

# THE PALESTINIAN BOYCOTT OF ISRAELI MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS IN JERUSALEM: POLITICS OF IDENTITY, LEGITIMACY, AND CIVIL RESISTANCE

Ieva Gailiunaite

Electoral boycotts are a form of civil resistance rooted in the refusal to accept the political status quo, and this is particularly notable in the East Jerusalem Palestinian boycott of Israeli municipal elections since 1967. The municipal boycott in Jerusalem has been studied as a part of wider analyses of Palestinian resistance to Israeli occupation. The situation has been presented to be a result of passivity, disillusionment, and path dependency, or depicting East Jerusalemite Palestinians as the hostages of the political impasse within the region. This dissertation argues for the centrality of the boycott as a long-term movement that reinforces Palestinian identity, legitimacy, and agency within Jerusalem. It demonstrates that long-term identity-based factors are more important than short-term civil and material ones. Concepts of a Palestinian East Jerusalemite identity within a divided city show the importance of the boycott in maintaining agency within the city, without legitimising Israeli occupation. The role of pressure from political actors on both the Palestinian and Israeli sides is evaluated in their influence on the boycott. The steadfastness of the boycott by a third of the voting population in Jerusalem demonstrates the importance of the city's Palestinian inhabitants and their active role from the heart of the issue within the wider scope of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

## SECTION ONE: INTRODUCTION AND METHOD

### INTRODUCTION

The city of Jerusalem is a unique place where thousands of years of history, religion, and politics have intertwined and often clashed. It is held to be one of the holiest cities for all three Abrahamic religions and is the contested capital of the homeland of both Palestinian and Jewish people. In the last 150 years, the Holy Land has acquired even more political salience due to a conflict arising between the Jewish people, who claim it as their historical homeland, and the local Palestinians. Jerusalem has found itself in the eye of this hurricane. The historical and contextual situation is introduced to understand the complexity of the issue in answering the research question of why East Jerusalem Palestinians refuse to vote in Israeli municipal elections in Jerusalem.

Throughout the last century, sovereignty over the city has been held by different political entities, from the British Mandate 1918-1948, a divided East and West Jerusalem between Jordan and Israel respectively between 1948-1967 and finally its current status quo as a divided city unilaterally annexed by the State of Israel after the 1967 war (Dumper 1997; Altayli 2013). According to the State of Israel, Jerusalem has been declared the capital of Israel, although this is contested by international law under the Fourth Geneva Convention (Altayli 2013, 43). The eastern part of the city, as divided by the Green Line, is predominantly inhabited by the local Arab Palestinian population, while the western part by the Jewish population (see fig 1.) (Dumper

Ieva Gailiunaite is a recent graduate of Social Anthropology and Politics from the University of Edinburgh. Originally from Lithuania, she is now working in East Jerusalem.

1997, 37). This is contested, with numerous Jewish settlements encroaching into the eastern part of the city.

Political actors from both the Israeli and Palestinian sides deem Jerusalem as one of the key non-negotiable issues, and thus the status of the city has often been the cause of a breakdown of peace negotiations (Altayli 2013, 32). Furthermore, several religious and social organizations hold stakes in the fate of the city and their respective Holy places, namely, the Muslim Awqaf Administration, various Christian Patriarchates, and the Jewish orthodox and ultra-orthodox communities (Dumper 1997, 174). Therefore, a complicated social and political horizon arises, setting the scene for this dissertation.

The divisions within the city reflect the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, where de facto occupied local peoples of Palestine are in confrontation with the State of Israel and their policies. To further elucidate this, the civil and political status of East Jerusalemites is outlined. This highlights the importance of historical and social context in examining the research question of municipal election boycott. Since the 1967 war, which is the timeframe of focus for this dissertation, the occupation of the city east of the Green Line resulted in the creation of a new “East Jerusalem” identity within the Israeli national framework. Israel tried to incorporate the local Palestinian population, realizing that since its annexation, the Jerusalem under Israeli control was also predominantly “a Muslim city, a Palestinian Christian city and an Arab city” (Dumper 1997, 23). Upon the 1967 incorporation of East Jerusalem into Israel, the approximately 65,000 Palestinians living within the new borders were offered Israeli citizenship (Dumper 1997, 48). Only 1% of that number accepted it, as this required the forfeiting of Jordanian passports, which they had held since 1947. Consequently, the local Palestinians in East Jerusalem were given non-citizen permanent resident status, received Israeli identity cards, and were offered the right to vote in municipal elections (Dumper 1997, 48).

Focusing on the issue of East Jerusalem Palestinians participating in their local governance helps to pinpoint some of the issues behind this geopolitical conundrum. Since 1967, they have almost overwhelmingly chosen to boycott the local



Fig 1. Map of East and West Jerusalem after the 1967 War (Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs, 2002).

municipal elections as a way to protest against their lives under occupation, as well as refusing to legitimize Israeli sovereignty over them (Altayli 2013, 50). A number of challenges and questions arise from their stance, which leads to the research question of why this choice is consistently made. The paper is structured accordingly. Section two will present an overview of the main literature and concepts, such as divided cities and identity politics within the Palestinian–Israeli conflict and the issue of Jerusalem. It will provide insight into the demographic and political circumstances within the city since 1967, as these aspects will then help in the analysis of why the boycott is taking place. Section three analyzes the question from the perspective of legitimacy and identity politics within East Jerusalem, outlining its status and relationship with Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt). Deliberate political inaction as a long-term political tactic will be juxtaposed against ideas of short-term local material and civil improvement. This supports the argument that long-term identity-related factors are more important, demonstrated by the fact that there has not been a significant change in voter turnout since 1967. Section four argues that while there are significant historical and contemporary pressures from political actors on both the Palestinian and Israeli sides to continue the boycott, they lack significant power to influence it. The role of East Jerusalemite Palestinian identity accounts more for the long-term steadfastness of the boycott. Section five summarizes these arguments, ultimately concluding that the boycott remains an effective resistance movement due to factors such as identity politics, resistance to occupation, and local disillusionment with democratic processes. It shows the choice to play the “long game,” as opposed to giving up their identity for short-term economic and material gain, which would result in a political loss of footing within Jerusalem, a crucial locus of the national struggle.

