

# Bayan بیان ביאן

The Arabs in Israel הערבים בישראל

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Editor: Arik Rudnitzky

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## From the Editor's Desk

More than two months have passed since the 22<sup>nd</sup> Knesset elections, held on September 17, 2019. The current issue of *Bayan* contains two essays. Mohammad Darawshe discusses developments in Arab politics between the last two electoral campaigns, and addresses the future implications of the election results for the 22<sup>nd</sup> Knesset. Dr. Salim Brake's essay analyzes the considerations and voting patterns of the Druze in the Knesset elections.

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We invite our readers to contact us, through the following channels:

- The Konrad Adenauer Program for Jewish-Arab Cooperation:  
Arik Rudnitzky (Project Manager)  
Tel. 03-6409991
- Moshe Dayan Center website: [dayan.org](http://dayan.org)

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## **Mohammad Darawshe \* / The Spring's Back in their Steps: Arab Politics Following the Twenty-second Knesset Elections**

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The re-establishment of the Joint List for the 22<sup>nd</sup> Knesset elections was not an easy undertaking, but the considerable support for the Joint List in the elections illustrates the Arab public's ability to use its electoral power.

What spurred the Arab citizens to vote in the elections was precisely Netanyahu's campaign, which included messages against the Arab citizens and their leaders.

The public willingness expressed by the head of the joint list, Ayman Odeh, to join the center-left government faithfully reflects the Arab public's longing for political influence.

The Arab public wants to see results on the ground. It is relatively easy to pass government decisions that help Arab society, but the test is in the implementation.

If the Center-Left bloc maintains a close relationship with the Arab public and bridges the gap between the Joint List and other parties, the turnout of Arab citizens in the next election will continue to rise.

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Israel held elections in September for the second time in 2019. However, this time their results were entirely different from the elections held in April, awaking a sense in Arab society that a correction had taken place on the level of internal politics amongst the Arab parties and on the national political level. In the realm of Arab party politics, the Joint List's four component parties reunited to run together and avoided the crisis of splitting that they traversed in the April elections. Moreover, the percentage of Arab participation in the elections rose after having dropped to a historic low of 49 percent.

### **Strength in the Hands of the Public**

The return of the Joint List injected life into Arab society's political leadership. It proved that the Arab public is sober and that it uses its electoral strength for better or for worse. For example, in the elections for prime minister in 2001, after the events of October 2000, the Arab public had two options: Ehud Barak, the incumbent left-wing prime minister, or Ariel Sharon, the leader of the right-wing camp. The Arab population didn't consider either candidate to be a viable option. Most Arabs adamantly rejected the notion of being practical and voting for Barak, whom they believed to be chiefly responsible for the killing of thirteen Arab citizens in the October 2000 events. Beyond refusing to vote for Barak as retribution, the Arab

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\* **Mr. Mohammad Darawashe**, Director of Equality and Shared Society at the Givat Haviva Institute, is an expert in conflict resolution and a researcher at the Hartman Institute and at the Robert Bosch Academy in Berlin. Formerly, he managed the election campaigns of the Arab Democratic Party and the United Arab List. Today, he is a lecturer and political analyst for local and international media on the status of Arab citizens in Israel.

public wanted to send the Left a message: a candidate perceived by Arab voters to have a negative past is not fit to serve as prime minister and cannot be forced upon them by default. Meretz experienced this too in the last election cycle, when they joined forces with Barak under the Democratic Union and tried to ignore his dubious past.

The electoral power of the Arab public with regard to the Joint List was also proven in the twenty-first Knesset elections that were held in April. The List split into two groups under the assumption that they would profit by giving Arab voters more leeway and freedom of choice. The preliminary polls indeed supported this assumption, however the dissolution led to loud and ugly political discourse that included many instances of party leaders issuing personal attacks against each other and harsh accusations of who was at fault for the split. Furthermore, the two new lists didn't manage to draw new support to compensate for the dissolution. As such, the strength of the Arabs in the Knesset shrank from thirteen to ten seats.

### **The Arab Political System in the Leadup to the September Elections**

The negotiations for the reestablishment of the Joint List after the April elections were no less ugly than the dissolution that preceded them. The Arab public's distrust of these leaders has increased due to the sense that they are self-interested, each individual looking to maintain his own seat in the Knesset and each of the component parties looking to increase its share of seats over the others. The majority of the Arab public viewed the battle for the eleventh to thirteenth Knesset seats as a greedy, petty political exercise with each of the parties demanding more than they deserved in light of their achievements just a few months before. Even after the eleventh to sixteenth seats were agreed upon, embarrassing details of the deal's proceedings were leaked, including the exchange of money for seats and general disagreements over the party's platform. All of this threatened the Joint List's chances of reclaiming the thirteen-seat victory it won in 2015. Most polls predicted that the party wouldn't win more than ten seats in the September elections.

Some attempts were made to establish new lists that would challenge the Joint List, since its image became one of a sloppy, aging party that had wearied from its internal clashes. There were promising polls that predicted the new movements would pass the voting threshold. Professor Asad Ghanem jumped on the bandwagon and established the People's Unity Party. His political inexperience and lack of funding led to a number of mistakes, from the selection of candidates, to hesitant messaging, to running a campaign without any aim. The total votes cast for the party were scant – less than 6,000.

Mohammad al-Sayyed established the Karamah wa-Mosawah (“Respect and Equality”) Movement and believed that social connections and reliance on a number of Sheiks from the Negev region would supply him many votes. He too was disappointed after winning the support of only 1,500 voters. Both men were noticeably lacking in political experience, in knowledge of campaign management, and in the funding necessary for connecting with potential voters.

