

# 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

The current issue of **Bayan** is being published about one month after the 25<sup>th</sup> Knesset elections which were held on November 1<sup>st</sup>, 2022.

In his article, **Dr. Arik Rudnitzky** summarizes the election results in the Arab sector, and their future implications for Arab politics in Israel.

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The opinions expressed in MDC publications are the authors' alone.

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

- The Konrad Adenauer Program for Jewish-Arab Cooperation:  
Dr. Arik Rudnitzky (Project Manager)  
Tel. 03-6406046
- Moshe Dayan Center website: [dayan.org](http://dayan.org)

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**Bayan** is published in Hebrew and English.

We thank Mr. David Simmer for translating and editing the English edition.

## **Arik Rudnitzky\* / Summary of the 25<sup>th</sup> Knesset election results in Arab society**

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Voter turnout in the Arab sector was 53.2% in the 25<sup>th</sup> Knesset elections, which represents a significant increase over the previous elections. However, this is still a relatively low rate in comparison to the average over the last decade (55.9%). One-half of Arab citizens still do not participate in the Knesset elections.

The Arab lists won 85.8% of the Arab votes. Ra'am became the largest party on the Arab street and solidified its dominant status in the Negev while Hadash-Ta'al maintained its strong position in the North. Balad did not pass the electoral threshold for the first time since 1996, although it was equal in strength to Hadash-Ta'al in the mixed cities. In the Triangle, the three Arab lists are more or less equal in strength.

Only 14.3% of Arab votes went to Jewish parties. The National Unity Party won the most support (3.2%) followed by Meretz (2.7%), which however did not pass the electoral threshold. Total Arab support for the Jewish parties was equivalent to less than two seats in the Knesset.

The increase in the participation of Arab voters, despite the breakup of the Joint List, is likely to herald a renewal of the connection between the Arab parties and their voters. On the other hand, as a result of the failure of Balad in the elections, a not insignificant portion of the Arab public is not represented in the Knesset. The Arab parties face a common challenge: to strengthen ties with the public before the next elections.

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This survey reviews the results of the 25th Knesset elections among the Arab public in Israel and their implications. The survey is based on the final election results, which were published by the Knesset Central Election Committee.

### **Participation of Arab voters in the Knesset elections during the past decade**

The rate of voter participation in the Arab and Druze sectors in the 25th Knesset elections was 53.2%, which represents a significant increase relative to the rate in the elections held last year (44.6%). Relative to the decade as a whole (2013–22), the most recent elections set a precedent: this was the first time that there was a significant increase in the turnout of Arab voters in Knesset elections, even though the Arab political system was not united as it was during the period of the Joint List. In all of the other elections during the past decade, voter turnout rose relative to the previous elections only when there was unity in the Arab political system and fell when there was disunity and division. This fact indicates that the fragmentation in the Arab political system in the last elections, which was manifested in the fact that

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\* Dr. Arik Rudnitzky is the project manager of the Konrad Adenauer Program for Jewish-Arab Cooperation, Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies, Tel Aviv University.