Jerusalem is one of the most contested areas of land within the Palestinian–Israeli conflict (Altayli 2013, 188; Khalidi 2010, xviii; Kroll-Zeldin 2014, 113) and between different religious leaders and pilgrims, making it a unique case to study politically. The role of elections and their effect on self-determination, quality of life, sovereignty, and identity are pertinent issues to analyze. This boycott is particularly interesting as it stands out against other electoral boycotts in the world, as the latter tends to occur on an election-by-election basis, carried out by opposition parties (Beaulieu 2014 in Blake et al. 2018). Further, this refusal and its changing trends over time can be examined and help to evaluate the political as well as social situation in the ever-changing conflict.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This dissertation uses library-based secondary research for its analysis. As the issue of Palestinian boycott in Israeli municipal elections is a political one and is intertwined with the wider Arab–Israeli conflict, it is especially pertinent to be reflexive of the sources used. The dissertation analyses the causes of the boycott but is aware of the political undercurrent present in the scholarly literature about such a polarizing topic

(Khalidi 2010; al-Jubeih 2017). The analysis is limited to works in the English language, thus omitting literature in Hebrew and Arabic. The use of sources in these languages would provide deeper insight and highlight the divisions of opinion on either side of the conflict. The speculative nature of some reports, in the form of policy recommendations, is noted, and only the relevant data is taken from them. Additionally, the nature of the conflict may skew the methodology when polling in East Jerusalem about issues related to the municipal elections. Khalil Shikaki notes that while the intentions to vote may be true, they may not translate to voting on the day of elections (Seidemann 2018). The advantages of focusing on a singular case study are the ability to concentrate on details and analyze the argument in depth. The importance of history and context within the issue of the Jerusalem municipal boycott lends itself well to a case study analysis. The unique nature of the situation and lack of comparability is also noted, hindering the generalisability of the analysis and its conclusions.

The terms and framework used in this dissertation will be defined and clarified. The case study of the city of Jerusalem, with particular focus on East Jerusalem Palestinians, is chosen due to the exceptional political and social divisions within the city. Further, this municipal boycott is a long-term resistance movement within the framework of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, making it relevant to ongoing studies of the issue in international relations. This paper focuses on a specific timeframe from 1967 until the 2018 municipal election and utilizes mostly qualitative data for analysis. The term “elections” refers to the Israeli municipal elections in Jerusalem, where the mayor and municipal council are elected. Municipal elections are run every five years by the Israeli Ministry of Interior, making the council accountable to the State of Israel (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2013). Boycott, in the case of this dissertation, means the non-participation in Jerusalem’s municipal elections by the East Jerusalemite Palestinians who hold the right to vote. The division between East and West Jerusalem is a blurry one as the Jewish and Palestinian populations are not exclusively divided by it. For the sake of clarity, the Green Line of the 1949 Armistice Agreement will be used to denote the division between the east and west of the city. The political and social vicissitudes within the historic Old City will not be considered due to the scope of this paper, although its Palestinian inhabitants may be counted in some East Jerusalem statistics on voting (Dumper 2002; Seidemann 2012).

It is worthy to note that the ever-changing nature of the conflict makes it difficult to pinpoint the main actors on either side, as fractures within both Israeli and Palestinian sides are numerous and shifting (Crisis Group 2012, 23). In terms of the actors this paper refers to, the main Israeli actors are the government of the state of Israel and the chosen representatives in the Jerusalem municipality. The Arab Palestinian population living in East Jerusalem with the right to vote in municipal elections will be referred to as Palestinian East Jerusalemites. This sample of the population is distinct from West Bank and Gaza Strip Palestinians in the fact that they possess the Jerusalem ID and thus have the right to vote in municipal elections. In terms of Palestinian political actors within East Jerusalem, the matter is more complicated. The area

is part of the Jerusalem Governorate, in the sub-district Jerusalem J-1, and is under the jurisdiction of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) (Pcbs.gov.ps, 2012). This is overlapping with Israeli politics and is disputed after the legal annexation of East Jerusalem by Israel in 1980 (Knesset of Israel, 1980). Thus, the PNA is the main political actor within East Jerusalem, with the PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization) holding historical agency which has been diminished over the past decades. The presence of the two main Palestinian political parties, Fatah and Hamas, is minimal in the city and will be discussed further on (Crisis Group 2012, 23). Therefore, as the actors are numerous and their influence varies in political and social scope, they will be explicitly stated throughout this dissertation.

## **SECTION TWO: DIVIDED CITIES, IDENTITY POLITICS, AND VOTER TURNOUT IN EAST JERUSALEM**

### **RELEVANT LITERATURE AND CONCEPTS**

The question of why East Jerusalemite Palestinians refuse to vote in Israeli municipal elections has been a pertinent one in academia and outside it since 1967. The political and social implications of this situation have been studied from different angles, questioning whether this gives East Jerusalemites agency for change or is another way of legitimizing Israeli occupation. This section will outline the key arguments and theoretical concepts that have been made regarding the political situation within the Holy Land, the city of Jerusalem, and East Jerusalem. This will support the analysis of this dissertation and provide direction to the main research question of why the municipal election is boycotted by a third of the voting population. Factors such as identity-based refusal to accept Israeli rule, political and social pressures, economic inequalities, as well as disillusionment with the municipality and democracy will be drawn out. While the existing literature acknowledges the reasons for this boycott and its relative importance in the resistance movement, it does not place enough emphasis or analysis on this phenomenon. This dissertation argues that the Jerusalem municipal boycott is an important matter to analyze separately and more in-depth as it reflects the Israeli-Palestinian conflict within a singular long-term movement.

Michael Dumper focuses on the political and geographic dominance and encroachment of East Jerusalem by Israeli actors. He argues that this occurs through the blurring of “the concept and practice of Israeli sovereignty” by introducing “incremental change...without provoking overwhelming resistance” (Dumper 1997, 24). He exemplifies the argument with the “tacit anomaly” of granting resident status and right to vote in municipal elections to a de facto occupied population. Effectively, the city is still controlled by Israeli actors, with power over issues such as house demolitions and settlement creation. This argument is further strengthened in his framework of divided cities. Dumper places Jerusalem in a subset of these; as a city whose division comes from ethnic and political conflict at the national level (2013, 1247). Thus, he links this to the boycott in East Jerusalem through a discussion of law and security enforcement within a divided city. It is a city whose stability affects the wider

regional conflict and where claims to legitimacy of the occupying state are explicitly noted. Therefore, the Palestinian refusal to vote in municipal elections demonstrates the lack of legitimacy in certain areas of the city, namely East Jerusalem. Nevertheless, the author argues that instead of granting them agency, this deepens the inequality of the situation as the Palestinians are treated as a threat. Thus, Israel further encroached on the eastern part through settlement creation and increased policing in order to retain control of the divided city (2013, 1263). The framework of divided cities aids in understanding the main question of this dissertation, yet its conclusion diverges from the argument. Dumper's view of the boycott as a pretext for Israeli forces to increase policing and settlement into East Jerusalem, marking its Palestinian inhabitants as politically passive and unable to resist, contrasts with the argument made through this paper. Further analysis will show that the boycott remains a key rallying point for identity, long-term resistance, and a form of agency in East Jerusalem Palestinians.

