

Palestinian Elections: Working Out the Modalities

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If implemented, Israel's proposal for elections in the West Bank and Gaza could create new opportunities to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Elections could produce Palestinian representatives with whom Israel is willing to negotiate and, if conducted in a democratic manner, they could also bolster each side's confidence in the good faith of the other. Elections in the territories pose many problems that are unique to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Still, certain lessons gleaned from other international efforts to use elections as a conflict resolution device could facilitate prospective Palestinian elections. A review of the successes and failures of past West Bank elections might also prove instructive.

A successful elections process will require major concessions from both Israel and the Palestinians. Both sides are concerned that the process could develop in a way that jeopardizes their basic interests. If the elections idea is to become a reality, it will probably require a leap of faith by both parties, along with considerable prodding and assurances from the United States. If the elections concept is accepted in principle, negotiations will proceed on election modalities. While no blueprint exists for conducting free and fair elections, certain basic standards regarding political freedom, voter and candidate eligibility and campaign environment must be adhered to. In the case of elections in the territories, some form of international monitoring should also be viewed as critical to the success of the process.

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