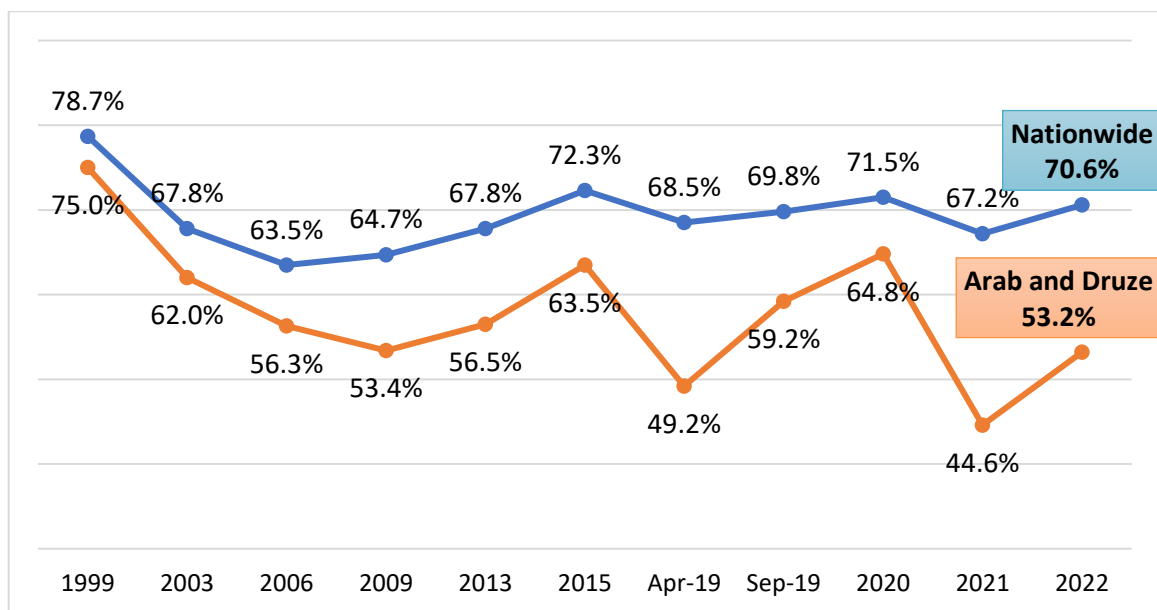
there were three Arab lists representing four parties, did not deter Arabs from participating – on the contrary, it increased their participation.

During the period of the Joint List (2015–21), the Arab street was united; however, the list suffered from a lack of synergy between its parts. Even worse, for large parts of the Arab public it represented a blurring of differences between the parties and left Arabs bitter and frustrated by the failure to unify. In the most recent elections, the Arab political system returned to a three-sided configuration which had characterized it since the establishment of the Joint List. For the first time in a decade, the Arab voter had three worthwhile options to choose from. The increase in voter turnout demonstrates that the Arab street is thirsty for political discourse, and this led to a renewed interest in voting.

Essentially, it was in fact the split between the various lists that encouraged many Arabs to vote. Some of them felt that it is now the right time to vote for a list that represents them—and only for it—without tying their vote to a package deal with other political players. Others—who chose not to vote in the previous elections (2021)—finally found an address for their vote. They may not have been enthusiastic about it but nonetheless they did not want to give up the chance to exercise their right to vote. Furthermore, a not insignificant number who had declared their intention to boycott the elections (on social media, for example) later reversed that decision. Some voted for Balad, not necessarily because they identified ideologically with the party’s platform but more out of a desire to help Balad get over the electoral threshold.

Nonetheless, voter turnout among Arabs in the most recent elections (53.2%) was still low, and even a little lower than the general average for the past decade (55.9%). Despite the increase in voter turnout in the most recent elections, the picture is clear: one-half of potential Arab voters still did not take advantage of their right to vote in the Knesset elections.

Figure 1: Participation of Israeli voters in the Knesset elections, 1999–2022



### **Performance of the Arab parties in the elections**

There were three Arab lists running in the 25th Knesset elections. They represented the four main parties that have been operating in the Arab political arena for the past two decades: Ra'am, Hadash-Ta'al and Balad. Thus, the Arab political system returned to the three-sided configuration that characterized it from 1999 to 2013, prior to the establishment of the Joint List in 2015.

