

Arab Politics in Israel and the 19th Knesset Elections

Arabs in Israel Update | Editor: Arik Rudnitzky | Issue 1,
January 7, 2013

The Konrad Adenauer Program for Jewish-Arab Cooperation

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The Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies



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From the Editor's Desk

We are pleased to publish the first issue of the Elections 2013 Update, which focuses on Arab politics in Israel in anticipation of the 19th Knesset elections. This issue contains current information on the activities of the Arab political system in preparation for the upcoming elections.

The 19th Knesset elections will take place on January 22, 2013. According to the Central Elections Committee, there are 5,656,705 eligible voters registered in the Voters Registry.¹ According to a recent Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics press release, it is estimated that eligible voters in Arab and Druze towns account for 15% of all eligible voters in Israel. Thus it can be estimated that some 848,500 Arab and Druze citizens have the right to vote in the current elections.²

Five Arab and Arab-Jewish lists will compete in the upcoming elections: (1) Ra'am-Ta'al-Mada, a coalition of the parliamentary faction of the Islamic Movement the Arab Movement for Change (Ta'al) and the Arab Democratic Party (Mada); Hadash – the Democratic Front for Peace and Equality; (3) Balad – the National Democratic Alliance; (4) Da'am – the Organization of Democratic Action; and (5) Hope for Change, a new Arab party.

Regrettably for many members of the Arab public, last month's intense negotiations over a possible unification of the Arab parties into a single Arab list (or two lists, at the most) were unfruitful. The phase of the preliminary preparations for the upcoming elections has ended: after the players in the political game have been determined, the Arab lists' primary joint challenge is to increase the voting turnout of eligible Arab voters. Instead, it seems that the Arab street's attitude toward the upcoming elections is rather characterized by a climate of political indifference. What are the reasons for this? How do the Arab parties plan to address this challenge? Will the Jewish-Zionist parties recapture a footing in the Arab street?

This issue of "Elections 2013 Update" attempts to answer these and other questions. It offers editorials, information pertaining to the parties' preparations, and a review of the main campaign issues, with emphasis on items and excerpts from Arab-language media (newspapers and websites). The final section of the issue includes background statistics on several topics. Information is based on the computerized data archive of the Konrad Adenauer Program for Jewish-Arab Cooperation.

¹ See <http://www.knesset.gov.il/elections19/heb/about/Elections19Facts.aspx>.

² Central Bureau of Statistics, "5.1 Million Eligible Voters Reside Today in Israel" (Jerusalem, 26 December 2012): www.cbs.gov.il/www/hodaot2012n/24_12_354b.doc [in Hebrew]

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This is a translated version of an issue originally published in Hebrew on December 20, 2012. We would like to extend our thanks to Ms. Renee Hochman, who translated and edited the material from Hebrew into English. We also thank Ms. Teresa Harings of Tel Aviv University's Moshe Dayan Center for her most valuable assistance in editing the material in English.

The Editor

Editorial

Arik Rudnitzky* / Arab Politics and the Knesset Elections: Ideology and Politics

The die is cast: The three primary parties that represent the Arab public in Israel—The Democratic Front for Peace and Equality (Hadash); the National Democratic Alliance (Balad), and the United Arab List (Ra'am-Ta'al-Mada) —will participate as three separate lists in the upcoming Knesset elections scheduled to be held on January 22, 2013. The parties' decision to run separately puts an end to suppositions of their possible unification into a single list in the upcoming elections, in contrast to the triadic political structure that crystallized over the past decade. The upcoming Knesset elections will therefore be a critical hour for all three parties: Each will be forced to convince Arab voters to give their vote to them rather than to the other parties.

It can be said that this is an “ideologically” critical hour, since the political arena as a whole, in whose shadows these three parties will operate, has become increasingly “ideological.” Many members of the Arab public believe that the State of Israel, which is defined as being “Jewish and democratic,” has become more “Jewish” than “democratic.” In the Knesset, the nationalist right-wing has become increasingly dominant, and at the same time the social left-wing front has collapsed. This transformation is manifest in legislative proposals, such as the “Nakba Law,” the amendment to the Citizenship Law, the Admission Committees Law in community settlements (all of which were approved by the recent Knesset), which are considered by the Arab public as being directly detrimental to its interests. At the same time, events of recent years have been overshadowed by Israel's demand that the Palestinians recognize Israel as “Jewish state” in the parties' negotiations on a final status settlement. The Arab public believes, however, that such a definition is extremely problematic in the current political circumstances, and it is not surprising that opposition to this definition is at the heart of public consensus.

The question is whether participation in the political system of the “Jewish state” is justified on political grounds (“today we may take part in the political process, but tomorrow we may refuse to do so”), or whether participation is based on ideological considerations. Paradoxically, instead of creating a consensus in Arab political discourse in Israel, opposition to the concept of a “Jewish state” has apparently encouraged each party to develop its own method of response.

From Hadash's standpoint, political participation of the country's Arab citizens, through Knesset elections, is a fundamental element of their ideological beliefs, which stem from their communist roots. Ideological justification for participation is traced to the fact that the communists accepted the 1947 Partition Plan (UN Resolution 181) and recognized de facto the existence of a “Jewish state” in Mandatory Palestine. Hadash leaders believe that Arab citizens in Israel are fully entitled to participate in the political system of a country that is defined as “Jewish and democratic,” which they in any case recognize. Moreover, the party's leaders believe that they also have every right to do everything possible to embarrass the country's government and

* This text is a revised version of a lecture delivered at the conference on **Arab Politics in Israel and the 19th Knesset Elections**, which was held at Tel Aviv University on November 27, 2012.

expose its unscrupulousness whenever it fails to uphold its democratic principles. It is therefore not surprising that Hadash leaders advocate participation in Knesset elections and it is reasonable to assume that many of the public poll respondents who intend to vote identify with Hadash.