An additional attempt to create a Jewish-Arab list was undertaken by former Knesset members Talab al-Sana, Avraham Burg, and David Zucker. They received positive reviews in the media and were perceived by many as a promising option.

Nevertheless, the opportunity quickly faded as it became clear that the initiative lacked financial resources and that it was targeting the same audience as existing parties, such as Meretz, the Labor Party, the Joint List and the new list parties (the People's Unity Party and Karama wa-Masawa). The leaders decided to take the responsible decision not to run, so as not to chip away from any of the parties in the Left camp to which they belong. As such, the options presented to the Arab public were not especially enticing and the prevailing atmosphere of heaviness hinted at another political collapse.

### **What Brought Arabs Back to the Polls?**

The Arab public began to awaken when the prime minister began disparaging them. From the beginning of his campaign, Netanyahu adopted a familiar trick for uniting the right wing: incitement against Arab citizens and Arab leaders. It was not a campaign tactic planned at the last minute – it was opened one month before the elections, and in fact, time worked against Netanyahu. The Arab public began to react with disgust and derision at the prime minister's statements. The statements were intended to delegitimize Arab voters, to attack their leaders, and to insult the entire Arab public with his threat to set up cameras at the voting stations. All of this prompted many in the Arab public to respond.

In the leadup to the September elections, a number of organizations mobilized to encourage Arab voters to utilize their voting rights. They took advantage of Netanyahu's attacks to create an air of emergency in the Arab community and called for action against it. For example, the "Zazim" ("We move") movement, harnessed the voting power of scattered Bedouin voters by providing them transportation to the polls on the organization's expense. When Likud members turned to the head of the Israeli Central Elections Committee and demanded he prohibit the organization from transporting Bedouin voters, a contingency of private volunteers spontaneously arose to take Bedouin voters to the polling places; instead of the 60 vehicles the "Zazim" movement had intended to deploy, 300 volunteers covered the territory in their own cars. The volunteers thus contributed to the atmosphere of the election and to a substantial increase in voter turnout in the Negev.

Perhaps the most dramatic occurrence that led to high voter turnout in September was Ayman Odeh's statements in an interview with Nachum Barnea for the newspaper *Yediot Ahronot*. Odeh expressed the Joint List's interest in joining a center-left government coalition and that the party would recommend appointing Benny Gantz to build the new government. He added that even if none of the Joint List's members would serve in the government, it would nevertheless provide it support and a safety net. It important to recall that in the last twenty years, the leaders of the Arab parties have been hesitant to make such statements and have dug their heels into a warring, oppositional stance. For example, such a stance was adopted as a backlash to the election of Ehud Barak as prime minister in 1999, wherein Barak won his mandate with the help of Arab votes, but then refused to include them in the government as he had promised during the campaign. Barak's actions caused the Arab public to feel that they had no group or person to partner with politically on the Left, and certainly not on the Right either, except for on specific agreements from time to time. This time, Ayman Odeh took a gamble that paid off. Odeh utilized polling data that asserted the Arab public is more pragmatic than its leaders, and shook off his fear of the Balad party's reaction to these statements, which had held him from making such statements in the past.

Odeh's statement met with a sympathetic public who wanted more of the same, and social media networks began to compliment him. They quickly silenced the boycott movement to the point that it had no influence on the elections, even after having been very active in the elections in April. Ta'al party leader, Dr. Ahmed Tibi, and the Islamic Movement leader, Dr. Mansour Abbas, joined in Odeh's sentiments and thus created a decisive majority for pragmatism within the Joint List. Balad's dissent had no noticeable influence over the voters or the ballots they cast.

### **Lessons from the Elections**

In this election cycle, it was Benny Gantz and his staff who learned a lesson. This time, they were more conservative in their discussion of the identity of the coalition they would establish, and they didn't speak of a Jewish or Zionist coalition. Their discourse was reserved and focused on the idea of a liberal coalition. In the leadup to the composition of their seating list for Knesset they even inserted a leading Arab personality in a secure position, but ultimately decided to return to their original list and instead proposed the idea of incorporating an Arab minister into Gantz's government (were it to be formed). Their campaign targeted young Arabs and attempted to attract them. This did not increase the number of voters for the Blue-White party in the Arab sector, however it did contribute to a positive atmosphere within the Arab community. They voted for the Joint List as an apparent potential partner in joining the Blue-White party in the formation of a government or in the creation of a strong opposition bloc. They hoped for the creation of a technical bloc that would provide support to a government without Benjamin Netanyahu, who never missed an opportunity to lash out at the Arab public in an attempt to turn the Jewish public against them.

In spite of their accomplishments, the Joint List was in no hurry to congratulate themselves. The scars from April are still visible and there is still doubt about the reactions of the Arab electorate. The Arab parties fear their voters when they raise demands, many of which will affect the party's agenda. The public does not want "niche" parties that express the ideology of the List's component parties. It demands the party to demonstrate results that will affect the voters' daily lives, such as a decrease in the level of crime and violence, the recognition of houses that were built without permits (through the approval of plans that outline the inclusion of these houses), and the creation of work places for the new strata of workers from Arab society who are looking to join the labor force (such as women).

