

The Arab Vote in the Israeli Elections: The Bid for Leadership

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GENERAL RESULTS

Arab voting patterns in the 15th general elections hardly differed from the previous elections held in 1996. Once again, Arabs proved in their strategic vote for the prime minister of their choice to be the sector or segment of Israel's voting public most loyal to the left-wing candidate; 94.3 per cent of Arab voters voted for Ehud Barak. Once again, they proved to favour, like Israel's ultra-Orthodox, parties whose sectoral identity was beyond dispute.

Of those 69.5 per cent of Arab voters who voted for the non-Zionist Arab or predominantly Arab parties; 31.1 per cent voted for the United Arab List (UAL) compared to 25.6 per cent in the previous elections, 21.3 voted for the Democratic Front for Peace and Equality (DFPE) compared to 36.9 per cent in 1996, and 16.8 per cent for the United Democratic Alliance (UDA) which in the previous elections ran as a coalition partner with the DFPE as the National Democratic Bloc (NDB) (see Table 1).

The UAL, an alliance between the nationalist Arab Democratic Party (ADP) and the southern branch of the Islamic Association, increased its representation in the Knesset from four to five seats, the DFPE managed to hold on to its three seats, and the UDA, better known as Balad, which ran alone to the Knesset, for the first time managed to secure two seats¹ (see Table 2).

This was the highest percentage of the Arab vote these parties ever drew. Participation was high as in the previous elections; 339,164 voters, 70 per cent of those eligible (excluding mixed towns where Arab voting patterns are hard to assess) cast their votes, slightly lower than in the previous elections and significantly lower than projections.² Eligible Arab voters accounted for 12.1 of the total eligible voters (11.1 in the 1996 elections).³ Ten Arabs (including Druze) were elected to the

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TABLE 1
THE ARAB VOTE FOR THE KNESSET, 1996-99

	1996 Votes	Percentage	1999 Votes	Percentage
<i>Non-Zionist Parties</i>				
DFPE-NDB	113,773	37.0	—	—
DFPE	—	—	72,241	21.3
UAL	78,104	25.4	105,480	31.1
AFPC (Tibi)	2,087	0.6	—	—
UDA (Balad)	—	—	56,979	16.8
Others	—	4.6	1,017	0.3
Total votes for Arab parties	204,994	66.6	235,717	69.5
<i>Zionist Parties</i>				
One Israel (Labour)	51,045	16.6	26,115	7.7
Meretz	32,287	10.5	17,636	5.2
Centre party	—	—	6,135	1.8
Am Ehad	—	—	9,157	2.7
Others	16,297	10.5	44,404	13.2
Total votes for Zionist parties	102,503	33.4	103,447	30.5
Total Votes	307,497	100.0	339,164	100.0

Source: Sara Ozacky-Lazar and As'ad Ghanim, *HaHatzba'a Ha'Aravit BaBhirot LaKnesset Ha-14* (The Arab Vote in the Elections to the 14th Knesset), Appendix 2, p.35; *Ha'aretz*, 19 May 1999. Figures are slightly modified to include mixed towns.

TABLE 2
NUMBER OF ARAB AND DRUZE MEMBERS OF KNESSET BY PARTY

Party	1996	1999
Hadash	4+1* seats	2+1* seats
United Arab List	4	5
One Israel (Labour)	2	1
Meretz	1	1
UDA - Balad	—	2
Total number of Arab members	11+1*	10+1*

* Tamar Gozansky (Jewish)

Knesset compared to 11 members in the previous term, a figure significantly lower than their proportion in the population and substantially lower than their actual participation rates would warrant.

The poor performance of the Jewish parties in the Arab sector mirrored the success of the Arab parties. Only one Jewish party, Shas, did better than in previous elections, receiving 4.1 per cent of the Arab vote compared to 1.3 per cent in 1996. The big losers were the centre and left-of-centre parties, One Israel and Meretz, whose share of the Arab vote declined from 16.7 to 7.7 per cent and from 10 to 5.2 per cent respectively.⁴ The poor showing of these parties in both the 1996 and 1999 elections was to be one more reflection of the larger pattern of nationwide 'sectoralization' in voting patterns in the past two general elections.

