



Political Participation Perceptions of Students in Palestinian Universities and Colleges

Analytical Report



2014

Analytical study about: Political participation perceptions of students in Palestinian universities and colleges – 2014

Project: “Promoting Young Women Political Leadership Programme”



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MIFTAH and the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) conducted a survey on the perceptions of students in Palestinian universities and academic institutes on political participation in 2014. This study is based on the survey's results and indicators.

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Political Participation of Palestinian University and College Students

Introduction

In line with MIFTAH's strategic objective, "Empower effective leadership within all components of Palestinian society in order to enhance democracy and good governance and raise public awareness concerning the rights and responsibilities of good citizenship" and within the framework of "The Participation Enhancement Program", MIFTAH aims to support and increase women political participation and leadership.

During 2014, MIFTAH has implemented a set of activities as part of the third phase of "Promoting Young Women Political Leadership Programme", funded by the United Nations Development Programme/Programme of Assistance to the Palestinian People (UNDP/PAPP). This set of activities aims at activating the role of a group of young women activists in the West Bank and Gaza Strip (WB & GS) through raising their awareness about the structure of different political systems, providing them with knowledge of lobbying, advocacy tools, and placing women issues on top of the agendas of decision-makers, especially inside political parties. This reflects on supporting young women leaders to efficiently engage in political action. The activities in this program are based on the findings of the field survey conducted in partnership with the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), which includes students at Palestinian universities and colleges in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The survey aims to establish a baseline on the perception of political participation among youth in general and young women in particular, in order to measure the efficiency and effectiveness of the political participation of the youth inside universities and student councils, and come out with accurate statistical rates about the reality of the political participation of young Palestinian women.

Methodology and Research Tools

The study adopts the findings of the survey on the political participation of Palestinian university and college students. Implemented during October 2014 through PCBS, the survey aimed at contributing to establishing a baseline to measure the political participation of the youth, with special focus on the political participation of young Palestinian women at Palestinian universities in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. It also aimed at contributing to providing statistical indicators about the political participation of young Palestinian women and developing interventions that support access of women and youth to decision-making positions in society, political life and to reduce all forms of discrimination against women.

The questionnaire was designed to be the main tool for collecting data, and was compliant with the appropriate technical specifications for data collection and processing. It comprised introductory data, including the name of the university or college, the name of the locality in which the student lives, the social background which covers sex, age, refugee status, school year, specific department and membership in the student union. The questionnaire included questions about the indicators for political participation, including political knowledge, the general legal framework, the bylaws of student movements, political action, political rights,

political framework, youth grassroots, community culture, political participation, available mechanisms of political participation, participation in student action, and the factors influencing the scale of political participation.

The framework of examination consists of higher education institutions, including universities, institutes, and community colleges in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. It included numbers of male and female students during the college year 2013-2014, and 2014 student council members. The sample size was estimated at 1,057 male and female students in the West Bank and Gaza, including all student council members. The total number was 1,028 male and female students and 180 male and female student council members (635 questionnaires in the West Bank and 573 questionnaires in Gaza Strip). The cases of no response included rejection and the absence of some student council members because of imprisonment, temporary withdrawal or other reasons.

The survey data was collected during the period between 20/10/2014 until 09/11/2014, by a field team who are well trained in methods of obtaining the required sample, work methodology inside universities, the concepts used in the survey, and tools for overcoming administrative obstacles the team may face in the field.

In addition to the survey, the study used the findings of the focus group conducted by MIFTAH, in which several representatives of political organizations/factions participated and gave their opinions about youth participation in political action. Furthermore, two special meetings were held to discuss the survey findings. The most important observations of activists concerned factions and institutions, including the youth sector were discussed in the meetings.

University and College Students Constitute a Major Part of Palestinian Youth

The youth sector has special significance in the structure of Palestinian society. In addition to the role of the youth in community development and their responsibility in building the future, the youth in Palestine are particularly important since they constitute around two thirds of the population. This means that the Palestinian population is young; there is a special need for focusing on the youth, on developing their capacities, and providing them with opportunities to expand their roles in all directions. The Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza Strip are around 4.6 million of whom 2.8 million live in the West Bank and 1.8 million in the Gaza Strip. The youth (15-29 years) constitute around 30% of the overall population of whom 38.1% belong to (15-19 years) age group and 61.9% belong to the (20-29years) age group. The sex ratio is 104.2 males to every 100 females¹. The school and university students belong to the young age group. The number of students at Palestinian universities and colleges reached around 220,000 students and are steadily increasing during the past two decades².

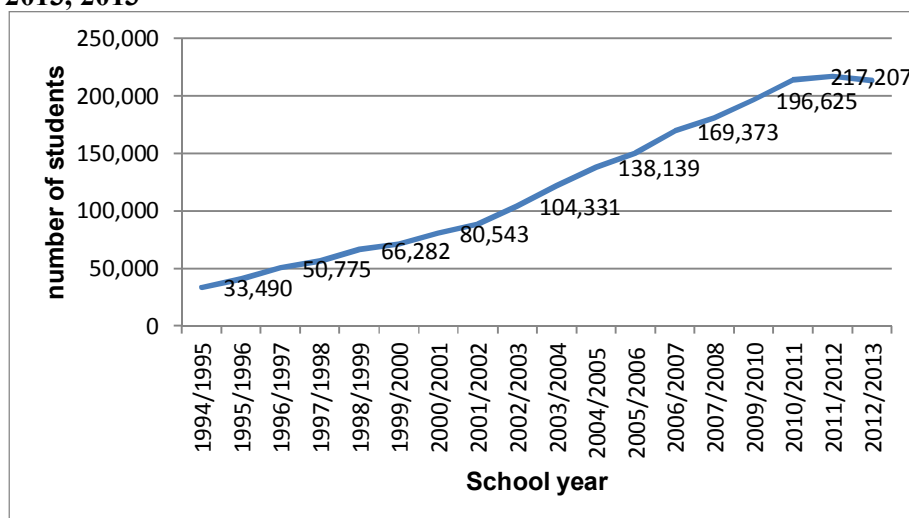
¹ PCBS, 2014. A press statement on the International Day of the Youth, 12/08/2014.

<http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/site/512/default.aspx?tabID=512&lang=ar&ItemID=1186&mid=3265&wversion=Staging>

² Source PCBS, 2015; Education statistics

http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/Portals/_Rainbow/Documents/Education-1994-2013-08A.htm

Chart 1: The Number of Students at Palestinian Universities and Colleges During 1995-2013, 2013



Source: PCBS, 2015; Education statistics

http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/Portals/_Rainbow/Documents/Education-1994-2013-08A.htm

Although natural to some extent, the increasing rate of female students at universities and colleges is telling. While the rate of females was around 47% in 1995, it reached around 59% in 2013. Moreover, the rate of female students in mid-level community colleges decreased from 54% in 1995 to 48% in 2013 (the rate of community college students reached around 12% in 1995 and around 6% in 2013 out of the overall higher education students, which includes universities, university colleges, and mid-level community colleges). This reflects the progress in the rate of enrollment of female students in higher education and shifting from mid-level two-year colleges, which is an important indicator of the improvement in female access to higher education, irrespective of the reasons and the socio-economic context. The important observation in this regard is that the findings of the survey showed that the rate of female representation exceeds 50% the ratio of females to males in Palestine.

The Concept and Attributes of Political Participation

The concept of political participation varies with context. The levels of participation vary, amid a problematic definition of “the political” in the Palestinian context, whereby it is of extreme importance to identify the concept of participation that this research paper addresses. Political participation is defined as the system of behavior and actions that the citizen voluntarily initiates, arising from his/her belief or feeling of commitment towards public affairs, and which aims at making the correct political decisions, from his/her point of view. This is achieved through lobbying with the political authority in the country to participate in making, implementing, monitoring and evaluating political decisions. Furthermore, because of the Palestinian specificity, political participation touches on engaging in the process of national liberation with its various democratic forms.

The literature about political participation and democratic participation mentions several definitions of political participation. Some define it as the “political system in which the citizens play increasing roles in deciding on matters that affect their lives”. Others refer to it as “the activity made by ordinary citizens with the aim of influencing the government’s decision-

making process, whether by individuals or groups, organized or spontaneous, steady or sporadic, peaceful or violent, legitimate or illegitimate, effective or ineffective³”.

Political participation is a voluntary and conscious process, rather than organized, to assert the right of participation to all members of the society. This is a manifestation of the rule of the people, to which the political science refers to as democracy. The other side of political participation is a manifestation of the duty and good citizenship, which essentially motivates the individual to assimilate into the general framework, namely the community in which they live.

Political participation is not a trend linked to a certain political system, nor to the desires of individuals or groups, but rather a necessary social action that expresses a need originating from historic changes and the development path of any country.

Political participation takes several forms and levels. On one hand, the political context of a country requires specific needs and forms that suit its conditions and needs; on the other hand, the level of participation depends on the individual's readiness and conviction of the role s/he may play, relative to the context in which s/he lives in his/her country. Consequently, political participation remains the outcome of a package of social, economic and political factors, within the framework of the prevailing culture in the country.

As for the relation between political participation and general community participation, the latter aims at raising public awareness and informing the people of their rights to challenge social, economic, environmental and other forms of injustice. Political participation, though, while still a part of community participation, is the clearer and more direct form of action to change the decision of the political system in favor of the points of view of the participants.

The Background and Context of the Palestinian Student Movement

There is a long history of political participation in Palestine. Under the British mandate, Palestinians initiated a national struggle to oppose land confiscation, illegal Jewish immigration and consequent settlements expansion. Resistance groups organized themselves to fight Zionist attacks in rural areas. In spite of their resistance efforts, the 1948 war ended with the creation of the state of Israel on 60% of Palestinian land. In 1964 the newly founded Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) took the lead on organized struggle against the occupation. On the other hand, civil society adopted various forms of resistance and defiance, most notably the peaceful uprising that started the first Intifada in 1984.

The 1970's and 80's were characterized by wide youth participation, particularly in universities and colleges. Despite the constraints imposed by the occupation, the student movement had a significant impact at many different levels during that period. It did not only seek to assist students, provide them with better educational means and improve their academic conditions,

³ Al-Azhar university- Gaza, 2010: Shireen Harbi Jamil Al-Dani: The Role of Palestinian Political Organizations in Raising Political Awareness among University Students in Gaza Strip
لدى طلبة الجامعة في قطاع غزة

but tried to organize students and mobilize them for national political action. It reached out to all Palestinians at every level of society⁴.

Following the Oslo Agreements in 1993 the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) was created. In this context the scope of political action and participation had to adjust to this new reality. This reflected on the available room for freedom of political expression, more accurately the level of democracy of the Palestinian political system and the resulting scope for political participation.

In this context, it is necessary to focus on the concept and scope of political participation within the Palestinian context and its additional complications; the dual goals for political participation, namely national liberation and democratic liberation, the constraints imposed on political participation because of occupation and the relation between political participation and the national struggle, which continues to face prosecution. Another challenge is the citizens' belief in participation and the nature of the nurturing environment for political participation.

Analysis of the Findings

This section shall focus on the findings of the survey conducted at Palestinian universities and colleges.

The Social Background

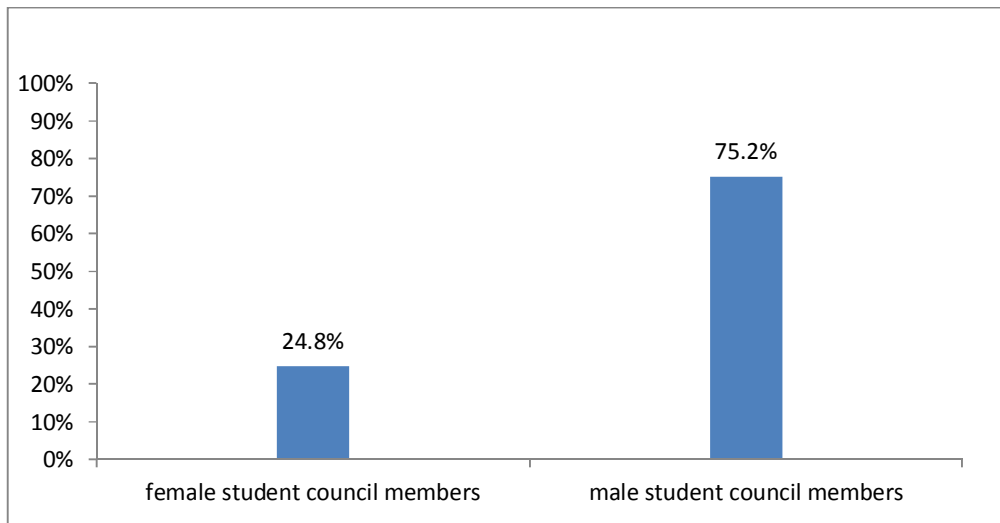
Female representation in student councils continues to be below the desired level and requires strengthening to become equivalent to male representation.

