

Factsheet

Anti-Discrimination Index (ADI) in Palestinian Universities

(Arab-American University – Jenin, Palestine University – Gaza)

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Factsheet on the Results of the Anti-Discrimination Index (ADI) in Palestinian Universities
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Discrimination Index Portal: <http://adi.miftah.org>



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Introduction:

Political participation is considered one of the most significant topics for Palestinian universities, not only because they are venues for information and knowledge, but because it is imperative that they act as a crucible of political maturity and awareness. These can then be translated into actual practices on and off university campuses, particularly political action as a means of expressing the future aspirations of their students, both male and female. Hence, the knowledge and information amassed by students through political participation and social, political and cultural events must be invested in, to reflect their sense of social responsibility on issues in their community and their mutual concerns and to then find the reasons for these issues and creative solutions to them.

There are 132,586 female students in Palestinian universities , or 62%, compared to 82,179 male students in universities and higher education institutes in Palestine, in 2021-2022. Political participation for female students is extremely important, as is public life within university campuses, both which have significant impacts on the achievement of sustainable development goals. Nonetheless, statistical data indicates that the level of political participation among female students still faces several hindrances in Palestinian universities. Data from the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research points to a gap in favor of male students, regarding who holds the Student Council chairs at Palestinian universities, with males

comprising 88% and females only 12%. This percentage was higher only at the Palestine Technical University – Khodori, at 66.6%, in three student councils, and 50% in two student councils at the Islamic University.

This factsheet highlights the most significant results of a MIFTAH study entitled, “Political Participation of Female Students in Palestinian Universities and Influencing Factors”, using the quantitative survey approach. The study sample is comprised of students from the American University in the West Bank and the Palestine University in the Gaza Strip, enrolled in the 2021-2022 academic year. A sample was chosen of 410 students (200 males and 210 females) and data was collected during the period of 10/11/2022 to 21/11/2022. For this purpose, MIFTAH designed a questionnaire to measure areas of discrimination and highlight gaps at the level of political, social, economic and cultural rights of students at Palestinian universities, particularly female students, which stymie their participation in public and political life. The research participants were asked to answer the following:

- 1)The factors that influence female students’ participation in university public life.
- 2)The factors that influence the participation of female students In student councils, clubs and student activities.
- 3)To specify the level of support for female students’ participation in public life.

4) To specify the economic, political and cultural rights provided by the university.

The questionnaire also included five sections on the demographic data of students at the two universities: gender, place and area of residence, and social status. Researchers used statistical tables for percentages after extracting frequencies.

Proportional distribution of students' responses on the participation of women in public life in universities (student councils, department clubs, activities, festivals, debates, symposiums...)

Table (1)

Statement	Agree	Neutral	Don't Agree	Don't Know
The university provides the necessary space for women to participate in public life	73%	9%	16%	2%
Women's participation in public life is impacted by the provision of a better environment for students in terms of accessing and obtaining services	79%	10%	10%	2%
Women's participation in public life is impacted by the extent of a democratic environment for all university students	74%	12%	11%	2%
Women's participation in public life depends on factional affiliation at university	25%	10%	54%	11%
Women's participation in public life depends on societal culture based on family, tribal and religious references	64%	15%	19%	2%
Women's participation in public life depends on female students' leadership personalities and cultural awareness at university	81%	5%	11%	2%

The figures shown in Table 1 point to several factors that influence the participation of female students in public life. Personal hindrances and cultural awareness among the students came in first place, (81%), followed by family, tribal and religious hindrances in second, 64% and factional affiliation in third place, 25%. It is noteworthy that factional affiliation fell to last place as the factor most influencing women students' participation in all aspects of public life, can be linked to the results of a 2018 study (Kathem). The study confirms that individuals are not aware of the objectives behind the establishment or parties or even the practical objectives of the election process, evidenced in only 25% of the sample who agreed to the influence of this factor.

Proportional distribution of students' answers about female students' participation in university life (student councils department clubs, activities, festivals, debates, symposiums...) according to the university variable.