Paradoxically, by becoming more distinctively 'Arab' in the way they voted, the country's Arab citizens were ironically being typically 'Israeli'. They also paid the political price emanating from the tendency to vote by sector. It was clear from these elections that the parties representing the new immigrants from the former Soviet Union were no longer a transient phenomenon and that the Arab parties had to compete with this new sub-sector for attention over their place on the national agenda and over funds. These two sub-sectors are of approximately equal size, voted in equal measure for their respective sectoral parties (the 'Russian' parties having carried 7.7 per cent of the total vote compared to 7.9 per cent for the Arab parties), and enjoy equal representation in the Knesset (ten members of Knesset respectively).⁵ There is an essential difference between these two sub-sectors as well. In the Arab sector, the parties are united around a common agenda to a degree scarcely reflected between the two parties representing the new immigrants from the former Soviet Union and even within the larger party, Yisrael B'aliya. This basic political consensus was reflected in the nearly unanimous Arab vote for Barak, compared to a much more divided vote for prime minister among the new immigrants. (See Vladimir Khanin's article in this volume on the 'Russian' vote.)

This competition and subsequent marginality of the Arab parties was reflected in the politics of forming the government after the elections. Once again precedent and tradition rather than novelty characterized the process. For all the talk of a post-Zionist Israel, the Arabs were important as long as they were considered to be the deciding factor in breaking the tie between a divided Jewish constituency. But Barak, having won by a wide margin in direct elections among the non-Arab electorate, relegated the Arabs to their traditional marginal role.⁶

At least regarding internal Israeli affairs, the new prime minister was evidently eager to anchor Israel to its Zionist moorings and maintain

two traditional rules of the game in the governance of the state: first, that Arab parties could not be part of the ruling coalition, particularly when fateful decisions regarding territorial withdrawal have to be made; and second, that Arabs, even if belonging to Barak's own party, cannot become ministers. For the Arab public, many of whom thought that they would have the decisive vote, the reaction was plainly bitter.⁷ As far as Israel's Arab citizens were concerned, Barak was proving quickly to be a 'Bibi (Netanyahu) compatible', a deviation from the liberalism that globalization was presumably to usher in.

Neither the subsequent placement for the first time of Arab member of Knesset (MK) Muhammad Mehamid on the Knesset's prestigious and sensitive committee on foreign affairs and security,⁸ nor the appointment of One Israel MK Nawaf Masalha as deputy foreign minister were palliatives to the stinging insult of not being even considered eligible to join a coalition that eventually consisted of almost 70 per cent of the non-Arab electorate. It was clear that while the Arabs expected Barak to engage in a two-track policy (in addition to two-track diplomacy) of making peace simultaneously with Palestinians across the 'green line' and with the state's Arab citizens within it, Barak was adamantly committed to a one-track policy of trying to establish the largest possible coalition in order to reduce the prospects for defection in preparation for the forfeiting of much of Judea and Samaria and perhaps all of the Golan in order to achieve political settlements with the Palestinians and the Syrians. Barak perhaps assumes that the grievances of the Arabs in Israel could be better tackled after Israel concludes the negotiation process with the Palestinians and Syrians. For their part, Israel's Arab citizens voted strategically for Barak on peace and voted ideologically for Arab parties, rather than instrumentally for 'Jewish' parties with more political clout in getting things done.

A MARGINALIZED CAMPAIGN AMID INTERNAL VIOLENCE

It was not only in the aftermath of the elections that Arabs were delegated to marginal importance but Arab interest in the election campaign was low key, for several reasons. The election campaign took place amid growing violence within the Arab sector.

The most ominous issue politically was the increasingly volatile dispute between members of the Islamic Association and non-affiliated Muslims and the DFPE-dominated Nazareth municipality over ownership of 6,000 square feet surrounding a small building reputedly containing the grave of Shaykh Shihab al-Din, the nephew of the legendary Salah al-Din, who destroyed the Crusader Kingdom.⁹ The site is situated close to the Basilica of the Annunciation in the very centre of the city. Nazareth, in addition to being one of the towns most identified

with Christianity, also serves as the intellectual and political centre of Arab life and a reflection of the Arab sector's inherent heterogeneity.