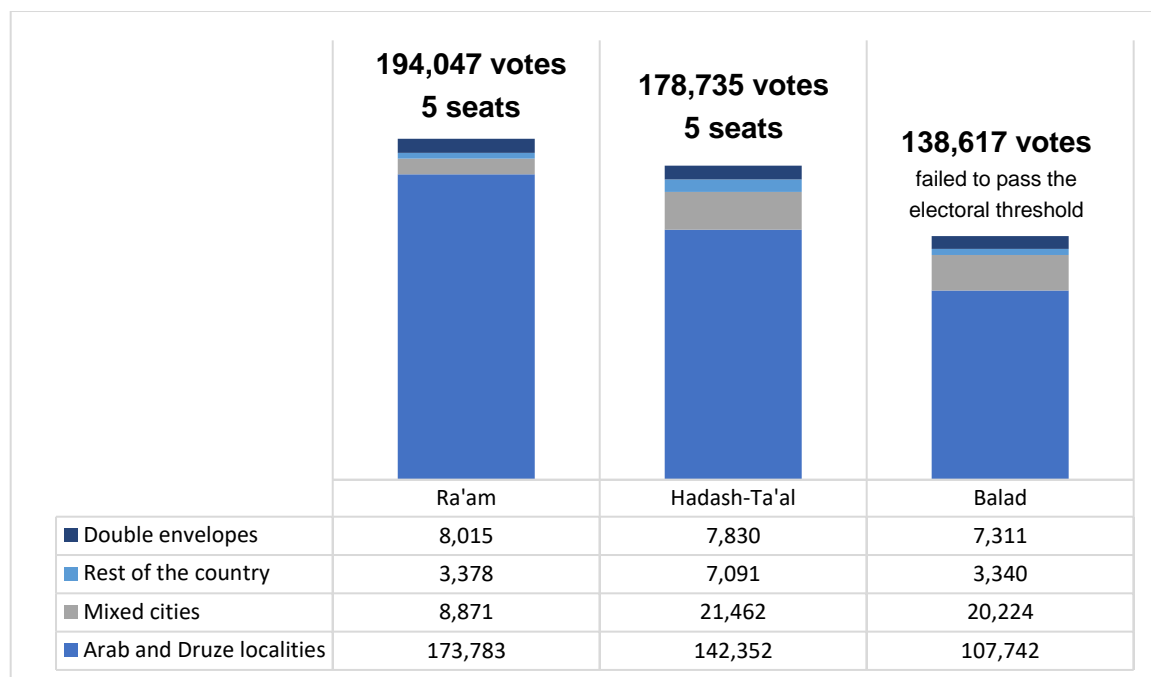
In the most recent elections, Ra'am became the largest Arab party, with five seats in the Knesset – the same number as Hadash-Ta'al. However, its level of support in Arab and Druze sectors (35.2% of the votes) was significantly higher than that for the other two parties: Hadash-Ta'al (28.8%) and Balad (21.7%). The dominance of Ra'am on the Arab street is clearly reflected by fact that the number of votes received by Ra'am in the Arab and Druze towns (173,783 votes)—not including mixed cities, absentee ballots (double envelopes) and non-Arab cities throughout the country—was on its own enough to cross the electoral threshold. As in the previous elections (in 2021), the Negev was one of the predominant strongholds of Ra'am in these elections and its support there was equivalent to one and a half seats.

The Hadash-Ta'al List also won five seats: four for Hadash and one for Ta'al. Its base is in the North and includes both the Arab towns and the mixed cities (Haifa, Akko, Ma'alot-Tarshihah and Nof Hagalil). Hadash-Ta'al also won not insignificant support in the non-Arab cities, in which Jews account for the vast majority of residents. Essentially, the number of votes received by Hadash-Ta'al in non-Arab cities (7,091) is greater than the number of votes received by the other two lists combined: Ra'am (3,378) and Balad (3,340). It can be assumed that the vast majority of the votes for the three lists in non-Arab cities consisted of Arab voters living in Jewish cities; however, Hadash-Ta'al also received a not insignificant number of Jewish votes, primarily for Hadash.

Balad did not reach the electoral threshold. For the first time since 1996, when the party first ran in the elections, it lost its presence in the Knesset. Nonetheless, the total votes for Balad within all of the valid votes (2.9%) is the highest it has ever received, and it was close to successfully entering the Knesset. Its main stronghold is the mixed cities in the Center, particularly the city of Lod. In the Triangle, its strength was equal to that of the other two parties, namely Ra'am and Hadash-Ta'al. On the other hand, it was weak in the North and especially so in the Negev, which tipped the scales toward its failure in the elections.

