, the impact of digital campaigns remained linked to the ability of youth lists to translate electronic presence into actual presence within the ballot box and local councils, which continued to face challenges related to the traditional structure of the electoral process and the dominance of familial and social factors.

Overall, youth participation in the Palestinian local elections of 2026 reveals a genuine desire by youth to engage in public life and contribute to local change, but this participation still faces structural and political challenges that limit its transformation into actual representation within local decision-making positions.

Figure showing youth responses regarding requirements for enhancing their participation in elections



The above figure shows the requirements for enhancing their participation in elections, with training and qualification opportunities for youth for political participation at the forefront.

Reading in Specific Models

First: Qalqiliya Model

The Qalqiliya model represents an important case for understanding the relationship between local competition and participation rates. Elections Commission data show that Qalqiliya governorate was not a single bloc in terms of turnout; rates varied between local bodies, with Habla recording 80%, Nabi Ilyas 76%, Jit 84%, while the rate dropped in Azun Atma to 48%.

This disparity reveals that high participation is not related to the governorate itself, but to the nature of competition within each local body, the extent of familial and community mobilization, and the extent to which voters feel their votes can make a difference.

Data from bodies where voting took place also show that the number of lists in some Qalqiliya municipalities was relatively high; Habla witnessed 5 lists, Azun 5 lists, while Jit, Nabi Ilyas, and Al-Fundug contested elections as village bodies under the individual system, with numbers of candidates ranging between 11 and 12 candidates in some of these bodies.

From the perspective of youth participation, Qalqiliya can be read as a model of community mobilization rather than just independent youth participation. Youth often appear in campaigns, mobilization, digital media, and communicating with voters, but their access to decision-making positions remains conditional on familial and organizational power balances and their ability to integrate within lists or build independent competing lists.

Second: Special Cases of Consensus or Lack of Candidacy in Major Cities

The 2026 local elections witnessed (3) notable special cases, namely:

Ramallah Municipality case, where one list won by Endorsement in Ramallah Municipality, despite the large demographic diversity, and the absence of a tribal combination, and despite the presence of an active local community, this community did not exercise its legal right to elect its representatives, and one list was announced by Endorsement, despite Ramallah being the administrative capital of the Palestinian Authority, and a city where civil society institutions and youth organizations are active.

Nablus Municipality case, where one list won by Endorsement in Nablus Municipality, despite it being one of the largest cities in terms of population in Palestine, with great diversity and civil societal culture, yet no citizen exercised their electoral right.

The Qalqiliya Municipality case, where no one ran for municipal elections despite the great polarization in previous elections, and the failure of even one list to run represents a model of familial and partisan problems, and quotas that were not completed, and citizens were deprived of choosing their representatives.

These three cases of major cities represent a regression in terms of exercising the electoral right, and citizens choosing their representatives in local administration with free will, and returning to the clan or party to select candidates with familial-partisan coloring at the expense of democracy, and the right of citizens to practice elections and the democratic process.

The Endorsement models constitute the clearest entry point for understanding the limits of democratic competition in the 2026 local elections. The reasons for the absence of competition in these bodies are due to intertwined factors, most notably familial consensus, avoiding social conflict, weak resources, declining trust of some actors in the usefulness of competition, in addition to the ability of traditional forces to decide lists in advance. From a democratic perspective, aside from the dominance of the one party, especially in major cities, Endorsement may reflect social consensus in some cases, but at the same time it limits the voter's right to choose, weakens public debate, and reduces opportunities for local accountability.

Its impact on youth is more evident; Endorsement reduces the space for free candidacy, limits opportunities for the emergence of independent youth lists, and deprives youth of a complete electoral experience including campaign, debate, mobilization, and popular testing. Therefore, it can be said that Endorsement, despite its social function at times in reducing tension, represents from the perspective of youth participation a regression in opportunities for democratic renewal and local accountability.