A more nuanced constructive view is held by Hillel Cohen. He argues that the Palestinian boycott of municipal elections in Jerusalem can be explained by the idea of a distinct Palestinian-Jerusalemite identity, which links to one of the key themes in this dissertation. The author highlights the historical and political importance of Jerusalem, whose identity is shaped by Palestinian and Israeli political processes within the city (Cohen 2011, x). Rashid Khalidi corroborates this stance, by positing that the Palestinian view of Jerusalem is historically interlinked with the city's perceived vulnerability (2010, 36). Since the times of the crusaders, Jerusalem was the holy center of worship for three religions and thus politically salient and constantly threatened by outsiders. Additionally, Cohen details the main contemporary factors that reinforce this identity-based resistance. He focuses on the importance of the annexation and division of the city, Israel's declaration of increasing control and encroachment, the physical barriers separating the city from the rest of the territories, and increased interaction with the Jewish population of Jerusalem (Cohen 2011, xviii). Thus, the Palestinian-Jerusalemite identity embodies a sense of responsibility and can be linked to the present-day steadfastness of the boycott and resistance. These concepts will be used throughout the dissertation as a framework to understand the persistence of the boycott as a symbol of Palestinian identity.

It is noteworthy that these authors discuss the subject of East Jerusalem in juxtaposition with Israeli actions. While this is an appropriate way to look at it, due to the city's occupied status, specific issues within East Jerusalem are also pertinent. The agency wielded by the Palestinian Jerusalemites through the right to vote and choice to refuse is overlooked by the authors. While they provide a coherent introduction to the complex situation within Jerusalem, they do not place enough emphasis on the boycott as unique agency granted to East Jerusalemites to resist the occupation. This drawback within the academic discourse is noted by Khalidi, who demonstrates that Zionism and the conflict with Israel formed only a small part of the construction of Palestinian identity (2010, 17). Even though this clash of identities reinforces their distinctiveness, it is important not to fall trap to seeing the East Jerusalem Palestinian struggle only in reaction to Israeli occupation. This critique links to the main argu-



ment which shows that in the long run, identity and stability are more important than short-term reactions to political changes.

One of the most contemporary papers on this issue can be found in the Rand Corporation's overview of the municipal boycott in Jerusalem. In their paper, a reverse situation to the current status quo is simulated. While the recommendations are speculative in nature and the non-academic and partisan nature of the corporation is noted, the paper provides a concise and up-to-date examination of the East Jerusalemite municipal boycott. They use a combination of Dumper, Cohen, and Khalidi's arguments, suggesting that the choice of boycott "transcends local issues and reaches the plane of national politics and national identity" (Blake et al., 2018, 13). The authors argue that if Palestinians started to vote, there would be different reactions from either side of the conflict. The Israeli government would be pleased with a more robust Palestinian turnout, on condition that it was limited and be used for public relations and not substantial change. The East Jerusalem side would focus on economic and social issues and would only manage to achieve small local level changes within the municipality (2018, xiv). It also provides several explanatory factors for the boycott, which are in line with the literature. For example, they propose the argument that voting would constitute legitimization of Israeli occupation and the importance of identity. Thus, their analysis provides this dissertation with important questions and an up-to-date overview of the situation and views held by either side. The question of whether the boycott is a form of political passivity and path dependency will be challenged in the following section.

Having introduced the literature on the reasons why East Jerusalem Palestinians boycott municipal elections, an overview of the counterarguments is presented. Authors such as Sari Nusseibeh propose the normative speculation for a radical change of policy. A reason for this is the on-going civil, social, and political interest in the issue and its unresolved status. Nusseibeh argues that policy change would encourage Palestinian participation and increase voter turnout in municipal elections. He cites the fact that were Palestinians to vote en masse, they would be able to gain a considerable number of seats in the municipality (Dumper 1997, 48). He uses this to pose questions that would address the existing reality in a situation created and ruled by Israel (2011, 11). Therefore, advocates of this stance support the argument that given the reality of Israeli occupation of Palestine (and especially Jerusalem), Palestinians need to act accordingly and use the means given to them to do so. This would entail using the rights and privileges given to East Jerusalem residents, especially those of local political participation (Nusseibeh 2011, 148).

The argument of accepting reality and adapting to it also has some local Palestinian support, especially in recent decades (Rasgon 2018; Blake et al. 2018). Notably, Palestinian East Jerusalemites employed by the municipality argue for participation defining the elections as a local contest "over the equitable allocation of services" (Dumper 1997, 48). Furthermore, advocates for political participation argue that denouncing all contact with the municipality only strengthens the Israeli occupation and control, giving "the occupiers a pretext for dodging its responsibilities"

(Crisis Group 2012, 24). This is the line taken by Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem who decide to run in municipal elections (Rasgon 2018). It is important to note these counterarguments in the context of this dissertation, as they show multifaceted reasons East Jerusalemites have for choosing to vote or boycott municipal elections. It also explains the changing trends in relation to this boycott. However, this dissertation ultimately demonstrates that these dissenting voices are not convincing enough to make significant changes in the Palestinians refusal to vote. The lack of significant change in voter turnout reinforces the argument that long-term resistance is favored at the expense of short-term mobilization and minor changes.

This section has outlined the key strands of thought in scholarly analysis on the issue of East Jerusalemite refusal to vote in municipal elections. Key concepts such as divided cities and the role of Israeli policing and encroachment were introduced and exemplified. They were built upon notions of identity, a national Palestinian, as well as a distinct East Jerusalemite one. Ideas of resistance to occupation and maintaining a strong voice in a long-term project for self-determination were introduced. These concepts will be used throughout the paper to frame the discussion and support the argument. Lastly, some counterarguments were presented to highlight the practical reasons for encouraging an end to the boycott. This juxtaposition of arguments provides a base for further discussion regarding a conceptual struggle between civil, political, and economic rights against the right to national self-determination and whether the two are ever compatible.

### **THE POLITICAL SITUATION IN EAST JERUSALEM**

The city of Jerusalem is one of the most uncompromising parts of the negotiations between Israel and Palestine (Altayli 2013, 32). The importance of the “indivisible” Holy City cannot be overstated, as its status has been the downfall of several peace negotiations (Goddard 2010, 158). Most notably, the 1991 Madrid conference, the Oslo process, and 1994 Oslo Accords did not manage to bring the issue of Jerusalem to the table, resulting in little political progress (Altayli 2013, 188). Further, the Camp David summit of 2000 was the first time the issue of Jerusalem was officially tackled in negotiations. The discussion between Yasser Arafat and Ehud Barak, which was convened by Bill Clinton, demonstrated the steadfast positions of either side. Their irreconcilable wishes not only reflected the deep cultural, social and political meaning of the city to both parties but also led to a breakdown of negotiations, which have since been stuttering (Altayli 2013; Khalidi 2010, xviii). Thus, the unique social and political East Jerusalemite position is summarized by Nusseibeh: “since the 1967 war they had to begin habituating themselves to living under Israeli occupation, neither Jordanians nor Israelis but, perhaps, Palestinians-in-waiting” (2011, 75) illustrating ideas about the possible future of the Palestinians and their hopes for a state of their own (Khalidi 2010, 204).