The challenge facing Hadash is the ongoing erosion of the Arab public's support for the party's traditional slogan, "two states for two nations." It seems that many in the Arab public are disinclined to recognize Israel as a Jewish state, as this slogan implies. Consequently, Hadash leaders argue that the slogan actually addresses the establishment of a Palestinian state, since a Jewish state was established sixty years ago. By doing so, Hadash leaders are appealing to the heart of the consensus in the Arab street in the hope of enlisting political support.

From Balad's point of view, political expediency outweighs ideology in the competition between ideology and political considerations. Although Balad's roots are planted deeply in the national Arab movement that originally rejected the legitimacy of the "Jewish state" in Mandatory Palestine, the party entered parliamentary politics in 1996 and, since the 2003 elections, has been represented as an independent party. Azmi Bishara, who founded Balad in the 1990s, eventually argued that ideological movements must adapt to existing political circumstances when implementing their ideology in the field. Therefore, the Knesset is simply a more effective medium for communicating the party's messages to a broad public, and a means to facilitate legal, political representation of broad sections of the Arab public who do not accept the idea of a "Jewish state."

Balad's challenge is to retain its ideological singularity as the representative of the Arab national sentiment that essentially rejects the idea of a "Jewish state" yet is nonetheless willing to support political participation in said state under specific circumstances. To this end, Balad coined the catchphrase "a state of all its citizens," which is proposed as an antithesis to a state defined as a "Jewish state." The party's aim is to emphasize that all citizens, both Jews and Arabs, have an equal right to politically influence events inside the country's borders. The cardinal question is whether Balad leaders will stick to these political considerations and advocate Arab citizens' participation in the elections in order to maintain Arab representation in the Knesset, even if the party (or any of its members) is disqualified.

The dominant element in the united list of Ra'am-Ta'al-Mada is the parliamentary faction of the Islamic Movement: Three of the first four candidates on the list are Islamic Movement representatives. From the Movement's perspective, politics is merely one aspect of Islamic action and therefore there is no fundamental contradiction between its politics and its ideology. Political participation is not necessarily justified in national terms but rather in religious terms: Can participation in Israeli politics serve the interests of the Muslim community as a minority community in a non-Muslim majority state? Paradoxically, experience shows that of all the parties, the Islamic Movement has best adapted itself to the political game in the "Jewish state". Nonetheless, members of the Movement's parliamentary faction are required to justify—perhaps even more so than in the past—their reluctance to forgo participation in the Knesset, an issue that caused a split in the Movement's ranks in 1996. To this end, leaders of the parliamentary faction are doing everything possible to offer religious justification for their participation in the Knesset, and parliamentary action has now become a kind of "civic Jihad," to use a phrase coined by the parliamentary faction's leaders.

While the parties have each seemingly devised a unique method to address the “Jewish state” challenge, they now face a common challenge that appears to overshadow all others: They must persuade the Arab public of the benefits of participation in the elections of the Knesset, the institution that most strongly epitomizes the “Jewish state.” Recent public opinion polls show that less than half of all eligible Arab voters intend to vote on Election Day. Now, when hopes for a united Arab party have been dashed, it seems that there is little chance that voting turnout will exceed the 50% mark. The anticipated low voting rate is evidence of Arab citizens’ mistrust of the Knesset as a catalyst for change. Many members of the Arab public question whether the Knesset is in fact the most appropriate arena in which to address the challenge posed by the “Jewish state.”

Mary Totry* / An End to the Era of Arab Participation in National Israeli Politics?

It is almost certainly true that the era of Israeli Arabs voting for Zionist parties has come to an end. In the past, the majority of Arab votes were given to Zionist parties or their satellites, but in the 2009 elections, only 18% of all Arab voters (primarily Druze) voted for Zionist parties. In view of the sharp drop in participation in elections, from an average of 80% in the period from Israel's first elections to the 1980s, to a mere 53% in the 2009 elections, is it also true that we are also about to see the end of the era of Arab participation in national politics altogether?

On Election Day in 2009, at six o'clock in the evening, the media reported very low voter turnout—28%—triggering genuine concern that the Arab parties, either all or some, would not cross the qualifying electoral threshold. In response, the three Arab parties (Hadash, Balad and Ra'am-Ta'al) made enormous efforts in the final hours of the day to increase voting, and employed PA systems to urge citizens to go to the ballots. Radio A-Shams also joined the campaign by interviewing public figures who encouraged citizens to vote, and, by voting, to respond to the rising electoral power of Lieberman and the right. The next day, the media reported that Arab voter turnout reached 53%. Behind the scenes, there is an almost total consensus that the real turnout was lower than this figure. Allegations of forged ballots were made, although no ballots were disqualified.³ Several arguments were exaggerated, but even the moderate contesters agree that some votes were forged. This situation gives rise to several questions: If party activists were in fact involved in voting fraud, do the parties have the right to "vote" instead of the voters? What were the motives behind the election boycott? Is there a consensus among Arab citizens to boycott the elections, or do they still have faith in Israeli parliamentary action? Was the government unaware of the voter fraud or did it intentionally disregard the rumors?

I will attempt to answer these questions briefly. Regarding the electoral threshold, there is no way to verify whether any or all of the parties would have crossed the electoral threshold without the forged votes. It is a fact that the voter turnout was 28% at six o'clock. Voter turnout might have possibly increased by 3 to 5 percent in the three hours that remained before the polls were closed, but the question remains as to which parties would have crossed the threshold and which parties would have failed to do so. On the second question, whether the Arab parties have the right to decide instead of the voters (on the grounds that the growing strength of Israel's political right-wing parties and soaring fascism in Israeli society demand that Arab parties maintain a presence in the Knesset), the answer is unequivocal: They have no such right. According to voters, the elections are the parties' test of public opinion: If voters decide to "punish" a party for its conduct in the preceding four years, no one—neither another party or any other entity—has the right to forge voters' wishes. Needless to say, electoral fraud is a serious offense.

