

Bayan بیان ביאן The Arabs in Israel הערבים בישראל

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From the Editor's Desk

This issue of Bayan is published almost two months after the 24th Knesset elections, and presents an in-depth essay by Ziyad Abu Habla, analyzing Arab voting patterns in the recent Knesset 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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The Konrad Adenauer Program for Jewish-Arab Cooperation (KAP) was established in 2004 by the German Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung and Tel Aviv University as part of the Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies. KAP is an expansion of the Program on Arab Politics in Israel established by the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung and Tel Aviv University in 1995. The purpose of KAP is to deepen the knowledge and understanding of Jewish-Arab relations in Israel through conferences, public lectures and workshops, as well as research studies, publications and documentation.

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Ziyad Abu Habla * / Analysis of Arab Voting Patterns in the Elections for the 24th Knesset

The Arab sector has the electoral potential to win 25 seats in the Knesset. The low voter participation rate in the last elections (44.6%) was the result of a number of factors: the Arab representatives' lack of influence on the government; the Arab community's lack of confidence in parliamentary endeavor; the marginal status of Arab society; and the ideological boycotting of the elections.

The poor results of the parties on the Left among Arab voters reflect their problematic relations with the Arab community. Arab voters do not view the leftist parties as a viable electoral alternative. On the other hand, only a negligible number of Jewish voters voted for the two Arab parties.

The success of the United Arab List (Ra'am) and the failure of the Joint List in the Bedouin sector are the result of the latter's inability to provide solutions to the problems of the Bedouin population, as well as the support in Bedouin society for Ra'am's religious and conservative platform.

Background

According to the data of the Central Bureau of Statistics, the Arab population of Israel was about 1.956 million at the end of 2020, which represents 21.1 percent of the total population. About 148 thousand of the total live in mixed Jewish-Arab cities.¹

This survey focuses on the election results for the 24th Knesset among the Arab population living outside the mixed cities who number 1,365,847 according to the Knesset Central Election Committee. Among them are 897,184 eligible voters who live in Arab, Druze and Bedouin municipalities.²

In the elections for the 24th Knesset, there were 6,578,084 eligible voters in Israel, of which 4,435,805 or 67.4 percent exercised their right to vote. The number of valid votes was 4,409,566. According to the voting threshold of 3.25 percent, a party required 143,311 votes in order to gain entrance to the Knesset and therefore the average number of votes per Knesset seat is 35,828. The number of eligible Arab voters outside of the mixed cities³ was 897,184, of which 399,954 (44.6 percent)

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¹ Lior Ovadia, Israel's Population at the Beginning of 2021, Central Bureau of Statistics, December 31, 2020 [Hebrew]: https://www.cbs.gov.il/he/mediarelease/DocLib/2020/438/11_20_438b.pdf.

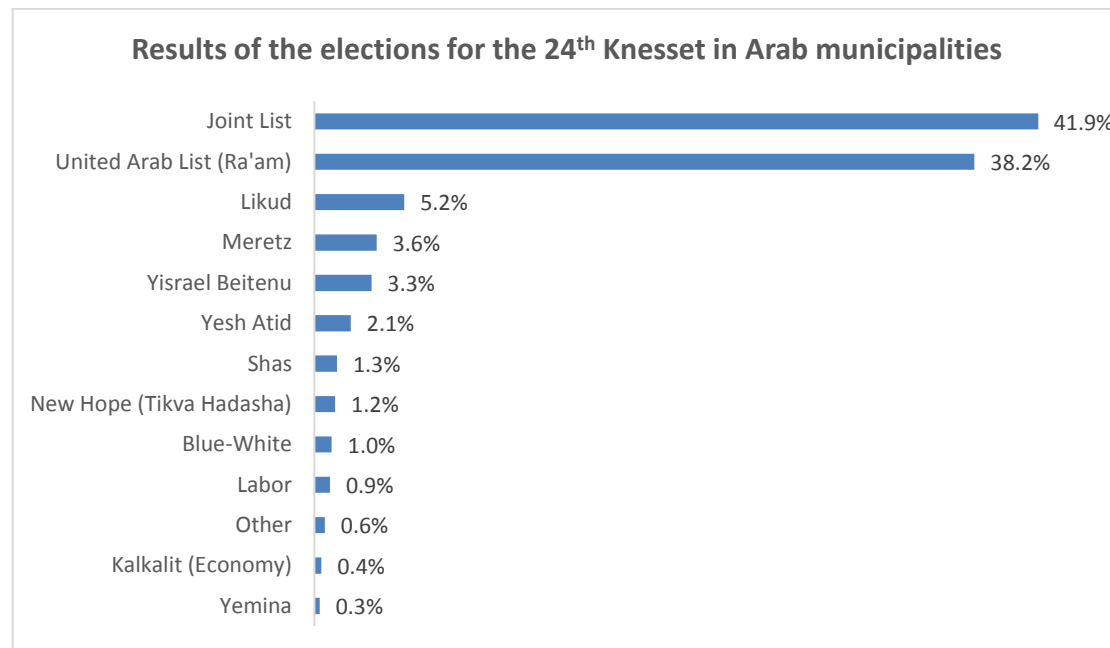
² The Election Committee of the 24th Knesset, Results According to City; processing by the author.