Overall, the three Arab lists received 85.7% of the votes in the Arab cities. If the voter turnout among Arabs had been 60%, and in view of the fact that the vast majority of Arab voters voted for an Arab list, it can be assumed that Balad would have exceeded the electoral threshold.

Figure 2: Results for the Arab parties in the 2022 Knesset elections

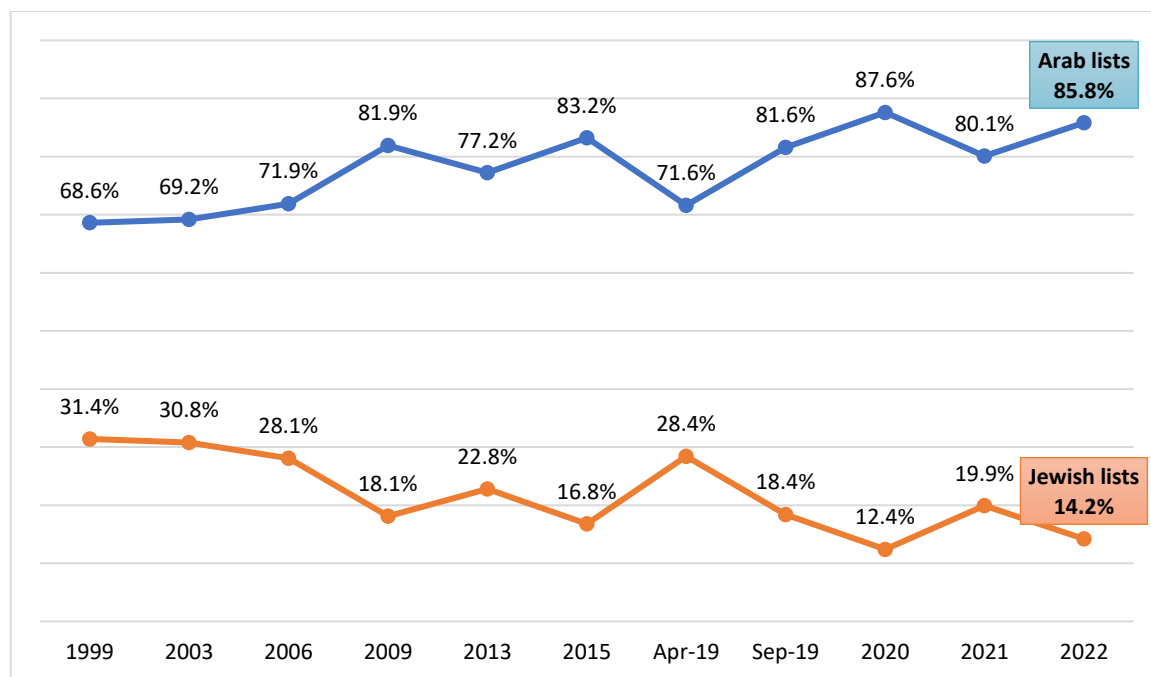


### **The decline of the Jewish parties in the Arab sector**

The results of the most recent elections provide additional evidence of the continuing decline of the Jewish parties on the Arab street. Thus, only 14.3 percent of Arab votes went to the Jewish parties. Essentially, the Jewish parties were no longer a relevant political option for the Arab voter. The number of votes received by the Jewish parties in the Arab and Druze towns is equivalent to less than two seats.

Of the Jewish parties, the National Unity Party won the most support (3.2%), which is equivalent to less than one-half of a seat. It received more than 15 thousand votes, the vast major of which (about 11 thousand) were Druze voters. Meretz also won significant support in Arab towns – about 13 thousand votes or 2.7% of the voters, which translates into about one-third of a seat. However, Meretz did not reach the electoral threshold. The Likud (2.2%) and Yisrael Beiteinu (2.0%) won support equal to one-third of a seat each while Yesh Atid (1.7%) received support equivalent to one-quarter of a seat. The Labor party and Shas, which in the past enjoyed some support on the Arab street, received only a small number of votes in the most recent elections (0.8 % and 0.5%, respectively).

