

Bayan بیان ביאן

The Arabs in Israel הערבים בישראל

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From the Editor's Desk

A month has passed since the elections for the 21st Knesset, held on April 9, 2019. The current issue of *Bayan* includes two articles. The article by Arik Rudnitzky summarizes the results of the Knesset elections and the voting patterns of the Arab public. Mohammad Darawshe's article analyzes the factors behind the historic low in the participation rate of Arab citizens, who stood at only 49.2% in the last elections.

Bayan is a quarterly review of Arab society in Israel, published by the Konrad Adenauer Program for Jewish-Arab Cooperation at the Moshe Dayan Center for Middle East and African Studies at Tel Aviv University.

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Arik Rudnitzky* / Arab Voting in the 21st Knesset Elections

This article reviews the results of the elections for the 21st Knesset in Arab and Druze communities. It also examines voting patterns in these localities by demographic characteristics (by ethnic group and geographical area) and voting patterns of Arab residents in mixed cities. The discussion then deals with two issues: (a) the question of the renewed connection between the Arab voter and Jewish parties; (b) the voting patterns of Christian voters. All data presented here were taken from the conclusions of Central Elections Committee.¹

Elections Results

The last elections for Knesset were marked by a historic low in the voting rate of Arab citizens of Israel; only 49.2% of eligible voters in Arab and Druze communities voted on Election Day. In this way, the last election campaign appears to be another milestone in the downward trend in voter turnout of Arab citizens in Knesset elections. In the past two decades, this rate has fallen by more than 25%: - from 75% percent in the elections for the 15th Knesset (1999) to 49.2% in the most recent election (2019). In retrospect, the relative increase in voter turnout in the previous election cycle (2015) only reinforces the conclusion that the increase was the exception rather than the reversal of the trend, as even with the participation of the Joint List – the same party that touted itself as the “will of the nation” – the voting rate rose only by 7% in comparison to the 2013 elections (in 2015 Arab turnout was 63.5%, as compared with 56.5% in 2019).

Despite the historic low in voter turnout, the two Arab lists (two alliances, each with two parties) succeeded in passing the electoral threshold and maintained reasonable representation in the Knesset. Hadash-Ta'al won 6 seats and Ra'am-Balad received 4 seats. The overall representation of the four parties in these two alliances (10 seats total) was three seats less than the number of seats held by Arab representatives of Arab parties in the outgoing Knesset (13 seats), wherein the four parties ran together on the Joint List.

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¹ The final results of the elections for the 21st Knesset are published on the Central Election Committee's website: <https://votes21.bechirof.gov.il>

Figure 1: Voter Turnout in Arab and Druze Communities in Knesset Elections, 1999-2019

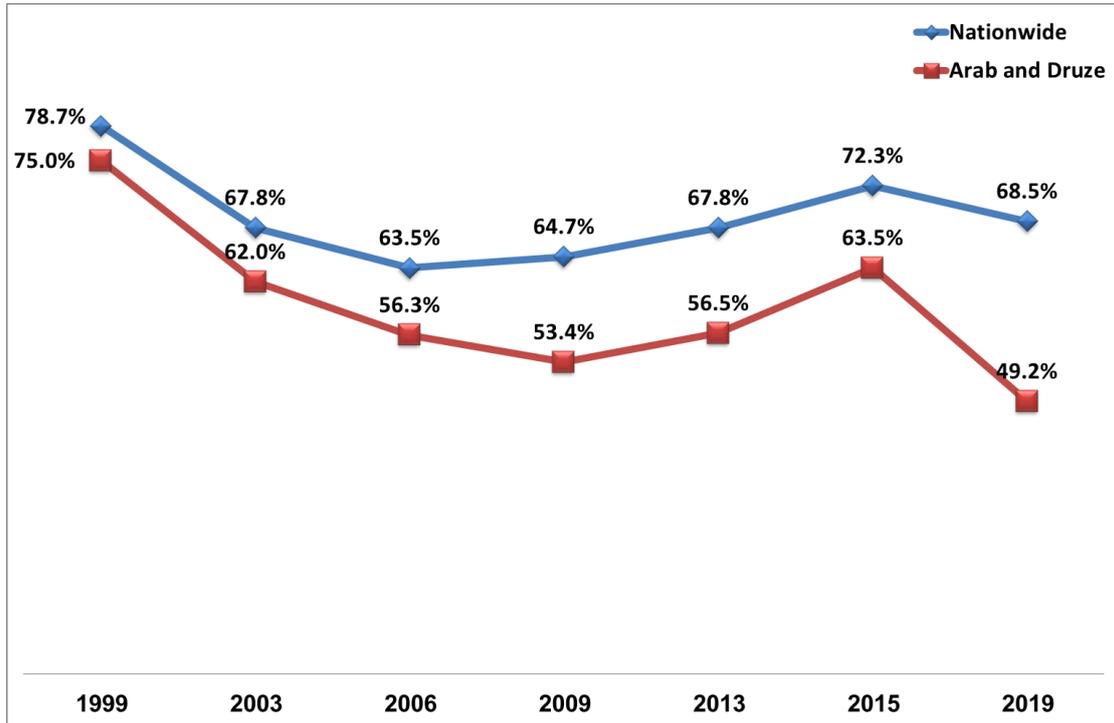
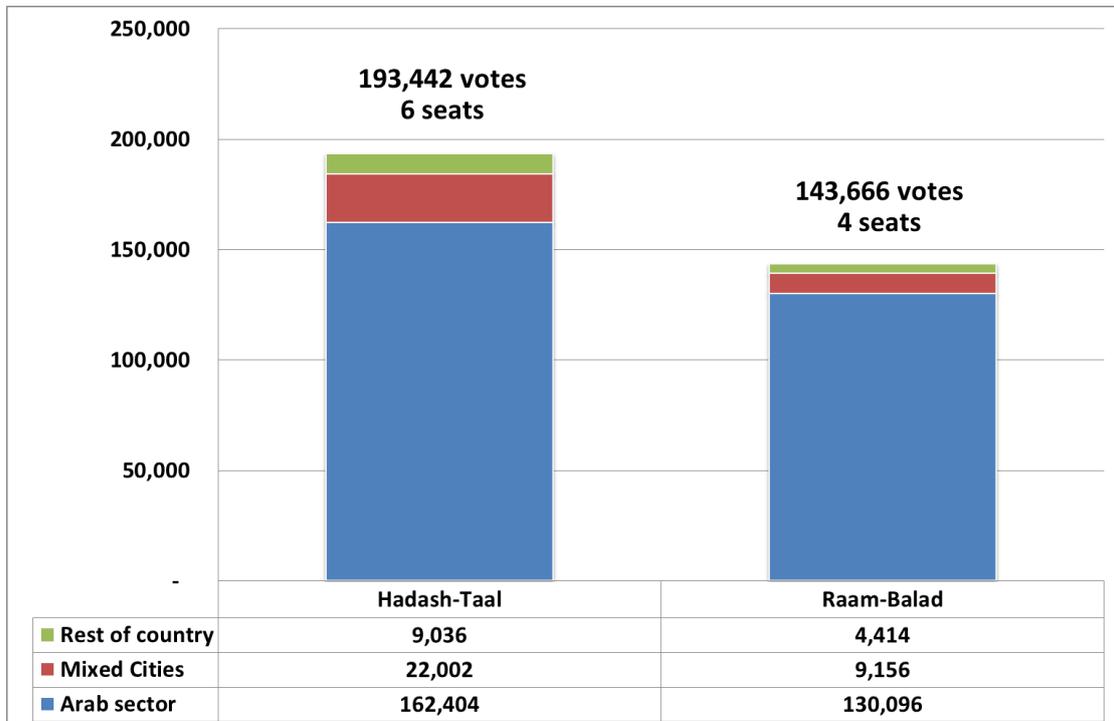