The controversy broke out after a school on the property was torn down in 1997, and the DFPE-dominated Nazareth municipality headed by Ramiz Jeraisi, who happens to be a Christian, was authorized with the consent of the council, including representatives of the United Arab List, to use the area surrounding the building to extend the square before the Basilica in preparation for the millennium commemorations in the year 2000. The decision was challenged by Muslim citizens, some of whom were prominent activists in the Islamic Movement, on the grounds that the burial site and the building were Islamic endowment property. They argued that a mosque should be built in order to serve Nazareth's rapidly growing Muslim population instead of a piazza. The mosque would change the wholly Christian character of the town centre. The Islamists, employing a means of protest Palestinians commonly use against land expropriation by the state, subsequently set up a protest tent site on the property.

Just how rapid and how volatile the dispute was becoming can be attested in part by the municipal election results November 1998 in which the local United Arab List won ten as opposed to nine seats secured by the DFPE-led list.¹⁰ The incumbent mayor, Jeraisi, remained in office after winning in the direct elections held on the same date. The dispute over land quickly escalated into a dispute over control over the municipality.¹¹ The United Arab List, having been refused offices in the municipality, petitioned the High Court of Justice to force Ramiz Jeraisi to appear before court to explain why he did not provide two offices in the municipality for the Islamic opposition as required by law.¹² The controversy degenerated into violence between Muslim and Christian youth during the annual Christmas procession and continued for several days and once again on Easter day in April 1999.

By that time, the prime minister's adviser for Arab affairs and increasingly the Vatican were heavily involved in trying to settle the dispute. Even more insistent in trying to resolve the dispute was Yasser Arafat and the Palestinian Authority (PA) who were busy organizing 'Project 2000' centred in Bethlehem but which nevertheless included Nazareth as well. In addition to meeting both parties, Arafat hoped that Minister Imad Faluji, a former member of the Hamas, would be able to persuade the United Arab List to make concessions, but to no avail. By that time, the controversy's impact was also being felt in the course of the general elections. The local branch of the United Arab List compared Ramiz Jeraisi to Arik Sharon in one of its fliers.¹³ The Shihab al-Din dispute poses the most severe test by far to local Muslim-Christian relations since the establishment of the state – a relationship which historically has been on the whole correct, if not warm.

Since the dispute continued to unfold during the election campaign, it raises the question of whether it had an impact on voting patterns, particularly regarding the Communist-dominated DFPE in which Christians were historically prominent, and the UAL, where Muslim fundamentalists have the upper hand.

Equally disturbing to Israel's Arab citizens has been the growing phenomenon of *hamula* (extended family), vengeance-related violence, often at considerable cost of human life.¹⁴ An indication of its severity may be gleaned from the fact that one of the first issues addressed by Shlomo Ben-Ami, the newly instated minister of internal security, was violence and crime in Arab neighbourhoods and localities.¹⁵ Local political elites bewail the seemingly endless and, from their point of view, useless violence within the community and propose channelling it into politically meaningful acts against the establishment. Most agree that it is fed by the segregation and seclusion of Arabs physically, culturally and occupationally from the Jewish mainstream and by rising unemployment in an economy characterized by a high growth in security-related high-tech but with otherwise stagnant industry.¹⁶

In the past year, there were also several incidents of violence involving Israeli Arab citizens and the state.¹⁷ The worst took place in Umm al-Fahum where protests against enclosure of state lands for military purposes ended in two days of violence between the police and students during the course of which police fired into a high school and seriously wounded a student. A state commission is presently investigating the conduct of the police in Umm al-Fahum. The event might be a harbinger of more incidents of this kind as Israeli military redeployment from the territories forces the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) to seek alternative training grounds and firing zones, often on land possessed by Israeli Arabs. But Israeli Arabs see very little relationship between the elections and solving the problems related to these various forms of violence.

