



*National Democratic
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International
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**PALESTINIAN PERSPECTIVES
ON DEMOCRACY**

A Focus Group Report

December 15, 1994

PALESTINIAN PERSPECTIVES ON DEMOCRACY

**A Report On
Focus Group Research**

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National Democratic Institute For International Affairs



conducting nonpartisan international programs to help promote, maintain and strengthen democratic institutions

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CONTENTS

Acknowledgments	2
Introduction	3
Methodology	4
Major Findings	6
Detailed Findings	8
The Palestinian Context	
System of Government	
Responsibilities of Citizens in a Democracy	
Sources of Information	
Information on Democracy and Elections	
Democracy	
Political Parties in a Democracy	
Current Number of Factions	
Ideal Number of Political Parties	
Programs of Different Factions	
Candidates as Party Members	
Organization of Political Parties	
Conditions for Free and Fair Elections	
Issues in the Electoral Campaign	
Qualifications of the Candidates	
Voting Experience and Prospects	
Women's Participation	
Role of Extended Families	
Religious Values and Development	
Responsibilities of Politicians and Voters	
Annex 1 - Focus Group Questions	20
Annex 2 - Authors' Biographies	22
Annex 3 - Map of the West Bank and Gaza Strip (Locations of focus group discussions)	23

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INTRODUCTION

This is the report of a series of focus groups conducted in the West Bank and Gaza Strip from October 4 through 12, 1994 by the National Democratic Institute.

The purpose of the exercise was to gather information from Palestinians -- about their views toward democracy, elections, political organizations, parties, governing institutions, and citizen participation in the political process -- that could inform and guide NDI's work in support of Palestinian democratic development. Together with information and advice provided to NDI since the establishment of a permanent program presence in February 1994, these findings will shape and influence the civic education program that NDI is developing in anticipation of elections in 1995.

The Declaration of Principles, signed September 13, 1993 by the Palestine Liberation Organization and Israel, establishes a framework for negotiations intended to lead to a final settlement of the status of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Pursuant to this framework, the Cairo Accord of May 4, 1994 established the Palestinian Authority which has since assumed some governing responsibility in the autonomous areas of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The Declaration of Principles also envisions elections to a governing council and negotiations are continuing about the modalities of these elections.

Focus groups are a useful starting point in gaining an understanding of a particular group's attitudes towards complex concepts. They may also yield specific relevant information. A focus group is a guided discussion in which a moderator asks a series of questions to a group of approximately ten to twelve people. While a focus group does not enable the organizer to quantify the division of opinion on a given issue, it does provide a way to discern the level of familiarity and interest in selected subjects. Unlike an opinion survey or poll, which typically asks for one word responses or a selection from multiple choices, a focus group allows for more expansive discussion of a particular topic. Thus, the group whose attitudes are being surveyed determines the words they will use and they are freer to indicate the level of intensity of their feelings.

After a series of several focus groups some broad concepts will be repeated and can be articulated in a report that tries, as faithfully as possible, to qualitatively represent what has been expressed by the participants. In the selection of moderators and participants, in the conduct of the focus groups, and in the synthesis of information, every effort must be made to neutrally reflect the responses of the participants. As a result, the information presented here does not necessarily represent the attitudes of the National Democratic Institute.

METHODOLOGY

The nine communities selected for this focus group exercise roughly reflect the demographics of the Palestinian population in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. In the West Bank, five sites were selected: Tubas town in the North East; Bal'a village in Tulkarem district; Samou', south of Hebron; Ramallah; and Jerusalem. In the Gaza Strip four sites were selected: Rafah refugee camp, Deir Al-Balah refugee camp, Gaza city, and Jabalia refugee camp. In each of Gaza City and Jerusalem only one mixed gender focus group was conducted. In each of the seven other locations two focus groups were conducted simultaneously in different venues, one comprised only of men, the other only women. The venues varied from libraries, school buildings or community halls to private houses or offices.