Figure 2: Achievement of Arab Lists in the 2019 Elections



The erosion of the strength of the four parties is properly reflected by comparing their specific weight in the Arab public in the last two election cycles. In the 2015 elections, the Joint List won 387,810 votes in Arab and Druze communities, which constituted 52% of eligible voters and 82% of the actual voters in these communities. In contrast, in the last elections, the two alliances (representing the four parties that once formed the Joint List) won 292,500 votes in Arab and Druze communities, which accounts for only 34% of eligible voters and 71% of the actual voters in these communities. Thus, although the number of eligible voters in the Arab and Druze communities has **increased by 14%** due to natural population growth, the combined achievements of these two alliances (in absolute numbers) in Arab and Druze communities were **25% lower** than the achievements of the Joint List in the 2015 elections.

Two other small Arab lists ran in the last elections but did not pass the electoral threshold. The Arab List, headed by Mohammed Kan'aan, won 4,135 votes, and the Hope for Change list won only 562 votes. Altogether, the Arab lists received 71.6% of the votes from Arab and Druze communities, while 28.4% of the votes in these localities were cast for Jewish parties, mainly Meretz (8.7%) and the Blue and White Party (8.1%).

Table 1: Votes Across Parties in Arab and Druze Communities, 2019

	Number of Votes	Percentage of voters	
Arab Parties	Hadash-Ta'al	162,404	39.3%
	Ra'am-Balad	130,096	31.5%
	Arab List	3,247	0.7%
	Hope for Change	196	0.1%
	Total	295,943	71.6%
Jewish and Zionist Parties	Meretz	36,051	8.7%
	Blue and White	33,620	8.1%
	Likud	9,330	2.3%
	Kulanu	9,277	2.2%
	Shas	8,445	2.0%
	Yisrael Beitenu	6,509	1.6%
	Labor Party	5,542	1.3%
	Other parties	8,449	2.2%
Total	117,223	28.4%	

A breakdown of the voting results by demographic characteristics (ethnic group and geographical area) shows that voter turnout in the north of the country (52.0%) and in the Triangle region (49.9%) was slightly higher than the national rate (49.2%). Voter turnout among Druze voters (56.6%) was relatively high, with an overwhelming majority (90%) voting for Jewish parties. Turnout was also relatively high in the Southern Triangle (60%). The highest ever voter turnout was recorded in Sakhnin (81.4%), the city of Mazen Ghaneim, who in October 2018 completed two consecutive terms as mayor and held the sixth position for a seat in Knesset on the Ra'am-Balad list. Although the alliance won more than 10,000 votes in the city (about 60% of eligible votes), Ghaneim remained outside the Knesset.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, the low voter turnout in Nazareth, the country's largest Arab city, was pronounced. Only 40% of the 57,000 eligible voters in the city actually voted. The residents of Nazareth were apparently disappointed in the exclusion of Mayor Ali Salam from the Arab lists for Knesset. Salam was elected to another term in the last local election and is popular among his constituents, who appear to have expressed their protest by not voting in the elections.

