FIRST PERSON
Putting an End to Illegal Campaigning

An observer ensures a free and fair vote at the Jabalia polling station

Photo: Tamkeen

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On January 9, the day Palestinians took to the polls to elect a new leader, Mu'taz Abu-Eljedian, a 23-year-old computer programmer and volunteer election observer, put an end to illegal campaigning at a Gaza polling station.

Mu'taz learned how to monitor elections from an organization that received training from USAID on election observation. As he was watching the voting process at a polling station in Jabalia refugee camp, Mu'taz noticed people pursuing voters and asking them to cast their ballots for a specific candidate — a practice forbidden by Palestinian electoral rules.

Mu'taz filed a complaint with the polling station manager, who asked Palestinian police to intervene. Two policemen stepped in and asked anyone engaged in campaigning activities to exit the polling station. They did, and voting proceeded without a hitch.

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USAID trained nearly 120 observers from 13 organizations on how to mount election observation campaigns — from the basics of training and fielding monitors to the complex procedures that should be observed. In turn, they trained hundreds of grassroots volunteers who fanned out across polling stations in the West Bank and Gaza to monitor the voting process.