Ms. Wafa' Abdel Rahman, Mr. Abed Abu Shamsyeh, Mr. Khalid El Ghouh and Ms. Oula Jaouni served as moderators and recorders for each focus group. The moderator asked the questions and guided the discussion, while the recorder took notes and recorded the session on tape. They traded roles in the course of the project, so that the moderator on one occasion would be the recorder on the next. Prior to beginning the exercise the moderators and recorders were trained over a four day period by Mr. Yousif Toma, a focus group expert, who has previously done work among Palestinians, and was retained by NDI for this project. The group also discussed the focus group questions and format during this period. Mr. Toma presided over the initial report writing period. Senior moderator Ms. Malak Ali El Nassar presided over the entire exercise and participated in a substantial portion of the training and the writing of this report. Mark Mullen, NDI Program Officer, was the principal coordinator of this exercise, from recruitment to report writing.

At each site, a local coordinator was identified to recruit participants for each focus group. The groups were presenting roughly representative samples of the population of each community. The criteria considered were socio-economic status, religion, age (although all participants were over eighteen years of age), political affiliation, occupation, and education. The local coordinators were members of the target community and had a thorough understanding of the project purpose and method. They were also in charge of selecting the venue.

Each focus group began with an explanation and introduction by the moderator. A tape recorder was then turned on and the questions would commence. For most of the session, the participants were asked each question verbally with responses taken from around the room. A brief general discussion would then ensue. For seven of the twenty-eight questions, participants were asked to write responses on a large card. After the replies for a particular question had been written, the cards were collected, posted in front of the group, and discussed. Using cards for shorter, simpler questions is useful for obtaining responses unaffected by responses of the rest of the group, as the responses are written silently and

simultaneously.

If for any reason, respondents had difficulty writing, a neighbor would assist. In two of the sixteen focus groups, the number of those unable to write was large enough that the cards could not be used at all. Each focus group would typically take between an hour and a half and three hours, with some groups taking a half hour prayer break. Following each session, the moderator and recorder would listen to the tapes, compare notes, and write an individual transcript report for each session. After all the focus groups were finished, all of the transcript reports were compiled into this report with frequent checks of the actual cassette recordings of the individual session.

MAJOR FINDINGS

- However they define it, Palestinians overwhelmingly support a democratic form of government. A multiparty democratic system is viewed as being the most appropriate and/or effective.
- People participating in this study are very well informed about regional political history and domestic politics. Much of the vocabulary of democracy is commonly used but specifics of meaning are often not well understood. There has been little exposure to the experiences of democratic countries other than Israel or to common processes of democracy around the world.
- Palestinians' experiences during politically fluid and unstable times has sharpened their political analysis of information. Although very curious about anything having to do with methods of democracy, they cast a very critical eye on political information and are very conscious of source.
- People believe they have experienced a top-down approach by almost all institutions in the West Bank and Gaza for a considerable time and they are dissatisfied. They feel this has prevented the development or emergence of a consensus about the proper roles of citizens and the state. There is, however, a widespread belief that men and women should be active as citizens but little concept of how citizens can or ought to participate in public affairs.
- There is a feeling that in order to organize, a responsible group -- such as a non-governmental organization, a research center, a party, faction, or even the government itself -- should initiate the process. Participants place the burden of initiative on these groups rather than upon their own shoulders.
- There is great emphasis placed on the rights of the citizen, particularly freedom of expression, but little understanding of how to obtain, guard and exercise these rights.
- Political parties and factions are viewed by people as internally non-democratic. This is frequently attributed to their long experience of working underground.
- The frequent splintering of parties has adversely affected people's confidence in and reliance on these parties. There is a desire for parties to develop and disseminate to the public clear organizational structures and party priorities and programs .
- The most important criteria that participants say they will use to evaluate elected officials will be absence of corruption, favoritism and nepotism.
- There are many demands people feel should be met by government but little concept of the

appropriate role of a government authority and the budgetary constraints that governments face. There is also little knowledge of effective means of communication with governing institutions.