The rate of male students in the survey sample was 43.1%, compared to 56.9% of females. The findings indicated that the ages of university students ranged between 18-24 years, and the rate of refugees among Palestinian university students reached 46.1%. The survey also revealed that the sample students were distributed in the following manner: 21.7% in the first year, 27.6% in the second year, 26.2% in the third year and 24.5% in the fourth year and above. Regarding the students' distribution over departments and programs, the highest was the School of Business and Economics at 16.1% and the lowest was the School of Journalism and Media at 1.9%.

The rate of female student respondents was representative of their presence at universities and colleges. Regarding the student sample distribution and membership in student councils, 180 questionnaires were filled for female and male student council members in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, with a ratio of one female to three male students. This reflects the low representation of females at student councils, which requires boosting to become equivalent with male representation.

⁴ Badil, Resource Center for Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights, The Right of Return, *إجريدة حق العودة* Issue NO. 48 <http://www.badil.org/ar/haq-alawda/item/1796-article20>

Chart 2: The Relative Distribution of Student Council Members at Palestinian Universities and Colleges According to Sex, 2014



The Political Knowledge

There is a gender gap in political knowledge whereby over two thirds of female students evaluated themselves as with no or limited political knowledge compared to less than half among males. On the other hand, the level of knowledge of female students who had the opportunity to participate in student councils was not differentiated from that of males.

The ultimate goal was knowledge according to Socrates. Although Plato did not engage directly in political life, he said that knowledge was the road to change. This is what we learned from ancient philosophers. By analogy, political knowledge means understanding the nature and types of political systems, the structure of political parties and the relations among states. Hence, the political position a conscious person or a person with political understanding takes is based on political knowledge; s/he expresses such knowledge in participation. This explains the importance of political knowledge and its role in political participation. Without knowledge, participation becomes aimless and does not conform to the reality.

In the survey, around 11% of the students in Palestine assessed themselves as having no political knowledge at all. There were no significant differences in the assessment of knowledge between the West Bank and Gaza Strip. However, there were clear differences reflecting a knowledge gap (at least in the self-assessment) between males and females, with 7% of males and 13% of females. Upon identifying the degree of knowledge, around half the students in Palestine described their knowledge as limited, while slightly over a third said they possessed good knowledge and less than 5% said they had excellent knowledge.

Table 1: The Relative Distribution of the Palestinian University and College Students' Assessment of Their Political Knowledge According to Sex and Region, 2014

Region and sex		No knowledge	Limited knowledge	Good knowledge	Excellent knowledge	Total
Region	West Bank	11.8	52.1	31.4	4.7	100
	Gaza Strip	9.2	46.7	39.5	4.6	100
Sex	Males	7.4	39.2	45.6	7.8	100
	Females	13.0	57.3	27.4	2.3	100
	Total	10.6	49.6	35.2	4.6	100

The table above indicates that the rate of students with knowledge is low, taking into consideration that the question is about the students' perception of their own knowledge. Second, it is not possible to consider "limited" knowledge as established knowledge, which is the case for around half the students from both sexes. Despite the small discrepancy between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in the level of political knowledge, the findings revealed a gender gap in the knowledge level; around two thirds of females responded by no or limited knowledge, compared to less than half the males. This is the most important conclusion, and requires searching for the opportunities for females to obtain knowledge. While political knowledge is a major factor in promoting political participation, the latter is also a source of political knowledge; it is a reciprocal and dialectic, rather than a one-way relationship. This conclusion is confirmed by the fact that no knowledge gap existed between female students who had the opportunity to participate in student councils and males. This indicates that when males and females have equal opportunities, there will be equality in contribution, participation and even knowledge.

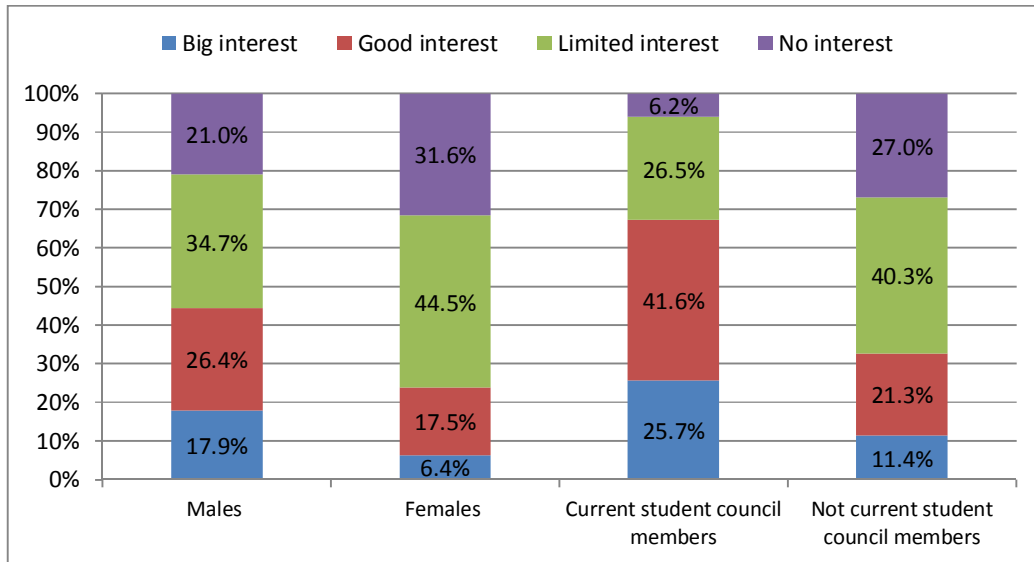
Table 2: The Relative Distribution of the Palestinian University and College Students' Assessment of Their Political Knowledge According to Membership in Student Councils, Sex and Regions

Region and sex	West Bank		Gaza Strip		Males		Females		Total	
	Student council member	Not student council member	Student council member	Not student council member	Student council member	Not student council member	Student council member	Not student council member	Student council member	Not student council member
No knowledge	1.9	11.9	0.0	9.2	0.6	7.4	1.8	13.0	1.3	10.6
Limited knowledge	25.3	52.0	24.6	46.7	24.7	39.3	27.3	57.3	25.1	49.6
Good knowledge	64.8	31.3	69.2	39.4	66.5	45.5	67.3	27.4	66.6	35.2
Excellent knowledge	8.0	4.7	6.2	4.7	8.2	7.8	3.6	2.3	7.0	4.6
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Regarding the relation with political knowledge, interest in discussing political issues is linked to political participation. 73.0% of the students said that they were interested in discussing political matters with others, with discrepancies in the level of interest (big interest, good interest, limited interest), with 79.1% of males and 68.5% among females. Around 27.0% said they had no interest in discussing political issues (20.9% among males and 31.5% among

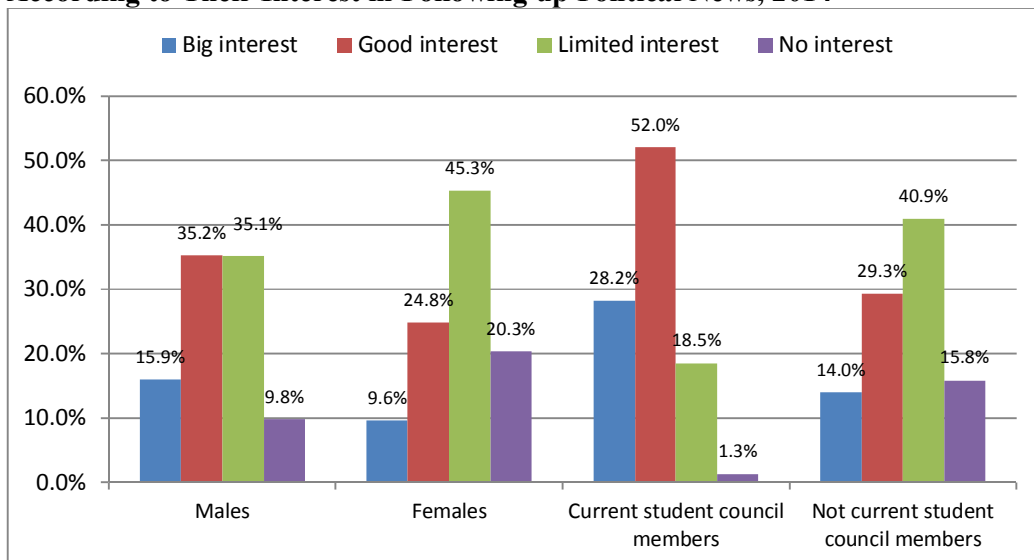
females). The chart below reveals that a low rate of students (6%) who are student council members have no interest in discussing political issues. This asserts the role of unions, and the other aspects of participation in student councils, namely advocacy of students' rights, rather than political activism only.

Chart 3: The Relative Distribution of Palestinian University and College Students According to Their Interest in Discussing Political Issues, 2014



One of the manifestations of political knowledge is following up political news in two directions: the first is the impact of following up political news on raising the level of knowledge and political awareness because of the increased knowledge, and attempting to link the news with what is happening and the consequent gradual engagement in the public domain. The second is the need to follow up political news because of political knowledge that creates a desire to keep abreast with political developments and public affairs.

Chart 4: The Relative Distribution of Palestinian University and College Students According to Their Interest in Following up Political News, 2014



The chart above confirms the relation between political knowledge and following political news; it reveals an increasing gender gap. The higher rate of students who follow political news are members of student councils, with only 1.3% having no interest in following political news; females were the least interested in following political news, as around one fifth of the female (double the males)said they had no interest in following political news.

The main sources of political information for students were the television, the internet, and family. Other sources had a small contribution as sources for political information for students. The findings indicated the dire need for student movements and councils to reconsider their programs and roles in student education and mobilization, and as a presumed vanguard of the student movement.

The main source of political information for university students sheds light on an extremely important issue related to the sources of knowledge, reflecting a general issue. The university/college environment did not constitute a source of political information for students except for an almost negligible rate of students; Hence, it is ineffective in this regard. The student environment at universities and colleges should constitute a natural space for enlightenment and information, including political information. Books constituted sources of knowledge for less than 2% of the students. In this regard, no distinction was noted between mandatory textbooks and other books a student may read upon their own initiative or others' recommendations. This reflects the problematic relation of university and college students with books as sources of information, not necessarily political information. At another level, a question arises about the role of textbooks as sources of political information, especially that the society is in a national liberation phase and needs textbooks and curricula that constitute natural sources of information for students. Students don't consider books "their best companions" anymore, with the technology and telecommunications information revolution, which has affected the society in general and the youth in particular. However, this does not absolve from the responsibility of maintaining books as important sources of political and non-political information. Within the framework of the university/college environment, student movements constitute the vanguard and spearhead for unionist and political action in the higher education institutions. However, they constituted sources of information for 1% of students only. From a regional perspective, this source is totally missing at Gaza universities and colleges, as no one relies on student movements or councils as sources of political information. In this context, it is not possible to consider this a temporary issue. This requires scrutiny and holding these movements to account about their programs, inclinations and conduct. In parallel, the student councils were formed to constitute an umbrella and an official student body whose task is not only advocating student rights vis-à-vis the university administrations, but also to play a political role. Under occupation, and before the inception of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA), the student movement had a complementary and mutually supportive relationship with the university administrations, despite some issues. This asserts that the student movement and its elected councils did not play a pure student union role, but was rather a reflection of the political reality of PLO during the years that preceded the inception of PNA and later too. However, this absent or absented role (which requires thorough scrutiny) warns of the instability that the student movement and councils suffer from today. The university administrations and their academic and extra-curricular inclinations are also not exempt from this responsibility. Naturally, higher education institutions and curricula simulate the reality and context in which we live, whether in research or extra-curricular activities. Hence, the university administrations and faculty must exert effort to increase their participation and become important sources of political and non-political information. The data indicated that the

contribution of the faculty in Gaza was less than the West Bank. However, this source was weak and below expectations in both regions.

Although some optimism prevailed during the period in which the survey was conducted because of the prospects of political reconciliation between Fateh and Hamas, prospects for political factions in the West bank and Gaza were relatively open. However, the survey findings revealed that the student movement and councils in Gaza universities suffer from a more severe crisis than the West Bank. In this context, an activist from Gaza said, “student councils in Gaza universities and colleges do not exist since they had been suspended since the division seven years ago. The student movements do not operate under optimal conditions since the division, which influenced their role in Gaza universities and colleges⁵”.