Figure 3: Distribution of Arab votes in the Knesset elections, 1999-2022



### **Arab voting patterns in the Knesset elections**

The Arab public is not monolithic. The voting patterns of Arab voters are dependent on basic demographic variables, such as area of residence and religious affiliation, and those affect the voter’s choice. Voting is also influenced by cultural norms that dictate political behavior, such as support for the local candidate. This voting pattern is known as “supporting the local candidate” and is manifested in a particularly high level of support for a local candidate, based on the desire of residents of that city or region to send one of their own to the Knesset.

#### **The North**

In the North of the country (the Galilee, the northern valleys, the Carmel mountains and the northern coastal plain) Hadash-Ta’al enjoyed the highest supports (31.6%) followed by Ra’am (27.3%) and Balad (21.3%). Historically, the North was considered to be the political and national cradle of the Arab community in Israel, and it is identified primarily with Hadash. In Hadash’s historical strongholds, including the Arab towns in the Nazareth metropolis and the Sachnin valley, support for Hadash-Ta’al reached 40% on average.

An analysis of the voting patterns in the North reveals significant differences that depend on the voter’s ethnic group and religious affiliation. Ra’am is the dominant party in the Bedouin settlements in the North and had the support of 66.8% of the voters, while Hadash-Ta’al and Balad won only low levels of support (11.1% and 10.6%, respectively). In the Druze towns, the Zionist parties won the vast majority of votes (90%), while in a few Arab-Christian villages in the Galilee the leading party was Hadash-Ta’al (39.8%) followed by Balad (24.3%).

## **The Triangle**

The rate of voter turnout in the Triangle was 52.5%, similar to the national average for Arab and Druze cities. Overall, the three Arab parties received a similar proportion of the votes: Ra'am (31.7%), Hadash-Ta'al (32.4%) and Balad (31.7%). Nonetheless, a comparison of voter turnout and voting patterns between the southern Triangle and the northern Triangle reveals significant differences in voter behavior and political preferences: voter turnout in the southern triangle (60.8%) was significantly higher than the national average while in the northern Triangle it was particularly low (46.2%).

The two dominant parties in the southern Triangle were Hadash-Ta'al (37.2%) and Ra'am (36.5%) while in the northern Triangle it was in fact Balad that was dominant (41.1%). The voting patterns do not necessarily indicate a difference in political orientation, but rather the identification of the voter with a local candidate. In the southern Triangle, Walid Taha from Kfar Qassem (Ra'am) and Ahmed Tibi from Taybeh (Hadash-Ta'al) attracted a larger number of voters while in the northern Triangle it was Walid Qa'adan from Baqa al-Garbiyyah (Balad).

## **The Negev**

The voting patterns in the Negev show that the Islamic Movement has a strong hold on this region. The dominant party in the Negev is Ra'am (73.9%) which was followed far behind by Hadash-Ta'al (11.9%) and Balad (6.1%). The fact that Ra'am has put the problems of the Bedouin residents of the Negev at the top of its agenda, along with the placement of the popular Walid al-Hawashlah in third place on the list, explains the sweeping support for Ra'am in this region.

It is worth mentioning that this is the second election campaign in a row in which the rate of support for Ra'am in the Negev was equal to at least one seat. Thus, in the previous elections (in 2021), it was the Bedouin voters who gave Ra'am its fourth seat, which put it over the electoral threshold while in the most recent elections the support for Ra'am in the Negev was even greater. Hadash-Ta'al and Balad received only low levels of support from Bedouin voters; nevertheless, a Hadash-Ta'al representative from the Negev, Youssef al-Atawnah who was number five on the list was elected.