- Although many people have participated in elections of various kinds (student or trade union leadership, for example) there is also a general acknowledgment that this experience does not constitute adequate preparation for meaningful participation in nationwide political elections, whether for national or local offices.

- Women are acutely aware of politics. They want to increase their role in politics and public life and desire more formal political education. However, they strongly believe that they do not currently have the political support or social connections to assume a public role in the near future.

- Gazans feel particularly responsible for the Intifada and feel that the peace process is a result of it. Thus far, they do not feel that they have benefited from this peace.

- Other than the above, there did not appear to be major differences between Gaza and the West Bank, in terms of attitudes towards democracy and elections.

DETAILED FINDINGS

The Palestinian Context

Among the different events which the Palestinians of the West Bank and Gaza have witnessed during the last few years, the participants consider the most significant to have been the Intifada, the peace process, the establishment of the autonomous Palestinian Authority, the creation of the Palestinian police force, the economic siege, and the Ibrahimi mosque massacre. Many consider the return of prisoners and exiles as one of the most positive things. "The best thing which has happened in the last few years is the peace initiative which entailed the release of prisoners" is a statement that was heard often.

Palestinians expressed conflicting feelings about the Intifada. The Intifada is perceived by a majority of the participants as the cornerstone to regaining the Palestinian identity. "The Intifada has made a major contribution to the inculcation of Palestinian identity" was repeated by many participants. Other participants, however, emphasized their anger and deep concern about the negative social and economic consequences of the Intifada, in particular, the lack of security, the deterioration of the quality of education and the high rate of unemployment and limited job opportunities. "It is sad to see all those young men hanging out on the street," many participants said. Many respondents also felt that economic hardships, in the form of pass restrictions and road blocks, had made their lives difficult. Many noted that during the Intifada, and since then, the Israeli Defense Forces sharply curtailed many Palestinians ability to move, which often affected their ability to work.

Regarding the Palestinian Authority, people in general appreciate the direct positive consequences of the Authority, such as the creation of a Palestinian police force, the release of prisoners, the return of exiles, and the Israeli army's departure from parts of Gaza. On the other hand, economic achievements in the West Bank and Gaza following the creation of the Authority are fewer and less substantial than had been hoped. Men and women in both the West Bank and Gaza described their expectations to include improved infrastructure, social services, job opportunities, educational improvement, participation in policy formulation and decision making. Participants in Gaza particularly mentioned security and housing.

System of Government

Virtually all the participants feel that the system of government does have a real impact on their lives. The system of government will dictate whether there are fair laws, social services, and effective economic policy. A woman in Jabalia said "The ruling system affects all aspects of life: education, journalism, security, and freedom of expression." A democratic system of government is seen positively, primarily because it will guarantee

rights, particularly freedom of expression. The primary effect of a dictatorship was seen to be the deprivation of rights. "The type of ruling system affects the opposition," a woman in Deir Al Balah said, "Under a dictatorship, opponents will end up in prison." There was a feeling, particularly among men, that a democratic system will lead to peace and that an authoritarian one will lead to conflict and war.

The Responsibilities of Citizens in a Democracy

Participants expressed different understandings of the responsibilities of citizens in a democratic system. The views expressed included: respecting other peoples' opinions (both opponents of the current government and supporters), the right to elect a nation's leaders, compliance with laws, monitoring government performance, criticism if needed, and researching and implementing ways to improve the government. A man from Samou' said, "It is our responsibility to control the elected authority."

Most participants, particularly women, believe that the responsibility of citizens is mainly to respect the government's decisions and laws. They believe that to be the basis for the establishment of democratic institutions. "A citizen's responsibility is to respect laws which are agreed upon by a democratic government," said a man from Jerusalem.

Participating in the economic and social development of the country at the national and community level was also emphasized as a major responsibility of citizens. People believe this will be achieved through hard work and dedication by each citizen in his or her own field of competence. This may include raising healthy families.