PARTIES AND SHIFTING COALITIONS

Arab voters could have easily been confused by the eight Arab parties that entered the race in February,¹⁸ and by the defections and the shifting coalitions that took place up to the elections. The UDA's decision to break up the alliance with the DFPE was by far the most eventful.¹⁹ Azmi Bishara demanded to head the list, claiming that the UDA attracted more votes than the DFPE. The latter refused. A comparison of election results in 1992, 1996 and 1999 proved Bishara wrong. In 1992, after the fall of the Soviet Union, the DFPE ran alone and received 23.2 per cent of the vote. In 1996, it allied with Bishara's National Democratic Bloc and won 37 of the vote, suggesting that Bishara contributed less

than half of the votes. The 1999 election results proved that the DFPE was right and the DFPE held its own in securing 21.3 per cent of the Arab vote compared to 16.8 per cent for the party headed by Bishara.

Bishara's defection triggered a three-way competition among the three lists, each eager to expand its coalition in order to demonstrate to the weary Arab voter that the divisiveness of the Arab parties was the other parties' fault, not their own. Two personalities in particular were being wooed to join – Muhammad Mehamid, an MK for the DFPE since 1990 and former mayor of Umm al-Fahum who left the DFPE before the campaign, and Ahmad Tibi, who headed the Democratic Movement for Change. He and his list were the failures of the 1996 election campaign.

Tibi eventually settled for Bishara despite personal and ideological antagonism between the two (Tibi was a staunch supporter of the Oslo peace process while Bishara was a die-hard opponent) and received the second slot on the newly formed United Democratic Alliance. But this occurred only after the press reported that he concluded a deal with the rival UAL. Judging by the results, Bishara did not profit from the bargain.²⁰ The UDA as partner in the alliance with the DFPE in 1996 attracted roughly 15 per cent of the vote increasing it by one or two per cent in 1999, implying that Tibi was not much help to Bishara.

Once again, the electoral results revealed conclusively that there was no relationship between strong links to the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) – Tibi serves as an unofficial adviser to Arafat – and electoral success. Mehamid, who was accorded the third slot after Dahamshe and Sani al-Talib in the UAL, proved to bring no greater dividends for the UAL than Tibi to the UDA. In Umm al-Fahum where Mehamid was former mayor, the DFPE (from which he defected) received 26.2 per cent of the vote, significantly above the overall percentage of votes the list drew in the Arab sector as a whole.

One can therefore conclude that like their Jewish counterparts, the Arab electorate does not like defectors who defect for other than what are perceived to be ideological considerations. This rule was demonstrated far more dramatically in the Jewish sector with the failure of the Centre party, but probably in both sectors the lessons fail to sink in either among the defectors or among the parties absorbing them.²¹

CHANGES NEVERTHELESS – THE BID FOR LEADERSHIP

However much Arab voting patterns conformed to 1996 patterns, it would be wrong to overlook some important changes with potentially long-term impact. Azmi Bishara's decision to present his candidacy for prime minister, vociferously condemned by almost all Arab political parties and prominent politicians except by his own party,²² was

probably the most important of them. Bishara identified what Israeli Arab politics lack – a prominent leader that could coalesce a fissiparous electorate and parties. This might sound surprising since one of the most prominent themes in any discussion on Arab politics typically revolves around the weakness of parties and the undue prominence of the leaders as attested by the many authoritarian Arab regimes. Bishara wrote a brilliant essay on the theme in the context of Palestinian politics and the emergence of the PA.²³

Israeli Arab politics, I propose, no longer so much suffer lack of institutionalization but from lack of a charismatic leadership. After all, the DFPE has not only been in existence since the mid-1970s but has weathered the downfall of Communism better than most Communist-dominated parties in the Western world. Even the much newer United Arab List, whose kernel, the ADP, was established in 1988, seems here to stay. The need for a sector-wide leader is a natural outcome of the presidentialization of the electoral system and the Americanization of the political process (albeit checked by movement away from primaries in the Likud).²⁴ The lack of leadership in the Arab sector was vividly demonstrated in a poll conducted in March 1999 where the most popular political figure, Azmi Bishara, was chosen by only 12 per cent of those sampled, followed by two other politicians with 11 per cent apiece.²⁵

Bishara has set a precedent even if he will probably never attain the leadership status he seeks. His Christian origins, secular convictions, and somewhat archaic pan-Arab sentiments reduce his attractiveness in a predominantly Muslim and conservative electorate. Bishara aimed to strike a deal with Barak to stave off a second round but conceded defeat a day before the elections. Had he been perceived to have commanded the support of most of the Arab electorate, Barak would have been forced into two-track concessions of the type outlined earlier. The potential for such a move certainly exists in the future, especially if the two-round voting procedure is maintained.