In addition, the middle class that is beginning to be consolidated in Arab society has demands for quality of life. The acquisition of better quality of life requires budgets for suitable infrastructures in Arab localities – roadways, lighting, open spaces, sports facilities, maintenance and cultural activities that local authorities are supposed to provide. The Joint List is expected to provide for these needs and must deliver these budgets and not just promises. Resolution 922, a government development plan from 2015 that budgeted 15 billion shekels to Arab communities, is beginning to be perceived as a disappointment because the budget has not been executed. Political influence is required to realize any government program; while it is relatively easy to secure government decisions to aid the Arab community, the difficulty lays in transferring the funds to carry out their purpose. In the past, there have been dozens of government decisions and laws intended to solve problems in Arab society, however their execution fails because there is no supervision from the government or Arab MKs. The marginalization of Arab Knesset members may have prevented them

from implementing their programs for Arab society, but joining a strong force like the center-left bloc may mitigate this marginalization and open a new page in Arab life. However, it is necessary to temper this optimism. While the center-left block realizes that it will not seize power without relying upon Arab MKs, it is not yet ready to confront right-wing delegitimization of Arab society. As such, the center-left still leans toward “a soft right” in its own language, especially since Netanyahu managed to impose the idea that the government should have a Jewish majority.

## **Conclusion**

In Arab society, a feeling has emerged that there is power in their hands – it has the ability to punish Arab parties for their behavior through the “carrot and stick” approach. It also sensed its ability to bring down right-wing incitement against it and to compel the center-left block to employ candidates and stances that reflect their desires. This power will grow stronger in the next election cycle. If the Left will manage to preserve mutually beneficial relations with the Arab public and take additional steps to become closer to the Joint List and other parties in the bloc, the number of Arab voters will increase in the next elections and their rate of voter turnout will increase in great measure, to even more than the 59 percent that voted in the September elections. We may even approach the general population turnout rate and restore the Arab voting rate in 1999, a year in which approximately 78 percent of voters in Arab society participated in the elections.

Nevertheless, political parties that want to enjoy a high voter turnout rate must be ready to speak with voters in their own language. The current structure of the Joint List has no democratic mechanism for decision-making and no dynamic mechanism for innovation or the incorporation of new voters. As such, the party is not attracting voters beyond those that casted their ballots for the List in September. The party must change in these regards and then it might succeed to benefit from an additional rise in Arab voter turnout.

The center-left parties must also make changes. Meretz must include new Arab leaders on its list that will return Arab society’s fondness for the party. It must also renounce Ehud Barak. The same goes for the Labor party, which has no accomplished Arab representatives or public servants on its list. Its leadership must understand that the era of Arab go-betweens has come to an end and that there is a need for Arab leaders whose worldview is close to the heart of the Arab public. The Blue-White Party, which is bidding to lead the government, must also grow and lead liberal policy toward the Arab public, a policy that espouses the principle of civil equality and supports common interests.

As for the right-wing parties, which together won almost a full mandate from the Arab public: they must at least respect Arab voters. They initiated the National Law and many other racist laws, and the Arab public replied in kind. The time has come to abandon the view of Arab as an eternal enemy; they will not profit from it.

## Salim Brake \* / The Druze Vote for the Twentieth, Twenty-First, and Twenty-Second Knesset Elections

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The Druze generally vote on utilitarian considerations, such as voting for parties expected to be included in the coalition and to influence government policy. Few of them vote for ideological motives.

Social networks voiced fierce criticism following two legislative acts that have hurt Druze over the past year: Kaminitz Law and Nation State Law. Despite this, the Druze artificially separated their stance on these laws and voted for parties that supported those laws.

The Blue-White party spoke against the Nation State Law in its current form, and as a result, drew significant support from the Druze community. However, Blue-White is only committed to amending the law and including a clause referencing equality within it, and not eliminating it as Druze hoped.

The increase in support for the "Israel Beitenu" party is due to the fact that the Druze representatives in the Likud are not seen as representing the real interests of the Druze community. In addition, the Druze candidate in the "Israel Beitenu" party expressed opposition to the Nation State Law.

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### Introduction

143,000 Druze live in Israel today. 122,000 Druze are concentrated in the Galilee and Carmel regions, and the rest are in the Golan. There are 84,000 Druze with the right to vote.<sup>1</sup> 54,000 of them reside in Druze villages; 26,000 reside in Arab communities such as Peki'in, Mughar, and Abu Sinan, where Druze, Muslims, and Christians live side by side; and the rest live in Jewish cities such as Naharia, Carmiel and Eilat, or in mixed cities like Akko, Ma'alot Tarhisha, Haifa, and Tel Aviv-Yafo.<sup>2</sup> A portion of Druze voters vote through absentee ballots, mainly soldiers and members of the security forces, and as such it is not possible to precisely examine their votes.

This article will examine Druze votes through a comparison of the twentieth, twenty-first, and twenty-second Knesset elections. This study will investigate votes from localities whose population is predominantly Druze, including Arab villages where part of the population is Druze. The study analyzes voting results based on various characteristics that help to properly isolate the Druze vote to a reasonable degree, in order to achieve maximal accuracy in the examination of their voting patterns.

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\* **Dr. Salim Brake** is a lecturer of Political Science at the Open University and at Yazreel Valley College. His research specializations are Israeli-Palestinian relations and Arab and Druze politics in Israel. His recent publications include: *The Arabs in Mixed Cities: Comparing Political Aspects* [Hebrew]. Haifa: University of Haifa, 2017; A. Ghanem, M. Mostafa, & S. Brake, *Israel in the Post Oslo Era*, London: Routledge, 2019. He is currently working on two forthcoming books: *Characteristics of Knesset Members and the Relationship Between their Function and Results*; and *The Druze Community in Israel: Social and Political Aspects*, a book which is part of a comprehensive study of the Druze in the Middle East entitled *Border Minorities in the Middle East: The Druze as a Case Study* (Routledge).