To answer the question whether there is a consensus in Arab society that the elections should be boycotted, we should distinguish between voters who abstain from

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³ Notably, in recent elections, the Arab parties voiced allegation of voting fraud; the 2009 elections were no exception.

participating in the elections, and voters who boycott the elections. Arab voter turnout in Knesset elections has dropped sharply since the 1970s and reached a record low of 18% in the 2001 elections (which were for the Prime Minister only). This significant decline was not incidental: it was a deliberate move led by the Popular Committee for Election Boycott, as an act of protest against the Israeli political system in general, and specifically against Ehud Barak's policies, and as a response to the conduct of the state and state agencies and their treatment of Arab citizens during the October 2000 events. Since the October Events, the trend among Arab citizens to boycott the elections has grown stronger.

In the upcoming Knesset elections, 65% of all eligible Arab voters are expected to abstain from voting based on various grounds, creating three groups of electoral non-participants: those who boycott the elections for ideological reasons, especially by the Sons of the Village nationalist Movement and members of the Northern Faction of the Islamic Movement (who account for a very small share of all Arab voters, not exceeding 10%); those who abstain from voting out of the indifference that is common in all western countries, known in research literature as political laziness (this motive accounts for no more than 20% of all eligible Arab voters); and finally, the political boycotters, who are motivated by their distrust of the ability of the Israeli political system or the Arab parties, or both, to generate genuine change in the conditions of Arab society (according to an estimate, more than 35% of all eligible Arabs voters subscribe to this motivation).

The final question was whether the establishment is aware of the electoral fraud. I believe that it is in the state's interest to have the Arab parties represented in the Knesset. A Knesset with no Arab representation will undermine Israel's image as "the sole democracy" in the Middle East, and the establishment is therefore allegedly turning a blind eye to the forged votes. The Arab parties in the Knesset no longer affect the political process (since they no longer are tie breakers in the coalition formation process), and therefore their presence is harmless. In many cases, Arab MKs were the targets of tirades of ultra-right-wing MKs, and, in other cases, they became sought-after media celebrities. For these reasons, paradoxically, the establishment wants the Arab parties in the Knesset.

The Abraham Fund Initiatives, a non-profit organization, recently completed a study on the factors that could potentially increase Arab voting rates. I believe that party representatives should learn from this list about the desires of their potential voters. According to one of the arguments made in this study, the formation of a joint non-partisan political organization might convince many Arab citizens to vote in the elections. In fact, Jewish and Arab activists have recently joined efforts to sign a large number of citizens on a petition calling the Arab parties and Jewish activists to unite against the growing racism in Israeli society.

Op-Eds

Arab Parties in Crisis / Wadea' Awawdy

Excerpts from an editorial that appeared on November 2, 2012, by journalist and publicist Wadea' Awawdy, editor of Hadith al-Nas, a weekly published in Nazareth.

This time, it seems that broad groups of eligible Arab voters plan to shed their indifference and express their protest by abstaining from voting for the Arab parties, if they remain in their current format. More than previous election campaigns, these elections are taking place under the shadow of a clear contradiction: the Arab parties are growing old, and the target audience is growing younger, smarter, and hungrier for change. This is reflected in the disrupted connection between the people and its Knesset representatives. According to public opinion polls, young Arab adults (between ages 18 and 24), who account for 42% of the [Arab] population, have despaired of their attempts to create change through the Knesset using conventional means.

Most important is the disappointment of Arab citizens over the failed attempts of the Arab MKs to bring about a significant breakthrough on topics such as racism and the Jewish nature of the state, which would provide an opportunity to influence decision-making. This [disappointment] is obvious from the survey conducted by The Abraham Fund,⁴ which reveals that two-thirds of all Arabs believe that the Arab leadership is not doing enough on social issues.

This survey and other sources indicate that Arab citizens have become disillusioned with the Arab leadership, which continues to pursue a discourse of self-justification and remains captivated by old means and measures that are based on speeches and media announcements, “fireworks” and circus shows in the Knesset [...] The people are hearing talk but see no results.

The public wishes to search for whatever will let it circumvent the dead end that citizenship represents. The public seeks alternative methods that do not entail face-to-face friction of a national character with Israel and [Jewish] Israelis, on issues that appear to be intractable in the foreseeable future, such as the Jewish nature of the state, recognition of the state as a Jewish state, and recognition of the Arab public as a national minority. This public expects a formula that will let it manage, rather than settle, the conflict. After the failure of the “all or nothing” formula, this public expects to achieve progress on civil rights through intelligent, calculated reasoning, and measured steps. There was never any previous serious or astute attempt to try this formula, which unites the homeland and citizenship. [...] If the parties think that this public and its aspirations can be circumvented through attempts to maneuver and outwit them, the parties are wrong, and the ballot boxes will be full of [their] disappointment.

⁴ Editor's note: see Jack Houry, “In Israel, Arab MKs seek the impossible – voters.” **Ha'aretz**, 26 October 2012. See link: <http://www.haaretz.com/weekend/week-s-end/in-israel-arab-mks-seek-the-impossible-voters.premium-1.472482>

Knesset Elections: Boycott, Participation, or International Monitoring / Zuheir Andreus

Excerpts from an editorial by journalist and publicist Zuheir Andreus, editor of Maa' al-Hadath, a weekly published in Tamra. The article was published in Maa' al-Hadath on November 2, 2012.