Hussniya Jabarah's successful bid for a Knesset seat was another novelty of these elections. Tenth on the Meretz list, she is the first Arab woman MK and is from Taibah, an Arab town now located on the fringes of the Dan metropolitan region, where she heads a teaching programme in a local college and is a graduate student at Bar-Ilan University.²⁶ She identifies herself as an Israeli Arab-Palestinian. It is doubtful, however, whether her candidacy contributed many votes to Meretz. The party, which in the 1980s was heralded by one academic as the wave of the future in terms of attracting Arabs votes, made do with 5.5 per cent of the vote – half of what it succeeded in drawing in at least three of the last general elections.

THE VICTORY OF THE UAL AS AN ARAB-ISLAMIC COALITION

Palestinians in the territories have consistently stated in various polls that they preferred an Arab Islamic regime to other alternatives such as the 'democratic' and a 'shari'a' state. Such a state, in their eyes, reflects a traditional rather than strictly normative outlook towards Islam and gives pride of place to Arab culture and language. For the first time, a plurality of Israeli Arabs, perhaps because of open bridges and increasing access to Arab cable and other media, chose a similar 'civilizational' option and voted for the UAL, transforming it for the first time into the largest Arab party. The UAL is composed of an Arab nationalist party and the more moderate wing of the Islamic Movement. Their strong performance relegated the DFPE to second place among Arab parties for the first time. Thus, identity voting no longer reflects solely the Jewish-Arab national divide but secular-religious and civilizational-liberal perspectives within the Arab community.

It should be noted that the change was by no means a landslide. Both parties have a place under the sun, but given the demographic predominance of the Muslims, the prospects of reversing the order in the near future seem slim. The DFPE's ability to maintain its strong hold despite its ideological affiliations might be due to the renewal it underwent. It was the sole veteran party in the Knesset to field only one incumbent, Tamar Gozansky. The main reason she secured her position was her Jewishness, whose importance she denies. For a party in the past composed of historic dinosaurs in the Stalinist tradition, this was a refreshing precedent. But the Stalinist tradition was hardly dead; all of the four major candidates were veteran members of the Israeli Communist party and a Muslim, Christian and Jew headed the list.²⁷ This was a paradoxical arrangement for a list that presumably transcended ethnic barriers²⁸ (but probably no less paradoxical than the former Soviet Union which denied ethnicity but proceeded to create republics along ethnic lines). By contrast, in the UAL, four of the five MKs who won seats in the 1999 elections were incumbents.

Also worth noting are the differences in the pecking order within the UAL. In the 1996 elections, the UAL was headed by the founder of the ADP, Abd al-Wahhab Darawsha. In the 1999 elections, Darawsha resigned, one of the few Arab politicians to give up office voluntarily, in order to allow Abd al-Wahhab Dahamsha from the Islamic Movement to head the list. The UAL also had the third slot filled by a former member of the Islamic Association. Thus, not only did the nationalist-religious right grow at the expense of the secular and Marxist left, but the religious wing represented by the moderate section of the Islamic Movement took the lead from the more secular ADP within the UAL to the obvious satisfaction of their electorate. Meanwhile, the rival

northern branch of the Islamic Movement headed by Ra'id Salah and Kemal al-Khatib came out with a declaration permitting members to vote as they saw fit, even though the movement refrains on ideological grounds from contesting in national elections.²⁹ It is difficult to know whether the decision was taken because the movement thought a call to boycott the elections would have been ineffective or because they were worried about the reaction of the establishment in taking a more radical position.

HOW CONFSSIONAL WAS THE VOTE THEN?