<sup>1</sup> Central Bureau of Statistics, 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Central Bureau of Statistics, 2016.



However, it is important to note that the most efficient way to examine the Druze vote would be to analyze votes from Druze localities alone. Votes from predominantly Druze communities in the Golan were not examined in this study, as very few voters exercised their right to vote.<sup>3</sup>

In the election cycle for the twentieth Knesset, Druze voter turnout stood at 57.7 percent. Voter turnout was 60.1 percent for the twenty-first Knesset, and it dropped to 54.5%<sup>4</sup> in the twenty-second election cycle, mostly owing to their disappointment in the legislation of the Nation-State Law. The high voter turnout in the elections for the twenty-first cadence is likely due to the mobilization of the Meretz Party, which placed a worthy Druze candidate with a reasonable chance of gaining a seat on its ticket, and due to its undertaking the struggle against the Nation-State Law, which helped it to differentiate itself from right-wing parties and from the Blue-White Party. The Blue-White Party did not commit to repealing the law, but rather vaguely promised to include an article in the law that would guarantee equal civil rights within the realm of individual rights. In light of the results of the elections for the twenty-first Knesset, Druze disappointment grew, and they began to sense that the law would neither be repealed nor amended.<sup>5</sup>

### **The Weight of the Druze Vote**

Leveraging the electorate by serving its utilitarian or expedient needs is not a new phenomenon. In the nineteenth century, electoral markets were common and widespread (in countries such as Great Britain, for example) following the expansion of the right to vote by giving it to the masses. Instrumental use of citizens' votes goes against democratic principles and creates openings for various forms of corruption. It is necessary to wrestle with this phenomenon, yet the need of Zionist parties to have some semblance of inclusion of minorities in their frameworks on the one hand, and the Druze need to improve their social and economic standing on the other, has given way to the entrenchment of this phenomenon by Druze power-brokers, thereby eroding the already limited electoral strength of the Druze population (just 1.3 percent of the general electorate) and weakening them as a group.

In general, the Druze population votes according to practical considerations. For example, they often vote for Zionist parties that will presumably be included in the government and therefor wield influence in it. Sometimes their voting patterns are distinctly instrumental: they vote for a party whose list includes a community or family member who may be able to bestow some kind benefit upon them, or they vote to promote a candidate at the municipal level, or they vote according to the influence of relationships and acquaintances with senior military personnel, and more. Few Druze voters are motivated by ideology.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> From 1,780 citizens with the right to vote, 314 (17%) of them voted in the twenty-first Knesset elections. The breakdown by party is as follows: Blue-White – 117; Likud – 96; Kulanu – 25; Meretz – 23. The rest voted for other parties. 377 (20%) voted in the twenty-second Knesset elections: Blue-White – 151; Likud – 102; Israel Beitenu – 19; Meretz – 6.

<sup>4</sup> All data was taken from the Central Election Committee for Knesset's website.

<sup>5</sup> Between the two election campaigns, social networks made noise on this issue, and even Druze lawmakers who petitioned to repeal the law began to make unsolicited statements, especially in light of the Likud's success in the twenty-first Knesset elections.

<sup>6</sup> Those interested in the Druze vote should see: Brake, 2018; Brake, 2002.

Since the Knesset elections, right-wing parties have placed their own Druze candidates on their lists for the Knesset who don't always represent their community's needs or desires. For example, the Israel Beitenu Party demonstrates open hostility against the Arab minority, and its members have spoken more than once in favor of reducing the number of Arabs in Israel. Even when a Druze representative is included on its list, the candidate is forced upon the Druze, having been chosen by the party and not by the Druze themselves; this in turn leads to damage in Druze relations with their Muslim and Christian neighbors. The Druze sometimes faced embarrassment on the part of such representatives, for example, as with Likud MK Ayoob Kara and his attacks on Arab representatives in the Knesset, or his puzzling insistence on being blessed by rabbis and the like. Some used Druze representatives against Druze interests, as seen in the passing of the Nation-State Law.<sup>7</sup>

Most parties place conditions on the receipt of services or various nominations, both implicitly and directly. For example, when the National Religious Party had control of the Ministry of Education, school directors received appointments according to their family's contributions to the party. Shas also operated in this manner when it ran the Ministry of the Interior, as have the Likud and Labor parties.<sup>8</sup> In several cases, the national party would strike a deal with a local family. Additional methods that have been used (and are still in use) are civil service appointments and promoting initiatives or services that are intended to advance a specific individual. For example, in 2013 Foreign Affairs Minister, Avidgor Lieberman, nominated the late Professor Na'im Araydeh, a Druze resident of Ma'ar, to serve as Israel's ambassador to Norway. This move contained a two-fold benefit for Lieberman, enabling him to shake off the image of a racist who hates Arabs while winning the support of the Druze within his party.

The Israel Beitenu Party exemplifies how party wheeler-dealers control the Druze electorate. This particular party espouses significantly racist opinions<sup>9</sup> and views the state's Arab citizens as true enemies. On more than one occasion, Lieberman referred to Arab Knesset members as "terrorists," even suggesting that its allowable to physically harm them.<sup>10</sup> Yet, the party stationed Druze politico, Hamed 'Amar, in the Knesset in its service since 2009, and counterintuitive to its rhetoric, currently enjoys the support of the Druze; in the twentieth Knesset elections, the party won a full quarter of the sector's votes. I spoke with several Druze who voted for the party to understand the ideological factors or values might explain their vote, as Israel Beitenu has been involved in more corruption than any other party to date.<sup>11</sup> I was told that Druze support was owing to the promotion of community member by an Israel Beitenu representative, and that the promotion had served him well. This method of influence also utilizes businesses and other sources of income. For example, a small

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<sup>7</sup> For more information on this topic see: Brake, 2019; Brake, 2018.