The sources of political information of the Palestinian university and college students were mostly concentrated (90%) on the different media sources (TV, internet, radio, and newspapers). This data asserts the importance of these sources of information, and the need to intensify efforts to develop their programs and mission to comply with the necessary standards that enable them to raise the awareness of students. Such standards include neutrality, honesty, and lack of factionalism, focus on patriotic messages that serve the country /citizens, and to promote public interests rather than partisan interests, as this distorts the way citizens, particularly the youth, including students think. At another level, study what really attracts the students and the youth to these sources rather than others, and whether it is the easy access, or the nature of published or broadcast material. The free press constitutes an important source of information in any society, since the main reason for their existence is providing information. How can we ensure that the media plays a transparent role that enjoys integrity in transmitting the patriotic message we all need to the Palestinian youth rather than divert their attention and interest towards consumerist issues? How can we ensure that the media provides programs that contribute to raising community and political awareness? This is a joint responsibility, not only among the sectors that use the media, the Palestinian government or the concerned ministry, but rather a central role for the national factions and the student movements and councils. In this case, these parties have a direct task of reframing these mechanisms and tools that guarantee access to the largest possible number of young Palestinians and develop the means that match between the needs and easy public access to them.

The family constituted a source of political information for around 6% of students. The family constitutes an initial nursery for the longest period of the youth’s upbringing (most of them at least). This requires all parties to exert effort to ensure that this nursery constitutes an additional lever in the educational process and in spreading the political culture, encouraging participation rather than the opposite. This requires an environment that encourages families to play such a role. The introduction of this research paper addressed this issue. Community participation, promoting the team spirit and avoiding selfishness may constitute the wide gate towards promoting political participation. It was noted that families constituted main sources of political information for females more than males, reflecting two observations: First, that females possibly spend more time than males with their families, and the second is linked to the degree of autonomy and acquiring ideas from outside the family. Regardless of the reason, the role of the family as a main source of political information is not sufficient, particularly

⁵ A citation from the minutes of a special workshop MIFTAH had held in Ramallah and Gaza through video conference to discuss the findings of the survey of the opinions of university and college students. The workshop was held on 23/02.2015.

among students, despite its distinctive role in shaping individual opinions especially in Palestinian society, with its specific structure and attributes.

It is worth noting that the above data refers to these sources as major sources, and not just sources. The information of the citizens and the youth is the result of cumulative experiences with time and from all sources. Knowledge or information cannot be restricted to a specific source, but substantive sources were identified from the students' perceptions and based on their own experiences in accumulating available information irrespective of the size of such information, quantitatively or qualitatively, which means its direction and philosophic dimensions, especially that this is political, not academic information.

Table 3: The Relative Distribution of Students According to the Main Source of Political Information, Region and Sex

Main source	Region		Sex		Total
	West Bank	Gaza Strip	Male	Female	
Newspapers/magazines	4.1%	6.6%	6.1%	4.6%	5.3%
Books	1.7%	1.9%	2.3%	1.5%	1.8%
TV	29.0%	28.4%	22.6%	34.0%	28.7%
Radio	4.1%	5.6%	3.8%	5.8%	4.8%
Teacher/lecturer	2.6%	0.2%	0.5%	2.2%	1.5%
Internet	49.4%	50.4%	57.1%	43.7%	49.9%
Student councils	0.6%	0.0%	0.2%	0.4%	0.3%
Student blocs	1.1%	0.0%	0.8%	0.4%	0.5%
Family	6.4%	6.1%	4.8%	7.5%	6.3%
Other	0.9%	0.8%	1.9%	0.0%	0.9%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

The Student Movements and Their System of Work

The student movements continue to require drawing the attention and curiosity of more than one third of the students, as around half female and a quarter of male students have no idea about the existing student movements at the university. This requires the actual presence of these movements

When around one quarter of the male students and half of the female students have no idea about the existing student movement at universities and colleges, this reveals a shortcoming with the student movements as students refrain from joining these movements. All sides may have contributed to this situation. However, the larger obligation lies with the side that has the bigger responsibility, not the public. While the state is responsible for providing job opportunities, development and an environment of merit-based fair competition and equal opportunities among citizens, citizens are responsible for searching, developing their skills and competing on fair basis to obtain a job opportunity. There are reasons for students to refrain from political participation or from participating in making decisions in the public domain. However, the reasons are partially objective, such as the socio-economic conditions of students, the frustrating political environment and the division. There are personal obligations and other subjective factors such as the desire, willingness, and awareness of the need,

responsibility and the sense of citizenship. While the student movements are partially responsible for the aggravation of these subjective factors, these movements must discuss both objective and subjective factors that the students face, to find solutions or help mitigate their impact, not only from a pragmatic perspective, but also as part of their student union duties, their human mission and their political goals.

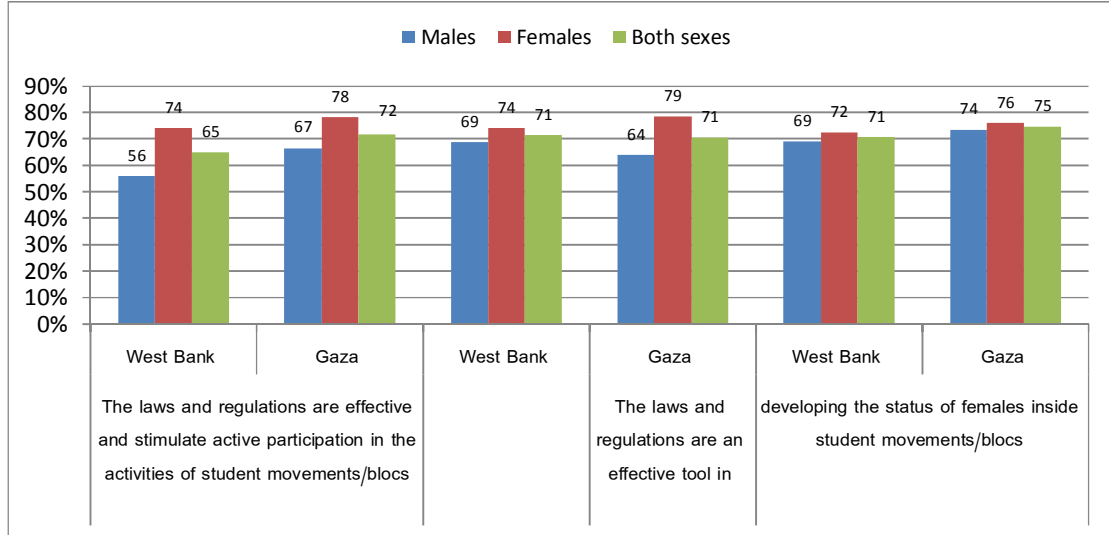
The student movements are part of the student body and environment, through their active presence; they should adhere to the public, and avoid having a huge gap between the “head” and the “body”. “The activity of student movements has been restricted in many educational institutions to the elections season or to celebrating some national occasions, in addition to activities held as a reaction to a public or private incident. Hence, the student movements lack a clear work methodology based on a work strategy, a specific and goal-oriented vision with detailed activities and tasks⁶”.

The important thing is not whether the students have an idea about the student movements or not. However, the fact that students have no idea about student movements means that they are absent from the field, and consequently from the minds of students. In other words, the aim is not for students to know about student movements, but to have a tool to measure and assess the effectiveness and presence of these student movements. It is not about raising the students’ curiosity about these movements and obtaining knowledge through meaningless media activities or marathons, but rather the student movements should work in the field and prove their presence, and their activities become part of the thoughts that the students use to accumulate their knowledge as an introduction to participation. The question is how the student movements can strengthen student participation in public activities and how they can further engage them in political participation. This conforms to the definition of “volunteerism to achieve certain interests”, personal or collective, through lobbying to direct a decision or reach new decisions for a better reality for the group at various levels. It is about contributing to promoting a culture of participation and networking for further lobbying with decision-makers to do what it takes to achieve the interests of the youth and carry out the public policies that serve everybody.

Having an idea does not mean sufficient knowledge. Hence, a question was raised about the knowledge of the bylaws that regulate the work of those movements. Around half the students (51.2%) were aware that such bylaws existed, i.e. around three quarters of those who have an idea about student movements (63.3% of males and 42.1% of females). Regarding the knowledge of these bylaws that regulate the work of student movements and blocs, around one third of those who know about the existence of these bylaws have not read them. Aside from the knowledge of the existence of bylaws, and based on the students’ perceptions of the nature of these bylaws, in terms of their effectiveness and stimulation of student participation in the activities of the student movement, around two thirds of the students said that they were effective and stimulated participation. Females were more accepting of the idea, and agreed more than males that these bylaws provided the opportunity for effective participation of females. This discrepancy might be linked to the ceiling of ambitions of females, in light of the fact that their political participation is not as big as males. Usually, these points of view change with the increase in female participation and engagement in public affairs, including political affairs. Furthermore, around three quarters of students considered these bylaws an effective tool to improve the status of females inside the student movements and blocs.

⁶ Quotation from the minutes of the focus group meeting MIFTAH held in Ramallah for the Palestinian national action factions. The workshop was held on 17/11/2014.

Chart 5: The Relative Distribution of Palestinian University and College Students According to Their Agreement that the Bylaws of the Student Movements Stimulate Effective Participation and Provide an Opportunity for Female Participation, 2014

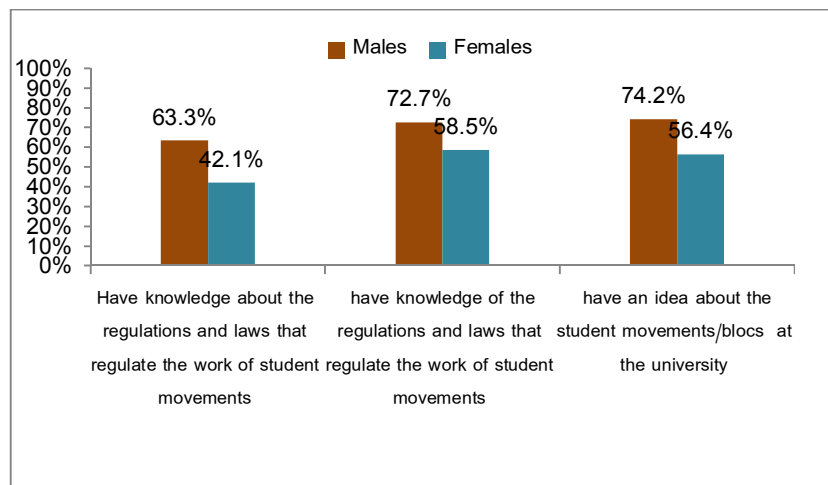


The bylaws are effective and stimulate active participation in the activities of student movements/blocs.

The bylaws provide an opportunity for female active participation.

The bylaws are an effective tool in developing the status of females inside student movements/blocs.

Chart 6: The Relative Distribution of Palestinian Universities and College Students According to Their Knowledge about Student Movements and Knowledge of the Existence of Bylaws, 2014



Regarding political affiliation, and not just general ideas about the student movements or the knowledge of the existence of bylaws, the findings indicated that around 20.4% of students have no political affiliation with any of the student blocs (15.6% of males and 25.2% of females). There were significant differences between the West Bank and Gaza Strip, with around 23% in the West Bank (around 17% of males and 27% of females) in comparison with around 16% in Gaza Strip (around 13% of males and 20% of females). This is an optimistic rate in comparison with the findings of the Palestinian public survey, especially in light of the political deterioration and division, whereby in 2009⁷, around 52% of the youth did not trust any existing political faction. The specificity of students, their limited responsibilities, the nature of the university environment and its impact on political and unionist action may stimulate wider engagement and consequently clearer political affiliation.

Table 4: The Relative Distribution of University and College Students According to Their Political Affiliations

Student movement	Sex		Total
	Male	Female	
Shabiba student bloc	47.2	34.8	41.0
Islamic bloc	26.6	34.2	30.4
Union (Ittihad) Student bloc	0.9	1.1	1.0
Student Action Front	4.5	2.2	3.3
Student unity (Wihda) bloc	1.0	0.6	0.8
The Palestinian Mubadara	1.3	1.5	1.4
Other student movements	2.9	0.4	1.6
Has no political affiliation	15.6	25.2	20.1
Total	100	100	100

The level of support to these student movements varies according to the period or the general conditions. However, rather than showing the size of support to these movements, it is more important for them to focus on the size of their responsibility for raising political awareness, engaging the students/youth in general in political action, and working on increasing female representation, especially in the movements that have a big gender gap in their supporters.