Similarly, from a social perspective, the city of Jerusalem is one of many inequalities. It is the politically most important yet economically poorest major city in the Holy Land (Blake et al., 2018, 7). Demographically, East Jerusalemite Palestinians



represent approximately 38% of the population, yet receive only 10-12% of the Jerusalem Municipal budget (Seidemann 2018). Thus, the fact that more than a third of the geographically distinct population does not vote plays a key role in the inequality and underrepresentation of the eastern part of the city. The Palestinian neighborhoods are lacking in essential infrastructure, have minimal access to social and welfare services, and face shortages in the education sector (Dumper 1997, 46; Blake et al. 2018, 7). Additionally, the issues of revocation of residency permits, house demolitions, and settlements are key, resulting in insufficient housing for local Palestinians. Another important connection between politics and material civil inequalities is the building of the Separation Barrier in the 2000s, which has cut off 120,000 Palestinians from the city (2013 1263). The Barrier has also physically, socially, and politically disconnected East Jerusalemites from the West Bank and the interim capital of Ramallah (Blake et al. 2018, ix). The significance of this disenfranchisement on the electoral boycott and disengagement from politics will be discussed in the coming sections.

Moreover, evidence of the voter turnout by East Jerusalemites in municipal elections since 1967 is important to look at, as it provides the foundation for analysis<sup>1</sup>. Fig. 2, shows significantly low voter turnout at all Municipal elections between 1967 and 2013. The highest is noted in 1969, and that is mainly due to the large number of officials who were threatened to lose their jobs at local municipal offices if they did not vote (Dumper 2014, 67). Similarly, the 1983 election turnout can be explained by similar rumors being circulated among municipal workers that if they did not vote, they might lose rights and entitlements (Seidemann 2018, 2). The data in the table demonstrates the long-term trend of very low voter participation in municipal elections. The newest figures show the steadfastness of the Palestinians in the boycott, as the three latest elections depict an ever-decreasing turnout.

<b>Election</b>	<b>Voter Turnout (Percentage of Eligible Palestinian Voters)</b>	<b>Number of Palestinian Voters</b>	<b>Mayor Elected</b>
1969	21–22 <sup>a</sup>	7,500–8,000	Teddy Kollek
1973	7	3,150	Teddy Kollek
1978	14	7,000–8,000	Teddy Kollek
1983	18	10,000–11,600 <sup>b</sup>	Teddy Kollek
1989	3	3,000–4,000	Teddy Kollek
1993	5–8 <sup>c</sup>	8,000	Ehud Olmert
1998	3–7 <sup>d</sup>	2,000–6,500	Ehud Olmert
2003	5	6,400	Uri Lupolianski
2008	2	2,600	Nir Barkat
2013	0.7–1.6	1,100	Nir Barkat

Fig. 2. Table of Palestinian Voter Turnout in Municipal Elections in East Jerusalem, 1969–2013. (Blake et al., 2018)

<sup>1</sup> It is important to highlight the methodological difficulties of collecting data on East Jerusalem Palestinian voter turnout. Due to the inclusion of Israeli settlements, the Armenian and Jewish quarters in the Old City as part of East Jerusalem electorate, the turnout numbers may not show only East Jerusalem Palestinian engagement.

The municipal elections of 2018 show a small increase from 0.9% (1,600) in 2013, to 1.5% (2,900) in 2018 (T-j.org.il 2018). While it can be argued that this signals an 81% increase in the voter turnout, the numbers of eligible voters casting their vote in the election do not show a significant increase. Additionally, the voting patterns for the municipal council and the mayoral race are in line with the above trend of non-participation. It is pertinent to note that the Palestinian activist Ramadan Dabash and his party list received approximately 72% of all East Jerusalem Palestinian vote, yet most of these came from two neighborhoods nearest to his home (Haaretz,2018). This implicates Dabash as a one-time phenomenon, especially if noted along with the fact that in twelve Palestinian neighborhoods there was a decline in voter turnout compared to 2013 (Seidemann 2018). In terms of the mayoral race, only 0.4% of eligible Palestinian voters cast a ballot, reinforcing the trend of boycott.

This section has examined the existing literature on the issue of the Palestinian boycott in Israeli municipal elections in Jerusalem. Most focus was placed on the concepts of divided cities and identity politics, which will provide the foundation for the analysis in the following sections. Further, the counterargument that this boycott has gone on so long as to lose political salience and capacity for change was noted. This led to calls for a significant change in policy and halting the boycott. Further, the political and demographic situation and divisions between East and West Jerusalem were outlined, in order to ground the next sections. Lastly, empirical data on the voter turnout for municipal elections in East Jerusalem was presented and analyzed in order to demonstrate the situation since 1967. Thus, this section has paved the way to answer the research question of why East Jerusalem Palestinians boycott the Israeli municipal elections in Jerusalem.

### **SECTION THREE: POLITICS OF IDENTITY AND LEGITIMACY**

#### **WHY DO PALESTINIANS REFUSE TO VOTE IN ISRAELI MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS IN JERUSALEM?**

The previous section has shown the different stances and concepts used when studying the active non-participation of East Jerusalemites in Israeli municipal elections as well as the social and demographic issues stemming from it. Deeper reasons such as Palestinian identity and resistance were highlighted by the continual decision to boycott elections at the expense of material economic and social advantages. The analysis in this section will build upon the argument that there is not one overarching reason for the boycott but a combination of historical, political, and identity-based factors. The main aspects of understanding this boycott will be drawn out by examining the status of Jerusalem and how it reinforces identity. Further, issues regarding disillusionment with social change through political means under the reality of the occupation will be analyzed. These arguments demonstrate the reality that the interplay of these factors is significant enough for Palestinian East Jerusalemites to choose to suffer systematic municipal neglect with little prospects for positive change.

The most cited explanation of why East Jerusalemite Palestinians boycott local municipal elections is one of “refusal rooted in a rejection of the legitimacy of Israeli rule in East Jerusalem and a vital strategic interest in having East Jerusalem be

the capital of a future Palestinian state” (Blake et al. 2018, 11). Palestinian opposition to the municipality is both a symbol of resistance to the annexation of East Jerusalem and a protest against the daily life grievances and social inequalities (Dumper 1997; Cohen 2011; Altayli 2013). Moreover, ethnographic data shows the importance of non-participation as a method of resistance to reinforce identity and as a symbol of independence against the reality of occupation (Kroll-Zeldin 2014, 157). The issue with this line of argument is the passivity induced by non-participation as well as the authors’ tendency to overlook the numerous other factors influencing the choice to boycott. This is particularly pertinent to note in relation to the longevity of the boycott, whereby this may have been the key reason in the beginning, yet as time went by and little change was noted, the complexity of the issue expanded (Crisis Group 2012, 29).