As has been the case in previous elections, voter turnout was particularly low among the Bedouin in the Negev, with only 37.5% voting. Two-thirds of the votes in Bedouin communities were cast for the Ra'am-Balad list. If the voter turnout of the Bedouin voters in the Negev had been similar to the general voter turnout in Arab localities, it would be quite possible that the Ra'am-Balad list would have won another seat, and the fifth candidate on the list, Taleb Abu Arar of the Negev, would therefore have been elected to serve as an MK.

Table 2: Voting Patterns in Arab and Druze Localities by Region and Population Group, 2019

Geographic Region	State Total	² Northern Region					Jerusalem Region ³	
		General	Bedouins ⁴	Druze ⁵	Christians ⁶	Circassians ⁷		
Eligible voters	848,869	521,638	46,569	83,203	11,624	3,468	6,958	
Actual voters	417,749	271,016	18,030	47,129	6,472	1,592	2,889	
Percentage of votes	49.2%	52.0%	38.7%	56.6%	55.7%	45.9%	41.5%	
Valid votes	413,166	268,230	17,712	46,678	6,410	1,570	2,753	
Arab Parties	Hadash-Ta'al	39.3%	38.8%	21.2%	7.0%	45.2%	2.8%	28.1%
	Ra'am-Balad	31.5%	26.4%	26.7%	3.8%	8.7%	2.0%	15.6%
	Arab List	0.7%	1.1%	0.8%	0.1%	0.1%	0.0%	0.6%
	Hope for Change	0.1%	0.0%	0.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.1%
	Total	71.6%	66.3%	48.8%	10.9%	54.0%	4.8%	44.4%
Jewish and Zionist Parties	Meretz	8.7%	7.8%	7.3%	15.2%	16.9%	10.7%	14.9%
	Blue and White	8.1%	10.8%	24.7%	34.3%	15.9%	62.2%	18.7%
	Likud	2.3%	3.0%	3.2%	10.7%	1.6%	1.1%	8.8%
	Kulanu	2.2%	3.0%	1.9%	7.8%	3.7%	4.0%	5.7%
	Shas	2.0%	2.6%	3.9%	4.1%	1.7%	0.3%	1.2%
	Yisrael Beitenu	1.6%	2.4%	0.1%	8.0%	3.2%	1.3%	0.4%
	Labor	1.3%	1.7%	4.8%	2.7%	1.2%	13.2%	2.9%
	Others ⁸	2.2%	2.4%	5.3%	7.3%	1.8%	2.4%	3.0%
Total	28.4%	33.7%	51.2%	90.1%	46.0%	95.2%	55.6%	

(Table 2 is continued on the next page)

² The northern region includes the Arab and Druze localities in the Galilee, the Golan Heights, the Valleys, the Haifa and Akko areas (not including the mixed cities of Haifa, Akko, Ma'alot Tarshikha and Upper Nazareth), and the Hof HaCarmel (Carmel Coast) area. Bedouin, Druze, Christian, and Circassian localities were also included in the northern region category.

³ The Jerusalem region includes the following localities: Abu Gosh, Ein Naqquba, and Ein Rafa.

⁴ This category includes 20 localities in the northern area with mostly Bedouin populations: Ibtin, Bu'eine-Nujeidat, Bir al-Maksur, Basmat Tab'un, Dmeide, Zarzir, Khawaled, Husniyyah, Hamam, Tuba-Zangariyyah, Kamaneh, Ka'abiyye-Tabbash-Hajajre, Manshiyah Zabda, Sawa'id (Hamariyyah), 'Uzayr, 'Aramsheh, Arab al-Na'im, Ras 'Ali, Rumat al-Heib, and Shibli – Umm al-Ghanam.

⁵ This category includes 12 localities total. In 10 of the localities the overwhelming majority of residents are Druze: Beit Jann, Julis, Daliyat al-Karmel, Horfeish, Yanuah-Jatt, Yarka, Kisra-Sami'a, Sajur, 'Ein al-Asad and Isfiya. The other two localities have mostly Druze populations: Peki'in (78%) and Maghar (58%).

⁶ This category includes four localities: Fassuta and Mi'ilya, whose populations are entirely Christian, and two localities where the populations are mainly Christian - 'Eilabun (71%) and Jish (64%)

⁷ This category included two localities with entirely Circassian populations: Kfar Kama and Rehaniya.

⁸ "Others" includes votes for Jewish parties and all those who did not pass the electoral threshold.

Geographic Region		Triangle Region			Southern Region (Bedouin)			
		Total	North ⁹	South ¹⁰	Total	Townships ¹¹	Neve Midbar and al-Qasum Regional Councils ¹²	Tribes and dispersed villages ¹³
Eligible voters		194,710	112,161	82,549	122,097	77,907	9,051	35,139
Actual voters		97,165	47,612	49,553	45,747	32,938	3,859	8,955
Percentage of votes		49.9%	42.4%	60.0%	37.5%	42.3%	42.6%	25.5%
Valid votes		96,054	47,054	49,000	45,214	32,569	3,811	8,839
Arab Parties	Hadash-Ta'al	50.8%	58.7%	43.2%	19.3%	25.0%	5.5%	4.3%
	Ra'am-Balad	30.0%	26.1%	33.7%	66.7%	63.0%	66.4%	80.5%
	Arab List	0.2%	0.2%	0.1%	0.2%	0.1%	0.3%	0.2%
	Hope for Change	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%	0.2%
	Total	81.0%	85.1%	77.0%	86.3%	88.2%	72.3%	85.2%
Jewish and Zionist Parties	Meretz	13.6%	8.8%	18.2%	3.9%	3.8%	5.7%	3.3%
	Blue-White	1.9%	2.0%	1.9%	4.4%	3.5%	9.9%	5.1%
	Likud	0.5%	0.5%	0.4%	1.0%	0.9%	2.2%	0.9%
	Kulanu	0.7%	0.9%	0.5%	0.6%	0.7%	1.0%	0.3%
	Shas	0.9%	1.1%	0.7%	1.3%	0.9%	4.7%	1.2%
	Yisrael Beitenu	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.1%	0.0%
	Labor	0.5%	0.4%	0.5%	0.7%	0.7%	0.9%	1.0%
	Others	0.9%	1.2%	0.8%	1.8%	1.3%	3.2%	3.0%
Total	19.0%	14.9%	23.0%	13.7%	11.8%	27.7%	14.8%	