⁷ Sharek Youth Forum, 2010, The Palestinian youth and political organizations

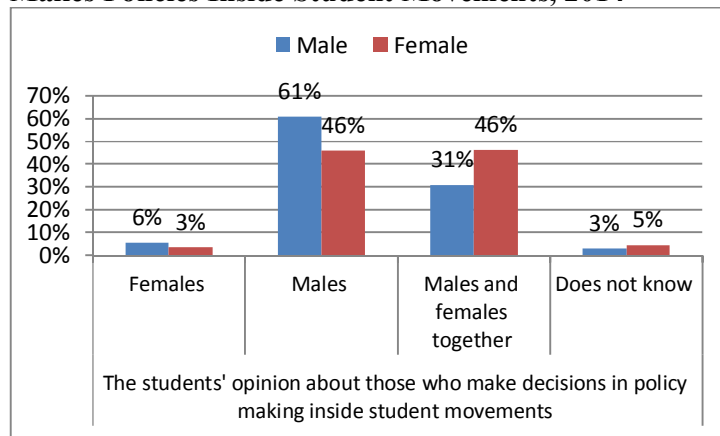
Table 5: The Relative Distribution of Students According the Reasons of Lack of Political Affiliation, Region and Sex

Reason	West Bank			Gaza Strip			Palestine		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Those who join student movements/blocs face a lot of trouble	47.2	24.1	32.1	59.0	31.0	44.7	51.3	25.7	35.5
The student movements/blocs do nothing	35.3	26.8	29.7	33.2	33.8	33.5	34.5	28.3	30.7
None of the student movements/blocs express my ideas	43.8	17.8	26.7	74.3	47.6	60.6	54.2	24.5	35.9
I am not interested in politics	27.7	70.9	56.0	23.0	31.3	27.2	26.1	62.0	48.3
I know nothing about those student movements/blocs and how to participate in them	17.6	31.1	26.5	4.7	18.8	11.9	13.1	28.4	22.5
Other reasons	6.3	5.2	5.6	22.0	12.0	16.9	11.7	6.7	8.6
The rate of students who have no political affiliation	17.4	27.3	22.9	13.1	20.0	15.9	15.6	25.2	20.1

The reasons that the students identified for the lack of political affiliation provide a clear indications among students from both sexes and both regions (West Bank and Gaza Strip). Regardless of whether these reasons stem from opinions, perceptions, and personal experiences or from the surrounding environment, the important thing is to look at these reasons to search for solutions or attempt to remove the causes. The fear of falling into trouble for joining these student movements or blocs was the main reason for not having a political affiliation for more than one third of the students. The rate was clearly higher in the Gaza Strip than in the West Bank. Regarding sex, the rate of those concerned was almost double among males than females. This is natural in a male dominated society, including in political participation and relevant concerns, because males suffer from trouble first. Such concerns explain the reality of democratic life, whether in politics or in the society, including the family and the immediate community. Since a significant rate avoids engaging in political action to avoid falling into trouble, this requires a reconsideration of the means to alleviate these concerns and the underlying practices of the political establishment and the executive power, as well as the prevalent social culture, whether actual or perceived. If they were real, they must lobby at all levels to spread a democratic atmosphere in the community, guarantee freedoms, stop the harassment of political activists, and raise the awareness of the Palestinian society and families about the need to stop discouraging their sons and daughters to engage in political action. However, if these were mere perceptions, then the concerned parties must clarify the reality and remove any ambiguity, addressing the source of such ambiguity. Taking into consideration other reasons identified by students, the conclusion is that the student movements and blocs should review their role. A significant rate of students (30%) who have no political inclination

said the student movements do nothing. The question is what are the actions that students expect but do not currently see? This is a joint mission for all student movements and students in general to re-establish a meaningful relation among themselves. An important issue in this regard is the need to re-examine the available room for making decisions and implementing policies adopted by the student movement at the institutions of higher education. Moreover, around 35% of the students said that these movements do not express their opinions. This asserts that the student movements must exert much effort to identify how they can express the students' needs and inclinations, in line with the national framework and priorities, while bearing in mind that they represent the students not only at the union level, but also at the intellectual and political levels.

Chart 7: The Relative Distribution of Students According to Their Opinions About Who Makes Policies Inside Student Movements, 2014

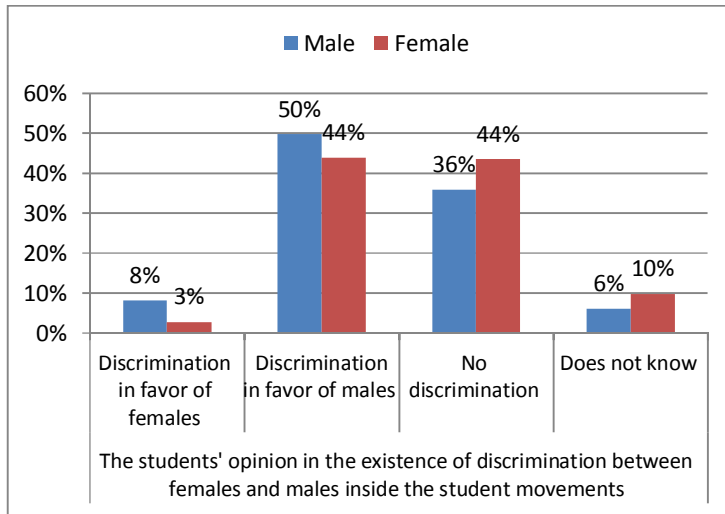


The table above indicates that no balance exists in the opinion of those who make policy decisions inside the student movements. Around 40% of students believe that males and females make policy decisions inside student movements, while the majority of students believe that there is no equality in policy-making. More than half the students said that males made these decisions, while 4% said that females made these decisions. Upon comparing the opinions of females and males, two readings are possible: the first is that females consider themselves partners in decision-making with a clear difference from males (46% of females and 31% of males). The second is that the rate of females who consider that males make the decisions is less than males themselves and with almost the same difference. With respect to decision-making and the required ceiling of ambition, the responses may be explained on the basis of the females' optimism to participate in decision-making with males, or that males deny that females participate with them in decision-making, or that they do not accept the idea of losing control over the "whole" decision-making process. Regardless of explanations, a clear fact is the lack of equality in decision-making between males and females. This requires revising and amending the work mechanisms and laws that regulate the student movements and their compliance with the values of equal opportunities among males and females. The aim is to include a clear identification of the boundaries and forms of powers of decision-making among the sexes, and developing all the necessary tools to monitor compliance with these laws, and evaluate implementation.

At the practical level, regarding the gender gap inside the student movement, the data reveal that discrimination is in favor of males. In this regard, there are at least two dimensions: first, the points of view of male and female students on discrimination inside the student movements vary, and second, the rate of students who believe that there is no discrimination is less than

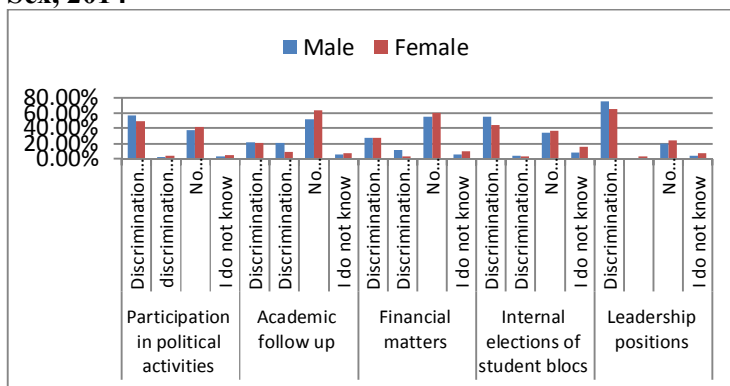
half. The first conclusion is that it is possible to confirm the existence of discrimination, and the second is that the concept of discrimination is problematic among students, irrespective of their sex. This is evident in the responses of both sexes for or against discrimination.

Chart 8: The Relative Distribution of Students According to Their Opinions in the Existence of Discrimination between Males and Females Inside the Student Movements According to Sex, 2014



To clarify the picture further and identify areas of gender discrimination, if it exists, specific aspects to examine the discrepancy in discrimination according to the aspect were listed. The common denominator between them was that the students asserted that discrimination was in favor of males, and that all aspects continued to suffer from this form of discrimination, especially in the opportunities for assuming leadership positions inside the student movements.

Chart 9: The Relative Distribution of Students According to Their Opinions about the Existence of Discrimination Between Males and Females in Certain Issues According to Sex, 2014



Political Actions and Political Rights:

The need to provide females with sufficient opportunities for political participation to increase their quantitative participation, contribute to accumulating experience and build their capacities to break the wall of fear from participation which will result in proving the females' capacity for success.

Around two thirds of the students (61%) agreed that females are knowledgeable and sufficiently aware of their rights and duties in the community, with no significant differences between females and males and very close rates between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. However, around three quarters of students (70.1%) believed that female participation in political action was insufficient. It is worth noting that both males and females agreed on this opinion. This shows the gap between the female knowledge of their rights, duties towards the community, and considering her participation in political action sufficient, since such participation is part of rights and duties at the same time. Since male and female students agreed that female political participation was not sufficient, this requires searching for the reasons that preclude sufficient participation or the extent of participation that females aspire to. The prevailing culture in the society was the first reason identified by the students who said that female participation was not enough (around 91%), with no significant differences between male and female opinions. It might be initially concluded that females did not mind participating, since they considered their participation insufficient. When males blame the prevailing culture (like females), there is a need to research those elements of the culture that preclude increasing female political participation, and what impedes changing the prevailing culture to allow for expanding female participation. We found that both males and females agreed on giving females the opportunity (around 78%), despite the discrepancy in the rates of those who said that the lack of opportunities was a reason for low participation (83% of females and 70% of males). In this regard, females may be more capable of identifying available opportunities. Even if we assume that females exaggerated and were not objective in blaming the lack of opportunity, males agreed with them, albeit at a slightly lower rate. The main conclusion is the need to provide females with the opportunities for political participation. The aim is not to expand their participation quantitatively only, but contribute to accumulating their experience, build their capacities to break the wall of fear from participation and enable them to prove their ability to succeed and have even better performance than males. The aim is also to enhance women's understanding of their own role in political action and alleviate any obstacles that justify the low female participation. Increasing opportunities for participation must accompany an increased level of desire for participation among females, which is still an obstacle. There is a need to work on providing opportunities to increase the desire, and to urge female participation based on their awareness and belief in their role, within the framework of their rights and duties towards the society. However, females must participate in this process, rather than playing marginal roles.

Some students blamed females for lacking the initiative for political participation, and for not working enough to acquire their rights in participation. Despite the relatively positive attitudes of students towards the bylaws that regulate the student movements and the "fairness" in the available opportunities, the political parties play a main role in alleviating practical constraints; it is not about issuing instructions but about practice and avoiding false excuses.