³ The classification was carried out by the author according to the municipalities that are identified as Arab.

exercised their right to vote. This is the lowest participation rate in Arab society observed for a Knesset election.⁴

Distribution of the Votes

The following graph presents the election results for the 24th Knesset among Arab voters and also each party's proportion of the Arab vote.



An analysis of the election results for the Arab population as a whole shows that the Joint List is the leading party with 165,738 Arab votes or 41.9 percent. Ra'am is in second place with 150,942 votes or 38.2 percent of the total. Next is the Likud which won 20,535 votes or 5.2 percent; Meretz is in fourth place with 14,425 votes or 3.6 percent; Yisrael Beitenu is in fifth place with 12,898 votes or 3.3 percent; and Yesh Atid follows with 8,422 votes or 2.1 percent. The other parties each received less than 1.5 percent of the total votes.

In order to understand the variation in the voting patterns, a sectoral segmentation was carried out of the Arab population according to the following grouping: (1) the Arab population without Bedouins and Druze; (2) the Bedouin population as a whole, the Bedouin population in the North and the Bedouin population in the South and the Bedouin periphery in the South (Negev); and (3) the Druze population.

1. *The Arab population without the Bedouin and the Druze*: This group consists of 671,388 eligible voters, of which 302,927 or 45.12 percent exercised their

⁴ The Central Election Committee for the 24th Knesset – Results According to City; processing by the author.

right to vote. The Joint List leads with 152,866 votes or 51 percent of this group; Ra'am is in second place with 104,371 votes or 34.9 percent; Meretz is in third place with 11,251 votes or 3.5 percent; and the Likud is in fourth place with 10,349 votes or 3.5 percent. Each of the other parties received less than 1.5 percent of the votes in this group.

2. *The Bedouin population as a whole:* This group consists of 154,569 eligible voters, of which 64,165 or 41.5 percent exercised their right to vote. Ra'am led the other parties with 46,365 votes or 73 percent of the total; it is followed by the Joint List which received 10,071 votes or 15.9 percent; in third place is the Likud with 3,619 votes or 5.7 percent; and in fourth place is Meretz with 964 votes or 1.5 percent. Each of the other parties received less than 1.5 percent of the votes.