⁹ This category includes 12 localities in the northern part of the Triangle: Umm el-Fahm, Umm al-Qutuf, Al-'Aryan, Baqa al-Gharbiyyah, Basmah, Zemer, Kufr Qara', Muqeibleh, Maysar, Ma'ale Iron and 'Ar'arah.

¹⁰ This category includes 6 localities from the southern part of the Triangle: Jaljulia, Taybeh, Tira, Kufr Bara, Kufr Qassem and Qalansaweh.

¹¹ This category includes the seven largest Bedouin towns in the Negev: Hura, Kseife, Laqiyah, 'Ar'arah in the Negev, Rahat, Segev-Shalom and Tel Sheva.

¹² This category includes the localities within the regional councils of Naveh Midbar and Al-Kasoum (two districts that were established in 2012 following the dissolution of the Abu Samah district): Abu Kreinat, Umm Batin, Al-Sayyid, Bir Hadaj, Dreijat, Molada, Makhoul, Qasr a-Sir, Tarabin al-Sana. The municipal status of these localities recently won recognition from the state, and were initially incorporated under the Abu Basma regional council, which was established in 2004 and dismantled in 2012.

¹³ This category includes 18 Bedouin communities dispersed throughout the Negev, most of which are tribes, that have not yet been recognized by the state authorities as having municipal status (commonly referred to as "unrecognized villages"): Abu Juwei'ed, Abu 'Abdun, Abu Robay'ah, Abu Rokeik, Atrash, Asad, Janabib, Hawashleh, Hozayel, Mas'udin – al-'Azazmah, Nasasrah, Sayyed, 'Uqbi (Banu 'Uqbeh), 'Atawneh, Qabu'ah, Qudeirat – al-Sana, Qawa'in.

Voting in Mixed Cities

How did Arab voters in mixed cities vote? To answer this question, we examine a sample of polling stations in each of the cities in which the percentage of votes for the two Arab alliances was significantly higher than the percentage of the city's Arab residents. In Ma'alot-Tarshiha, five polling stations in Arab Tarshiha were selected to represent the actual voting patterns of the city's Arab residents.

Table 3: Arab Voting in Mixed Cities

Locality	Percentage of Arab residents ¹⁴ (2017)	Polling Sample		Municipal Results			City's turnout
		Average percentage of votes cast for Arab alliances	Average voter turnout	Percentage of votes cast for Arab alliances			
				Total	Hadash-Ta'al	Ra'am-Balad	
Haifa	11.3%	56.6%	48.9%	6.1%	5.1%	1.0%	58.7%
Lod	30.3%	67.9%	33.7%	10.9%	7.2%	3.7%	56.1%
Ma'alot-Tarshiha	21.3%	72.5%	51.6%	14.0%	8.8%	5.2%	59.6%
Upper Nazareth	25.8%	43.1%	58.8%	15.3%	13.0%	2.3%	55.2%
Akko	31.8%	72.3%	49.8%	20.5%	10.8%	9.7%	58.3%
Ramle	23.3%	59.0%	44.1%	9.7%	5.5%	4.2%	58.9%
Tel Aviv-Yafo	4.4%	36.3%	48.5%	2.3%	1.6%	0.7%	63.0%

The findings demonstrate that in most of the mixed cities (Haifa, Akko, Ma'alot-Tarshiha, Ramle and Tel Aviv) the rate of Arab participation was similar to the general voting rate in Arab localities. In Upper Nazareth, a significantly higher voting rate was observed in comparison with the national Arab voting average, while in Lod, the opposite picture emerged, with the lowest voter turnout of the mixed cities.

A comparison of the findings from the 2019 elections to the 2015 elections (in which the Joint List competed) shows that in mixed cities, the participation rate of Arab voters in the last elections declined, similar to the overall decline in voter turnout in Arab localities throughout Israel. The steepest decline was in Ma'alot-Tarshiha (approximately 21%), however it is reasonable to assume that the moderate decline in votes from the two large cities of Haifa (9%) and Tel Aviv-Yafo (11%) significantly reduced the overall number of votes received by Arab lists in comparison with the number of votes won by the Joint List in the 2015 elections.