<sup>8</sup> For more information on conditional state appointments and services in voting see: Brake, 2002; Brake, 2010.

<sup>9</sup> "Lieberman: We will remove the heads of those who are against us with an ax," *News 2*, 8 March 2015; Eldar, 2017.

<sup>10</sup> In just one of many examples, Lieberman declared there is no reason for Arabs to be citizens of Israel. See: Nir, 2017; Khoury, 2017.

<sup>11</sup> Since joining politics Avigdor Lieberman has been investigated by the police for various matters. Although he was acquitted, his acquittal was owing to the statute of limitations that resulted from the unreasonable lengthening of the Attorney General's handling of the matter, and from the refusal of witnesses to testify as well as the disappearance of some. For more information on this subject see: Alef, 2015. His party, Israel Beitenu, is one the most corrupted parties in Israel in terms of the number of incidences and scope of corruption. For further details, see: Megiddo, 2019.

business owner told me he had turned a sizable profit after a party representative purchased services from him: “When he called me before the elections, I hadn’t forgotten him, and I recruited nearly my entire clan to vote for him, and it’s a very big clan in the village.” Israel Beitenu has gone even farther than this. Hamed ‘Amar established a Druze youth movement within the party, and the organization transfers funds from its budget to various Druze businesspeople in every village. These businesspeople are then transformed into meaningful soldiers on election day.

The elections for the twenty-first and twenty-second Knesset generated a paradoxical situation: the Druze were required to vote against their stated interest and even against the declarations of their representatives in the Knesset. The elections were held after two acts of legislation that greatly impacted the Druze: the amendment of the Planning and Building Law (known as the “Kaminich Amendment”), and the Nation-State Law.

For more than a year, social networks have been in an uproar against these pieces of legislation, however, the Druze voted for parties which initiated and advanced these laws and supported them in each stage of legislation. The situation rose to such crescendo that Amir Khneifes, the grandson of Sheikh Salih Khneifes, a principle supporter of the Zionist Movement, issued an emphatic verbal attack of the Nation-State Law’s lead advocate, Avi Dichter. Why then did the Druze vote for parties that advanced these laws in such large percentages? (In Shafram, 80% of Druze voted for Israel Beitenu.) It seems that the Druze made a superficial distinction between the Druze MK who had voted against the law in the plenary session – ‘Amar, for instance – and his party, to an extent that seems unreasonable and contrary to logic.

### **Voting Trends Compared**

From the twentieth to the twenty-second Knesset elections the number of Druze voters rose by about six thousand. In the twentieth Knesset elections, one quarter of Druze voters voted for Israel Beitenu, which won the highest number of votes. Behind Israeli Beitenu was the Zionist Union, which included the Labor Party and Hatnua Movement. Until that election cycle, the Labor Party had always been first among the Druze population, usually winning between twenty and thirty percent of their votes. Third amongst Druze voters was the Kulanu Party, whose representative, Akram Hasson succeeded to recruit a substantial part of votes from Daliyat al-Karmel and many other villages. The Joint List, whose representative Abdullah Abu Ma’rouf was in a high position on their list (their rotating seating arrangement was not disclosed to the public), won 11.6 percent of the Druze vote. The Likud, with a Druze representative who had been a deputy minister, won 8 percent of the Druze vote, which was even less than Shas (8.6 percent).

### **Analysis of Druze Voting Trends for Mainstream Parties**

**Israel Beitenu:** This party was the strongest among the Druze population in the twentieth Knesset elections, winning 23.8 percent of its votes. The party’s advantage was the result of concerted and consistent party efforts among the Druze community, as previously stated. Beyond this, the absence of a Druze candidate in a realistic position on the list of other parties aided the decline of the Likud Party.

The party's power decreased by almost half in the twenty-first Knesset elections, winning only 12.6 percent of the Druze vote. This is partly due to the fact that the party's Druze candidate did not appear to have a realistic chance of joining the Knesset, according to forecasts that predicted that the party would not pass the mandate threshold. Conversely, the Meretz party placed a Druze candidate in a realistic position on its list, and thus increased Druze support by a large measure, as we shall see. Another reason for the decline in Israel Beitenu's power was its support of the Nation-State Law.

In the twenty-second elections for Knesset, the party's power increased in the Druze sector, mainly because Kulanu's list was absorbed into the Likud, making it impossible to vote for the former. Additionally, the fact the Druze candidate on the Meretz list was pushed back to an unrealistic position returned voters to Israel Beitenu. This time, the polls brightened as it seemed that Hamed 'Amar, who didn't serve in the twenty-first Knesset, would return to serve in the twenty-second cadence, and indeed it came to pass. Moreover, 'Amar succeeded to convince many voters that he would personally fight against the Nation-State Law – which he did – and that they should vote for him despite his party. He partially succeeded and his party received 18.8 of the Druze vote. In 'Amar's town of Shafram, the party won 75 percent of the Druze votes, edging out almost every other party. In other Druze localities, such as Peki'in, Rameh, and Usfiyyah, the party won more votes than any other party.