The Arab parties should accept the fact [...] that the proportion of the "1948 Arabs" who boycott the elections will rise. This is because an increasing number of Arab citizens have become completely convinced that the so-called "Arab Spring" has had no impact on the Arab parties until now. While the Zionist parties enter into strategic and tactical alliances and present "new materials" in order to gain votes, we remain where we were: the parties remain unchanged, and the contenders remain unchanged. Why doesn't this equation change? What is the reason for [Arab MKs'] attachment to their seats in the Jewish parliament? Why are we making no change despite the winds of renewal that are blowing on us and the "new materials" being introduced? We demand democracy in Syria, but do not adopt it for ourselves?

We are not stating categorically that parliamentary action was and will continue to be something negative. It has a lot of good points. Nonetheless, we propose to establish a new follow-up committee, which would be elected directly by the "internal" Palestinians [Israel's Arab citizens] and function as a Palestinian parliament [of Israel's Arab citizens]. We can conduct a legal campaign without the Knesset by appealing to global public opinion to express our concerns with the racist state. There is nothing wrong in thinking in a candid, academic, and pragmatic way about the option of appealing to the international community to protect us against Israel's fascism.

There is an alternative to restored faith in the parties and the politicians / Ramzi Hakim

Excerpts from an editorial by media correspondent and publicist Ramzi Hakim, which appeared on www.alarab.net (the website of Kull al-Arab weekly) on October 31, 2012.

The dangers that the Arab public faces are greater than the dangers that all the [Arab] parties face together. Therefore it is arguable that even if no elections were held [...] our parties and our civic political organizations would have to discover ways to cooperate with each other on the basis of an agreed-upon common denominator, that might try to offer a solution to the challenges of the hour, and give people what they need in this special situation: restoration of their faith in the group and in the ability of the individual and the group to take action and make a difference; restoration of their faith in politics, politicians, parties, and political streams; and in civic society and its ability to address issues.

Allow us to state honestly: How will we—the parties, the lists, the individuals, leaders, and groups—persuade more than 50% of Arab voters that it is important to participate and vote, and that the potential power of their voices is important for meeting the challenges and overcoming the dangers? The Arab public has already been the target of a more serious attack when [MK] Gideon Ezra stated several years ago, on the Knesset podium, that “the Arab MKs do nothing for their public.” He was the first MK to make that attack, which was subsequently repeated by the entire Knesset. At the time it was obvious that the rules of the game had changed, and that there was an attempt to incite against the Arab MKs, to sow despair, frustration and indifference in many, and to exclude Arab identity from [public] participation, influence, and voting. Therefore, at the time, we called [these attempts] a “political transfer”. This time, however, the "transfer" is voluntary!

I am not blaming those who are boycotting [the elections] on ideological grounds, although I disagree with them. We now have a situation of indifference and frustration, and that is very serious. Our parties and leaders must turn this situation around. The results [of this situation] might be reflected in an absence of forward-looking thinking or hope, an absence of sentiments that give people hope and a sense of the future in a manner that encourages them to participate and make a difference. [...] This is the responsibility of the parties. We must accept that the real proportion of abstention may exceed 60 percent—mainly due to indifference, frustration, and despair.

Key Elections Campaign Issues

The Arab Political System – General Positions

- **Op-Ed: Election Campaign on Social/Economic Issues will Awaken Indifferent Arabs**

An excerpt from an op-ed by attorney and political activist Khaled Titi, entitled “What Do the Arabs Want from the Knesset?”: “We must acknowledge that not everything can be achieved through the Knesset. An Arab party that, at best, has 3-4 MKs is not omnipotent. It is not possible to trigger a social revolution, achieve full equality in all areas and on all levels, prevent all the manifestations of racism, put an end to the wars, make peace, establish a Palestinian state, or return the refugees exclusively through the Knesset. [...] The Arab parties need a change in their marketing and propaganda strategy on all aspects of the issues for which the Arabs “go to polls”, without exceeding the boundaries of the “national Arab consensus” on issues such as identity, equality, rights, and the position on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Social issues are urgent for the Arab street, the Arab public craves economic improvement, Arab youngsters set their sights on the world at large, the world of technology, progress, and career [...] A massive socio-economic campaign that takes place within, rather than detached from, the scope of the Arab political consensus, will rouse the indifferent people and breathe hope into despairing individuals for whom national politics has no appeal. (www.ynet.co.il, December 11, 2012)

- **Chairman of the Follow-Up Committee: For the Arab public, a right-wing or left-wing government makes no difference**

Muhammad Zaydan, head of the Supreme Follow-up Committee of the Arab Population in Israel, spoke at a political meeting of Ta'al: “What has recently triggered my anger is the emergence of several individuals from the Arab sector who urge [voters] to vote for the Israeli Left. I would like to ask them: What Israeli Left are you talking about? Any government, either a left-wing or a right-wing one, is extreme. There is no left wing in Israel, and it is our duty to stand united together and face this reality—unity is the basis of [our] power.” (www.bokra.net, December 1, 2012).

- **Former MK: The “Arab Spring” climate of rejuvenation bypassed the Arab parties**

Abbas Zakkur, former MK for Balad and Ra'am-Ta'al, directed harsh criticism against what he described as “the focus of the elections on parties and individuals, instead of platforms and ideas that serve the interests of our public.” [...] Zakkur stated, “I am in favor of any plan whose goal is to place us in an ‘Arab Spring’ atmosphere that will bolster our strength. We are the strongest link in the Palestinian nation, but in practice we are the weakest link, because neither the Arab or Muslim world, nor Israel takes us into consideration.” Zakkur added, “We have many educated individuals, much talent, and much human capital, but they are not doing

their job. The parties should give them an opportunity to play a role, and should propose ideas to allow them to fulfill their role. Otherwise, we will remain on the sidelines, outside the Israeli playing field.” (*Kull al-Arab*, November 2, 2012)

In Favor of Voting in the Knesset Elections

- **MK Afou Agbaria: How can Arab society remain indifferent to its own rights?**

MK Afou Agbaria of the Democratic Front for Peace and Equality (Hadash): “I think that there are some Arab parties that are working to boycott the elections. This is an action motivated by specific interests, and it is not in the interests of the Arab public. The boycott stems from two reasons: ideology or indifference. I appeal to those who are not indifferent and say to them, how can a person be indifferent to his civic, national, social, health, and other rights when he is outside the decision-making circle and has not expressed his own opinion? How can he exercise the few rights that he has? Arab society, which is poor and vulnerable, must get up and protest loudly.” (*Hadith al-Nas*, November 16, 2011).