Table 1: Voting patterns in Arab and Druze towns in the 2022 elections

		Support percentage	Votes
<b>Arab parties</b>	Ra'am	35.2%	173,783
	Hadash-Ta'al	28.8%	142,352
	Balad	21.8%	107,742
	<b>Total</b>	<b>85.8%</b>	<b>423,877</b>
<b>Jewish parties</b>	National Unity Party	3.2%	15,654
	Meretz	2.7%	13,138
	Likud	2.2%	10,811
	Yisrael Beitenu	2.0%	10,022
	Yesh Atid	1.7%	8,511
	Labor	0.8%	3,903
	Shas	0.5%	2,297
	Jewish Home	0.2%	1,062
	Religious Zionism – Otmah Yehudit	0.1%	588
	Other	0.8%	4,132
	<b>Total</b>	<b>14.2%</b>	<b>70,118</b>

Table 2: Voting patterns in Arab and Druze towns by region, 2022

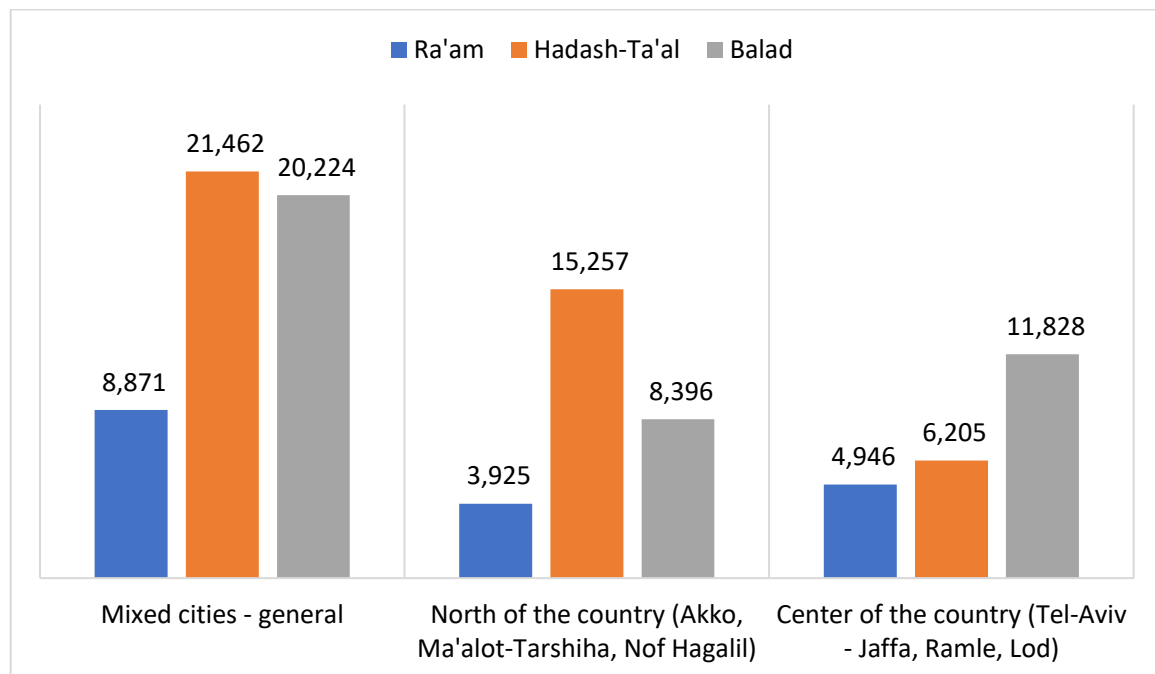
Region		Arab and Druze sector	North of the country	The Triangle	Jerusalem corridor	The Negev
<b>Eligible voters</b>		938,401	573,878	211,980	7,683	144,860
<b>Actual voters</b>		498,894	309,455	111,272	4,294	73,873
<b>Turnout</b>		53.2%	53.9%	52.5%	55.9%	51.0%
<b>Arab parties</b>	Ra'am	35.2%	27.3%	31.7%	28.6%	73.9%
	Hadash-Ta'al	28.8%	31.6%	32.4%	24.2%	11.9%
	Balad	21.8%	21.3%	31.7%	36.1%	8.1%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>85.8%</b>	<b>80.2%</b>	<b>95.8%</b>	<b>88.9%</b>	<b>93.9%</b>
<b>Jewish parties</b>	National Unity Party	3.2%	4.8%	0.4%	0.3%	0.7%
	Meretz	2.7%	3.3%	1.7%	1.6%	1.7%
	Likud	2.2%	2.9%	0.5%	6.2%	1.5%
	Yisrael Beitenu	2.0%	3.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
	Yesh Atid	1.7%	2.5%	0.3%	0.9%	0.7%
	Labor	0.8%	1.1%	0.3%	0.6%	0.3%
	Shas	0.5%	0.6%	0.4%	0.1%	0.2%
	Jewish Home	0.2%	0.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
	Religious Zionism – Otmah Yehudit	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%	0.4%	0.1%
	Other	0.8%	1.0%	0.5%	0.7%	0.9%
<b>Total</b>	<b>14.2%</b>	<b>19.8%</b>	<b>4.2%</b>	<b>11.1%</b>	<b>6.1%</b>	