If the religious right did so well, how much was this due to broader sectarian electoral patterns or simply reflected the waning of the Israeli Communist party's influence? It is clear that encapsulated sectarian voting patterns of the type witnessed in Lebanon do not prevail among Israel's Arab citizens. It is equally clear, however, that Muslims tend to vote in a far higher proportion for the United Arab List while Christians favour to an even greater extent the 'secular' parties where Christians were placed in secure slots. Recall that Azmi Bishara, a Christian from Nazareth, headed the UDA and that the DFPE placed a Christian from Haifa second on its list.

The evidence for this first proposition can be derived through basic arithmetic. In the Arab sector as a whole, 20.1 per cent of the Arab electorate voted for the DFPE and 16.7 for the UDA for a combined total vote of 36.7 per cent. If we take into account that both parties are weak among the Druze (8.7 per cent voted for DFPE, seven per cent voted for the UDA) and that the Druze comprise less than ten per cent of the 'minority' vote, the Druze could not have contributed more than two per cent of the 'Arab' vote to these parties (see Table 8). Even if most of the Christians, who comprise less than 12 per cent of the Arab population, voted for these two parties (let us say ten per cent of the vote), it would still mean that nearly two-thirds of the votes to these parties came from the Muslim population.

A look at both exclusively Christian or Muslim and mixed Christian-Muslim localities is also instructive. Because of the Shihab al-Din controversy, it would probably be best to focus on Nazareth, Israel's unofficial Arab capital. With 43.6 per cent of Nazarenes voting for the DFPE, over twice the sectoral average, Nazareth remained a traditional DFPE stronghold. By contrast, the UDA received less than its sector-wide share of the vote in Nazareth (13.3 compared to 16.8 per cent). The UAL did just slightly better than the national average (33.3 compared to 31.3 per cent). The three parties together captured 90.2 per cent of the votes. It is generally assumed that Nazareth is presently 60 per cent Muslim. Assuming that all those who voted for the UDA

were Muslim, as were the 9.8 per cent of the electorate who voted for parties other than the big three, even then over a quarter of Muslim voters would have had to vote for either the DFPE or the UAL for these parties to draw the votes they did. Further confirmation of this reality may be found in Umm al-Fahum, an exclusively Muslim town. Both the DFPE and the UDA did better than the sector-wide average. The latter's strong performance may partially be due to the UDA's use of Islamic symbols during its campaign.³⁰ It is evident, however, that the major explanation may be due to the secular nature of these parties.

Nevertheless, an analysis of the distribution of votes for the major non-Jewish parties in the past two elections in eight villages that are exclusively or nearly exclusively populated by Christians³¹ suggests that Christians tended to favour the secular parties more than Muslim voters favour the UAL (see Table 3). Such a tendency is not only understandable ideologically but also geographically. While the DFPE at least fields candidates from both the Galilee and the Triangle, the UAL draws its candidates exclusively from the (Muslim) south. Nevertheless, religious identification *per se* might still be an important factor. The strong showing for the UDA in the 1999 elections even compared to the DFPE might suggest that preferences are not only ideological or geographical but stem from the fact that in the latter party, a Christian heads the list. In any event, the wide variation in voting patterns even among so small a subgroup cautions against making sweeping generalizations.

A comparison of voting patterns in these localities in the past two elections seems to indicate that neither tensions between Christians and

TABLE 3
VOTING FOR MAJOR ARAB PARTIES IN PREDOMINANTLY CHRISTIAN
VILLAGES, 1996 AND 1999
(in percentages)

<i>Village</i>	1996 DFPE-NDB	1999 UAL	DFPE	UDA	UAL
Gush Halav	39.7	13.2	11.6	43.1	12.9
Kfar Yasif	57.7	7.8	34.9	30.7	15.6
Ma'iliya	41.3	0.3	8.6	51.5	—
Ilbun	46.2	8.6	41.9	20.6	10.1
Fasuta	46.5	—	17.3	45.2	0.2
Rama	45.5	8.2	25.9	24.3	7.0
Tarshiha	52.9	11.5	19.4*	37.4*	13.2*
I'blin	57.4	15.8	26.8	35.8	13.8

Source: www.elections-yedioth.co.il

* Ma'alot-Tarshiha is a mixed town and the data was presented without distinction between Ma'alot, the Jewish section, and Tarshiha. Therefore data for the 1999 elections was computed on the assumption that all who voted for the three parties were Arabs and that the percentage of those voting for Zionist parties equalled the national average.