Observing and criticizing government policy and performance through available means, particularly mass media, was emphasized mainly by male participants as a major responsibility of citizens. Some went further and expressed their understanding of the responsibility as including taking corrective action by citizens, either individually or collectively. Some participants mentioned that it is the responsibility of citizens to create awareness among people of their rights and duties. "Democracy does not mean chaos, it means knowing citizens' duties and rights, and when practicing democracy, everyone should start with himself," a woman from Samou' said.

Sources of information

Print media, radio, and television are the major sources of information about political events. Participants often listen to radio, mainly to Israeli, Jordanian, and Egyptian broadcasts, Monte Carlo and the BBC. Many people commented on the various strengths of different radio stations. Radios, in particular, are widespread in all cities, rural areas, and camps, and are accessible to both men and women. People listen to different radio stations in order to compare information. The television stations of various countries are also watched, although less for news than other programs. As for the print media, almost all

participants that read newspapers said they rely on *Al-Quds* and *An-Nahar*.

Conversation with friends and relatives are considered an important means of disseminating information and analyzing events. A large section of the rural population, particularly women, mentioned their friends and relatives and "people with experience in life" as well as national and community figures, as the major source of information. "Aged people, who have witnessed the major national and international events have a lot of information," a woman in Deir Al-Balah said. Most of those who belong to political parties or factions said that they receive information from their respective organizations. "Different programs and leaflets of different factions," a man from Gaza said. Some people said that they get information from leaflets and pamphlets issued by research centers such as Bissan Center and Al-Haq in Ramallah, and Panorama in Jerusalem.

Information on Democracy and Elections.

Most people, in order to obtain specific information about democracy and elections, would refer to specialized information centers, specialists in this field, educational books and essays, and the media (radio and newspaper). Books in particular are viewed as being the most accurate and least biased source of information. Some of the more educated people and residents of major cities, would refer to different Palestinian and international organizations, research and human rights centers (Bissan, Panorama, Al-Haq). Others said that they would refer to institutions established by the Authority and to books on the experiences of other countries in democracy, election procedures and electoral law. A woman from Deir Al-Balah said, "the electoral committee should start disseminating information about elections." There was a particular interest in the democratic experiences of countries with similar histories. "We can study the history of countries which experienced occupation, " a man from Rafah said.

Women, particularly in the West Bank, said that they would refer to the educated persons in their community whom they trust (for example their children and relatives). "Whenever I need to learn about a topic, I refer to my daughter who is a student in Bir Zeit University," a woman from Bal'a said. Participants, particularly in Gaza, said that they would refer to their party to get information about such issues. "We are committed to the information disseminated by our faction," a man in Rafah said.

Democracy

Almost all the participants in the focus groups understand democracy mainly as freedom of expression. As a woman from Bal'a said, "To me, democracy means free expression and equality among people." Freedom, according to the participants, should be applied in many different ways such as by respecting each others' opinions, being allowed to speak and criticize freely without fear, the right of everyone to elect and to be elected with equal rights and responsibilities. A man from Jabalia said, "democracy means people having the right to choose their leadership and their political system."

Four major characteristics of a democratic state were given: popular participation, security, a multi-party system, and equality under the law. Popular participation was said to be achieved through free and just elections. "People should participate in the decision-making process," a man from Rafah said. Likewise, it is believed that people should live in security and peace regardless of individual political positions as supporters or opponents of government policy. One woman from Ramallah stated that, "democracy is to live secured and peacefully regardless of one's political beliefs." A multi-party system was stressed as a major requirement for a democracy. It is believed that the majority rules the community, while the minority has the right to express their thoughts freely and completely. At the same time, the minority should respect the majority's decisions. Furthermore, in a democratic system civil and political rights are protected for groups and individuals under the authority of the law. "Fair laws will eliminate factionalism and nepotism," a man from Jabalia said.

