



Palestinian Views on Women's Political Participation in Peace-building Efforts

Executive Summary

Introduction:

The following is a presentation of the results of a study, conducted by Arab World for Research and Development (AWRAD), for the Palestinian Initiative for the Promotion of Global Dialogue and Democracy (MIFTAH) and The Culture and Free Thought Association (CFTA). The study was conducted using a quantitative approach, specifically a public opinion survey. In an attempt to fully capture the intentions of the research objective, the questionnaire of the survey was prepared through a consultative process between the research team at AWRAD and representatives of MIFTAH and the CFTA.

Methodology:

The current study interviewed 1,200 Palestinian from across the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip. This sample was selected on a probability sample basis and the margin of error for the results is +/-3 percent. Fieldwork was conducted from 12-21 November.

A condensed summary of the most important results of the study is presented below:

1) Women's role in the different realms of life:

- **A high recognition of women's role in family and community cohesion:**
The results indicate that 99 percent of respondents believe that the contribution of women to family cohesion is important (88 percent very important, 11 percent somewhat important). Further, 98 percent of the respondents believe that women's role in social cohesion is important (83 percent very important, 15 percent somewhat important).
- **A recognition of the importance of women's role in the public sphere:**
The majority of respondents recognize the significance of women's role in the public sphere; 97 percent believe it is important. Of these, 77 percent consider it very important, while 21 percent consider it somewhat important.
- **Division over the importance of women's role in the political sphere:**
When asked about the importance of women's contribution to political decision-making, 42 percent of respondents believe this contribution is a very important one, while 35 percent consider it somewhat important. However, 22 percent disagree. Specifically, 7 percent of them believe the role of women in this sphere is very unimportant, while 15 percent consider it somewhat unimportant.

- **Recognition of women's presence in social and awareness-raising activities:** Weaker recognition is present when assessing the role in women in social and awareness-raising activities. Currently, 62 percent of respondents confirmed that women have an active role in awareness-raising activities that serve the unity of the community. Further, 57 percent of respondents believe that the women play an active role in social issues. However, there is a decline in rates of agreement when assessing women's political participation. Only 36 percent believe that women have an active role in political discussions and platforms.

2) Women's rights and the importance of their participation in political realms:

- **A third of the respondents believe in equal political rights:** Currently, 34 percent of respondents expressed their belief in the equality of men and women, in terms of political rights. While half of the respondents believe in equality, they do not believe it should be present in all political realms. In total, 15 percent of respondents state that they do not believe in the political equality of men and women.
- **Variances in opinion exist when assessing women's right to express political opinions, compared to their right to engage in political activities:** The vast majority of respondents (over 90 percent) support women's rights to express their opinions on political and national issues. However, the rate of agreement declines to 75 percent when assessing the rights of women to engage in political advocacy and lobbying campaigns. The percentages decline further when evaluating the following specific activities:
 - 66 percent support women's rights to engage in decisions concerning outreach to global institutions,
 - 64 percent support women's rights to engage in the Palestinian reconciliation process,
 - 58 percent support women's rights to engage in the political negotiation process between Palestinians and Israelis,
 - 52 percent support women's rights to engage in decisions related to peacemaking or war with Israel.

3) Participation in the political discussion; Levels, motivations, and obstacles:

- **A quarter of respondents received invitations to participate in political events or meetings:** Currently, 24 percent of respondents state that they have received invitations to participate in political events, in the form of workshops and meetings. The remaining 76 percent state that they have not been invited to such events.

- **Divergence in social focus; Less attention to women, less participation:**

A gap exists in the interest of political institutions to engage with men compared to women. Currently, 18 percent of female respondents state that they have been invited to participate in political meetings, compared to 29 percent of men. Rates of acceptance are also greater among men; 44 percent of men state that they accepted one of these invitations, in comparison to 27 percent of women.

- **The rate of actual participation:**

Men (13 percent) participate at greater rates than women (5 percent). The motives for participation are fairly uniform, when compared by gender, though the motives for non-participation present important distinctions. Among women, 51 percent cite social constraints as the reason for non-participation, compared to 22 percent of men. In addition, 54 percent of women abstain from political participation because they believe they will make no difference, compared to 46 percent of men.

4) Women's role in the national reconciliation process:

- **The majority of respondents do not acknowledge women's role as an important one in the reconciliation process:**

Presently, 36 percent of respondents believe women have a significant role in the reconciliation between Hamas and Fatah. In contrast, 57 percent believe that women do not have any role in reconciliation. A final 9 percent were uncertain how to evaluate women's role. Further, while 23 percent of respondents believe women's contributions are significant in the reconciliation process, 44 percent believe the opposite.

- **A symbolic recognition of women's role in prompting reconciliation:**

Women (42 percent) are more likely than men (31 percent) to believe they play a significant role in the reconciliation process. However, 19 percent of all respondents do not see a role for women in peace-building and conflict resolution.