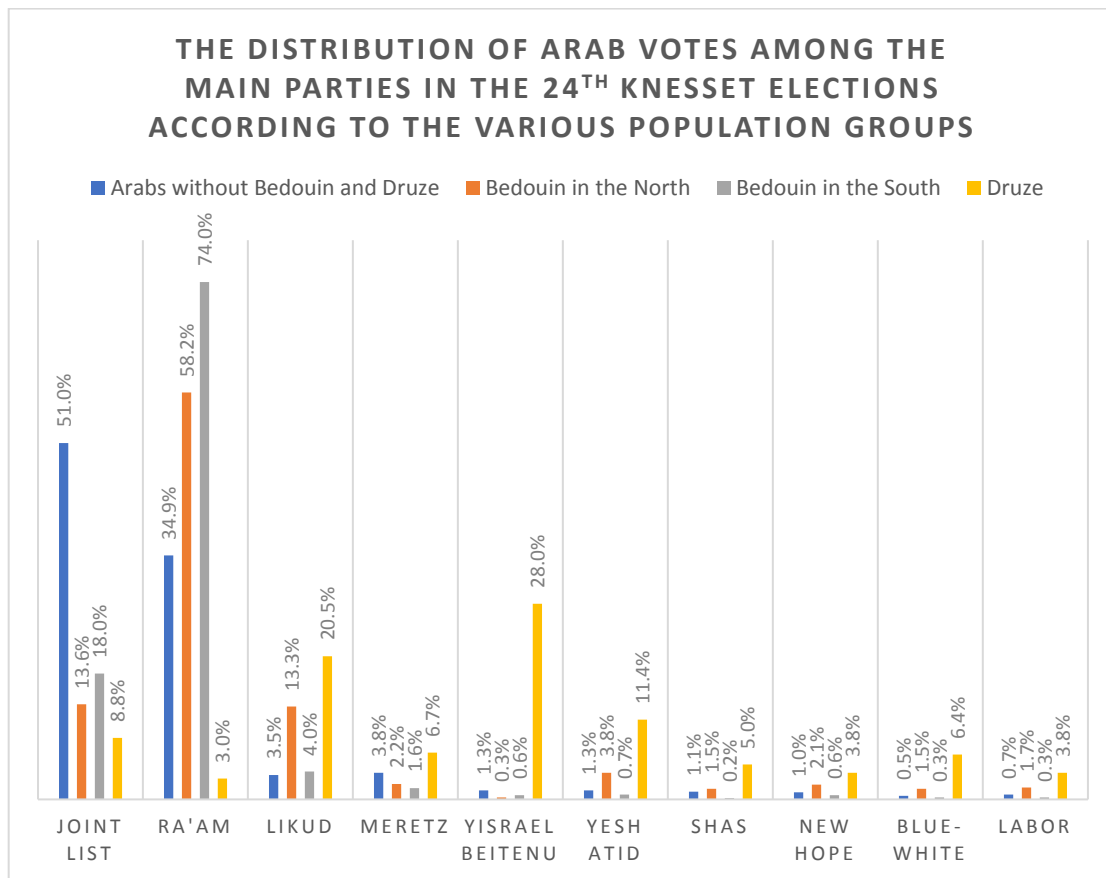
- 2.1 *The Bedouin population in the North:* This subgroup includes 22,427 eligible voters of which 8,781 or 39.2 percent exercised their right to vote. Ra'am led with 5,057 votes or 58.2 percent of the total, following by the Joint List which received 1,186 votes or 13.6 percent; the Likud is in third place with 1,154 votes or 13.3 percent; Yesh Atid is in fourth place with 331 votes or 3.8 percent; Meretz is in fifth place with 191 votes or 2.2 percent; and New Hope (Tikvah Hadasha) is in sixth place with 179 votes or 2.1 percent. Labor is in seventh place with 147 votes or 1.7 percent and Blue-White and Shas share eighth spot with 1.5 percent. The rest of the parties received less than 1.5 percent each of the total votes.

- 2.2 *The Bedouin population in the South:* This sub-group includes 100,277 eligible voters, of which 46,049 or 45.9 percent exercised their right to vote. Ra'am led the other parties with 33,709 votes or 74 percent of the total; the Joint List is in second place with 8,184 votes or 18 percent; the Likud is in third place with 1,841 votes or 4 percent; Meretz is in fourth place with 722 votes or 1.6 percent; and the other parties each received less than 1.5 percent of the total votes in this subgroup.

- 2.3 *The Bedouin periphery in the South (Negev):* This subgroup includes 31,865 eligible voters, of which 9,335 or 29.3 percent exercised their right to vote. Ra'am was the leading party with 7,599 votes or 82.1 percent of the total. It is followed by the Joint List with 701 votes or 7.6 percent and in third place is the Likud with 624 votes or 6.7 percent of the total in this subgroup.

3. *The Druze population:* This group includes 68,585 eligible voters, of which 31,993 or 46.6 percent exercised their right to vote. Yisrael Beitenu received 8,861 votes or 28 percent of the total; in second place is the Likud with 6490 votes or 20.5 percent; in third place is Yesh Atid with 3,593 votes or 11.4 percent; in fourth place is the Joint List which received 2,769 votes or 8.8 percent; in fifth place is Meretz with 2,113 votes or 6.7 percent; in sixth place is Blue-White with 2,015 votes or 6.4 percent; Shas is in seventh place with 1,591 votes or 5 percent; New Hope (Tikvah Hadasha) is in eighth place with 1,213 votes or 3.8 percent; Labor is in ninth place with 1,208 votes or 3.8

percent; Ra'am is in tenth place with 936 votes or 3 percent; and Yemina is in eleventh place with 480 votes or 1.5 percent of the votes in this group. The rest of the parties received less than 1.5 percent each.