The act of voting is seen as an act of complicity to Israeli occupation and a tacit acceptance of the unacceptable status quo. The municipality is held responsible for a “lack of satisfactory zoning plans, home demolitions, the poorer education system and many more aspects of urban dereliction and harassment” (Cohen 2011, 34), which affect everyday lives of Jerusalem’s residents. By overtly spiting the “privilege” of municipal voting rights, East Jerusalem Palestinians reinforce their opposition to the occupying power and partake in a continual everyday resistance movement. This is a pervasive and often oversimplified reason used to explain the situation. Nevertheless, it is historically important as, in the years immediately after 1967, the municipal boycott was used as an active strategy in the hope of gaining material and social autonomy (Crisis Group 2012, 2). However, the situation after the 1990s, following numerous failed mediation attempts, shifted to more violent resistance, such as the two intifadas (Altayli 2013, 29). This points to disillusionment with political processes and the prolonged nature of the conflict. Further, in the past ten years, East Jerusalem has found itself “simultaneously marginalized from and integrated into West Jerusalem” (Cohen 2011, Crisis Group 2012, 2), demonstrating a blurring of social, political, and cultural boundaries. This “blurring” can be linked to Dumper’s notions on divided cities, whereby, politically, it is indivisible, demographically, it is divided, yet socially there is some spill-over and integration (Crisis Group 2010, 26; Goddard 2010, 246). Thus, interacting with the West Jerusalem “other” strengthens the Palestinian East Jerusalemite conception of a separate self.

### THE STATUS OF JERUSALEM

Ideas about the future of the Palestinian state are compromised over the status of Jerusalem. By denying legitimacy to the occupation, East Jerusalem Palestinians cling to the hope that Jerusalem will be the capital of a future state of Palestine, which Israel denies (Kroll-Zeldin, 2014, 149; Crisis Group 2012, 26). Thus, the boycott of the elections helps to unite the East Jerusalemite community and provides the opportunity to voice their claim over the city. Through this, they demonstrate their projection for the future of the city and their state as one where they can vote for

their own municipality. These reasons strengthen the idea of a Palestinian Jerusalemite identity as responsible actors for the safety of the Holy City and a crucial point of negotiations (Khalidi 2010, 32). By not surrendering to Israeli incentives and pretensions at democracy, the Palestinian population believes in holding the State of Israel and the international community accountable to the illegality of the annexation and occupation.

This form of protest directly contrasts with Israel's claims over Jerusalem as an "undivided and united capital of the Jewish people" (Knesset of Israel 1980). Thus, not only does the boycott represent the hope for Jerusalem as a future Palestinian capital, but it also denies Israel sovereignty over it. Furthermore, the international community's stance on the status of Israel within the city was brought into question in 2017, when the sitting United States President recognized Jerusalem as Israel's capital (govinfo.gov 2017).

The constant encroachment of Israeli actors into the eastern part of the city through policing and infrastructure furthers the divided cities' narrative (Dumper 1997, 43). These factors strengthen the East Jerusalemite Palestinian grievance of *de facto* living in Israel, being governed by its laws and paying taxes, yet lacking political representation and access to more than municipal elections (Cohen 2011, 34). As the systemic neglect of East Jerusalem demonstrates, this situation of "taxation without representation" forms a strong sense of injustice in an already precarious political state of affairs (Kroll-Zeldin 2014, 27). Israeli exclusion of Palestinian rights to vote in the Knesset, coupled with Palestinian refusal to accept the limited "privilege" of a voice at the municipal level, demonstrates not only a lack of coexistence but also disadvantages the Palestinian side (Seidemann 2018, 10; Dumper 2013). While this exclusion poses physical and material problems, it also results in creating a rallying point for resistance to the occupying state and its policies.

Furthermore, Palestinian identity and ideas of a communal struggle for an occupied city and land at the face of impossible odds are reinforced through the boycott (Khalidi 2010, 195). By participating in elections, ideas central to the Palestinian struggle and sense of self—of *Sumud* or steadfastness—would be compromised (Khalidi 2010, 162; Kroll-Zeldin 2014, 146). Staying in Jerusalem and not voting is seen as "a way of ensuring cultural survival and shifting the history and politics of the present" (Kroll-Zeldin 2014, 147). It also serves to show feelings of agency in resisting the election as a statement of Palestinian identity. Thus, they choosing to stay in Jerusalem and wield agency by ignoring calls to political action by the occupying state. This is done at the expense of material incentives and at risk of municipal maltreatment. The choice to suffer the consequences of not being represented or supported by the municipality has also become a form of solidarity with Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, who are often not allowed to enter Jerusalem (Kroll-Zeldin 2014, 151). Kroll-Zeldin presents the importance of Jerusalem as a "symbol of Palestine and of Palestinian resistance" (2014, 151), with the boycott being the key way to reinforce this imagery. Thus, political participation would be perceived as an act of giving up their agency over the fate of Jerusalem as well as creating a chasm between

East Jerusalemites and their West Bank compatriots (Seidemann, 2018, 12). This line of reasoning supports the argument of this dissertation as it demonstrates short-term sacrifices being made as a result of long-term, identity-based resistance.

Conversely, the idea of the struggle for Jerusalem being a representation of wider Palestinian solidarity carries drawbacks. The unique nature of the East Jerusalemite identity alienates them from the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and even the interim capital of Ramallah, which is less than 30 km away. The issues faced by East Jerusalemites are very different from their compatriots, as are their privileges. This is especially pertinent in the post-Oslo years when a physical separation of Jerusalem from the Palestinian territories was at its peak. Cohen notes that while officially, this was done for increased security, “its security effectiveness was limited and the harm it did to Arab Jerusalem was extensive” (2011, 35). This, he argues, reinforced the differences, creating a new generation that came to regard the Palestinian Authority as a “neighbouring entity, rather than a source of authority and identity” (Cohen 2011, 36). The privileges of holding a Jerusalem ID have strengthened this feeling of alienation, whereby East Jerusalemites can still worship in the Al Aqsa mosque, travel through Ben Gurion airport, and access health and social services (Seidemann 2018). Therefore, the arguments of Palestinian identity and the importance of Jerusalem for the Palestinian national struggle cannot be the only ones in explaining the boycott, and one needs to delve into the issues within the city.

If the boycott is seen as a form of civil resistance to the occupation of East Jerusalem since 1967, its on-going status can be viewed as a form of path dependency. Ethnographic research shows that this idea is held by critics and a number of East Jerusalemites. They stand for the idea that it would be a mistake to change strategy now after so many years of boycott (Kroll-Zeldin 2014, 151; Crisis Group 2012, 29). As one of the longest-lasting methods of resistance, it is also one of the most important for Palestinians, given the importance of Jerusalem to hopes of national self-determination. Thus, there is a widely held idea that voting in one election “would undo all the hard work put in since 1967” (Kroll-Zeldin 2014, 151). While this is convincing and reflects the ideas of steadfastness and resilience, a critique arises in the form of the deteriorating state of the eastern part of the city, with no change on the horizon (Crisis Group 2012, 28). It can be argued that the boycott has become a symbolic form of politics masking a clear absence of such as well as enabling both Israeli and Palestinian leadership to evade responsibility for the situation (Crisis Group 2012, 28). Thus, the status quo of East Jerusalemite inaction remains, resulting in day-to-day hardships for its inhabitants with slow but methodical Israeli encroachment.