- **MK Sheikh Ibrahim Sarsur: We have to cast off our indifference in order to teach the extreme right a lesson**

MK Sheikh Ibrahim Sarsur, chairperson of the Ra’am-Ta’al-Mada list: “It is already obvious that Israeli society is making rapid progress in reinforcing its grip on the political arena through an alliance between the two parties, Likud and Yisrael Beytenu, which are supported by the other ultra-right parties. It is therefore obvious that the Arab society in Israel must cast off its indifference. It must rally to action, reunite, and widely exercise its right to vote in the upcoming parliamentary elections. This should be the response to the high voter turnout expected in Jewish society. The time has come for the voices that call to boycott the elections, which are a small percentage, to understand that their very call offers up our Arab public on a silver platter to the ultra-right in Israel, which hopes that it will not encounter the Arab voice in the Knesset, because this voice causes him insomnia. [...] The United Arab List (Ra’am) will continue to be strong and will confidently move forward to the victory that will be achieved with Allah’s will. To this end, Ra’am urges the Arab public to teach the ultra-right a lesson in the form of a high voter turnout. We hope turnout will reach 70%.” (*Hadith al-Nas*, November 9, 2012)

- **MK Hanin Zoabi: We must break loose from the cycle of indifference because silence on racism is a crime**

Excerpt from an interview with MK Hanin Zoabi (Balad): “I would like to urge every Palestinian woman and man, every young woman and man, not only to vote, but to break out of the cycle of political indifference. Silence in the face of racism is a crime. Your silence against your oppressor and the one who bans you from a dignified, happy life, or who bans your nation from such a life, is more than a show of weakness, more than a sign of lack of self-respect—it is truly a crime. [...] We cannot

live a normative life without taking action to attain our rights. One of the ways to break out of the cycle of silence and indifference is to support and reinforce our national parties, which are acting responsibly and wisely.” (www.alarab.net, October 21, 2012).

Calls to Boycott the Elections

- **The Popular Committee for Boycotting the Knesset Elections: The Arab MKs should leave the Zionist entity**

The Popular Committee for Boycotting the Knesset Elections published an appeal to boycott the Knesset elections for ideological reasons. Following are excerpts from this announcement: “The [peace] settlement based on the two-state solution, which the PLO accepts despite its being a ‘temporary solution’, created a split in the Palestinian nation; [after this event] its rights were defined on the basis of factors that were effectively determined by Zionist policy: 1) the right to civic equality—for Palestinians with Israeli citizenship; 2) the right to self-determination in the form of a state—for Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip; 3) the right of return—for Palestinian refugees. It does not seem that Israel, which ignored the rights of the Palestinian nation as a whole, would agree to reinstate these rights for each group separately. [...] Since the failure of the two-state solution, the outbreak of the Second Intifada, and the October 2000 Events, Israel has found itself in a historic crisis, left with a single option: to complete the establishment of an apartheid state on all the lands of Palestine.” (*Hadith al-Nas*, November 9, 2012).

- **Op-ed: Liberal secular Arab citizens have no one to vote for, not even the Arab parties**

Four years ago, I confess, I didn’t vote in the elections. I refrained not because I don’t believe in democracy, but for a very simple reason: There was no one to vote for. And now, wonder of wonders, with new elections upon us, this opinion of mine has received redoubled validity. After all, the electoral discourse, which is steadily growing more heated, stinks once again. Like all Israeli elections, this one is being conducted as a “Jewish democratic election,” as befits a “Jewish democratic” state. Beneath this discourse hides a bitter truth: A liberal, secular, democratic, fair-minded Arab citizen has nothing to look for in this election. These “democratic” performances are aimed at establishing governments strictly by and for Jews.

[...] A secular, liberal, democratic and fair-minded Arab citizen can’t vote for either parties that support the Butcher of Damascus and his ilk, as Hadash and Balad do, or a separatist Muslim party like UAL. Nor can such an Arab citizen vote for the Zionist parties, which exclude him from the government of his country and his homeland for racist reasons. Therefore, in the absence of a truly civic party, there is no one to vote for in these elections. (*Ha’aretz*, October 16, 2012)

Position of the ex-parliamentary faction of the Islamic Movement

- **The ex-parliamentary faction of the Islamic Movement: Our position on the Knesset is known**

Excerpts from a manifesto published by the ex-parliamentary (Northern) Faction of the Islamic Movement on the failed negotiations to unite the Islamic Movement and the decision of the Southern Faction to participate in the Knesset elections:

“Everyone knows what our position on the Knesset elections is. We stressed to our brothers [in the parliamentary Faction] that we do not concur with or believe in uniting the Islamic Movement under the frame of the Israeli Knesset. It was obvious to us that this matter was closed and behind us, and therefore there was great progress in the negotiations in the matter of unification.”

“There is no doubt that the Israeli establishment is the one that decided to advance the date of the Knesset elections. This had a strong impact on the parties and the political movements, including our brothers in the other faction of the Islamic Movement. They chose the Knesset option, while we chose our usual position regarding the Knesset elections. [...] We stress and state that we are calling for a genuine unification of the Islamic Movement, but we are forced to wait until the proper time.” (www.alarab.net, November 24, 2012).

