

# WHY THE HECK SHOULD I VOTE?

Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem are not allowed to participate in Israel's general elections, but they are allowed to vote in Jerusalem's municipal elections. The vast majority do not vote, choosing to reject the legitimacy of the regime. A Palestinian woman has second thoughts.

Why the heck should I vote? In their elections? Crazy.

You know they don't let me vote in their national elections, right? They let me vote in the local elections—big whoop. Why should I care about voting for the mayor of Jerusalem if I can't vote for the prime minister of the whole country?

I'm a Palestinian. Born in Al Quds—Jerusalem to you—in the house my great-great-grandfather built. Many, many years before the Jews came and told me it was their homeland, not mine. Years before they gave Hebrew names to neighborhoods in Jerusalem that already had names. Years before they came waving “democracy” as an excuse for taking over my land, my country, my city.

And now you expect me to vote? It would be like someone invading my house and giving me a choice about what kind of milk to put in the fridge. I don't care about the milk—get out of my house!



Look, between us, that analogy doesn't completely work. Of course I would care about what milk to put in the fridge. I'm lactose-intolerant.

Same with voting in the Jerusalem elections. However much I hate this system, it would be great to have a say on how my city should be run. If all of us Palestinians chose to vote in the local elections, we'd be able to get them to fix our terrible roads, and finally clear the garbage. Maybe they'd stop demolishing our houses when we build them after they don't give us permits.

I work in schools as an educational psychologist. There are 370 of us in all of Jerusalem, but only thirty-seven in all of the Palestinian side of the city. I'm rushed off my feet and never feel like I've given my clients enough time or attention. If we all voted, we could change that. Right now I'm paying all my taxes to them but not getting to tell them what to do with the money. It's crazy.

But then if I vote, I'm telling them that their system is fine. If I voted I'd be telling them that I'm not a Palestinian anymore. I'd be giving up who I am. Who we are. What they are.

I don't know what to do . . .





## GUIDING QUESTIONS

- What should she do?
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## BACKGROUND

In 1967, in the Six-Day War that Israel fought against Jordan, Syria, and Egypt, Israel conquered land, including that which is today called East Jerusalem. This war is perhaps most famous for the Israeli recapturing of the Temple Mount, including the Western Wall. As a result of this war, Israel redrew its borders, which included taking control of East Jerusalem (all the areas to the right of the green dotted line in the above map.)

The Palestinian people who lived in East Jerusalem at that time were given permanent residency status in Israel. That is, they were not granted citizenship in Israel, but they—and their children and grandchildren—were given all the rights, responsibilities, and services of Israeli citizens, except for two: they were not required to serve in the Israeli army and they could not vote in the general elections. They were, however, permitted to vote in the municipal Jerusalem elections.

The lives of these some 330,000 residents have been impacted greatly by the local political and practical situation of the city in which they live. They are required to pay taxes, and they receive municipal services, including education, water, health, etc. Critics of Israeli policy point to the poor living conditions in much of East Jerusalem, saying that the Jerusalem municipality

is not living up to its end of the bargain, as it does not provide equal services to East Jerusalem residents.

In 2018, FP ([foreignpolicy.com](http://foreignpolicy.com)) reported as follows:

“Jihan, 39, who works for a Palestinian human rights organization and spoke on the condition that her name be changed to protect her anonymity, told FP that the ‘Palestinian Authority has always said that we should forgo the struggle for a better standard of living and our civil rights, because it would mean legitimizing the Israeli occupation.’”

But, she argued, “The Palestinian Authority hasn’t done anything for us, either. They use Jerusalem as a symbol to maintain their position in the Arab world as the defenders of the holy city. But they don’t care about us, the real people who live here and love this city.” She was so fed up that she decided to vote in the municipal elections.

“East Jerusalemites are schizophrenic,” Jihan explained. “Palestinians on the West Bank resent us because we have benefits and options that they don’t have. Palestinians who live in Israel and have full citizenship think of us as West Bankers. And we’re certainly not Israelis. Voting could be a way forward, because we Jerusalemites have to fend for ourselves.”

In 2013, Daniel Seidemann, the director of Terrestrial Jerusalem, reported that less than 1 percent of eligible Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem voted, and in 2018 the number was lower than 3 percent. Recently, a few Palestinian East Jerusalem residents took another step, and decided to run for city council and even for mayor. However, after pressure against them and even violence from Palestinians who oppose their participation in normalizing Israeli control, these candidates dropped out of the race.



## QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION

- Are you the kind of person to fight from within a system, or do you choose to fight it from without?
  - Would you say that someone's inclination to fight a system depends on external circumstances, or their personality?
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## THOUGHTS TO RETURN TO AFTER A NIGHT'S SLEEP

- 1 I wish I'd said ...
- 2 That idea I rejected, now that I think about it ...
- 3 That whole conversation reminded me of ...