A few participants said that although democracy has been practiced in the West, it has not been promoted by those same countries in this part of the world. Therefore, there was a feeling by some that the Western countries are not qualified to discuss democracy with Palestinians.

Political Parties in a Democracy

Two ideas were prevalent among participants concerning the purpose of political parties in a democracy. The first is that competition among parties is in and of itself healthy, and that this political competition and scrutiny of one another will lead to more effective government. The second, particularly strong among women, is that parties should represent different opinions or ideologies within the government. "When all sides are represented the government runs better," a woman from Ramallah said. Many voiced their feeling that a multi-party system is desirable: it is necessary for democracy, is the most effective instrument for expressing diverse opinions, and it prevents the unchallenged domination of one opinion. A woman in Bal'a commented, "All democratic countries have parties."

Some said that a multi-party system automatically allows for changes of opinion over time. Although the value of diverse opinions was overwhelmingly expressed, many of the same people also emphasized the importance of unity and reaching agreement or consensus within the government. Finally, many said that parties themselves can strengthen a person's candidacy.

The Current Number of Factions

Participants' estimates of the current number of factions ranged from three to forty two. Many qualified their answers based on evaluation of the importance of various factions. Some counted "sub splitting" within the main factions or "the ten factions in Damascus" in opposition to the peace agreements. However, most answers indicate that people do not know the exact number of factions or the names of people representing them. Some participants

were not even able to give an approximate number. Most often people said the number of factions that actively participate and have an impact on political events is between three and five.

Ideal Number of Political Parties

Most participants believe that a smaller number of factions is better, as too many factions drown out consensus and make compromise difficult. "Some of the existing factions are too small to be considered political parties," said one man. Coalition among factions with similar political thoughts is possible." Many said a large number increases the likelihood of conflicts which would adversely affect the country's security and development. "Palestine is a small country and doesn't need many parties," said a man in Bal'a.

A few participants thought that a large number of parties is an indication of a healthy political environment because it allows many ideas and opinions to be expressed. "Each party would represent a certain group of people," a man from Jerusalem said. Several people said that the optimum number of parties would be three or four in order to minimize the chance of having one party dominate the government.

Programs of Different Factions

There was a consensus among participants that although factions make many statements and public condemnations, they unfortunately do not disseminate their programs to the general public, but only to party members. As a consequence, programs are not clear to the public. Many said that they are able to distinguish between the programs of political parties with clearly differing ideologies, but that is difficult to do with those parties and factions sharing the same or very similar ideologies.

Some people said that all Palestinian political parties and factions have the same objective, but they have different programs for achieving it. In general, women feel less informed about the programs of the different political parties and factions.

Candidates as Party Members

Participants expressed conflicting opinions about whether they would prefer that candidates run as representatives of political parties or as independents.

Three groups of responses arose from this discussion. First, some participants strongly believed that candidates should belong to a party. Most of them considered that only with a party would candidates have the backing they would need to win in the elections, as parties are geographically extended and could provide support to candidates both for campaigning and in policy implementation. In fact, some believed voters would judge parties on the basis of the strength of the candidates they put forth.

Others indicated that they would not vote for a party member but would rather support an independent who is familiar to them. This would enable the people to elect freely without being limited to the parties, as many feel that there are a number of potentially qualified candidates who do not belong to a party. "The independent might express the opinion of the majority that doesn't belong to any party, noted one woman."

The third group did not believe that affiliation or lack thereof is important. "The important thing is for a candidate to be qualified whether independent or with a party," said one person. "We will vote for the best, whether he is independent or a member of a party," said another. Several participants were skeptical of the existence of Palestinian independents. "There is nothing named independent here," a woman from Deir Al-Balah said.

Organization of Political Parties

The majority of participants strongly believe that all the Palestinian parties and factions are not democratically organized. Some of these people believe that internal democracy has not been applied because of the prolonged occupation which necessitated that parties work underground. As a result, membership input was often subordinate to protection of the leadership. "Democratic organizations do not exist because what we have today is the appointment system and not democracy," a woman from Tubas said.