Conclusions

The voting patterns observed for the Arab population point to the following conclusions:

- a. **The Arab population has unexploited electoral power:** The number of eligible Arab voters outside the mixed Jewish-Arab cities was 897,184. Based on a threshold of 3.25 percent, this population could have captured about 25 seats in the Knesset if the voter participation rate had been equal to the rate in municipal elections and about 18 seats if it had been about 70 percent, which is the rate for the total population in Israel. The current participation rate of 44.6 percent captured 12 seats for the Arab population (10 for Ra'am and the Joint List and another two distributed primarily between the Likud, Yisrael Beitenu and the rest of the Zionist parties). The reasons for the low participation rate in Arab society call for an in-depth empirical study, but are likely to include the following: the Arab MKs' lack of influence on legislation and the workings of the government; the status of Arab society as a marginalized minority; the lack of confidence in the Knesset's ability to achieve results for the Arab population; disappointment with the Arab MKs; ideological reasons, etc.

- b. **The status of the Israeli Left has declined in Arab society:** The decline of the Leftist parties in Arab society, as exemplified by Meretz which received 3.6 percent of the Arab votes and the Labor Party which received 0.9 percent, and the shift to the Right among Arab voters have raised doubts among the Arab public as to the viability of the Israeli Left. The percentage of Arab votes going to the parties of the Left was particularly low, which is an indication of the problematic relations between these parties and Arab society. The saying that “the Arabs are not in the pocket of the Left or the Right” is liable to spell the end of the Israeli Left among Arab voters who do not view the Arab parties as an electoral alternative.
- c. **The inclusion of Arab representatives within the “Zionist” parties did not achieve the intended outcome:** Meretz included two Arab candidates in sure spots on its list, namely the fourth and fifth, but captured only about 14 thousand Arab votes, which is equivalent to 0.4 seats. Labor captured about 4 thousand Arab votes, which is equivalent to about 0.1 seats; the Economic (Kalkalit) Party of Yaron Zelekha, which did not pass the threshold to enter the Knesset, had two Arab candidates in the first ten spots but only received 1,600 Arab votes, which is equivalent to about 0.04 seats. There are various factors that might explain this: the candidate was not the right choice for Arab society; Arab voters did not agree with the party’s platform; a refusal in principle to vote for “Zionist” parties; the party’s lack of presence or lack of effort on behalf of Arab society when it was needed; a new party that did not yet have any achievements under its belt; etc. These factors constitute obstacles for any party that is running for the Knesset and advocating cooperation between Jewish society and Arab society.
- d. **Failure of the Joint List in the Bedouin sector:** Only 15.9 percent of Bedouin voters voted for the Joint List, while about 73 percent voted for Ra’am. The Bedouin population is the poorest sector within Arab society. The low number of votes received by the Joint List may be the result of several factors: the lack of a Bedouin candidate in a safe spot on the Joint List, in contrast to Ra’am’s list; the Joint List’s inefficiency in solving the problems of the Bedouin population; the religious discourse that has emerged around support of the LGBT community among conservative Muslims, etc.
- e. **The Bedouin periphery in the Negev:** It appears that the members of the Bedouin periphery preferred to vote for the establishment party, i.e. the Likud, over the Joint List. Although most of them (82 percent) voted for Ra’am, the Likud received 6.7 percent of their votes, which is close to the 7.6 percent received by the Joint List. The number of votes captured by the Likud is a significant milestone, in view of the status of the Bedouin periphery, which numbers about 80 thousand residents living in unrecognized settlements and who suffer from an even lower standard of living than the rest of the Bedouin population. Moreover, this population has suffered from many years of being marginalized in the formulation of government policy, which is reflected in, among other things, the demolition of unrecognized settlements and in particular the settlement of El Arakib which has been demolished more than 150 times. The similar number of votes received by the Joint List and the Likud, the lack of attention from the parties of the Left, such as Meretz, and the particularly low rate of participation among the

Bedouin periphery (about 29 percent) and among the Bedouin population in general (45.9 percent) reflect a lack of confidence among the Bedouin both in the central government and government policy on the one hand and in the Joint List and the rest of the parties of the Left, such as Meretz and Labor, on the other hand.

- f. **Directly voting for the governing party:** The Likud was more successful than Meretz outside the mixed cities and received votes equivalent to about 0.6 seats. The Likud is in third place with 5.2 percent of total Arab votes while Meretz is in fourth place with 3.6 percent. If we consider Arab society without the Bedouins and the Druze, the Likud is then in fourth place with 3.5 percent of the votes in contrast to Meretz which is in third place with 3.8 percent.
- g. **Jewish votes that went to an Arab party:** The Joint List received about 3,500 Jewish votes (excluding mixed cities) and Ra'am received about 2,000. The Jewish votes for the Arab parties are an indication of a new trend in voting patterns on the Jewish street, although it still represents only a negligible number of voters.