**Blue-White:** This party, of which three of its members have served as Chief of Staff for the Israeli Defense Forces, caught the attention of the Druze because many of them recognize its leadership because of their service in the army. The party expressed opposition to the Nation-State Law in its current platform and thereby stirred hope that the Druze would gain recognition as equal citizens through the law's repeal. Despite this, the party's commitment to the law in principle, to amend it and include within it values of equality, slightly hampered Druze motivation to vote for it. The Druze had hoped for the law's repeal and not merely its amendment, while the commitment to equality on part of the Blue-White party referred exclusively to individual civil equality and not collective rights. Beyond this, many Druze (as well as Jews of Arab origin) were affected by the nullification of the Arab language's status as an official state language. Needless to say, the Arabic language is the Druze population's language of worship, speech, culture, and production.

The forum of Druze military commanders had hoped that Blue-White's list would include a Druze commander, however, party leader Gantz chose the well-known and outspoken journalist, Ghadir Kamal Mreih, instead. With this move he signaled that he is not obligated to his friends in the military, but to the advancement of the Druze and to making meaningful changes in their community, such as advancing a woman (such as Kamal Mreih) to a leadership position.

In the twenty-first Knesset elections, the party won 36 percent of the Druze vote, and in the twenty-second elections (after Meretz weakened), Blue-White's support in the Druze sector grew to about half (47.8 percent). In Daliyat al-Karmel the party won 78.1 percent of votes, 69.9 percent in neighboring Ussafiyya, and 51.8 percent in Hurfeish.

**The Likud:** Although the Likud is in power and although its representative Ayoob Kara was a deputy minister and later a minister, support for the party is rather low. In the twentieth Knesset elections it won only 7.8 percent of Druze votes (as a comparison, the brand new Kulanu party won 18.4 percent). Even in Daliyat al-Karmel, which is Kara's village, the party won even less support. The party's

strongholds were in Rameh, where Druze businessman Saher Ismail had been appointed adviser to Gideon Saar, as well as in Abu Sinan.

In the twenty-first elections, the party received 11.1 percent of the Druze vote, making it the fourth strongest party in the sector. The Likud's power rose due to the mobilization of Yarka, whose resident was given a realistic placement on their list, and the mobilization of the town's neighbor, Kisra-Sumei. The Likud retained its strength in the twenty-second Knesset elections (9.6 percent), even though it led the Nation-State Law and its Druze minister, Kara, supported it against the Druze interest. The reasons for the weakening of the Likud are, as mentioned, its advancement of the Nation-State Law and of Druze party members who were not perceived as representatives with concern for the interests of their community.

**Meretz:** This party had historically received only one to two percent of the Druze vote. For example, in the twentieth Knesset elections, only two percent voted for Meretz, however, it initiated two important actions in the twenty-first election campaign that increased its power. First, it raised the flag for abolishing the Nation-State Law, and second, it placed an appropriate Druze candidate on a realistic position on its list. These moves led Meretz to win 15.8 percent of the Druze vote, and win 64.8 percent of the vote in its Druze candidate's hometown of Beit Ja'an. In the next election cycle, when the party pushed its Druze candidate, Ali Salalha, to a lower position on its list, its popularity in the Druze sector shrank to 3.2 percent of the vote.

**Shas:** While it's quite clear that there is no connection between the Shas party and the Druze population, the party nevertheless receives a fair amount of its votes. In the twentieth Knesset elections, 5 percent of Druze voters voted for Shas, and the party earned a similar portion of votes in the twenty-first and twenty-second elections – 4.4 and 4 percent, respectively. Shas won considerable support from Druze in the past due to the mobilization of clans from Yarka, however their power has shrunk by half at present. The party recruits votes through appointments at the Ministry of the Interior and therefore has relatively large power in Ma'ar and Abu Sinan, where Druze from these communities (both formerly high-ranked commanders in the army) were given executive appointments when the Ministry of the Interior was under Shas' control.

**The Joint List:** Leading up to the twentieth Knesset elections, the Joint List received 11.6 percent of the Druze vote, mostly from the village of its candidate Abdullah Abu Ma'aruf, a resident of Yarka (in Yarka, 36.9 percent of voters supported the List). At the time, the rotation of the Druze candidate's seat in the Knesset was not publicized. In the twenty-first Knesset elections, Balad-Ra'am won a negligible amount of Druze votes. Hadash Ta'al, which placed a Druze candidate in a low position on its list and limited his term in their parties' agreements, won only 2.9 percent of the vote, most of the votes coming from Ma'ar (9.9 percent). In the twenty-second Knesset elections, it was felt that the Druze candidate's position was unrealistic, and the candidate was not well-known among the Druze, so the Joint List won only 5.6 percent of the vote – much less than the forecasts apportioned them in Druze intellectual discourse. Even in Ma'ar, the village of candidate Jaber 'Asaqleh, the Joint List received only 12.3 of the vote, less than Israel Beitenu or even Shas.<sup>12</sup>