¹⁴ Demographic data are up to date as of February 2019. See: Press Release: Israel Local Authorities Archive - 2017 (Jerusalem: Central Bureau of Statistics, February 18, 2019), https://www.cbs.gov.il/he/mediarelease/DocLib/2019/057/24_19_057b.pdf

Table 4: Change in voting and achievements of Arab Lists: A Comparison of the 2015 and 2019 Elections¹⁵

City	Percentage of Arab voter turnout (estimated)			Percentage of votes cast for Arab parties		
	2015	2019	change	2015 (Joint List)	2019 (two Arab alliances)	change
Haifa	58.1%	48.9%	- 9.2%	8.3%	6.1%	- 2.2%
Lod	47.5%	33.7%	- 13.8%	16.2%	10.9%	- 5.3%
Ma'a lot-Tarshiha	72.7%	51.6%	- 21.1%	19.9%	14.0%	- 5.9%
Upper Nazareth	66.5%	58.8%	- 7.7%	16.3%	15.3%	- 1.0%
Akko	59.9%	49.8%	- 10.1%	25.9%	20.5%	- 5.4%
Ramle	60.0%	44.1%	- 15.9%	14.9%	9.7%	- 5.2%
Tel Aviv-Yafo	59.7%	48.5%	- 11.2%	3.2%	2.3%	- 0.9%

The Arab Voter and the Jewish Party: Renewed Ties?

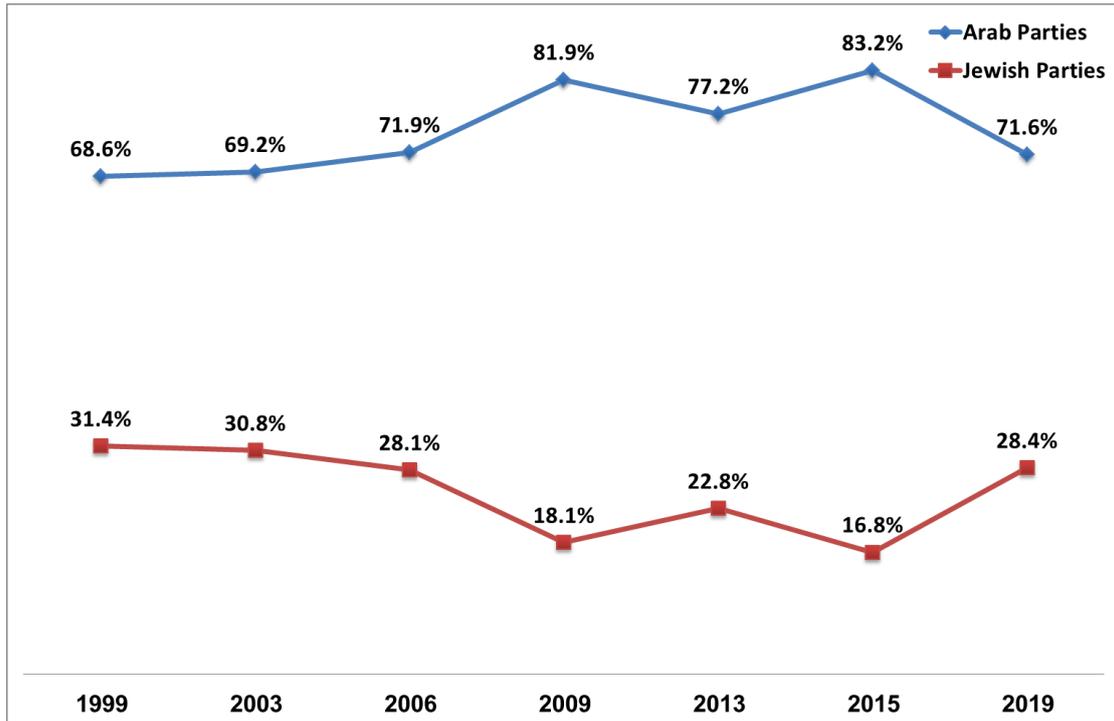
It is no coincidence that the two Jewish parties that emerged with the most impressive achievements in Arab communities were Meretz and the Blue and White Party. Meretz placed two Arab candidates in realistic positions on their list: in fourth position, Issaw Freij, a Muslim from Kufr Qassem who had served as an MK since 2013, and in fifth position, Ali Salalha, a Druze candidate from Beit Jann. In the end, the party won only four seats and as such, the Druze candidate failed to enter the Knesset, but the party demonstrated to the Arab voter - both in its platform and in the presence of its members on the ground during the election day - that it was serious in its intentions to bring about a positive change in the status of Arab citizens in the country. In fact, nearly a quarter of the votes Meretz received in the last elections were drawn from voters in Arab and Druze communities; its lack of support among Jewish voters is what prevented it from increasing its power.

Support for the Blue and White Party came mainly from Druze voters. A third of them, more than any other population segment in Arab society, gave their vote to the new party headed by Benny Gantz. Anger over the passage of the Nation-State Law – anger which was expressed in one of the popular demonstrations against the law held last summer in Tel Aviv – explains Druze support of the Blue and White Party; Druze voters sought to pay the Netanyahu government retribution for supporting the law.

In the three previous elections (2009-2015) the Jewish parties won an average of 19% of Arab votes. The significant increase of Arab votes cast for Jewish parties in the last elections (28%) raises the question: Has the Arab voters' connection to Jewish parties been renewed?