Table (2)

Statement		Agree	Neutral	Don't Agree	Don't Know
The university provides the necessary space for women to participate in public life	PU	75%	11%	12%	1%
	AAU	75%	7%	20%	3%
Women's participation in public life is impacted by the provision of a better environment for students in terms of accessing and obtaining services	PU	77%	12%	9%	2%
	AAU	80%	8%	10%	1%
Women's participation in public life is impacted by the extent of a democratic environment for all university students	PU	69%	16%	12%	2%
	AAU	80%	8%	10%	2%
Women's participation in public life depends on factional affiliation at university	PU	18%	6%	64%	11%
	AAU	32%	14%	44%	10%
Women's participation in public life depends on societal culture based on family, tribal and religious references	PU	64%	18%	17%	1%
	AAU	64%	12%	21%	3%
Women's participation in public life depends on female students' leadership personalities and cultural awareness at university	PU	75%	9%	15%	1%
	AAU	86%	3%	8%	3%

The results indicate the focus of women's participation of public life at university (student councils department clubs, activities, festivals, debates, symposiums...). According to the university variation, the percentages of respondents who agreed to the majority of statements pertaining to this point are close and did not exceed 11% in the best of cases, with the exception of the statement: "Women's participation in public life depends on factional affiliation at university". 18% of students at the Palestine University agreed to this statement in comparison to 32% of Arab-American University students, with a difference of 14%.

Proportional distribution of students' responses regarding women's participation in student councils, clubs and student activities.

Table (3)

Statement	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Don't Know
The university provides the necessary space for women to participate in student councils	55%	13%	22%	10%
Women's participation in student council elections impacts the percentage of voting in electoral lists	67%	8%	16%	9%
Women's participation in student council elections depends on factional affiliation	33%	11%	43%	13%
The public discourse within universities is supportive of women's participation in student councils and student activities	61%	16%	17%	6%
Community culture in universities is discriminatory against women's participation in student councils and student clubs	31%	9%	55%	6%
The prevalent student mentality at universities is untrusting of women's ability to participate in electoral debates and campaigns	35%	12%	48%	5%
The limited number of women in leadership positions in student councils and clubs is due to their weak character	28%	8%	60%	4%
The limited number of women in leadership positions in student councils and clubs is due to their lack of interest in public affairs	40%	12%	42%	6%
The classifications of city, village, camp, Bedouin community, etc. constitute a discriminatory factor against women in their participation in political life in universities	43%	9%	45%	4%
Women reaching leadership centers in student councils and clubs depends on the women's strength of character and their leadership qualities	84%	6%	8%	1%

In regards to the participation of female students in student councils, clubs and student activities, the results showed that 67% of male and female students polled are aware of the impact of female students' participation on the percentage of votes pertaining to student council electoral lists. However, the students' responses to the other indicators reveals the ambiguity of this awareness, whereby 55% and 61% of both male and female respondents agreed on the provision of a democratic and supportive environment for women's participation. They also agreed that public discourse in university social circles is supportive of women's participation in student councils and student activities. Furthermore, only 33% agreed that factional affiliation influences female students' participation in student council elections, as opposed to 43% who disagreed with this statement. The results also confirm the ambiguity of this awareness and its misalignment with the literature reviewed, which point to the influence of factional affiliation on the limited participation of female students in student councils. Also, a comparison of these results with the gap in female student representation (32%) as opposed to male students (68%) in student councils in Palestine, is evidence that their responses are not associated with the reality of women's low participation, due to several reasons that must be studied in a qualitative research that offers an in-depth examination of their political awareness.

In regards to the factors that influence female students reaching leadership positions, strength of character and leadership skills came in first place (84%), followed by their lack of interest in public affairs, at (40%). It is noteworthy

that the factor most seemingly impactful on female students' participation in various fields of political participation is their strength of character, in comparison with other factors, which might also play a key role in hindering their political participation. For example, the lax roles of various political parties in bolstering female students' participation in the political process and creating a democratic atmosphere.

Proportional distribution of students' responses regarding support for women's participation in public life

Table (4)

Statement	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Don't Know
I support raising the percentage of women's participation in public life at university	82%	6%	11%	0%
I give the necessary moral and informational support to encourage women to participate in public life in my personal surroundings (family, friends)	80%	8%	10%	1%
I give the necessary moral and informational support to encourage women to participate in public life in public spaces (student councils, clubs, student cultural and sports activities)	80%	8%	10%	2%
My support for women's participate in public life depends on my personal convictions	81%	8%	9%	1%
My support for women's participation in public life at university depends on my faction	17%	9%	70%	4%
My support for women's participation in public life at university depends on women's ability to impact social, economic and political policies	82%	7%	9%	2%

In regards to the viewpoints of respondents and their support for women's participation, the study concluded that the majority of those polled, (82%) support increasing the percentage of women's participation in university public life. Moreover, 80% said they supported offering moral and informational support to encourage women to participate in public life in their private surroundings (family and friends) or within public spaces (student councils, clubs, student sports and cultural activities). At another level, their agreement to support female students' participation was associated with the extent of their influence on social, economic and political policies, which came in first place (82%). Personal convictions of the participants came in second place, (81%) and in third were religious and familial references, at (51%). The factional point of reference came in fourth place, with a noticeable difference, at 44%, compared to the religious and familial reference, at a difference of over 60% compared to their ability to influence policies or compared to personal convictions.