### **DISENCHANTMENT WITH DEMOCRACY AND THE STATUS QUO?**

Systemic, political, and identity-related factors show the extent of the reasons for the boycott and point to a wider problem with democratic processes. The Palestinian East Jerusalemite boycott of municipal elections demonstrates frustration with their current situation and indeterminate status, which can lead to more public disillusionment with democracy (Bavli and Gerver n.d.). The boycott displays more than just

resistance to the occupation: it is a boycott against the perceived unfairness of the election itself. The municipality is widely perceived as a “cog in the machine of occupation and colonization” (Kroll Zeldin 2014, 151). Similarly, the Palestinians view their votes as insignificant as they believe it would not make substantial changes to the status quo of Israeli political hegemony (Cohen 2011, 126). The long-term nature of the boycott, coupled with several failed peace negotiations, have played a significant part in the East Jerusalemite disillusionment with political processes. Additionally, this may not be a unique issue to East Jerusalem and reflects a more global trend of declining political participation and trust in democratic processes (idea.int, 2016).

The structural inequalities between East and West Jerusalem feed into the idea that the boycott is a form of political disillusionment and lack of faith in agency for change. The municipal neglect of the eastern part of the city is often quoted as an important aspect of the boycott. On the other hand, it must be noted that this “inequality in services is not unrelated to the lack of Palestinian participation in the political system” (Dumper 1997, 48). The lack of advocacy for East Jerusalem at the municipal level is a contributing factor. Thus, this situation reflects “an ironclad rule of politics: politicians and senior civil servants will rarely if ever allocate anything— be it time, effort, budgets, or entitlements— to those who do not vote” (Seidemann 2018, 11). These arguments introduce a circular problem whereby underrepresentation and inequalities in the eastern part of the city affect turnout, which in turn affects further neglect. While this stance is valid and possibly generalizable to wider analysis, authors focus either on quantitative data or personal grievances. They do not address the deeper political undercurrents behind this neglect, and the wider-scale political games played between the Israeli administration and Palestinian actors as well as the international community. This links to Dumper’s concept of divided cities and the importance of legitimacy and control, exemplified by Israeli encroachment in maintaining influence within the wider national conflict.

This section has demonstrated the factors that help to analyze the municipal boycott. The focus on East Jerusalemite identity and refusal to legitimize the occupation has been in line with the overall argument of the dissertation. Further, the structural inequalities and grievances within the city, as well as disillusionment with democratic processes, work together in supporting the argument. They show the complex reasons behind the boycott as an interplay of historical, political, and identity-based factors.

#### **SECTION FOUR: SOCIAL AND POLITICAL INFLUENCES ON THE MUNICIPAL BOYCOTT**

Political and social pressures from both Palestinian and Israeli governmental actors present another set of factors in understanding the East Jerusalemite boycott of Israeli municipal elections. This is a long and historically fraught problem, as the issue of East Jerusalem has been used as a political tool throughout the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Cohen 2011, 18; Dumper 1997, 233). Evidence shows that, while East Jerusalem Palestinians who hold the Jerusalem ID are theoretically free to vote in their local



municipal elections, a number of actors have influenced their actions relating to this right (Seidemann 2018, 10). The following section will discuss the roles played by both Palestinian and Israeli political actors in the boycott as well as the impact they have had on the situation in East Jerusalem. This links to Dumper's idea of divided cities, whereby, in the case of Jerusalem as a key locus of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, stability, and legitimacy of rule are disputed between both sides. Therefore, efforts to influence the East Jerusalem Palestinian population to boycott the municipal elections are noted from a different lens—that of external political pressures.

Moreover, the political and religious strategic importance of Jerusalem as a contested city within the wider conflict is highlighted. Sovereignty and legitimacy of rule in the city are contested between the Zionist project, Palestinian statehood, and global geopolitics, making it prone to influence at national and international levels from both sides of the conflict. This is demonstrated by the internal and external politics that impact the outcome and turnout of local municipal elections in Jerusalem. Dumper highlights the city's particularity and the difficulty of administration within it (1997, 46). He argues that the small size of the city is contrasted with its great importance to both sides of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict making it especially vulnerable to bureaucratic and economic influences (Dumper 1997, 46). Significant Palestinian national actors have, since 1967, encouraged the boycott of municipal elections by Palestinian Jerusalemites (Dumper 1997, 48). Further, the Israeli side has also been accused of making polling stations less accessible (Cohen 2011, 33) as well as fewer in number in East Jerusalem (Seidemann 2018, 10).

### **ISRAELI HISTORICAL LEGAL PRESSURE**

Historically, due to the politics of the annexation of Jerusalem in 1967, the Israeli side has incrementally introduced legal frameworks to strengthen their position. According to most of the international community, these actions are a violation of international law (Dumper 2013, 1250). A number of UN resolutions emphasize Israel's actions in Jerusalem as lacking legitimacy and affirm the eastern part of the city as a part of the occupied Palestinian territory (Altayli 2013, 43). This is not substantially different from how the issue has looked since 1967 when Israel's unilateral annexation of East Jerusalem was put through Israeli legislation. Through the adoption of Amendment No. 11 of the Administration and Ordinance Law and Amendment No. 6 of the Municipalities Ordinance Law and the Protection of Holy Places Law, Israeli law, jurisdiction, and administration were extended to the occupied part of the city (Berkowitz 2018). Further legal action was taken in 1980 through the adoption of the "Basic Law: Jerusalem" (Knesset of Israel 1980), whereby the city of Jerusalem was declared as the capital of Israel. This has been widely contested in the international community, where no country has recognized it, with most embassies and consulates found in Tel Aviv. This position has been revisited in international relations after the United States announced Jerusalem as the capital of Israel in December 2017 and moved its embassy to West Jerusalem in May 2018 (Govinfo.gov 2017; U.S. Department of State 2018).

The role of the Israeli government in limiting East Jerusalemite Palestinian access to municipal polls is often overlooked, demonstrating the incremental approach in extending Israeli rule in East Jerusalem (Dumper 1997, 24). Despite pledges to enable participation for all its inhabitants, evidence suggests that fewer polling stations are made available in the eastern part of the city. For example, in the run-up to the 2018 municipal elections, only six polling locations were provided in East Jerusalem, while 187 were available in the West (Seidemann 2018, 11). After some backlash, notably from the Palestinian candidate Ramadan Dabash, the number was increased to 21 (Seidemann 2018, 11). While this highlights the systemic inequalities faced by East Jerusalem Palestinians, it can also be considered a result of the minimal turnout in every previous election. Further, while the lack of effort from the municipality to improve East Jerusalemite participation is notable, the reason may be a pragmatic and economic one. A larger Palestinian turnout would enhance the political legitimacy of Israeli rule over Jerusalem and thus would be politically and socially advantageous. This idea links to Dumper's argument that the boycott is only increasing the inequalities between the two sides of the city.