¹⁵ The data on the 2015 elections were taken from: Arik Rudnitzky, "An Analysis of the 20th Knesset Election Results in the Arab Sector." *Bayan* 5 (May 2015), pp. 3-13, <https://dayan.org/content/bayan-arabs-israel-issue-5>

Figure 3: Distribution of Voting in Arab and Druze Localities, 1999-2019



Evidently, the answer to this question is “no.” It should be taken into account that while the rate of voting in Arab communities fell to an unprecedented low in the last elections, most of those who refrained from voting support Arab parties. In a poll conducted by the Konrad Adenauer Program about three weeks before Election Day, 63% of the respondents (in total) declared that, regardless of their actual intention to participate in the elections, they feel close to the position of the Arab political parties and movements. Of those, 57% said they support one of the four main parties: Hadash, Balad, Ta’al or Ra’am. On the other hand, 20% of the respondents said that they feel close to the positions of the Jewish parties – a percentage similar to the average rate of Arab support for Jewish parties in the previous three elections. The rest of the respondents, about 17%, said they did not identify with any political party or refused to reveal their position.¹⁶

Conclusively, the Arab parties suffered the stiffest blow from election boycotting and the sharp drop in the participation rate of Arab citizens. Conversely, the electorate of the Jewish parties remained almost unchanged, and as evidenced, the Druze participation rate in the last elections (56.6%) also remained unchanged since the 2015 elections (56.3%).

¹⁶ The survey was conducted from March 12 to March 16, 2019 among a representative sample of eligible Arab and Druze voters. The sample included 506 respondents, and the maximum sampling error was 5%. The survey was conducted by the Yafa Research Institute, headed by Aas Atrash.

Arab Christian Voting

The Christian vote merits special consideration. The identity dilemmas of the Arab-Christian community in Israel have intensified in recent years under the influence of the events of the “Arab Spring,” and are now being studied more deeply. In contrast to Christian’s traditional identification with Arab parties (especially Hadash), a new trend has arisen in which there is a deepening identification with the state, even including Christian enlistment in the Israel Defense Forces.¹⁷ In order to examine the manifestation of these trends in the recent Knesset elections, voting patterns were examined in four localities in the Upper Galilee, where the population is either entirely or overwhelmingly Christian: Fassuta and Me’ilya (both 100% Christian), ‘Eilabun (71% Christian), and Jish (64% Christian). The electorate in these communities is not insignificant and consists of 11,624 eligible voters (slightly more than the number of Arab Christian voters in Haifa, for example).

The findings presented in Table 2 (above) show that the Christian voters in these communities are divided in their positions: a small majority (54%) supported Arab parties. 45% of the votes went to Hadash-Ta’al, in accordance with their traditional voting loyalty. In contrast, nearly half of the Christian voters (46%) voted for Jewish parties, mainly Meretz (16.9%) and the Blue and White Party (15.9%). The question therefore arises: Is there an upward trend in the power of the Jewish parties among the Christians?

In order to answer this question, a counter-sample was drawn from two religiously mixed Arab localities – Kufr Yasif and I’iblin – which meet the following conditions:

- a) The percentage of Christians is particularly high: Kufr Yasif (52% Christian/45% Muslim/ 3% Druze); I’iblin (43% Christian/57% Muslim).
- b) The proportion of Druze is negligible, and Druze votes for Jewish parties are therefore neutralized. For this reason, the town of Rameh (50% Christian/31% Druze/19% Muslim) was not chosen. Indeed, in Rameh, the rate of support for Jewish parties was 51%.
- c) The size of the electoral population in the sample localities and their voter turnout is similar to the situation in the Christian localities mentioned above.

A contrasting picture emerges from the data. In the sample localities, Arab parties received considerable support, 78.7%, while support for Jewish parties was only 21.3%. In fact, voting patterns in these localities are similar to those of Arabs on the national plain. From this, it can be concluded that in religiously mixed Arab localities, voting patterns tend toward the general Arab (Muslim) mainstream - high support for Arab parties and less support for Jewish parties.

¹⁷ Yusri Khaizran and Muhammad Khlaile, *Left to its Fate: Arab Society in Israel Under the Shadow of the “Arab Spring”* (Tel-Aviv University: The Konrad Adenauer Program for Jewish-Arab Cooperation, 2019). [in Hebrew]

Table 5: Arab Christian Votes Compared

	Christians	Christians – Mixed Localities (Sample)
Eligible Voters	11,624	16,698
Actual Voters	6,472	9,247
Voter Turnout	55.7%	55.4%
Valid votes	6,410	9,140
Hadash-Ta'al	45.2%	63.4%
Ra'am-Balad	8.7%	15.1%
Arab List	0.1%	0.2%
Hope for Change	0.0%	0.0%
Total support for Arab parties	54.0%	78.7%
Meretz	16.9%	8.3%
Blue and White	15.9%	4.7%
Likud	1.6%	1.7%
Kulanu	3.7%	1.5%
Shas	1.7%	2.1%
Yisrael Beitenu	3.2%	0.8%
Labor	1.2%	1.2%
Others	1.8%	1.0%
Total support for Jewish parties	46.0%	21.3%

Conclusion

The main phenomenon observed in the last elections was a sharp decline in voter turnout of Arab citizens. This phenomenon has a number of reasons, which are thoroughly discussed in this issue, in the article by Muhammad Darawashe. However, despite the historic low in the voting rate, the achievements of the Arab parties in these elections were considerable and all four founding parties of the now dismantled Joint List maintained their representation in the Knesset. Both the overall decline in the nationwide voter turnout rate and the fact that Arab voters do not tend to throw away their votes on parties that don't pass the electoral threshold contributed to this. Thus, with the counting of valid votes given to lists that succeeded in passing the threshold, the relative weight of Arab votes increased.

However, it is clear to the Arab parties that there is no stability. It is difficult to draw a demographic profile of non-voters. It is also difficult to know the proportion of non-voters who deliberately boycotted the elections and the proportion of those abstaining out of political indifference. According to the Konrad Adenauer survey (cited above), it can be estimated that most of those aged 35 and under - almost 60% - did not vote on Election Day. These young people are the future generation in Arab politics, and the ball is now in their court. Arab parties must adopt a discourse of "new politics," take account of public criticism about their failed conduct that led to the dismantling of the Joint List, and even open their doors to young political parties who are not necessarily affiliated with their party apparatus. In this respect, the recent elections could mark the beginning of a new era in Arab politics in Israel.