Chart 10 A: The Rate of Students Who Consider Female Participation in Political Action Insufficient According to Sex and Motive, 2014

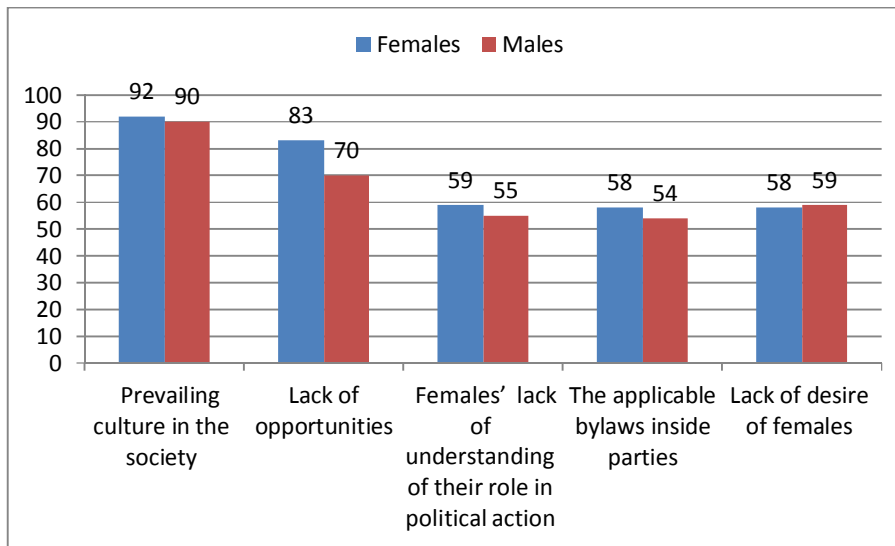
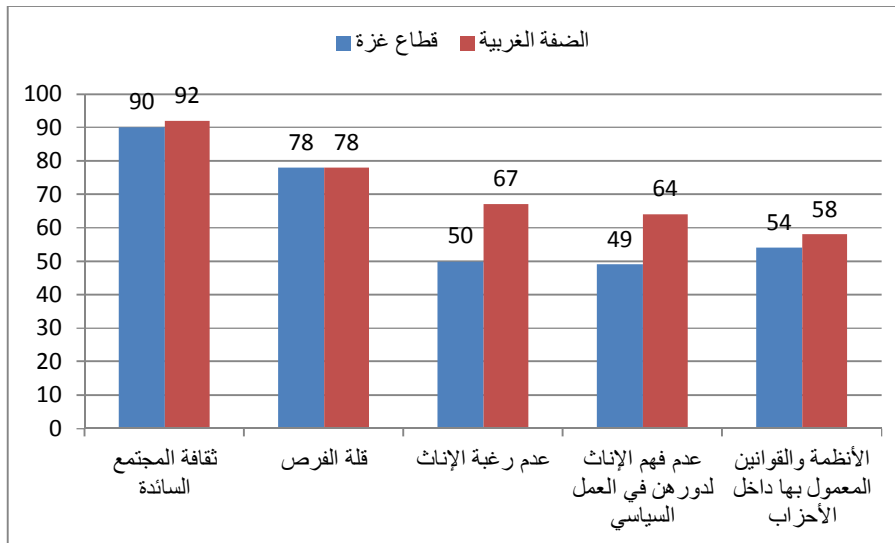


Chart 10B: The Rate of Students Who Consider Female Participation in Political Action Insufficient According to Region and Motive

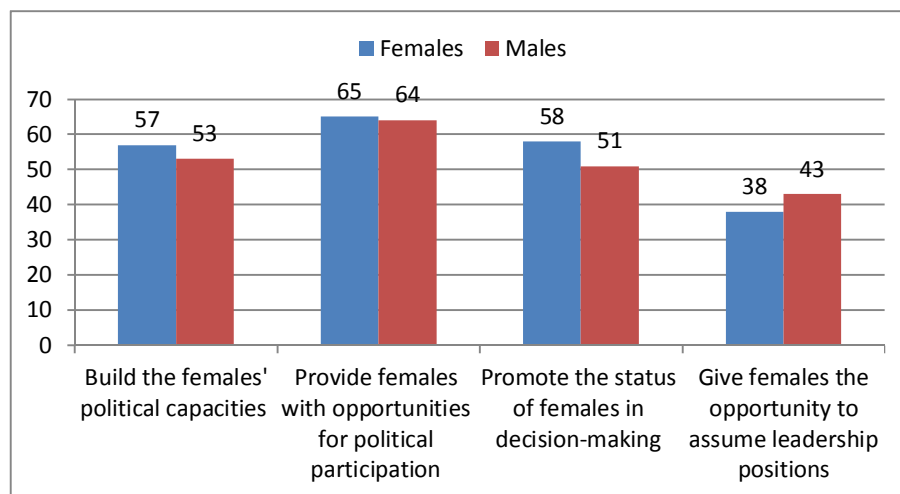


- The prevailing culture in the society.
- Lack of opportunities.
- Lack of will of females.
- Females' lack of understanding of their role in political action.
- The applicable bylaws inside parties.

The gap between de jure bylaws and de facto practice on the ground is the most important issue that the Palestinian political movements and organizations must address and find practical solutions for. It is no longer acceptable to justify their positions by asserting that their bylaws

are void of gender discrimination. They should provide the solutions that would end the problem of poor female participation, because this situation not only deprives females from their opportunities, but also deprives the society, the cause and the whole development process from the potentials of half the society. Another claim that puts the blame on females is that female leaders don't have strong personalities and presence. However, we cannot expect to have females with strong personalities amid male chauvinistic views and practices that underestimate females and deprive them from experience that enables them to learn to express their opinions and build their capacities. The process of female political participation is complicated and complex. It does not start with a perfectionist attitude, but is rather a cumulative process that requires participation and continuous development of potential, as well as promoting trust and increasing opportunities, that ultimately lead to effective and broad participation based on partnership, and not a mere cosmetic process.

Chart 11: The Opinions of Students in the Role of Political Parties According to Sex and Motive, 2014



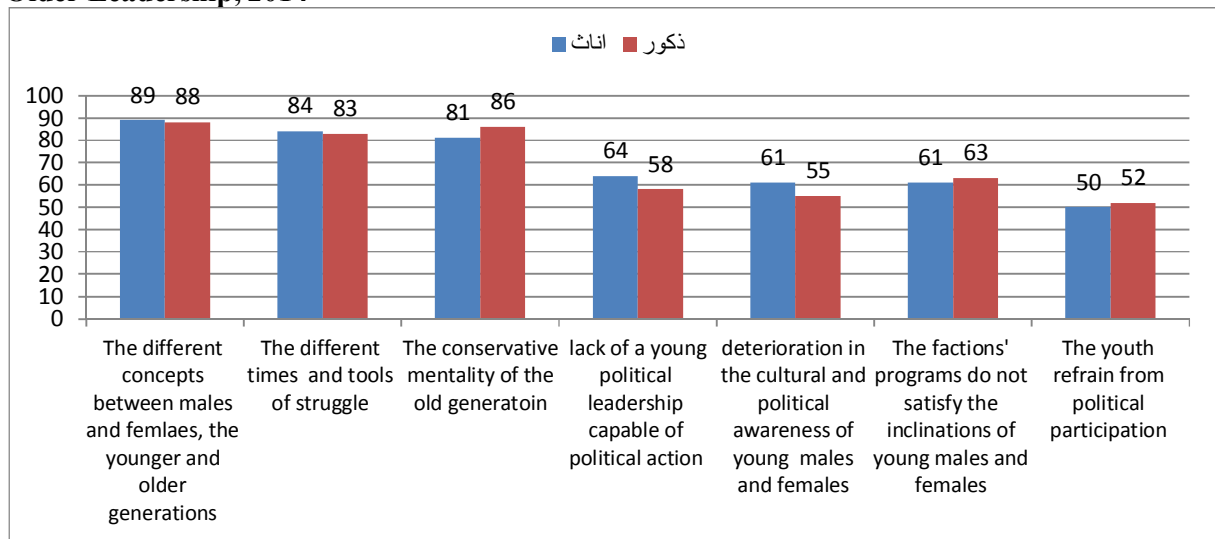
The Political Framework and the Youth Grassroots:

Promoting a democratic environment is very important for resolving the chronic problem of bridging the generation gap that is not unique to Palestine. There is a need to give opportunities to those who deserve them transparently and without selfishness, and avoid any behavior that promotes personal interests, conflict of interests and corruption.

Representation is a core value of political action, and is an indispensable part of political legitimacy. The Palestinian youth constitute a major component of the society and are a major source of legitimacy to the political leadership. Nevertheless, if around half the students (48%) in the survey indicated that the political leadership in Palestine is old (56.6% of males and 41.5% of females). Regardless of whether this is a fact or a perception, more than three quarters of the students (78%) believe that there is a generation gap with the leadership. The listed reasons for this gap attribute the responsibility to three parties: the political leaders, the youth (males and females), and the nurturing environment for political action, including the Palestinian parties' programs and principles. The youth are required to work and increase their engagement in political action. They should not expect to receive attractive invitation cards for work. They should not expect delegating any responsibilities to them without showing serious

interest, and the will and motivation to work. Similarly, the political leadership must have an outlook to the future and consider the need for fresh blood in the organizational process, which constitutes the foundation of political life. This is not achieved without an organizational framework of reference that regulates this work, guarantees the boundaries of interventions and seeks to promote such tendencies. Some may consider this impossible, while others may consider it naïve and unachievable. However, it is not possible to resolve this historic problem of the generation gap, and which is not unique to Palestine, without spreading a democratic climate in political action, through giving sufficient opportunities to those who deserve them transparently and without selfishness, and avoiding any behavior that leads to promoting personal interests, conflict of interests and corruption.

Chart 12: The Opinions of Students in the Causes of the Gap between the Youth and the Older Leadership, 2014



Around half the students believe the programs of political parties in principle express the ambitions and aspirations of the youth (though they do not equally meet the youth's inclinations), while the other half do not find their aspirations in these programs. How is it possible to benefit and enhance such belief? The theoretical assumption here is that programs are not necessarily implemented, which is usually referred to as the gap between theory and practice. The crisis is not about developing instructions and partisan or organizational programs that assert the right of females and the need for their political participation. The core issue is to transform them into daily practice in all aspects related to the political organizations, ensure mechanisms to monitor implementation based on gender equality at all levels, from the bottom to the top, in a transparent- accountable manner and with periodic-continuous evaluation. Furthermore, the people in general, and the youth in particular, shall become more aware of party programs. The survey findings indicated that around 45% of students believe that young males and females have no awareness of the programs of political parties. When the youth understand the party programs, they are required to apply those fair principles and try to develop them to enhance the success stories of youth participation, and overcome the attempts to confiscate their rights, both males and females.

Community Culture and Political Participation of Males and Females

The community culture constitutes an important component in the environment that surrounds women participation. In the Palestinian culture, as is the case in many others, there is a big gap between people's beliefs and actual practices.

Chart 13: The Rate of Students Who Agree With These Specific Statements According to Sex

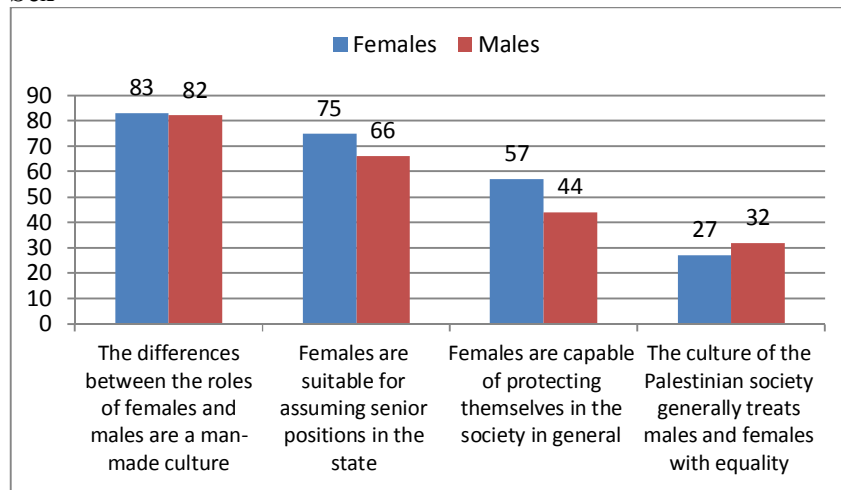
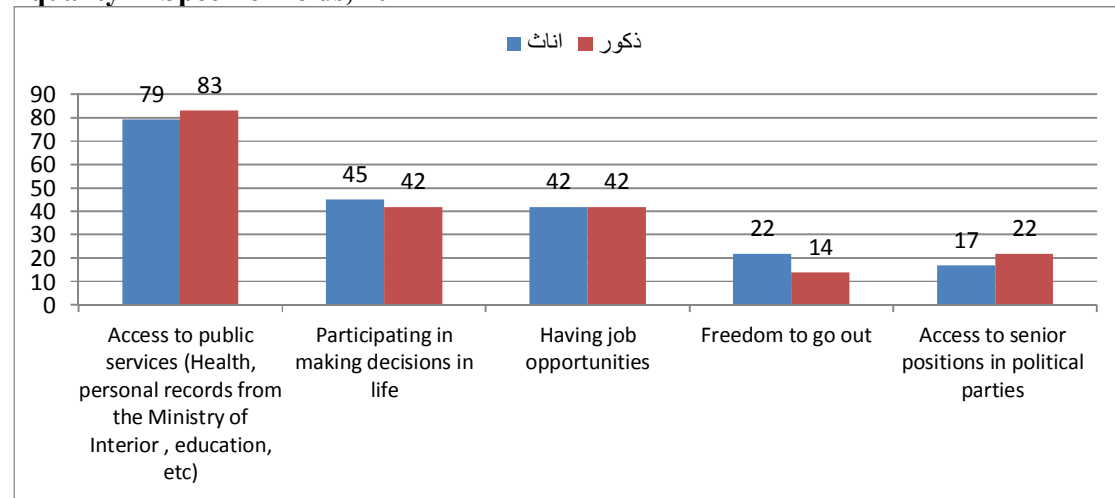


Chart 14: The Rate of Students Who Believe that the Palestinian Society Has Gender Equality in Specific Fields, 2014



The thorniest issue in equality between males and females is the freedom of females to go out, which is the widest gate for her participation in community as well as political activities. Regarding the perceptions of gender equality, around one fifth of the students said that there is equality in going out (14% of males and 22% of females), i.e. females believe in the existence of such equality more than males. 81.0% of the students said that there is gender equality in access to public services (83% of males and 79% of females). We conclude that equality in access to public services (which is important) does not necessarily reflect equality in other

aspects, especially those related to the prevailing community culture. On one hand, there is a need to raise the citizens' awareness in the aspects of the required equality, especially those related to public life, such as going out to participate in the community and participation politically, in addition to linking awareness towards such equality with the resulting progress. On the other hand, there is a need to avoid appearances that claim equality, and give women their rights in political participation.