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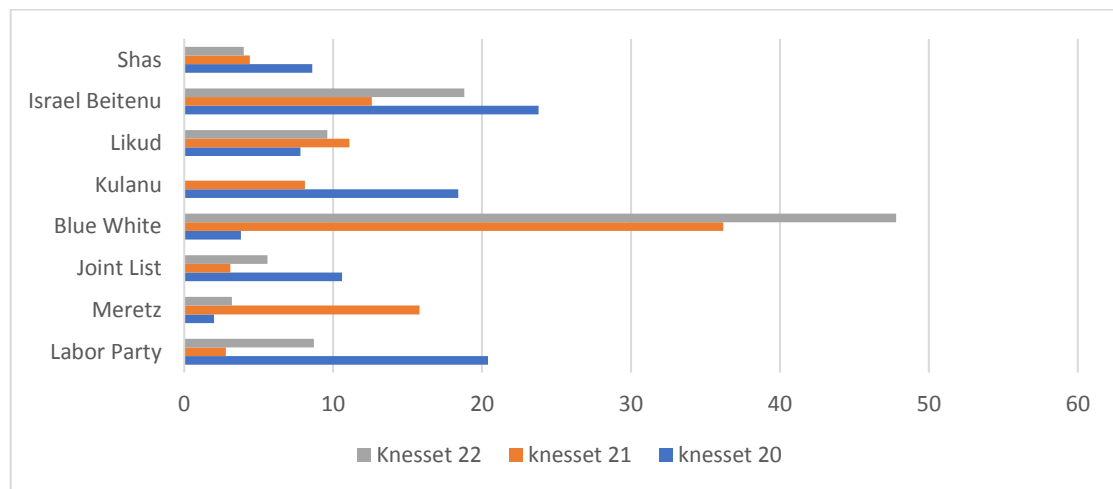
<sup>12</sup> The Election Committee data referred to herein represents numbers taken from predominantly Druze localities, but not Druze votes from mixed villages and cities.

## **Conclusion**

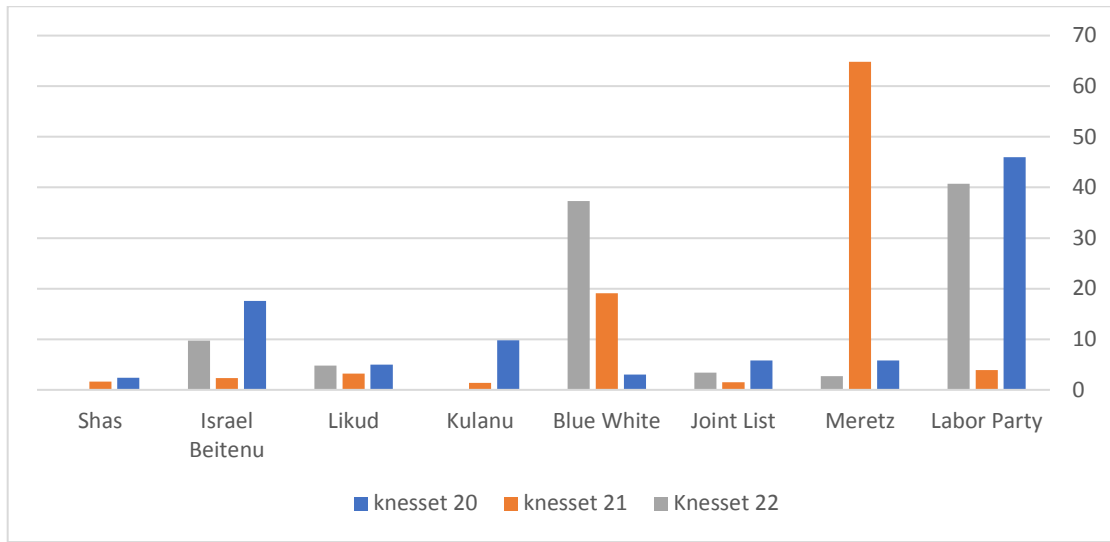
In conclusion, the Nation-State Law didn't cause substantial changes in Druze voting trends, in spite of their loud protest. They continued to vote according to classic codes: preference for parties currently in power or with the potential to be in power; preference for parties at the heart of Israeli consensus, and of course preference for fellow villagers and family members, even when a party itself works against the interest of the Druze (as in the case of the Nation-State Law) or doesn't advance any initiatives on their behalf. Occasionally, people voted for parties with no interest whatsoever in the Druze. For example, in the twenty-second Knesset elections, 342 Druze voted for the Jewish Home party, and 616 for Oren Hazzan (approximately one quarter of voters in the town of Yanuh-Jat). These votes demonstrate the weakening of the Druze, and not only from an electoral standpoint; the Druze are an especially small minority, its electorate is dispersed in an inefficient manner and uneducated in effective political strategies, agreeing to give their votes for the advancement of short-term personal or family gain. Like in elections past, the Druze have not nurtured any party loyalties, perhaps because they have, time and again, found themselves to be the odd man out or even wholly alienated from mainstream political ideologies in Israel.

**The following figures reflect the distribution of the Druze vote for the Knesset (Figure 1) and the distribution of votes in selected villages.**

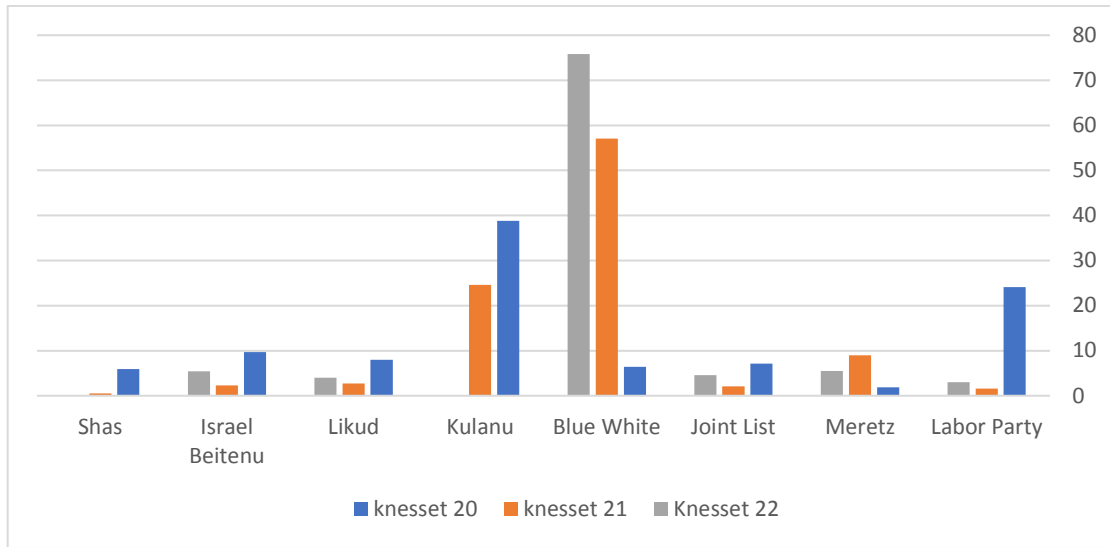
**Figure 1: Distribution of Druze Votes by Party, by Percentage**