The Parties' Preparation

Hadash

- **MK Afou Agbaria: Hadash places the right person in the right spot, independent of all other considerations**

Dr. Afou Agbaria, Hadash MK, responded to statements on the composition of Hadash's list, which will be running for the Knesset unchanged, without an injection of any new blood, and which is therefore described as an "old party". Agbaria said that these statements are irrelevant in politics. He stated that "Hadash places the right person in the right slot, independent of his age, as long as he is faithful to the party line, and the principles, and he has achieved results for the party that he leads." [...] Agbaria added, "We treat men and women equally, with no difference. The fact that a woman is in fifth place does not result from the fact that the party is reserving a spot for a woman, but that she reached it in her own right since she is deserving and worthy of this spot. If a woman deserves to be in the first place, or the second or the third, there would be no opposition. On the contrary." (*Hadith al-Nas*, November 16, 2012).

- **Hadash manifesto: The ballots should be cleared of Zionist parties**

Excerpts from a manifesto by Hadash in the Arab village of El-Be'na in the north: "As the date of the Knesset elections draws near, nothing remains but to remind the voters in El-Be'na how they taught the Zionist parties a lesson in the last elections, on the backdrop of the massacre committed by the [Israeli] Occupation in the Gaza Strip at the time. Netanyahu's government is waving the banner of a new kind of violence toward the Gaza Strip. It is not adopting a political agenda designed to reach a fair resolution of the Palestinian Cause, but rather to deepen the occupation and the actions to Judaize Jerusalem, and is implementing a discriminatory, racist policy against the state's Arab citizens. We are also certain that we will continue to preserve the voters' resilience that was achieved in the previous elections, so that the voting booths in the upcoming parliamentary elections will once again be free of Zionist parties." (www.bokra.net, October 29, 2012).

Balad

- **Former MK Taha: Balad has not disappeared from the political map; It is the primary force in the Arab public**

From statements by Wassel Taha, former MK for Balad: "In the last few days, many people have wagered that Balad will lose its popular support, but the results and achievements of over 16 years have proven that this party has its own flavor and its own identity. The years have proven that it has become a factor with its own unique features that distinguish it from the others. We have proven that today we are a major force in the Arab public, but we have many challenges ahead of us. In the past, people wagered that Balad would disappear from the political map, but I believed that such a

thing would never happen since the national movement has put down roots in our public. In effect, the national movement is playing the greatest role in protecting the national identity of the Arab public.” (*Kull al-Arab*, November 23, 2012).

- **Balad Secretary: If Balad is disqualified, we will call to boycott the elections**

Awad Abd al-Fatah, Balad Secretary, stated: “We don’t obtain our legitimacy from the Knesset. We are not running for the Knesset to obtain legitimacy. At this point, I am saying that in the event that our candidacy for the Knesset is disqualified, we will call to boycott [the elections], because it is inappropriate for the government to force our parliamentary representatives on us.” (*Kull al-Arab*, November 23, 2012).

- **MK Hanin Zoabi: We emphasize the national dimension of current events and therefore it is important that we will be in the Knesset.**

Excerpts from an interview by Jordanian newspaper *Al-Arab Al-Yawm*, with MK Hanin Zoabi: “I believe that, as national parties, our main role is to shape national identity and build our national institutions that shape this identity. Our primary role is to preserve national identity and political consciousness. Therefore, before you start to develop a campaign program, you have to shape those who will be carrying this program on their shoulders so they have a national consciousness. Therefore, this [should be] a person with consciousness and readiness to engage in a struggle. In my opinion, as national parties, this is our supreme concern. This is being taken care of outside the Knesset, not in it, but our representation, our voice, and our functioning in the Knesset greatly help us in shaping our national identity.”

“We believe that the Knesset elections and our representation in the Knesset are one of the ways that we fight for our rights, but only one of the ways. In 1995, there was a serious debate in Balad about whether to enter the Knesset or not, because the issue is not something obvious or decided and done with. Furthermore, it is not a long-term or even short-term strategic choice: It is a choice of the tactics of the struggle. The moment that our presence in the Knesset no longer serves our national program, or fails to express our program or the maximum [goals] of our struggle, we will not be in the Knesset. The utility of boycotting [the Knesset elections] lies in the fact that the boycott will be a collective matter, in other words, a boycott must serve our national program and not lower our maximum national [goals]. Second, our presence in the parliament is not measured in visible achievements, such as a series of laws that we passed or prevented from being passed, because we cannot be compared to parliament members in France or Jordan. The significance of our presence [in the Knesset] is in representing our voice and our political project, representing our nation and its interests, opposing the government, and our attempts to change it. We are not an ordinary opposition. We also function as a national buffer between the Zionist parties and the Arab citizens who are looking for someone to take responsibility for their individual and collective demands. We give a national dimension to current events that might lose their national dimension if they are addressed by Zionist parties.” (www.arabs48.com, October 18, 2012).

Ra'am-Ta'al-Mada

- **MK Taleb El-Sana: After my term is concluded, I will pass the leadership baton to the young people.**

At the Fifth Convention of the Arab Democratic Party (Mada), which was held in Nazareth, MK Taleb El-Sana, chairperson of Mada, stated: “This is the last time that I am running in the Knesset elections. We will pass the baton over to the bright young people and I will follow their lead.” [...] El-Sana emphasized the need for broad cooperation of the Arab citizens in the Knesset elections, as was the case in the local government elections. [...] He noted that the party [Mada] is studying the possibility of supporting a settlement based on [one] democratic bi-national state, after the two-state solution has failed. (*Hadith al-Nas*, November 23, 2012)

- **Mohammad Kan'an: Hopes that the Northern Faction of the Islamic Movement will not call for an election boycott**

Mohammad Kan'an, head of the National Arab Party and sixth on the Ra'am-Ta'al-Mada list, expressed his hope that the Northern Faction of the Islamic Movement “will not call for a boycott of the elections, and will allow everyone to vote as their conscience guides, for the sake of our national interests.” (*Hadith al-Nas*, November 16, 2012)

- **MK Ibrahim Sarsur: The Knesset is one of the paths of struggle and civic Jihad**

Excerpts from an op-ed by Sheikh Ibrahim Sarsur, entitled “Challenges at the threshold of the Knesset elections”: “From our perspective, politics is part of a comprehensive view of *shari'a* [Islamic Law], whose slogan is, ‘Allah accepts anything as long as it’s in the interests of the Muslims,’ and is completely subject to the numerous rules that presumably guide our political and non-political course of action.” [...]