To identify the family member who makes decisions on specific issues, an attempt was made to define matters that relate directly or indirectly to political participation. There were somewhat conflicting points of view towards identifying the roles of males and females towards certain decisions. For example, responding to a question about who in the family made the decision on women going to the labor market, half the females said that it was a joint responsibility between males and females in the family, while only 37% of males chose this response. The rate was almost the opposite in favor of the view that males took such decisions. What does that mean? Will females insist on their view and will? Are males bluffing and do not wish to admit that they have been deprived of their historical patriarchy? As for the decision on males going to the labor market, 81% of males said that they took that decision by themselves, in comparison with three quarters of females who adopted this point of view. Both are possible, but the prevailing mentality continues to grant males superiority and gives them control over family decisions, which reflects on community and political participation. The survey findings indicated that more than half the females shared with males the decision on their participation in community activities. However, only 38% of males agreed on this opinion. 28% of females and 43% of males gave the decision on female participation in community activities to males. There are contradictory positions and strong competition over decision-making in reality and in perceptions. How then will the situation be when it involves actual derogation of responsibilities or giving up privileges? This also applies on female participation in political activities, a reflection of the democratic life of the Palestinian families.

Available Mechanisms for Political Participation:

The first sign of a gender gap in the will for political participation indicates the need to search for possibly cultural reasons. One should not overlook the reasons linked to the level of attention of student movements and political organizations and the different conditions in which females live, and which play a role in restraining their will among other potential reasons and factors.

Several factors influence political participation, in terms of the different available levels and forms in the political structure, which depends on the nature of the political system. Nevertheless, this is linked with the definition used in this study and based on volunteerism, i.e. on the will of the public for political participation, which in turn requires several factors and a nurturing environment. The desire for political participation, starting with exercising the right to vote, through participating in political discussions, and culminating in actual presence in the authority's structure, is related to the extent of free public access, which creates an atmosphere of interaction that shapes the consciousness and develops social, political and ideological individual stands. Restricting opportunities for participation reduces dialogue, and produces deficient consciousness that does not serve expanding the basis of political participation, "The participation of the majority of citizens at least consciously and positively in developing

policies and decisions and selecting rulers and members of representative institutions at the central and local levels⁸”.

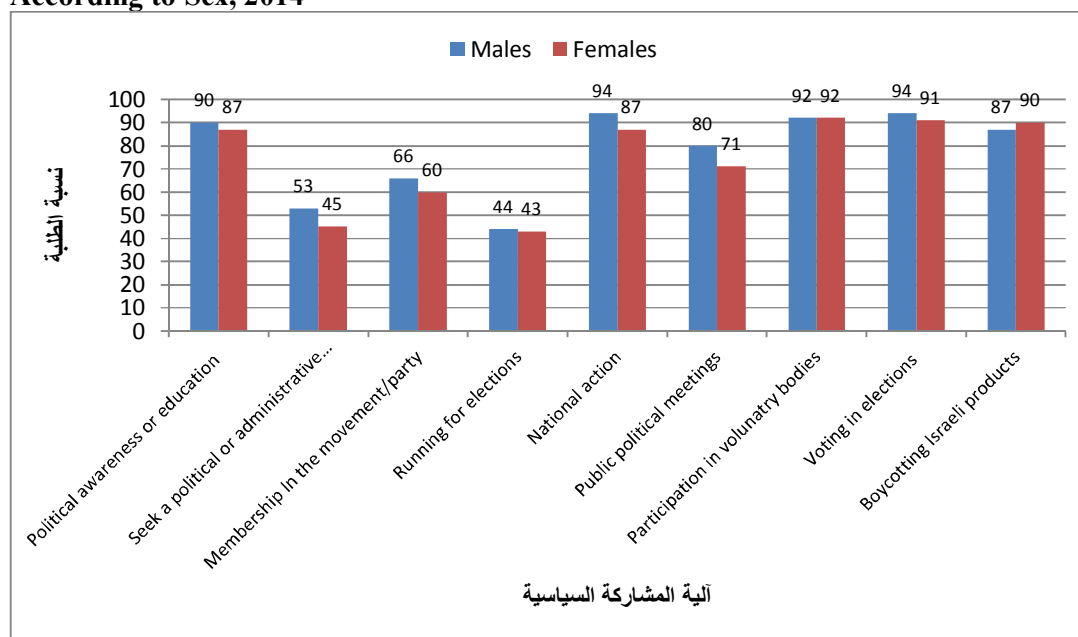
The survey findings indicated that around 38.7% of students have the will for political participation (49.5% of males and 30.6% of females). This is not a low rate but is rather an expression of a large group of students for their desire to participate, irrespective of the proposed forms or methods of participation. On the other hand, we noticed a clear difference between males and females who have such a desire. The first conclusion from this gender gap is the need to examine the reasons, which may be essentially cultural. However, there are reasons related to the attention and interest of student movements and political organizations and to the different conditions under which females live, and which play a role in restraining this will, among other possible reasons and factors. One may also note the difference in the rate of desire for political participation between the Gaza Strip (43%) and West Bank (35%) students. Despite the common cultural, political and socio-economic factors, there are differences. The isolation, siege, constrained movement, continuous wars, occupation that does not exist physically on the ground, the high rate of unemployment, the low standards of living, the high population density and other conditions under which the students and society in the Gaza Strip live, all these are different from the conditions in which the West Bank students live. This is not because of the different political systems that lead each of the regions. The discrepancy existed even under the inactive National Consensus government, and the optimism that prevailed during the implementation of the survey, which was much more positive than the period of writing this report.

In the same context, the survey tried to identify the methods of political participation that the students prefer. The methods the survey covered included education and developing political knowledge, which in turn include political meetings as a tool for education and political knowledge. The survey also included work in the public domain through voluntary work or national action in general, and representation and political gains or partisan identity, including voting in elections. These methods resonated with students, as they got high rates of responses that peaked at 92% for participating in voluntary bodies and voting in elections. Political awareness, education, and boycotting Israeli products received a high rate (88%). Participation in public political meetings received 76%. Other methods, which received lower rates, were related to partisan identities, such as membership in a specific student movement or political party, although not very low (63%). The methods that incorporate individual or personal gains received the lowest rates, such as running for elections or seeking a political or administrative position. Despite these low rates, it is worth pointing out the limitations and security concerns that impede talking freely about party membership, especially for supporters of parties outside the political authority, in addition to the fact that young students cannot run for elections even if they wanted to because of their age. Refraining from expressing their desire for seeking a political or administrative position may reflect avoiding linking it to attempts to achieve personal interests. There were discrepancies between West Bank and Gaza Strip students, which may be explained by the dire political and socio-economic conditions under which Gaza Strip students live and which make them more devout or self-denying.

⁸ Al-Azhar University, Gaza: Shireen Harbi Jamil Al-Dani: The Role of Palestinian Political Organizations in Raising Political Awareness among University Students in Gaza Strip

There was a high level of conformity between the responses of male and female students, with the exception of public political meetings. The general environment, which grants males more flexibility than females in participation in public events, explains the gap of 9% in responses. It is worth studying the most frequent choices of females and males to identify the obstacles that impede female political participation and means of overcoming them.

Chart 15: The Students' Opinions in the Preferred Method of Political Participation According to Sex, 2014



Rate of Students Method of political participation.

The importance of political education is not only related to the principle of political participation but also to the preferred methods for students. Hence, the main potential source that may influence students or constitute an initial nurturing environment that shapes their political inclination was identified.

While the family and the educational institution bear the largest responsibility in the social upbringing of the youth, since this is where young people spend most of their time, the technological revolution and the enormous progress in telecommunications and the media also constitute factors that influence the knowledge and trends or inclinations of the youth. While it is natural for the family to be the first source for the value system of the youth, it is also natural for the educational institution to be a primary source of their knowledge. The parties and national factions must play a pioneering and larger role than others in the political education of the youth, which is not the case according to the survey findings.

The educational, especially the higher educational institutions played a unique role in the Palestinian national liberation efforts during the past decades. They spearheaded the struggle and constituted the forefront of political action and participation. How did they lose this position? This survey revealed that the educational institutions ranked fourth out of five sources of political education, as they constituted a source for only 12% of the students. The role of educational institutions in the West Bank (17%) is around double that in the Gaza Strip (8%). Regarding gender, there is a slight difference between females (14%) and males (10%). There is a need to benefit from educational institutions to enhance female political education,

benefiting from their presence there as students. At the regional level, there is a need to rectify the role of educational institutions in the Gaza Strip to increase their involvement in political education.

The data indicates that the role of universities and colleges in the political education of the youth is deficient; they are not playing their expected role. Although West Bank students and females gave the educational institutions a priority in comparison with political parties, they meant the venue, or the university with all its components, including the students, extra-curricular activities, curricula, faculty, administration, environment, procedures, bylaws, student blocs, student councils and other components of the educational institutions.

It is normal for the family to rank first (37.2%) among the sources of political upbringing and education from the perspective of students (35.4% of males and 38.7% of females). Its importance is slightly higher for females than males.

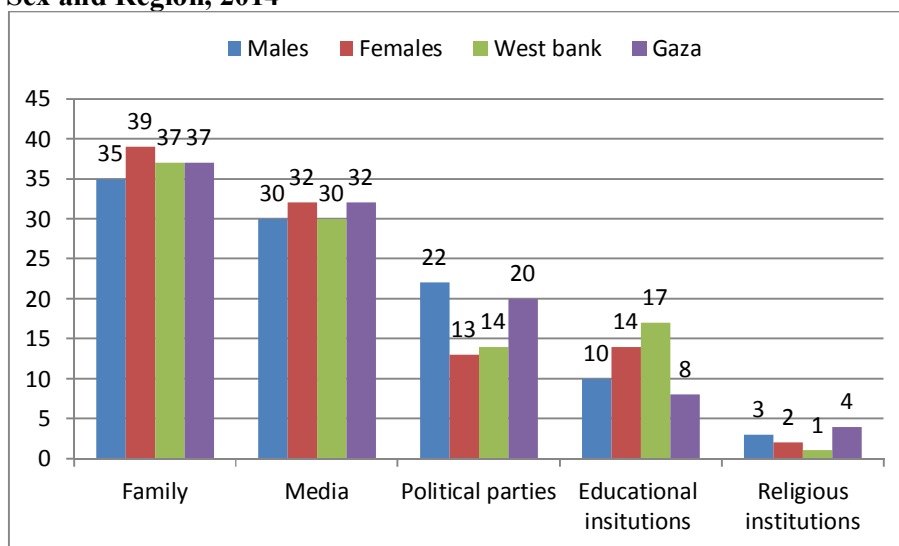
The media ranked second in the sources of education and upbringing (31%) from the students' perspective. This finding sheds the light on the extreme importance of the media in developing programs and creating a real forum for national education that enhances the youth, particularly female political participation. Around one third of the students selected this response; hence, it is worth ensuring that it is well used, and that it broadcasts good programs with suitable information and ideas.

Political parties ranked third at 17% (22% of males and 13% of females). Three conclusions were drawn: the first is that from the students' perspective, there is no link with their role or mission. The political parties and factions play a central role in political education, although it is natural for them to play a unique role in this regard, not only because it is their field of specialization, but also because political upbringing and education is the major responsibility of political parties. The low rate reflects the extent to which the students feel such a role. The second is that the females' point of view towards the role of political parties as a source of education is even lower, possibly explained by the lack of attention of political parties to females. The third is that the perception of political parties as sources of education is higher among Gaza Strip students than the West Bank.

The political parties and factions are required to seriously reconsider their roles in social shaping, focus more on females and the West Bank, and boost their mobilization efforts.