Mohammad Darawashe* / To Close the Rifts, Leadership is Needed

For the Arab voter, there weren't compelling reasons to vote in the 2019 Knesset elections. In fact, a number of reasons motivated him not to.

Quarrels around the issue of seat rotation plagued the Joint List and clarified for the Arab voter that the hope for unity had been lost. The Arab public therefore decided to punish the parties, taking from them the privilege it had given, returning them to their natural size in order to school them in the laws of modesty.

Arab voters perceived the Nation-State Law as the antithesis of the integration to which they aspire. The law conveyed a clear message to Arab citizens that a border had been placed before them, and that they should not cultivate aspirations for class equality.

Arab leaders must open the ranks of leadership and accept into it pragmatic social and economic figures. The mechanism of political parties are outdated and no longer reflect the new moods of the Arab public.

There is no doubt that it is time to open a new chapter in Center-Left relations with Arab society. Without Arab cooperation, the Center-Left bloc will never come to power. Conversely, without the partnership of the Center-Left, the Arab public will not be able to influence decision-making in the state of Israel.

Had the voter turnout of Arab citizens in the last elections been the same as it was in the elections of 2015 (then, it was 64%), they would have won 16 seats in the 21st Knesset and the number of Arab MKs would have been the highest in the nation's history. But as we know, this was not the case. Arab voter turnout in the 2019 elections was at its the lowest since the establishment of the state - 49% - and there were several reasons for this. The Arab citizen was not presented with convincing reasons for voting, and additionally, a plethora of reasons motivated him not to vote. As such, the Arab public felt a sense of fatalism that amounted to an experiment in mass political suicide.

The first reason for the low voter turnout was internal: voters were disappointed in the Arab MKs who received an expanded mandate and trust from the Arab public in the previous elections, but ultimately failed them. In 2015, the Arab public pushed for the establishment of the Joint List, and polls promised that a united party would increase voter turnout on the part of Arab citizens who until then had preferred to abstain from voting. This wave of support was followed by great expectations of the Arab representatives in the Knesset, among them, the expectation of maintaining unity

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and cooperation between the various parties that formed the List. Moreover, the merger of Arab parties seemed feasible because the Arab voter did not understand the real differences between them; while they all spoke similarly in Hebrew when relating to the Israeli establishment, their rhetoric in Arabic, which was intended for the Arab public, expressed the differences between them. As a result, they turned against each other.

The quarreling between the parties that formed the Joint List peaked in a fiasco surrounding the rotation of Bassel Ghattas' seat, highlighting the individual interests of each party and emphasizing the divisions between them. It was clear that the hope for unity had been in vain, and that splitting into two parties that would represent the Arab voice in a respectful and dignified manner should be considered, with the expectation that two parties would awaken the dormant political space in the Arab communities and increase voter turnout.

The formation of the Joint List raised complications because it was not clear how to measure the true value of each of the List's parties. The last time the Arab parties ran separately was six years ago, in 2013, and the equation used to allocate seats in Knesset to each of the list's parties at that time seemed irrelevant in 2019. Some thought - perhaps rightly - that things had changed since 2013, and that their party now deserved greater representation. The main argument came from MK Ahmad Tibi's Ta'al party. The polls predicted success for him, partly due to the successful half term of the second candidate on his list, MK Osama Sa'adi. Tibi asked to allocate him two of the top ten seats, and three seats overall from the expected thirteen seats. Like Tibi, the Islamic Movement had never run independently, yet estimated that it was entitled to three seats in the top ten and five out of the total thirteen. The members of Balad acted in kind; though they had never claimed more than two seats when they ran independently, they asked for three seats in the top ten position and four out of the anticipated thirteen. Hadash, which at its best reached five seats in 1977 and in 2015, sought four seats in the top ten and five of the thirteen.

The Arab public perceived this internal conflict as a clash of egos between the parties, an attempt to undermine the joint lists' unity, and finally as a betrayal of the mandate given to them by the voters. As a result, the public decided to punish them, and took from them the right they had given, returning them to their natural size in order to in school them in the laws of modesty.

The second reason for the low voter turnout of the Arab public was anger at Israel's political system because of the Nation-State Law, which was viewed by the voting Arab public as the antithesis of the integration process to which they aspire. Participation in the elections is the most salient civil act of Israelization, and it emphasizes the desire to integrate into the political arena and not only in the state's social and economic arenas. The Nation-State Law erected a glass ceiling above the heads of those wishing to belong to the state and conveyed a clear message to Arab citizens that a border had been placed before them, and that they should not cultivate aspirations for class equality because their status in the hierarchy between Jews and Arabs in Israel would always be inferior.

The ideological boycott of Arab citizens intensified during the Knesset elections. The process of pushing the Arab public aside was answered with a process of its withdrawal from the political system, against its own clear interest.

The third reason for Arab society's low voter turnout was dissatisfaction with the idea of replacing the current government with Benny Gantz. It was not his image as a person nor his image as a military man that concerned the Arab public; in fact, other military chiefs of staff – Ehud Barak and Yizhak Rabin – had won their support.