Some people think that some parties are partially organized in a democratic manner. Many participants use the expression "centralized democracy" to explain the organization of some parties. They explain this expression as democracy at the top. Many of the Palestinian women in villages said that they are not aware of the internal organization of the political parties because they are not members and are not involved.

Conditions for Free and Fair Elections

Almost all participants said that "elections in any place of the world should be fair and free" in order to achieve their purpose. However, this comment was often accompanied by doubts and fears about whether the imminent Palestinian elections would be fair and genuine. Many participants stated that it is very important to understand the purpose of the elections and the process of voting in order to ensure wide participation.

People believe that the most important condition for fair and free elections is to have unbiased election administration to oversee the electoral procedure and to ensure an accurate vote counting system. Many participants said that "international organizations should supervise the electoral process." Others said that there should be local committees agreed on by all parties that include honest trustworthy people who will observe and try to prevent any illegal practices. A woman in Tubas said, "it is important to prevent the intimidation of voters, putting pressure on them, or even using bribery to oblige them to vote for a certain person or party."

In addition, there are people who say that there should be an electoral law accessible and understood by both voters and candidates. This law should give everyone the right to elect and to be elected under agreed upon conditions. Participants stated that the law should also provide for a secret ballot. Other people said that in order to have a fair and free election everyone should be familiar with the electoral procedures before election day, considering the limited experiences of the Palestinian people. Participants suggested that relevant information should be disseminated through a great variety of channels: information centers, political parties, and the formal channels of the Authority. "The Palestinian National Authority should establish information centers," a woman from Samou' said.

Issues in the Electoral Campaigns

The participants in both the West Bank and Gaza offered two types of responses when asked what they think the candidates should emphasize during their electoral campaigns; the first type addressed issues relevant to Palestinians in general, whereas the second type highlighted issues specific to the West Bank or Gaza. Participants, by and large, pointed to the significance of issues relating to educational, social, economic and health sector development.

All participants agreed that education needs serious attention, schools need improvement, and they believed that any candidate should address the issue of opening new schools and kindergartens and developing literacy programs. Many also said that the candidates should address the expansion of the rehabilitation programs and vocational training for those handicapped during the Intifada and the released prisoners. Opening cultural and entertainment centers was also mentioned, especially in villages.

In Gaza there was more emphasis on the problem of unemployment. Participants said that the candidates should focus on solving this problem by opening different labor intensive projects to provide new job opportunities to the large number of unemployed young people. Participants believed that it would be beneficial for candidates if they concentrate on providing infrastructure and municipal services. In addition, many Gazan participants said they expect candidates to pay serious attention to solving the problem of housing especially in the refugee camps.

In the West Bank, particularly in villages, participants emphasized that candidates should focus on improving health services including opening public clinics and hospitals, and providing medical equipment which is not available in Palestinian hospitals. Women in particular considered it very important to reduce the hardship people encounter in order to get medical treatment in Israel, which entails time obtaining permission and great expense.

Qualifications of the Candidates

Having "qualified" candidates is seen by participants as a matter of utmost importance. Some of the qualifications raised in every meeting included: a high level of education, good conduct, honesty, political experience, willingness to work, no criminal record, past democratic practices, "fear of God", and "dedication to the homeland." Most of the participants stressed the idea of having "the right person in the right position". According to them "the right person" implies a qualified person, responsible, socially and politically experienced, accepted by Palestinians, "someone who is just," works for the people's sake, and most importantly, someone capable of holding the responsibilities he or she intends to assume. Many also said that candidates should have "a history of resisting the occupation." They also emphasize that candidates must keep their campaign promises and that a very critical eye will be cast on the reasonableness of those promises. Other qualifications that were stated included age over 35 years, a strong personality, not overly factional, and cognizant of Palestinian society's values and traditions.