The role of religious and other institutions in political education was marginal at 3% (3.0% for males and 2% for females). The positive interpretation of this finding is that religion does not constitute a major factor in the political education of students, and that spiritual doctrines are not confused with political action, thus sparing the Palestinian context further complications. However, even at such a small rate, it is of utmost importance for the parties concerned with political and educational affairs to exert systematic efforts to ensure that the discourse disseminated through these institutions is not fanatic.

Chart 16: The Students' Opinions in the Main Sources of Political Education According to Sex and Region, 2014



Participation in Student Action:

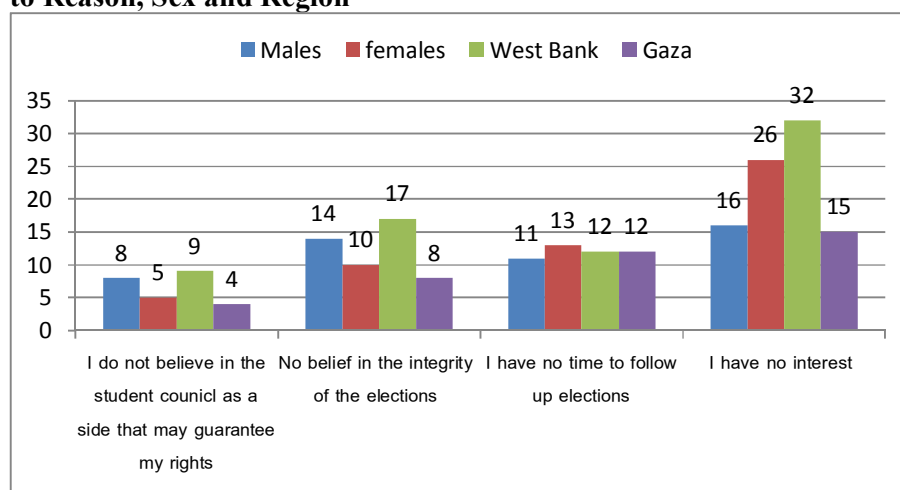
The significantly low rate of female participation in student action that reflects political activity reflects the role that females play in universities and colleges. To identify the possible reasons for such low female participation, one must examine the factors that may either promote or hinder such participation. These may include the bylaws or the general perceptions about the potentials of females, as well as their will. They also include the underlying cultural, economic and systemic reasons, the organizational obstacles, and the trust given to females to prove themselves through the available opportunities.

The engagement in student action affects political participation since the student movements focus on political activities rather than other activities, such as academic, social, cultural and other. This indicates that student activists are usually political activists. Around 26% of students said that they considered themselves student activists (35% of males and 20% of females). The rates also differed between the West Bank (30%) and Gaza Strip (23%). The low rate of female activism in student action and consequently in political action is obvious in the role that females play at universities. A thorough examination of the reasons for such low rate of participation requires examining the factors that may promote or hinder such participation.

These may include the bylaws or the general perceptions about the potentials of females, as well as their will. They also include the underlying cultural, economic and systemic reasons, the organizational obstacles, and the trust given to females to prove themselves through the available opportunities. These rates are in line with a major student activity, namely the student council elections. During the last elections, the rate of participation reached 48% (55% of males and 42% of females). The student movements and political organizations have the responsibility of scrutinizing the situation. On one hand, the existing gap between student activists and those who participate in elections is almost double, which leaves a wide room for attracting part of them to actively engage in student action. On the other hand, the rate of participation in the general student elections is low. The rate may seem normal in comparison

with other areas, such as the trade unions or even the presidential or legislative elections inside and outside Palestine. However, the student life is usually more vibrant and enjoys higher levels of participation with several positive attributes compared to other areas. Regarding female participation in elections, the findings are in line with the general trend of female engagement, available opportunities and preferred methods. To shed light on certain positive aspects, the vast majority (around 92%) of the students who participated in the last student council elections at their universities and colleges believe that voting is a right of male and female students. Membership in student blocs and movements, the need for student councils and considering participation in elections equivalent to provision of academic, financial and union-related services to the students who needs them fall within the same framework. Although there was a small rate of students who participated in elections for minor motives such as their friendship with candidates or for small personal gains, the rate of females with such motives was less than males. A set of reasons were identified to explain the rate of 52% who refrained from participating in the last student council elections (45% of males and 58% of females)⁹. The reasons were mostly the lack of interest in electing a student body and refraining and lack of interest mostly among females (over a quarter) and in the West Bank (around a third) in comparison with males in the Gaza Strip. Around 12% refrained because of lack of time. Low rates of male and female students (around 6%) do not believe in the need for a student body that advocates student rights.

Chart 17: The Rate of Students Who Did Not Participate in the Last Elections According to Reason, Sex and Region



Usually the rate of student participation in elections is linked to their perceptions about the results or their satisfaction. However, when it turns out that only 30% are satisfied with the results of elections, this warns all concerned parties to reconsider the process. It should be noted that around one third of the students know nothing about the results of the elections, which raises the rate of the satisfied students to around half of those who know the results. A close look at the students who could not tell the results of the last elections revealed that two thirds of Gaza Strip students did not know which made sense since no student council elections were held in most higher education institutions.

⁹ A major reason in Gaza Strip was that student council activity was suspended following the division of the Palestinian political system, which affected the student life too. The data collected about the students' inclinations in Gaza is linked to the restoration of partial activity through forming provisional committees or by other forms.

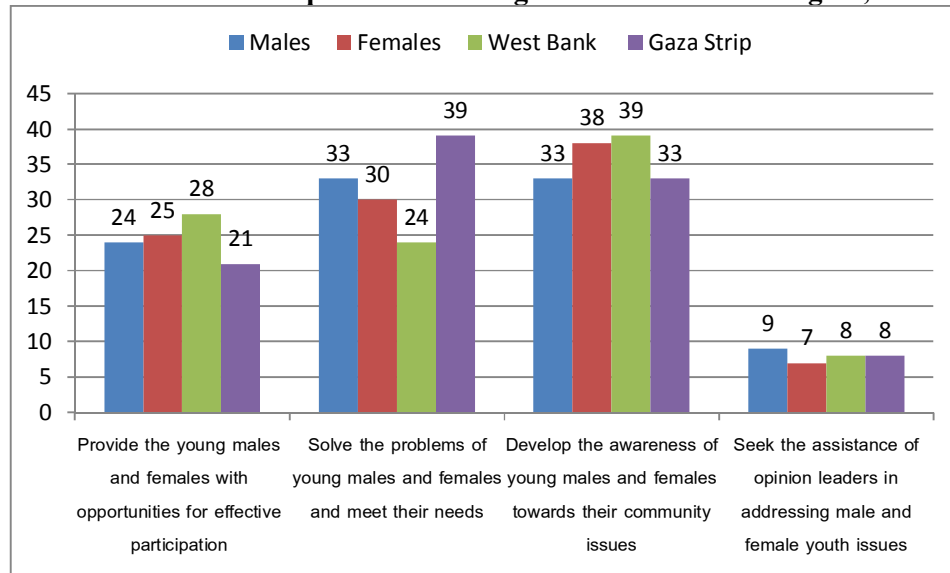
It is necessary to strengthen the trust between the students and the student movements to minimize the gap between the student vanguard and grassroots, through adopting principles of transparency and accountability in program implementation. Such trust is enhanced through providing services to students irrespective of their political affiliation.

The reasons for the students' dissatisfaction with the results of the elections revolve around crucial issues related to procedures, integrity or lack of suitable candidates (although there are of course). Some reasons revolve around partisanship, personal and other interests. However, the crucial matter here is the increased rate of abstention from the democratic process, one of the most substantial manifestations of political participation and a measure for its scale by many standards especially that around 70% of the students agree that the student councils are performing their role, namely providing services to students at universities. This is a positive sign for engaging more students in political action. However, regarding transparency and accountability, around half the students only believe that the student blocs comply with their electoral programs if they win the elections, hence there is room for working to increase trust between students and their movements to minimize the gap between the student vanguard and students at large.

The Factors that Influence the Scale of Political Participation

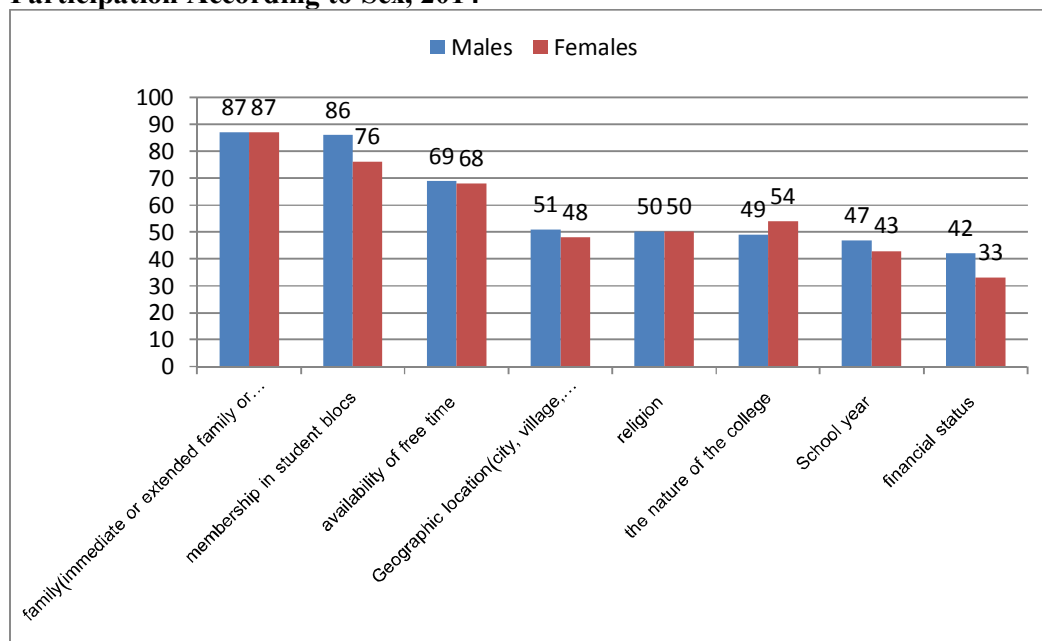
Based on the students' experiences and perceptions, there were differences in the perceptions of males and females towards the main factors for effective youth participation, except for the factor of seeking the assistance of opinion leaders in addressing male and female youth issues, which received 8% only as a factor. A quarter of the students said that providing the youth with the opportunities was the main factor in effective youth participation. The highest rate (36%) went for developing the awareness of young males and females towards community issues. The developmental factor is practically crucial to effective youth participation, followed by the solving the youth problems and meeting their needs, which received around 31%.

Chart 18: The Relative Distribution of the Students' Opinions of the Main Factors for Effective Youth Participation According to the Sex and the Region, 2014



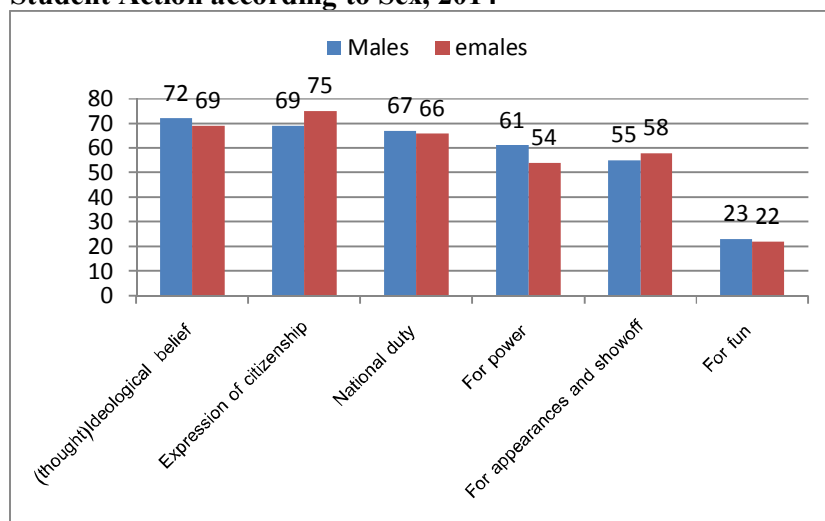
The main factors in the students' political participation became clear. Regarding the main factors that affect the scale of students' political participation, the family (immediate, extended family or the surrounding environment) ranked first at 87.1% of students and negligible differences between males and females, followed by the student blocs at 80.4%, and the availability of free time at 68.3%.

Chart 19: The Student Opinions in the Factors that Identify the Scale of Political Participation According to Sex, 2014



In general, no gender gap exists in the factors that identify the scale of political participation. Despite the importance of the first three factors, other factors were also significant. Each factor had a certain role and they must be perceived as a package that defines the scale of political participation, and which depends on the surrounding environment, personal inclinations, desire, knowledge and beliefs.