Proportional distribution of students' responses regarding economic, social and cultural rights

Table (5)

Statement	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Don't Know
The university provides suitable health services that meet the needs of all student sectors	52%	10%	36%	2%
University buildings and facilities are suitable and meet the needs of all student sectors	65%	9%	25%	1%
The cost of credit hours influences the academic choices of students according to their economic situation	90%	1%	7%	2%
The privatization goods and services inside the university is discriminatory against limited-income students	70%	6%	19%	6%
There are discriminatory practices against female students in receiving educational services (blackmail, harassment, assault...)	44%	13%	30%	13%
My support for women's participation in sports and cultural events at the university depends on their influence on public opinion on campus	80%	8%	10%	2%

In regards to the discriminatory gaps pertaining to economic, social and cultural rights within Palestinian universities, the study concluded that students are subject to discrimination in universities, mostly when it comes to the cost of credit hours and the impact this has on the academic choices of the students, according to their economic situation, which came in first place (90%). It should be noted that there are no noticeable differences between the responses from students of either gender (90% females and 91% males). As for the policy of privatization of goods and services at universities as being discriminatory against limited-income students, this came in second place (70%), while discriminatory practices against female students in receiving educational services came third, at 44%. These gaps, especially those pertaining to economic rights, could be considered as hindrances to the political participation of individuals.

Recommendations:

Developing awareness of political, social and economic rights

- Developing the awareness of male and female students on the importance of political participation in public life in Palestinian universities and especially in student council elections, given its positive ramifications on their future.
- Developing a capacity-building program in various life skills, including transformation leadership skills, to enable students of both genders to assume leadership positions in student councils.
- Preparing awareness programs for students in the fields of equality and social justice so they can know their social, economic and political rights.
- Working to change the political culture, particularly among female students themselves; encouraging their political participation in public life in Palestinian universities and bolstering their capabilities to form alliances with various parties in order to impact public opinion in universities to the benefit of all students.
- Developing a training manual using the positive model approach to highlight the image of female students as leaders, feature successful experiences and also specify points of strength and potentials that create influence towards change at the individual and also familial, university and social levels.

Policies and procedures.

- Preparing a qualitative study to fill the cognitive gap regarding social, political and economic hindrances, which hamper female students' participation in student councils, clubs and cultural activities from the viewpoint of the students themselves, both male and female; producing policy papers and presenting them to relevant parties to develop policies that encourage students on political participation.
- Working to open channels of communication with the student affairs departments at universities to encourage young women to engage in student activities by registering student council involvement as volunteer community hours.
- Giving the opportunity to students to form forums through university student councils to discuss the issues, concerns and challenges facing students economically, socially and politically. This in order to implement campaigns led by the students themselves to pressure decision-makers in educational institutions, which is considered one form of political participation aimed at generating change.
- Opening channels of communication with student affairs departments in universities to encourage female students to engage in student action; also reviving joint student activities that include all student blocs and promoting a culture of dialogue between them. This has positive ramifications on effective student communication, which in turn reflect on the provision of quality and appropriate health,

- academic, economic and social services that meet the needs of all student sectors of both genders.
- Establishing an institute for female student leaders inside universities to offer a more in-depth understanding to students on the foundations and importance of political action and democratic practices, the objective of which is to create an overall and supportive atmosphere for female students in student councils. It will also train them on the basics for selecting candidates according to specific criteria such as: factional affiliation, electoral platforms, the character and capabilities of candidates to offer services, in addition to offering students alliance-building skills and obtaining the support of effective parties in decision-making or influential positions.

Parties

- Pressuring political parties to commit to supporting a 30% representation of female students in student councils and electoral lists and in the periodical heading of lists and campaigns.
- Building bridges of communication at the decision-making levels within political parties and female students in Palestinian universities, in order to increase their awareness to the importance of their political participation and public life on campuses.