## The mixed cities

An analysis of the voting patterns in the mixed cities reveals major differences between those in the North (Haifa, Akko, Ma'alot-Tarshiha and Nof Hagalil) and those in the Center (Tel Aviv – Jaffa, Ramle and Lod). In the North, Hadash-Ta'al is the domain Arab party, with support equal to that of the other two lists (Ra'am and Balad) combined. This voting pattern is consistent with the dominance of Hadash-Ta'al in the Arab towns in the North, which are the traditional stronghold of Hadash.

The dominant Arab list in the mixed cities in the Center is in fact Balad, which received more support than the other two lists (Hadash-Ta'al and Ra'am) combined. This is explained by the popularity and support for Sami Abu Shehadeh, the Chairman of Balad, particularly in Lod and Yaffo, where he is considered to be a local. In the past, Hadash had dominant candidates in all of the mixed cities (in both the North and the Center); however, the results of this election demonstrate that Balad is now equal in popularity to Hadash-Ta'al in these cities.

Figure 4: Results of the Arab parties in the mixed cities, 2022



## Conclusion

The results of the last Knesset elections represent both good and bad news for Arab politics in Israel. The good news is that a not insignificant portion of the Arab public has taken a renewed interest in the elections. There was a significant increase in Arab participation relative to the historical low reached in the 2021 elections. This in fact occurred after the (apparently final) breakup of the Joint List and the return of the Arab political system to a three-sided configuration which had characterized it until a decade ago. This is evidence that the Arab voter was thirsty for a political discourse that would highlight the differences between the various parties. It is still too early to know whether the 2022 elections were a turning point and whether the Arab parties are again taking a leading role among the Arab public. The results may be a harbinger of a renewed direct connection between the Arab

parties and the voter. From that perspective, it may be that this is the best news coming out of the election campaign.

The bad news is that for the first time since the 1996 elections not all of the main ideological movements in Arab society are represented in the Knesset. The parties that managed to get into the Knesset represent the Islamic movement (Ra'am), the non-Zionist Arab-Jewish movement (Hadash) and a moderate nationalist viewpoint (Ta'al); however, the main representative of the nationalist perspective in Arab society, namely Balad, remained outside the Knesset – for the first time since the 1990s. Thus, added to already existing political divisions on the Arab street is now the fact that part of the public is represented in the Knesset while another (sizable) part is not.

Nonetheless, neither the parties nor the Arab public is giving up when it comes to the Knesset. The political question on the Arab agenda is not whether to participate in the parliamentary process that exists in Israel—by means of political parties running in the Knesset elections—but rather how to make the process more effective for Arab citizens.

The Arab parties—both inside and outside the Knesset—now have time to organize their political activity. This is assuming that another round of elections is not on the horizon and that they have four years until the next elections. Each party faces its own challenges, according to its political path, but all of them also face one common challenge: strengthening the connection with the public. The Arab voter pins a lot of hope on his representatives. It appears that the efforts in preparation for the next elections have already started.