Chart 20: The Students' Assessment of their Reasons for Political Participation in Student Action according to Sex, 2014



The university students (irrespective of their participation in political action) clearly believe that political participation in student action is an expression of positive values, despite some aspects related to personal gains. The first three responses were ideology, citizenship and national duty. The responses that reflect personal interests received lower rates. It is natural for young students to seek to find a place to express themselves or to have fun. If we look at the bright side of these responses, they indicate that a significant rate of students is searching for places to have fun. While free time is a double-edged sword, all stakeholders must seek to boost the positive side, rather than push the youth towards negative conduct. Once the youth are engaged, they gradually go through a cumulative educational process that strengthens their belief in their national duty or citizenship, or enables them to acquire ideological beliefs.

Important Factors for Reading the Figures:

- The need to treat the figures and data in this study as mostly perceptions or points of view of students and not necessarily based on conclusive evidence.
- The political division constitutes an influential factor in the views of students and the extent of openness in responding to the questionnaire and expressing their opinions.
- The frustration that students feel towards the political situation is a reflection of the current general situation.
- The general political situation affects the role of university and college administrations in creating an enabling or restraining environment for the students' political participation.
- Despite the positive indicators, the democratic environment in political action is not at its best, and this affects all details of political action in universities and colleges.
- The difficult economic conditions that the Palestinian society suffers from have an impact on the conditions of students.

The Challenges and Potential Obstacles:

- The continued occupation is an obstacle to intellectual and human development of Palestinian citizens.
- The accumulating political frustration and the impasse in political negotiations led the youth to wonder about the use of political action.

- The political division since eight years, and the resulting frustration led to the emergence of a stringent regime that does not promote citizens' rights and wider public participation under various pretexts and excuses that do not accept the other.
- The spread of "pragmatism" among Palestinians who became more willing to participate for personal, rather than public interest.
- Suspending the legislative elections, which constitute the most prominent form of political participation. The minimum age for PLC candidacy is 28 years, which excludes wide sectors of the youth and may limit their participation.
- Youth participation is restricted to voting; they participate neither in formulating political visions and public policies nor in their implementation.
- The absence of full democracy inside the Palestinian political parties and public institutions from the students' perspective.

The Potential Future Interventions:

- Demand that the political leadership removes any practical constraints and all procedures that may inhibit the citizens' particularly the youth's democratic rights of political participation.
- Introduce some legislative reforms to ensure wider youth participation such as reducing the minimum age of candidacy for the legislative elections.
- Invite all political parties and factions to re-consider their political and organizational programs in a manner that enables wider youth participation in their different bodies, including their leadership and decision-making bodies, through introducing democratic reforms to their bylaws.
- Develop bylaws that ensure wider youth participation in decision and policymaking.
- Represent the youth in different oversight bodies that monitor and supervise the implementation of public plans.
- Strengthen the relations between parties and factions on one hand, and youth and student commissions on the other hand, by enabling them to address the youth and student grassroots with attractive work plans that meet their needs and advocate their rights and interests.
- Schedule elections for the suspended university and college student councils, and hold them regularly to ensure developing the skills of young leaders in political action.
- Make use of the information and communication technology (ICT) revolution to develop the factions' tools, methodologies, and programs in a manner that ensures involving the youth in political action.
- Concentrate on spreading and practicing the culture of democracy and accepting the other. Also concentrate on the importance of participation among the youth, and instilling the principle of respect of freedoms.
- Promote the principle of a minimum quota for youth representation in various bodies and frameworks to encourage their political participation.
- Hold seminars, conferences, and lectures to raise the awareness of students towards the importance of political participation.
- Promote dialogue between students on one hand, and party and political leaders on the other hand.
- Encourage the students to participate in expressing their opinions in issues related to their interests and to follow up social events so as they develop naturally and expand their participation until they reach the level of political participation.
- Amend the educational curricula to ensure incorporating principles of democracy and student participation in a manner that enables taking into consideration the students' opinions.
- Expand the opportunity for the students to take interest in political issues as part of student activities at universities.
- Prepare the secondary school students for wider participation at universities and colleges.

Recommendations:

For the Student Movements and Blocs and the Student Councils

- 1- Raise the level of female representation at student councils through developing the applicable quota system. It is possible to benefit from the approach adopted by PLO Central Council, which seeks to increase women representation in political positions up to 30%.
- 2- The clear relationship between political knowledge and political participation requires designing a “knowledge curriculum” within the students’ reading lists or a student package that constitutes part of the university and college students’ knowledge foundation, ensuring gender equality in access to this package.
- 3- The university administration shall contribute to adjusting the methods of designing, implementing and monitoring the implementation of the required community service hours, since these activities contribute to enhancing student participation in public life as a gateway to political participation.
- 4- Reconsider the bylaws of student blocs to include regular lectures/sessions for their supporters and to encourage them on acquiring knowledge and disseminating such knowledge at political debates and specialized seminars on campus. These activities and programs strengthen the students’ academic responsibility and constitute opportunities for students to make use of available free time.
- 5- Coordinate with the university or college administration to identify the required resources and attempt at providing some resources through donors or through allocating part of the returns of some activities or art performances for funding activities aimed at political knowledge and national awareness.
- 6- Innovate in designing extra-curricular activities that attract students rather than adopt conventional methods of conveying knowledge, such as seminars and debates; expand the use of committed art, such as drawing, singing or other forms of art to convey national messages that awaken the students’ thought and deepen their knowledge.
- 7- Produce attractive regular media programs for students, rather than suffice with the use of social media in election campaigns; design a full-fledged plan within a strategic vision for utilizing the different communication and media tools to raise the students’ political knowledge and awareness.
- 8- Develop/activate a code of honor among student blocs that identifies mechanisms for monitoring compliance, and accept arbitration from parties inside the university, such as the teachers associations or the university, college or institute administrations, within the framework of an integrated system that enhances the democratic environment, and contributes to promoting political action inside universities.
- 9- Lobby for activating student councils to play their role and refuse deactivating them through consensus with other parties and based on win-win arrangements.
- 10- Student blocs and councils should not restrict their activities to political and national occasions, but follow up the students’ academic rights and needs, through providing the adequate teaching staff, the required scientific specializations and contribute to resolving various problems with the university administration and any other parties. This should be done based on a complementary and not adversary relation between the students and the administration.

- 11- Promote trust between the students and the student movements through providing services to all students irrespective of their political affiliations, and in a transparent and accountable manner.
- 12- The feeling among students that the student movements do not represent them places a big responsibility on the student blocs to identify what the students want and how they can rectify the relation. This may be partially achieved through establishing a more balanced relation with male and female students and giving the female students the feeling that their interests and ambitions are represented just like males students.
- 13- Adopt social, academic and political conduct that assures students that participation in political action does not cause trouble but rather contributes to developing a knowledgeable, patriotic, conscious and strong personality. This may enhance the participation of both sexes.
- 14- Female students constitute a major part, sometimes even more than half of the students. They must be involved in making, rather than merely implementing decisions, through providing them with the opportunity to participate in decision-making and policy-formulation in student blocs and councils.
- 15- Exert pressure through student action to introduce new blood continuously to the leaderships of political organizations, student councils, specialized committees and others, since these contribute to disseminating a culture that considers the youth's interests and practically contributes to capacity building.

The University or Institute

- 16- Revise the general education requirement courses, especially those that provide the students with general knowledge, particularly in political and civic affairs, with the participation of the student political activists and the national factions in general.
- 17- Increase the students' theoretical knowledge through engaging them in practice. There may be a need to reconsider the required number of community service hours or the quality of accepted activities and mechanisms of monitoring their implementation.
- 18- Strengthen the role of the university media (newsletter, website, educational portals, etc...) with the participation of students, which may be considered part of their community service.
- 19- Expand the margin of freedoms for non-academic student activities, including the time and the necessary facilities, such as meeting rooms, presentation tools and others.
- 20- Allocate a special budget as a percentage of tuition fees for developing extra-curricular activities that spread political knowledge and national consciousness.

- 21- Organize regular meetings for the trade unions on campus to discuss joint action and benefit from the students' potential that may contribute to developing the work at universities.
- 22- Set up continuous channels of communications between students and universities to promote the culture of dialogue and agree on broad lines of action that evolves on an on-going basis.
- 23- Write, in cooperation with student blocs, general guidelines for the faculty that focuses on using the language of unity and the sense of national responsibility, avoiding the narrow partisan language that drives students away from political bodies (in addition to other damages resulting from such factionalism).

The Media

- 24- Examine the possibility of developing the best possible awareness, educational programs, and methods that contribute to raising the youths' political awareness and education.
- 25- Seek the assistance of the youth (students and non-students) for ideas to develop media programs that respond to their needs.

National and Political Factions

- 26- Contribute to providing the media with appropriate material for use in programs rather than only interviews and talk shows that are not sufficient for disseminating and accumulating knowledge.
- 27- Play a role in evaluating the performance of the media in spreading national education and political awareness.
- 28- Provide the universities with sufficient copies of their publications and books that constitute part of national education; spread the news about their availability in cooperation with student movements and blocs, through either unconventional book fairs or other "marketing" activities of reading lists that increase knowledge.
- 29- Follow up the re-election of student councils in coordination with the student blocs, the government through the concerned ministry, the factional national coordination commission, and university/college administrations to contribute to creating a democratic atmosphere and defuse political tension at educational institutions.
- 30- Work seriously to build female leaders and decision-makers in factions so that they constitute role models for the student movements and councils as well as for the official institution. The factions should not rely on existing female members, but make a deliberate effort to attract new groups of females, even with limited experience or knowledge, and build their capacities and expertise through training.

- 31- The factions, with the assistance of civil society organizations, shall assume the responsibility of disseminating a community culture that promotes the political participation of females, through the female protection and support programs inside the family, the university, the street, and the society.
- 32- Many students believe that the leaderships of national factions are not young, and are skeptical towards their ability to represent the youths' ambitions in their programs, methodologies, approaches, and future visions. Hence, the factions must take the necessary measures to respond to the youths' needs and means of meeting them.
- 33- Stop treating the public (in this case the students) like votes for elections, depriving them from engagement; they participate initially, but step away later and start looking for alternative interests that are not met with politicians.

The Authority (with the Different Powers)

- 34- Develop the programs of the official media and cooperate with different public and private media outlets to divide the roles and complement each other, particularly in content.
- 35- Contribute to spreading democratic concepts at the legislative, executive, and oversight levels; Avoid violating freedom of opinion/expression and take firm measures against the perpetrators of violations of freedom of opinion and expression.
- 36- Issue binding instructions to resume the elections of student councils, college committees, and specialization councils, which represent the students' unionist and political rights in cooperation with university administrations and national factions.
- 37- Contribute to alleviating the perception that political action leads to trouble, since many students have such concerns and avoid engaging in public action accordingly.
- 38- Work on disseminating a community culture that promotes female participation in public action, rather than succumb to the blind respect to traditions and use them as a pretext to deprive females from their natural role in the society; Take a firm stand against those who violate female rights to public action, including student action. This is linked to the freedom of going out which is guaranteed by the law, without breaking family relations and the structure of the Palestinian society.
- 39- The current legislations on public freedoms, especially the freedom of expression and association is not enough; it requires revisiting to ensure full rights of citizens and mechanisms that guarantee adequate implementation in practice, in a transparent manner and open for public scrutiny.

Appendix: The Findings of Selected Knowledge-Based Questions:

Indicator	Result (Percentage)	
	Males	Females
The rate of students who assess their knowledge of the Palestinian political system as good or excellent	50.6	26.5
The rate of students who know the Palestinian political system	61.0	62.3
The rate of students who know the length of the presidential term in Palestine	76.9	71.2
The rate of students who know the current chairman of the PLO	96.4	94.4
The rate of students who know where the Charter of Independence was declared	79.6	82.8
The rate of students who know the date of the declaration of the Charter of Independence	58.0	51.2
The rate of students who know the number of legislative elections held in Palestine	69.3	66.6
The rate of students who know the number of PLC members in the first term in 1996	41.1	40.6
The rate of students who know the number of PLC members in the second term in 2006	64.9	56.0
The rate of students who know the current PLO position towards the conflict with Israel	87.7	83.4
The rate of students who know the difference between PLO and PNA	57.7	56.7
The rate of students who know when and where the last time that the Palestinian National Council (PNC) convened	36.1	36.5
The rate of students who know the current PNC chairman	17.3	15.1
The rate of students who know the official name of the current Palestinian constitution	29.8	24.8