5) Women's role during the last Gaza War:

- **Significant recognition of women's role during the last War:**

The vast majority (86 percent) of respondents believe that women played an influential role during the War (Very influential 57 percent, somewhat influential 29 percent). Only 12 percent disagree with this assessment. There is greater recognition of the role of women among respondents in Gaza than the West Bank.

- **Gender gap in recognition of women's role during the War:**
While 63 percent of female respondents believe that women had a highly effective role in the previous War, only 50 percent of males express the same view. In addition, 64 percent of female respondents believe that women participated effectively in marches against the War, while 55 percent of male respondents believe the same.
- **Meager participation of women in the reconstruction of Gaza:**
Only 26 percent of respondents agree that women are represented in the reconstruction efforts. In addition, 29 percent agreed to some extent. In contrast, 36 percent disagree and 9 percent are uncertain.

6) Women and decision-making:

- **Satisfaction with the present level of representation of women:**
Presently, 87 percent of respondents express satisfaction with the current level of women's representation across decision-making positions in NGOs. Another 81 percent express satisfaction with the level of representation in local councils. Slightly fewer express satisfaction with the representation of women in decision-making positions in unions and syndicates (76 percent), immediately followed by their representation in private sector institutions (75 percent). Satisfaction with women's representation in the PLC placed fifth (63 percent), followed by satisfaction with their representation in the institutions of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA). Respondents are least satisfied with the level of representation of women in decision-making positions in the PLO (57 percent) and political parties (51 percent).
- **Recognition of significant impact by women in NGOs and minor impact in parties and the PLO:**
When assessing the impact of women within the aforementioned institutions, respondents are less positive. It is believed that women have the greatest impact in NGOs (31 percent), followed by private sector institutions (28 percent), local councils (14 percent), the PLC (9 percent), unions (8 percent) and the PNA (6 percent). Respondents believe the impact of women's participation is most insignificant in the PLO and political parties (2 percent each).
- **The funnel (pyramid) phenomenon and the mentality of *fait accompli*:**
When asked about their views regarding women occupying decision-making positions in society, the answers reflected the (funnel or pyramid) phenomenon, in which support for women in decision-making decreases as the influence of the position increases. Further, the views expressed reflect a *fait accompli* mentality, where respondents are more willing to support the right of women to hold positions that women already hold. For example, support for women

as executives of institutions and companies is high (91 percent support vs. 9 percent oppose). In addition, 83 percent support women as PLC members, while 17 percent oppose. As for ministerial positions, 74 percent support, while 26 percent oppose. The elevated position of Prime Minister receives the support of 54 percent and the opposition of 46 percent. Opposition exceeds support in decision-making positions related to security (59 percent oppose, 41 percent support). Respondents are least supportive of women holding the greatest decision-making position in the country (President), with 61 percent expressing opposition and 39 percent expressing support.

7) Security and knowledge of relevant international conventions:

- **Widespread feeling of insecurity:**
Only 10 percent of Palestinians express a feeling of security (to a large extent) for themselves and their families. While 42 percent feel secure (to some extent), 48 percent feel insecure.
- **Majority prefers traditional approaches to resolving conflicts:**
When asked about the institutions used by respondents to resolve disputes and conflicts, the reported results indicate that a majority prefers traditional institutions or state institutions. As much as 47 percent say that they would resort to their family or clan to help resolve a dispute or conflict. In addition, 6 percent say that they would resort to tribal dispute-resolution mechanisms. A separate 16 percent say that they would resolve their dispute on their own. In contrast, 30 percent say that they would resort to the formal institutions (police and courts) when resolving disputes. In general, religious institutions (mosques and churches), as well as political parties, play no real role in resolving disputes and conflicts among Palestinians.

8) Recommendations:

- a. Enhance public understanding of women's role in all of society's different sectors through highlighting role models of successful women and successful women's organizations.
- b. Enhance the media coverage of women's peace building and reconciliation activities.
- c. Develop empowerment trainings that introduce effective skills and strategies for peace building among interested and activist women, particularly young women and students.
- d. Organize trainings that raise awareness among youth, both men and women, about conflict resolution and peace building.

- e. Organize a comprehensive campaign for all Palestinians, through traditional and modern media, to raise knowledge and awareness of international laws that protect the rights of citizens, especially those of women, during times of war.
- f. Conduct a number of accountability sessions with political parties and government institutions to lobby for stronger representation of women in their high-ranking positions.
- g. Reach an agreement with unions, local councils and political parties on the best methods and mechanisms to integrate women in political events, meetings and discussions that tackle political and policy-related issues at local and national levels.
- h. Contribute to a national campaign on the importance of the role of women in high-level decision-making positions.
- i. Establish a national mechanism that institutionalizes, expands and sustains lobbying and advocacy efforts to achieve national unity and reconciliation. This requires transcending individual projects and efforts and building a consolidated mechanism that incorporates all interested parties under the same umbrella.
- j. Prepare a cohort of young women to reach and hold high-level positions in the fields of negotiations and reconciliation, by placing them in the ranks of negotiation teams and other representative bodies or committees working in the same fields.