“What is sad and even absurd is that we hear voices from our public—their positions or affiliation are not important at the moment—calling to boycott the elections. They continue to grasp onto obsolete arguments that would not even convince children; this is happening in a society in which the rate of religious and national consciousness is on the rise. This society is characterized by a readiness to resolutely challenge fears, a willingness to reinforce its presence everywhere, inside and out of the Knesset, and a willingness to harness its potential force to action, using all the paths of struggle and civic jihad, including the parliament, in order to prevent the wolves of Israeli politics from exploiting opportunities, and in order to block the path of those who are appropriating our nation’s desires. It is unfortunate that some of these factors treat these paths of struggle as if they were mutually exclusive. We in the Islamic Movement do not believe that the public campaign should be expressed only in the Knesset elections. Therefore when the party decided to participate in the 1996 elections, it created another path of struggle, in addition to the dozens of paths that our blessed movement had adopted in the interests of our public, and it continues to implement them in full force. [The Islamic Movement] views this new path [the Knesset] as one that supports and bolsters the other paths.”

“We, the 1948 Palestinians, live in a very difficult situation that does not leave us any option other than to fully and effectively participate in all areas of life, and exploit every official or popular institution that might serve us and protect us from even the slightest harm or danger, provided that this does not contradict our religious and national principles. For example, the army, the various security mechanisms, and civic service in its Zionist format are examples of institutions in which we refuse to take part due to the reasons that are obvious to all. Our greatest challenge as an Arab public is the extent of our success to transform the various paths of struggle in and outside the Knesset into a coordinated campaign with cumulative achievements that rouse our public.” (www.alarab.net, November 3, 2011).

Da’am – The Democratic Action Organization

- **Party announcement: Jewish-Arab party with a social agenda will restore voters’ faith**

Excerpt from a press release of Da’am, the workers’ party: “After all the calls to unite the Arab lists failed, the Arab public is left frustrated and angry. In four years, the three Arab parties—Raam-Ta’al, Hadash, and Balad—proved that they have lost all influence on Israeli politics and legislation, and that they have no impact on any aspect of the government’s Arab policy. [...] Due to their exclusive focus on a national agenda and their neglect of the critical issues that concern the Arab public, such as poverty, employment, housing, and education, voting turnout is expected to fall below 50%. [...] The trend of abstaining from voting is a gift to the Israeli right wing, which aspires to revoke the Arabs’ right to participate in the elections. [...] Any Jewish-Arab party that is based on a social agenda and has a clear political stance should be considered a golden opportunity for Arab citizens who refuse to follow the Arab parties and abstain from voting.” (www.panet.co.il, December 12, 2012).

New Arab Party: Hope for Change

- **Party announcement: We will sit in any government coalition in order to ensure the [favorable] social and economic condition of Arab society**

An announcement on behalf of the Hope for Change party stated: “The Hope for Change party is a new party that was founded at the beginning of 2012. Heading its agenda are social and economic issues, and specifically, [the aim of] improving the social and economic conditions of Arab citizens. [...] The party will not sit on its hands and will not be part of the opposition, but it will work toward proactive participation in decision-making. It will do everything possible to participate in any government coalition, on the condition that the government commits to implementing the agenda that the party presents in its campaign platform. First and foremost are budget allocations and establishing the infrastructure necessary to improve the social and economic conditions of Arab citizens in Israel. It is not possible to influence matters without participating in decision-making and in the division of the country’s general budget. [...] It should be remembered that our society has reached the edge of

the cliff, and it is living in a cycle of forms of violence. Arab society suffers from soaring unemployment and ruptures in the social and family fabric as a result of the dire economic situation. We hope to generate the desired change, and we will make an effort to realize it in practice. We must stop using slogans and inflammatory speech that do not put food on the table of even one Arab citizen living in poverty.” (www.alarab.net, December 13, 2012).

The Labor Party

- **Labor candidate: The Labor Party will compete with the Arab parties for Arab votes**

Erel Margalit, slotted in the tenth place on the Labor Party’s election list, emphasized: “There will be no Labor Party leadership that doesn’t stretch out its hand to the Arab public, and therefore there will be no leadership that will not work together with the Arab sector, which is an obvious partner.” Margalit added, “Every time the Labor Party was strong in the elections, it was due to Arab participation, because the Arabs play an important role in the party and in its leadership.” According to Margalit, “No less than 7,000 Arabs registered with the Labor Party to recruit other voters and party members from the Arab sector. [...] The Labor Party takes a different view of the Arabs compared to the ultra-right parties. The Labor Party’s leadership was the first to extend its hand to the Palestinians, and reached a historic decision to divide the country into two states. It paid a heavy price for that and lost its leader, Yitzhak Rabin. It was also the first to appoint the first Arab minister in the state of Israel.” Margalit introduced his program to support and integrate members of the Arab minority into the hi-tech industry, and he stated that he believed that this field is “a small example of coexistence between Jews and Arabs, state management, and pursuit of the desired quality of life. Success in the hi-tech sector opens up employment opportunities and will breathe new life into the economy of the Arab minority and the country in general.” Margalit summarized, “The Labor Party will compete with the Arab parties over the votes of the Arab voters.” (*Kull al-Arab*, November 16, 2012).