On the other hand, the lack of East Jerusalemite political participation in municipal elections serves Israeli municipal and national political actors as it can be used for avoiding responsibility for the territory they have occupied. In a municipality lacking Palestinian representation due to the boycott, a predominantly Israeli cabinet can implement "discriminatory policies without internal pressure from Palestinian politicians serving on the municipal council" (Kroll-Zeldin 2014, 150). Furthermore, comparisons can be made to the minimal concessions reached in the Knesset by representatives of the Arab-Israeli community. Thus, the critique arises that the cost of minimal change in Jerusalem's municipal civil life is too high a price to pay for reinforcing Israel's legitimacy and "façade of democracy" within Jerusalem (Crisis Group 2012, 25). This aligns with the argument made in this dissertation that long-term resistance is favored over tentative short-term changes to the unsatisfactory status quo.

### **PALESTINIAN POLITICAL ACTORS AND THE BOYCOTT**

The role played by Palestinian governmental actors in influencing the boycott is of key importance in this analysis. The situation is harder to examine, as it is historically enmeshed, and different conceptions of Palestinian self-governance have made varying claims about the municipal boycott by East Jerusalemites. The overarching stance has been to support the municipal boycott so as not to legitimize Israeli occupation of Jerusalem and to demonstrate solidarity with the plight of the Palestinians in the West Bank and diaspora (Kroll-Zeldin 2014, 151; Cohen 2011; Blake et al. 2018; Seidemann 2018). Since the 1990s, in conjunction with numerous peace negotiations and their subsequent failures, East Jerusalem has become more an icon of resistance in Palestinian political and social imaginations than a strong political actor. The Oslo Accords excluded the city from the temporary governing arrangements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, thus physically and politically alienating its inhabitants. This

chasm was further deepened by the building of the Separation Barrier in 2002. The importance of the city in Palestinian politics was diminished in the post-Oslo period due to a conjunction of factors such as the death of Faysal Husseini (a notable political activist in East Jerusalem), the suppression of the Second Intifada, and the shutting down of the Orient House, which had been the PLO's headquarters in the city (Crisis Group 2012, 23). Thus, Palestinian political access to the city is increasingly limited by Israeli rule, supporting the idea of divided cities through policing, encroachment, and use of force (Dumper 2013, 1248). These elements, as well as the move and creation of many national institutions in Ramallah, have overshadowed the political centrality of Jerusalem. This section analyzes the roles of various Palestinian political actors within the city.

The PNA is rooted strongly in the interim capital of Ramallah, making it distant and ineffective when it comes to dealing with issues within Jerusalem (Crisis Group 2012, 23). Israel also greatly limits the outreach of two main political parties, Fatah and Hamas. This results in their weak presence in Jerusalem due to restricted funding, which can only be deployed by third parties (Crisis Group 2012, 36). Additional attempts to expand Palestinian presence in the city, such as efforts to organize events marking the Arab League's designation of the city as the "cultural capital of the Arab world" in 2009, have been blocked by Israel (Crisis Group 2012, 5). This demonstrates the effective Israeli obstruction of Palestinian political actors from gaining political footing within the city, linking to the argument of encroachment and legitimacy in a divided city.

Regarding the issue of municipal elections, the PLO has strongly urged the East Jerusalemite population to boycott them as they run against the "Palestinian national interest" and legitimizes Israeli authority (Crisis Group 2012, 23). This stance is demonstrated in the most recent municipal elections in 2018, whereby Saeb Erekat, the Secretary-General of the PLO's Executive Committee, urged East Jerusalemites to continue the boycott. He noted that "participating in the elections will help the Israeli establishment in promoting its Greater Jerusalem project...and play a complementary role in implementing its colonial settlement plan and ethnic cleansing operations" (Rasgon 2018). Therefore, the stance promoted by the PLO shows steadfast support of the political impasse in the city, showing the symbolic importance of the boycott at the expense of daily local grievances. This reflects many of the arguments made in this paper, such as the alienation of East Jerusalem from the rest of the oPt, the weak presence of Palestinian actors, and the strong role of Israeli encroachment.

While the role of Palestinian actors in influencing the perpetuation of the boycott is certainly present, the strength of this argument must be questioned. By comparing the turnout of voters in the 2005 PNA elections in East Jerusalem, a similar pattern is noted. The PNA urged for participation in these elections, and Israel facilitated the voting process by opening several checkpoints (Seidemann 2018, 10). Yet, despite active encouragement and fewer limitations, the turnout in East Jerusalem was 6% of the 100,000 eligible voters (Seidemann 2018, 10). Thus, this demon-

strates that neither Israeli or Palestinian political actors have significant power over the turnout and choice to boycott in East Jerusalem Palestinians. Links can be drawn to physical and social disparity and separation of East Jerusalemites from their West Bank counterparts as well as a general disillusionment in democratic change for the deadlock in Jerusalem.

#### **LOCAL ACTIVISM: A SHIFT IN ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE BOYCOTT?**

The issue of East Jerusalemite Palestinian political consciousness and identity can help to elucidate the factors behind the boycott. As noted above, a significant factor behind the longevity of the boycott is the acceptance of the status quo, the lack of hope for change, and the support of this stance by Palestinian political actors. On the other hand, the most recent elections show some shift in these attitudes. This is illustrated by the East Jerusalemite activists who decided to run in the 2018 elections. For example, Ramadan Dabash stated, “we are saying that we need to make sure we receive better services. We need to have a voice on the city council to fight for our rights” (Rasgon 2018). His stance exemplifies the most common reasons for increased Palestinian involvement in Jerusalem’s politics: increased accountability for the municipality over the eastern part of the city, higher representation allowing better access to municipal services and resources, and the acceptance of the reality of the situation and making the most of what is given (Nusseibeh 2011). This demonstrates a shift in attitudes from staunch refusal to a realization that this impasse is not making a significant change, and thus new options must be explored. This is corroborated by a Crisis Group interview whereby a local civil society leader noted that if PLO were to license electoral participation, “it will find Palestinian civil society in East Jerusalem more ready to mobilise for elections than many assume” (2012, 23).