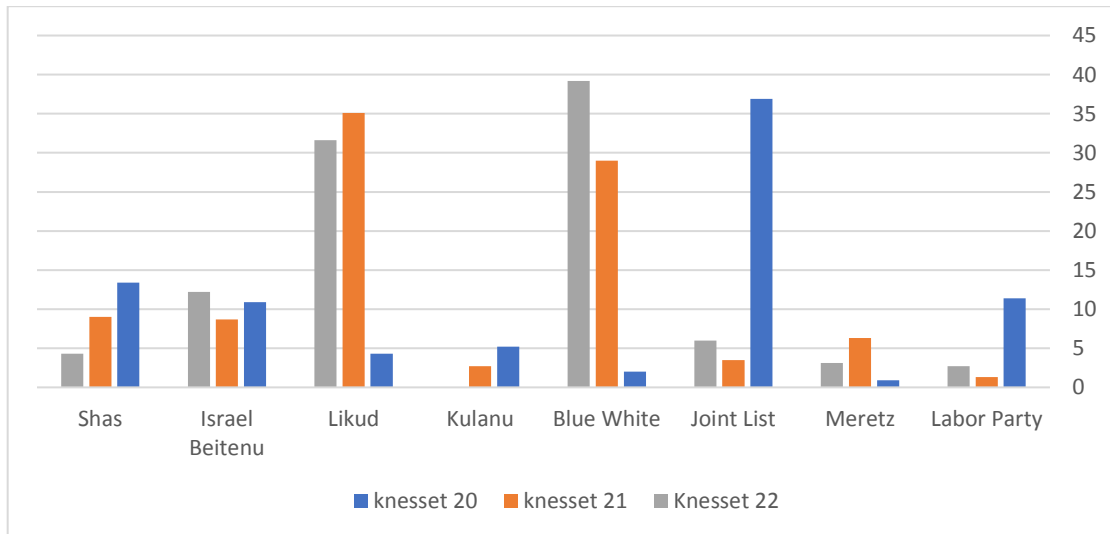
**Figure 2: Distribution of Druze Votes in Beit Jan, by Percentage**



**Figure 3: Distribution of Druze Votes in Daliyat al-Karmel, by Percentage**

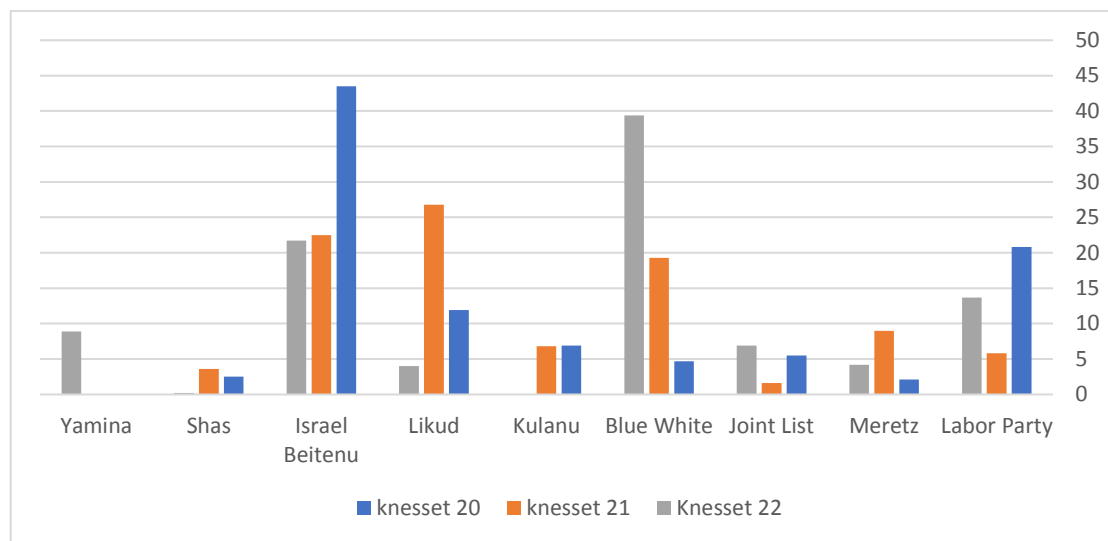


**Figure 4: Distribution of Druze Votes in Yarka, by Percentage**





**Figure 5: Distribution of Druze Votes in Kisra-Sumei, by Percentage**



Notes on the figures:

1. In the twentieth Knesset elections the Zionist Union (composed of the Tnuah and Labor parties) ran. In the twenty-first and twenty-second election cycles, the party campaigned under the name “The Labor Party.”
2. In the twenty-first Knesset elections, two lists ran: Balad-Ra’am and Hadash-Ta’al, the parties which composed the Joint list in the twentieth and twenty-second Knesset elections.
3. The Kulanu party was absorbed into the Likud in the twenty-second elections.

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