Meretz

- **Issawi Freij, Meretz candidate: Meretz will increase its support from the Arab street by threefold**

“As a citizen of the State of Israel, [and] as a Palestinian Arab, I feel that we Arab citizens should no longer restrict ourselves to the role of 'preacher at the gate' that is held by the Arab parties. I don't want to be someone who only says the right things. I want to be a partner to the action and to the charting of the path of the State of Israel. Meretz, as a Jewish-Arab party by definition, is the only place in which there is true partnership stemming from a [jointly held] world-view. I truly hope that this partnership will serve as an example for analogous partnerships on the national level.”

“Meretz is much appreciated in the Arab sector, but in the last three election campaigns the sector was not wise enough to place an Arab candidate in a slot with

realistic chances for election. I can confidently say that Meretz will significantly increase its electoral power in these elections, and receive at least three times more votes in the Arab sector now than it did in the past. Israeli Arabs want to view their representatives as involved in the decision-making process, and not merely serve as “token Arabs” to decorate the Knesset lists.”

When asked how he feels as an Arab member of a Zionist party, Freij responded: “I will define myself the way I like, and you define yourself as you like. In Meretz we have a joint social-political-economic party platform, and that is what guides me – not the specific people [on the list]. I have had had enough of the view that says – what’s good for the Jews is bad for the Arabs, and vice versa. Meretz adopts the approach that what is good for the Jews, is also good for the Arabs. I agree with that approach, and many in my sector feel that way too.” (*Ma’ariv*, 13 November 2012)

Shas

- **Aryeh Deri: We take care of the have-nots, and that’s exactly the case of the Arab sector**

From an investigative report entitled “Shas Courts the Arab Vote”: According to Aryeh Deri, “The majority of the Arab sector live in the country of the ‘have-nots’ and these are the people that we take care of. They wish to preserve their heritage, and we also wish to preserve our own. I hope that we can help them, just as we help others.” [...] Chairperson of Ra’am-Ta’al, MK Ibrahim Sarsur, stated several days ago that it is possible that “Aryeh Deri’s Shas” will steal votes from the Arab parties. In the past, when Deri served as the head of Shas, he appealed to Arab voters and received many votes in Arab towns, where he maintained active offices. As Minister of the Interior, Deri extended assistance to local Arab governments, and the appointments he made in the government-appointment committees did much to strengthen the party’s status in the Arab sector. [...] At this stage it appears that Deri’s Shas is the only Jewish-Zionist party that is already scouting out the Arab vote. (*Uvda*, November 9, 2011).

Background data

Voting turnout in Arab and Druze towns 1992-2009⁵

| | Arabs and Druze | Nationwide |
|-------------------|-----------------|------------|
| 1992 | 69.7% | 77.4% |
| 1996 | 77.0% | 79.3% |
| 1999 | 75.0% | 78.7% |
| 2001 [*] | 18.0% | 62.3% |
| 2003 | 62.0% | 67.8% |
| 2006 | 56.3% | 63.2% |
| 2009 | 53.4% | 64.7% |

* In 2001, special elections were held for Prime Minister only.

Voting patterns in Arab and Druze towns 1992-2009⁶

| Party | 1992 | 1996 | 1999 | 2003 | 2006 | 2009 |
|---|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| DFPE (Hadash) [*] | 23.4% | 37.0% | 21.3% | 28.3% | 24.3% | 27.5% |
| Progressive List for Peace | 9.2% | | | | | |
| ADP | 15.1% | | | | | |
| Ra'am / Ra'am-Ta'al ^{**} | | 25.4% | 30.5% | 20.0% | 27.4% | 32.1% |
| NDA (Balad) ^{***} | | | 16.8% | 20.9% | 20.2% | 22.3% |
| Arab and Arab-Jewish (non-Zionist) Parties | 47.7% | 62.4% | 68.6% | 69.2% | 71.9% | 81.9% |
| Labor | 20.3% | 16.6% | 7.4% | 8.8% | 12.8% | 4.6% |
| Meretz | 9.7% | 10.5% | 5.0% | 4.8% | 2.8% | 1.4% |
| Kadima | | | | | 6.8% | 3.7% |
| Likud | 8.9% | 2.2% | 4.8% | 4.1% | 0.9% | 2.1% |
| Shas | 4.9% | 1.3% | 3.5% | 3.6% | 2.9% | 2.0% |
| Other parties | 8.5% | 7.0% | 10.7% | 9.5% | 1.9% | 4.3% |
| Zionist and Jewish Parties | 52.3% | 37.6% | 31.4% | 30.8% | 28.1% | 18.1% |

* In the 1996 elections, Hadash's list also included Balad. In the 2003 elections, Hadash and Ta'al presented a joint list.

** Ra'am participated in the 1996 elections for the first time as a joint list of ADP (Mada) and the parliamentary faction of the Islamic Movement. In the 2006 elections, Ra'am presented a joint list with Ta'al.

*** In the 1999 elections, Balad ran jointly with Ta'al. In the 2003 elections and onward, Balad presented an independent list.

⁵ 1992-2006 election data from: Elie Rekhess and Arik Rudnitzky (eds.), **Arab Society in Israel – Information Kit** (Neve Ilan, Israel: Abraham Fund Initiatives, 2009). Chapter 6: “Arab Politics in Israel” [in Hebrew]. Data on 2009 elections from: Ephraim Lavie and Arik Rudnitzky (eds.), **Arab Politics and the 18th Knesset Elections: Special Issue no. 2** (Tel Aviv University: Konrad Adenauer Program for Jewish-Arab Cooperation, March 12, 2009).

⁶ Figures include the distribution of votes in Arab and Druze towns for parties that crossed the electoral threshold. Source: See footnote 5.