While these arguments are true, this is only to an extent, as the current situation clearly demonstrates that they are not significant enough for mass mobilization and change (Blake et al. 2018). Intimidation, threats, and political pressures have played a role in almost every election since 1967, with Palestinian activists proposing the idea of voting or running for office allegedly being targeted (Seidemann 2018; Blake et al. 2018). A recent example of this is the candidate Aziz Abu Sarah stepping down in the 2018 race due to threats from Palestinians and difficulty with documentation from the Israeli side (Berger 2018). Conversely, the issue has deeper roots and the PLO does not have enough power to influence the entire population of East Jerusalem (Prince-Gibson et al. 2018). Therefore, the issue links to Cohen’s idea of a distinct Jerusalemite Palestinian identity. The new post-Oslo generation is both more aware of their relatively better social and political position in relation to fellow Palestinians and less willing to lose it. This distinguishing identity has awarded them with a sense of stability “in the face of the Israeli governments whims, on the one hand and those of the PA on the other” (Cohen 2011, 36).

On the other hand, the social and economic deterioration of the city has added to political complacency, whereby the East Jerusalemites feel increasingly aban-

done by both the Israeli administration and the PNA. As a result, a certain political passivity has pervaded the city, with the inhabitants left in the crux of a conflict “situated between Israel and the PA, between local and national Palestinian leadership, between personal interest and national struggle” (Cohen 2011, 34). Additionally, the lack of a coherent “Jerusalem Agenda” has further exacerbated the problem, whereby even those willing to act would not find a worthy scene or a population ready to mobilize (Cohen 2011, 67). This problem is concisely summed up by a Palestinian Jerusalemite interviewed by the Crisis Group: “we can’t just wake up one day in ten years and say, “we dub this desolate city our capital” (Crisis Group 2012, 28). Thus, this argument provides a critical point against the hope for a changing status quo. While there has been some change and activism, it is not strong enough to mobilize such a historically ingrained movement.

This section has looked at the way local Palestinian political activism in East Jerusalem reflects changing attitudes towards the municipal boycott. It has demonstrated the problems faced by activists trying to change the status quo of the boycott, showing the pervasive ideas of disillusionment with politics, passivity in the face of the occupation, and the actions of Palestinian political actors. Contrarily, the argument of East Jerusalemite Palestinians wielding a unique identity and political agency can be brought in. Instead of looking at the relative failure of local political activism within the city as passivity and inert path dependency, a conscious decision to refuse Israeli occupation and encroachment through the boycott is noted. The long-term resistance movement of the municipal boycott thus supports the argument that ideas of self-determination and steadfastness are more important than short-term political and material gains.

## **SECTION FIVE: CONCLUSION**

To conclude, this dissertation has argued that, in order to answer the research question of why Palestinians refuse to vote in Israeli municipal elections in Jerusalem since 1967, an interplay of historical and contemporary factors have to be taken into account. An analysis of factors such as the identity-based refusal to accept Israeli rule, the status of Jerusalem, and economic inequalities was used to understand the reasons behind the boycott. Furthermore, the role of Israeli and Palestinian political actors in imposing political and social pressures and affecting disillusionment with the municipality and democracy were examined. The longevity of the municipal election boycott has been analyzed through concepts of identity and the issue of power politics within a divided city. The importance of Jerusalem as a locus of resistance to the Israeli occupation is highlighted, supporting the argument for the centrality of the boycott in maintaining agency within the city without legitimizing Israeli occupation and maintaining hopes for the future of the Palestinian state. The paper has shown evidence that deliberate political inaction is consistently selected when faced with the choice between short-term civil, political, and economic rights and long-term rights to national self-determination and resistance.

Section two presented the main literature and concepts on the issue of the electoral boycott in Jerusalem. The drawbacks of the existing literature were noted, namely the use of the conflict with Israel as a key explanatory tool. Thus, this paper argued for the importance of placing focus on East Jerusalem and its inhabitants, as the boycott reflects more than just resistance to the occupation. The concepts of divided cities and identity politics within Jerusalem were introduced and guided analysis throughout. To lay a foundation for section 3, the demographic and political condition of Jerusalem since 1967 was presented.

Section three focused on the issues of identity politics and legitimacy within Jerusalem and how this is reflected in the boycott. It explored the issues of voting as a legitimization of the occupation, importance of the status of Jerusalem in ideas about a future Palestinian state, and resistance to Israeli encroachment of the eastern part of the city. In addition, dissatisfaction with material and civil inequalities within the city, disillusionment with democracy, and feelings of detachment from their Palestinian compatriots in the West Bank and Gaza Strip were analyzed. As a result, the importance of a Palestinian East Jerusalemite identity in resisting the occupation, “safeguarding” Jerusalem, and feeling distinct from the rest of the occupied Palestinian Territory is demonstrated. This supports the argument that long-term resistance is chosen at the cost of social, material, and political benefits as a result of identity politics.

Section four demonstrates the different roles Palestinian and Israeli political actors have played in the electoral boycott. The argument covers both Israeli encroachments into East Jerusalem and why turnout in elections is important to them in de facto ruling the divided city of Jerusalem. Further, the question of how various Palestinian political actors have approached the boycott was analyzed. This was done to show the decreasing influence of the PNA in Jerusalem, which contrasts with the importance of the city as a symbol of Palestinian national resistance and the role of the PLO as consistent supporters of the boycott. Thus, the way a unique East Jerusalemite Palestinian identity was formed in relation to both Israeli and Palestinian political actors was demonstrated, supporting the argument that identity politics is one of the main reasons for the boycott. The deep-rooted and contextually important self-perception of East Jerusalemites has resulted in consistently low voter turnout in municipal elections. This was done as a long-term resistance movement, disregarding the possibilities for short-term, minimal material gain. It is argued that the failure of the relatively increased local activism in the 2018 election did not show the passivity of the East Jerusalemites but instead demonstrated their choice to support the boycott as active agency in playing the “long-game” against the occupation.

Furthermore, the limitations of this research paper must be acknowledged. The scope of such a complicated issue cannot be fully elaborated within an undergraduate dissertation. Further research could focus on more factors, such as how Palestinians view democratic processes by looking at various elections in the oPt. Alternatively, instead of focusing on the Palestinian boycott of the municipal elections in Jerusalem,



the role of the municipality on the divided communities within the city could be analyzed, as well as looking at the tensions within the Old City. The role of global geopolitical shifts in impacting the status of Jerusalem could add to this research in showing how international changes affect local political participation. Additionally, stemming from the findings in this paper, further research could use this for comparative analysis of similar cases within the Holy Land or in cases in Ireland or South Africa as examples of divided cities. Lastly, the lack of political agenda within East Jerusalem since the 1990s could be analyzed and thus shed light on why there is a lack of candidates or a politically active community.

Finally, in the fast-paced reality of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the importance of analyses such as this one remains key. It helps to elucidate the lived experiences of a uniquely positioned demographic and the way they choose to utilize this. The municipal election boycott on behalf of East Jerusalem Palestinians is an illuminating example of a long-running civil resistance movement, highlighting the importance of identity-based factors in exchange for minimal, short-term material gains. Thus, the steadfastness and perseverance of East Jerusalemites in the face of continuous complex obstacles is an impressive example of long-term resistance held for the sake of one's identity, city, and homeland.

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