Findings and Conclusions

In light of the analysis of the political and social context of the Palestinian local elections of 2026, and the study of the reality of youth participation and the impact of the phenomenon of Endorsement and disparity in voter turnout rates, the study reached a set of main findings, which can be summarized as follows:

1. The Palestinian local elections of 2026 showed the continued presence of youth in the public sphere, whether through candidacy, participation in electoral campaigns, or voting, despite the political, economic, and social challenges they face.
2. Despite the reduction of the candidacy age for youth to 23 years, the percentage of youth winners in local bodies (23-30) remains limited (8%).

3. Although the new election law increased the women's quota, the election results indicate that the percentage of women winners remains limited (26.1%) by voting and (24.4%) by endorsement, although it was higher than the 2021-2022 local elections.
4. The election results revealed a notable expansion of the phenomenon of Endorsement, where the results of 197 local bodies were decided by Endorsement compared to voting taking place in only 183 bodies, in addition to no list or individual running in (40) local bodies, which was directly reflected in the level of democratic competition and opportunities for youth political participation, especially in some major local bodies.
5. The study showed that the continuation of the Palestinian political division and the suspension of general elections contributed to declining citizen trust, especially youth, in traditional political institutions, and pushed some of them towards dealing with local elections as a service and development space more than as a tool for comprehensive political change.
6. The study showed that familial and social factors played a pivotal role in forming electoral lists and determining the nature of competition in many local bodies, especially in villages and small towns, which reinforced the presence of local consensus at the expense of programmatic and political competition.
7. The elections revealed a clear disparity in participation rates between different regions, where voter turnout rates rose in some areas that witnessed strong competition and active social and familial presence, compared to their decline in some cities and areas that witnessed political abstention or absence of actual competition.
8. The study showed that Palestinian youth are increasingly relying on social media and digital platforms as tools for political participation and electoral influence, especially in electoral campaigns and community initiatives.
9. The study showed that youth and independent lists faced multiple challenges, most notably weak financial capabilities, lack of organizational experience, the dominance of traditional and familial forces over the local sphere, in addition to the impact of Endorsement, which reduced opportunities for electoral competition in a large number of local bodies.
10. The study revealed that local councils still represent for a wide segment of Palestinian youth one of the most important spaces available for political participation and influence on local issues, especially in light of the absence of comprehensive national elections.
11. The study showed that the continued weak representation of youth within local bodies may lead to weakening opportunities for renewing local political elites, and the continued dominance of traditional structures over decision-making positions.
12. The study concluded that the future of democratic participation in Palestine is directly linked to the ability of the political system and local society to expand youth participation, enhance the democratic environment, and reduce the obstacles that limit their access to influence and local leadership positions.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, a set of recommendations can be presented that would enhance youth political participation and develop the local democratic process in Palestine:

1. Work to enhance youth participation in local bodies by adopting policies that encourage their representation within electoral lists and local councils.

2. Develop training and qualification programs for youth in the fields of local administration, municipal work, and political leadership, to enhance their readiness to participate in elections and manage local affairs.
3. Encourage democratic competition and limit excessive expansion of the phenomenon of Endorsement, by enhancing democratic culture and supporting political pluralism within local bodies.
4. Support youth and independent lists by providing a more equitable electoral environment, and enhancing opportunities for access to funding, media, and electoral training.
5. Strengthen the role of universities and civil society institutions in spreading political and democratic awareness among youth, and encouraging them to engage in public work and local initiatives.
6. Expand the use of digital tools and social media in enhancing youth political participation, and develop interactive platforms connecting youth with local councils and decision-makers.
7. Work to end the Palestinian political division and reactivate the comprehensive democratic path, including holding legislative and presidential elections periodically, to enhance youth trust in political life and public institutions.
8. Develop development and economic programs targeting youth, especially in the fields of employment and entrepreneurship, as this has a direct impact on enhancing community stability and political participation.
9. Encourage local councils to involve youth in advisory committees, community activities, and local decision-making, to enhance the concept of active citizenship.
10. Conduct periodic studies and research on youth political participation in Palestine, to help develop more effective policies in the field of political and democratic empowerment.

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