On the other hand, participants suggested that some groups of people should not be allowed to be nominated. They include "collaborators," illiterates, people who have been convicted of a crime, have "bad reputations," are under a stated age, and people who "became rich during the Intifada." However, many participants stressed the need to be careful in disallowing candidacy for any groups. "If the Palestinians are aiming to apply democracy," said a man in Gaza, "nobody should be prohibited from nominating himself."

Voting Experience and Prospects

Participants believed that Palestinian experience in voting is limited to those who have participated in student council elections at schools and universities and elections in professional associations. With the exception of those over sixty years old, they have not experienced general elections. Women and Gazans have not had the same opportunities to vote in the above mentioned spheres.

The overwhelming majority of participants expressed great enthusiasm and interest in elections. "Of all that is going on, I'm concerned most with voting," said a man from Deir Al-Balah. On the other hand a few are skeptical of the value of elections or the real purpose behind them. "I am not concerned with voting in the elections because its useless," said a man in Jabalia. Also, several respondents, particularly men, said that the circumstances and conditions of the elections will determine whether they participate. Furthermore, some women expressed that they would vote only under certain conditions, such as the participation of all people, all parties, and factions. "If they don't give the right to women to vote, they [women] will ask for it from that moment," said a woman from Rafah. However, most women expressed their unequivocal interest in the planned elections, and are sure that they will participate.

Several participants, particularly males, stated that they would only vote if a legislative body, and not simply an executive body, is elected. "If we will elect a legislative authority I will vote, but if we will elect an executive authority I will not." Some participants were unsure if the ballot would be secret or not, stipulating that if it was not, they would not vote.

Women's Participation

There was a consensus among female and male participants that there will be women presented as candidates in the coming elections. Participants believed that because women have worked in politics "underground," they want to work "in the light." Different ideas were raised about voting for women. Many participants believe that a number of women will be elected; some male participants believe that women will win because all women will vote for them. "Women are 52% of the Palestinian population, so if all women vote for women candidates, they will succeed." However, most women think that female candidates would have to work very hard to mobilize women to vote for them. A significant part of the male participants said that they would vote for female candidates although some thought that "other people" may not vote for women. Very few women participants share this opinion. One said "Of course people will vote for women candidates because there is no difference between men and women; if people want to elect the best, perhaps women will be the best." Religious tradition, lack of confidence in women's ability to hold responsibility and jealousy (women will not vote for other women) were mentioned as the major reasons voters may not support female candidates.

Some other comments included: "Men will not allow women to hold dominant positions because they are not accustomed to being ruled by women," "Men might use their influence to limit the active participation of women in our village," "The women who will gain votes will be those who are connected to powerful male politicians," "The women who will be allowed to become candidates are the wives of VIPs and not because they deserve to."

The Role of Extended Families

The general belief among participants is that the extended family's influence on individuals' voting decisions will be strong. This was felt to be less so for very religious people. It was repeatedly mentioned that "only religion would reduce the influence of the extended families in the voting decision."

Many participants expressed the belief that voting decisions would be based on clan consensus, much the same way that disagreements are often solved in Palestinian society. It was also said that a husband influences his wife, a father influences the whole family and so on. Other participants believe that people usually prefer to vote for the candidate they know or are related to, "because a voter expects special treatment if his candidate is elected." In addition, some people think that independent candidates will rely mainly on the support of their families.

On the other hand, there was another category of people, particularly in urban areas, who downplay the effect of family and clan. One person said: "Either people are politically involved and already related to a political party, or independent and would not be significantly influenced by their clan."

Religious Values and Development

The majority of the participants were confident that a compromise would be achieved between religious values and economic and social development. One opinion was shared by most participants, particularly men: "If the government is elected by the people it will express their opinions, so there would not be any contradiction between development and religious values." On the other hand some, particularly women, said that the conflict will be acute. "Having mixed schools is good for social development," said one woman, "but it contradicts the basic principles of religion."