Rather, it was Gantz's exclusionary rhetoric that troubled them, especially his unfortunate statement that he would join a coalition that would only establish Jewish parties, and his boasting that during his tenure as chief of staff, "parts of Gaza returned to the Stone Age." These two statements shattered his image as a possible alternative to deliver them from Netanyahu. The Arab public felt there was no justification to support such a substitution – it would be easier to criticize Netanyahu and his right-wing government for their blatantly racist rhetoric than to stretch to criticize latent racism. Gantz did not address the Arab public as a man who wished them well, as one who recognizes the legitimacy of their citizenship, or as one who understands their feelings. In turn, they taught him a bitter lesson: whosoever aspires to supplant the rule of the Right must approach the Arab public with respect.

The fourth reason for the low turnout of the Arab public in 2019 elections was the abandonment of on-the-ground campaign activity in the last month of campaigning and particularly on election day. There were no real political campaigns on the ground. I have run several parliamentary and local campaigns, and I can testify that this year there was a prevailing sense that the Arab parties did not know what to do because they feared facing criticism in the field. Therefore, they abandoned on-the-ground activity and decided to run a campaign based around social networks and a number of hollow campaign posters. They did not present a platform or content, did not apologize for their mistakes, were not seen enough in the streets, did not shake the hands of potential voters, and did not touch people's hearts. Arab voters live in a traditional society that demands a personal touch and knows how to forgive when one comes toward them. A miserable campaign yielded piteous results, and only feelings of mercy saved the Arab parties in the last two hours of the election day, when the voters concluded that the leadership had been damaged enough and that at the very least, the parties should be prevented from disappearing from the political arena altogether. The problem was that this awakening came too late.

Arab leaders must draw conclusions and initiate a reconciliation with the Arab public that is based on genuine appreciation and humility. Voter turnout of Arab citizens was 49%; from which 72% voted for them, meaning that 35% of the Arab public put their faith in them. In order to regain the hearts of Arab citizens, Arab leaders must open the ranks of leadership and accept into it pragmatic social and economic causes that are rooted in reality. Leaders of political parties are perceived as obsolete, tired, and self-serving; they are out of step with the new moods of the Arab public. Arab society requires leaders with the power to deal with the increasing violence and crime that is consuming it. It requires leaders with the power to lead economic growth in Arab society and channel its economic strategy. It requires leaders who identify with young Arab's breakthrough in Israeli academia and who know how to utilize their intellectual potential to the fullest. It requires leaders who can conduct effective and positive conversation with Jewish society, without prickliness and finger-pointing at the group as a whole. The Arab parties must adopt a social-economic agenda that will yield real results and abandon fiery rhetoric and speeches.

There is no doubt that a new chapter in relations between the Center-Left and Arab society must be opened – a chapter based on interdependence and mutual respect, not based on the understanding of Arabs as a "spare tire" for their camp. Without Arab participation, the Center-Left bloc will not rule in the future. On the other hand, without the Center-Left, the Arab public will be unable to influence decision-making in the state of Israel, thus perpetuating the Arab role as eternally hurting, complaining, and disappointed. The Arab public aspires to be a real partner with a Jewish public

that will reward them with a true partnership. The meaning of such a partnership is social and economic equality, as well as political equality, as promised in the state's Declaration of Independence. The Jewish majority must cast away their fear of coalition with the Arabs, as this is the only structure for an alternative government in Israel. Beneath the fears raised by the right-wing against government that would rely upon Arab MKs, it bears remembering that the legitimacy of this idea is derived from the Right itself: in 1996, Benjamin Netanyahu himself invited the Arab Democratic party to join his government, making *him* the first prime minister to offer a ministerial appointment to an Arab from an Arab party (the position was offered to MK Abd al-Wahhab Darawasha, but he politely declined). The resolutely right-winged Ariel Sharon was the first to promise he would appoint an Arab minister in his 2001 run for prime minister, a promise which forced the Labor Party to offer Salah Tarif to serve as the first Druze minister in the history of the state of Israel. In 2007, Ehud Olmert did not hesitate to appoint Raleb Majadale as the first Arab-Muslim minister, and he suffered no political consequence for it.

Unfortunately, the Left invests its efforts in immunizing themselves against the Right, trying to appear more right-wing and thereby amplifying the delegitimization of the Arab leadership. When Ehud Barak won prime minister in 1999 with the help of Arab votes, he then turned his back on his electoral partners and declared that it was necessary to have a government that relied on a Jewish majority in the Knesset. Barak was wary of the Right and feared backlash for having a government that relied upon Arabs rather than a Jewish majority. This cowardice exacted a high price from Jewish and Arab relations in the country, deepening the rift between the leftist camp and the Arab public. Furthermore, the Arabs' deep disappointment with their partners on the Left was expressed by the boycott of that same government and prime minister. This atmosphere was among the reasons for the outbreak of events in October 2000, events that deepened the divide between the Jewish and Arab publics and lost them an entire decade. The leaders of the Center-Left must extend an outstretched hand, mobilize bravery, courage, and faith in full civic equality and a willingness to withstand the anger and accusations of the Right. Attempts to please the Right have proven, time and again, to be a failed strategy.

There were considerable aftershocks following the difficult election campaign. The Arab leadership suffered greatly at the hands of Netanyahu's incitement and from the Arab public's dissatisfaction. The Center-Left bloc was defeated because it didn't succeed to speak to the Arab public, and because it attempted to masquerade as something that bears no resemblance to its actual civic identity. Jewish and Arab citizens alike endured demonstrations of incitement, polarization, and delegitimization. We require leaders with intelligence, integrity, and reason who will know how to bridge divides.