



## CASE STUDY

# Observers Oversee Historic Vote

### Grassroots effort mobilizes Palestinians to take ownership of election



Photo: Yusef Abu-Eljedian, Tamkeen

A Palestinian woman cast her vote at a Gaza polling station on January 9, 2005.

***On election day, civil society organizations were present at 80 percent of the 1,000-plus polling centers set up in Palestinian cities, towns, villages and refugee camps.***

### Challenge

Dire economic conditions, lack of security and a history of government corruption are realities of life in the West Bank and Gaza, making the practice of democracy particularly challenging. Most Palestinians are preoccupied with making ends meet and navigating the complexities of an environment fraught with political instability, restrictions on movement and sporadic violence. In such a context, setting the stage for a free and fair electoral process is daunting at best — even more so given that presidential elections are new to the Palestinian people.

### Initiative

In the lead-up to the presidential elections of January 9 — the first since Yasser Arafat's death and the second ever — USAID provided \$16 million in grants to almost 100 Palestinian organizations to strengthen civil society and promote democracy. The project trained 118 community leaders from 60 organizations, who then organized and fielded hundreds of domestic election observers, including prominent numbers of youths and women. USAID also funded awareness-building campaigns to educate voters on their rights and responsibilities, the basics of the election process, and the candidates' platforms — all in a non-partisan way.

### Results

On election day, civil society organizations were present at 80 percent of the 1,000-plus polling centers set up in Palestinian cities, towns, villages and refugee camps. Three thousand observers were fielded in the West Bank, 2,000 in Gaza. Observers who received adequate training were more engaged and active than those who did not, asking questions, taking notes, completing questionnaires and, in some cases, helping to resolve issues between voters and election officials. The grassroots participation in the election observation effort demonstrated democracy in action, giving Palestinians a sense of ownership over the conduct and outcome of the vote. With USAID support, the organizations involved in the election observation are drawing on what they learned to become neutral watchdogs over the emerging democratic process.

### Telling Our Story

U.S. Agency for International Development  
Washington, DC 20523-1000  
<http://stories.usaid.gov>