Many people emphasized the importance of having all the parties represented in the government as a condition to reach compromises in this respect. Very often the view was expressed that, "there will not be any conflict because religion is for God and the homeland is for all people." Some apparently religious people said there will be no conflict if the government is religious because the government can apply its own economic and social system. Several people asked, "So why do we have to import a western system for us?"

Responsibilities of Politicians and Voters.

The participants, in general, perceive the responsibilities of elected people as fulfilling both their promises and the voters expectations, as well as putting aside personal interests. Almost all participants expressed their worries about an elected person who may forget his or her promises after they win the election. The responsibility of elected persons was frequently described by participants as working for people's interests. More than one person said: "Elected persons are from people, supported by people; therefore they should serve people." Participants believe that elected officials must understand the people's problems and, most importantly, keep in continuous contact with them. For example, a person in a refugee camp said "elected people should work on improving the camp situation, provide them with services, clinics and hospitals, solve the problem of housing, and the unemployed."

Accountability is understood as criticism of poor performance. Some participants identified the means of criticism and communication between the elected people and voters as including mass media and demonstrations. A participant said, "in case of poor performance, we will send letters to the media and to newspapers." Most women said that they would not vote in the subsequent election for those that perform poorly. Some also said they would create opposition against them, after giving them another chance to correct

themselves. Most of the male participants said that they would go on strike and demonstrate to express their dissatisfaction with elected officials.

Other participants perceived accountability as having the right to watch, stop and punish those elected in the case of poor performance in achieving their programs. One person stated, "When we elect them we put them in authority so it's our right to remove them; if they wouldn't change we will make an uprising against them." Another said, "we have to put pressure on them to resign."

Several participants believe that there should be a higher council of some kind responsible for controlling the representatives' performance. A few believe that the supreme court or the government is responsible for overseeing the performance of those elected.

ANNEX 1

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

1. What is the best and worst thing that has happened in your community in the past few years?
2. Does the type of ruling system matter to you?
3. Do you think that the type of ruling system has a direct effect on your life? How?
4. What do you think of when you hear the general expression "national authority"?
5. What do you think of when you hear the word ~ democracy?'
6. Have you voted in any kind of elections before? Was the ballot secret?
7. What is, in your opinion, the main aim of elections?
8. Are you interested in voting in the coming elections? Why/why not? Do you think that your vote will be secret?
9. What are the conditions that should be present to ensure free and fair elections?
10. What are the main responsibilities of elected people? What is their work?
11. What can you do if the elected candidates or political parties are not doing their job as they should?
12. Who has the right to question elected people? Who do elected people work for?

13. What are the qualifications that should be present in the person who nominates himself?
14. Are there certain groups that should not be allowed to nominate themselves?
15. Do you think that there will be women nominees? Why/why not?
16. Do you think that people will vote for women nominees? Why/why not?
17. What is the main purpose of having political parties in a democratic society?
18. What is the number of existing factions?
19. Do you think that a larger or smaller number of factions is better to establish a democratic atmosphere?
20. Is the difference between the programs and ideologies of the different factions clear to you?
21. Are the factions themselves democratically organized?
22. Is it preferable that candidates nominate themselves as individuals (even if they are members of a certain party) or as representatives of a certain party?
23. What is the responsibility of an ordinary citizen in a democratic society?
24. In a democratically elected government, is it possible that religious beliefs can coincide with economic and social development?
25. Where do you get information on political events and attitudes?
26. What is the role of the family, clan or tribe in people's electoral decisions?
27. What are the issues upon which candidates should concentrate in the election campaign?
28. If you wanted to receive certain information about democracy and elections, where and to whom would you go?

ANNEX 2

Ms. Malak Ali El Nasser has extensive experience in management training and project implementation. She has worked with both the Institute of Public Administration and UNESCO in Jordan. She has designed and organized numerous focus group projects in Jordan. She has a B.A. in Business Administration from The University of Jordan and an M.A. in Public Administration from Harvard University. She is currently a management consultant in Amman.

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