Muslims in Nazareth nor the newly secured dominance of the Islamic wing within the UAL visibly affected the UAL's electoral performance. Christians voted for the UAL at a rate that was less than one-half the sector-wide average in both the 1996 and 1999 elections. Of course, from the perspective of the state and the dominant community, the electoral differences between the Christians and Muslims hardly matter. Both Muslims and Christians overwhelmingly supported Arab parties with similar attitudes towards the nature of the state. If anything, an analysis of the data seems to indicate that a higher percentage of Christians vote for non-Zionist parties than do Muslims.

Finally, let us look at the data regarding the Bedouin who are spatially segregated in specific localities for which data is readily available. The Bedouin are strictly Muslim and 67.5 per cent voted for the UAL, with only 4.8 per cent for the DFPE and 2.2 per cent for the UDA, the 'secular' parties (see Table 4). Yet this might be more a reflection of their ecological cultural distinctiveness in broader Muslim society and the fact that Talib al-Sani, a member of a prominent southern Bedouin tribe, was placed in the third slot on the UAL. One cannot rule out the religious dimension, however. In 1983, when the Islamic Movement first began its activities in the Negev, there were no mosques among the Bedouin. In 1998 there were 46, all controlled by the Islamic Movement.³² Five of these mosques include educational centres. In the local elections held in November 1998, a member of the Islamic Movement was elected as mayor of Rahat, the largest of the seven towns the state built to sedentarize the Bedouin.³³ The continuity in Bedouin voting patterns seriously questions the validity of modernization (now renamed) globalization theories. Despite urbanization and proletarianization, differences in electoral preferences among the Bedouin and religious sub-groups show no signs of disappearing. By contrast, the once-marked differences between rural and urban voting patterns in the Arab sector, in which the smaller villages tended to vote for the Zionist establishment parties while the more urban areas voted for the radical opposition, have almost completely disappeared (see Tables 5-7).

The Bedouin have also become radicalized over the years. Some 74.5 per cent voted for the three Arab parties, higher than the average for the Arab sector as a whole. In the 1992 elections they were the most conservative in their electoral preferences among the Muslims and Christians. In the 1992 elections, 60.1 per cent voted for Jewish parties and only 39.4 per cent voted for either the DFPE and the United Arab List. Their flight from the Jewish parties during this period, especially from Labour and Likud, must be seen as a protest vote. In addition to their being the most disadvantaged sub-sector in Israeli society by almost every criterion, their relationship with the establishment has also been marred by increasing conflict over land ownership and expropriation.

TABLE 4
A COMPARISON OF KNESSET RESULTS IN THE BEDOUIN SECTOR
FOR MAJOR PARTIES, 1996-99
(in percentages)

<i>Party</i>	1996	1999
One Israel (Labour party)	14.9	4
Hadash	2.3	4.8
Likud	1.5	0.7
Meretz	64.2	67.5
UDA (Balad)	—	2.2
Shas	0.5	3.4

TABLE 5
A COMPARISON OF KNESSET RESULTS IN LARGE VILLAGES FOR
MAJOR PARTIES, 1996-99
(in percentages)

<i>Party</i>	1996	1999
One Israel (Labour party)	13.8	6.1
Mafdal	1.3	1.9
DFPE	37.3	22.1
Likud	1.1	0.6
Meretz	11.3	6.1
United Arab List	27.7	31
UDA (Balad)	—	19.7
Shas	1.1	4.5

TABLE 6
A COMPARISON OF KNESSET RESULTS IN SMALL VILLAGES FOR
MAJOR PARTIES, 1996-99
(in percentages)

<i>Party</i>	1996	1999
One Israel (Labour party)	25.8	13
Mafdal	1.7	1.9
DFPE	21.8	10.6
Likud	2.3	6.9
Meretz	16.7	7.9
United Arab List	23.3	31.5
UDA (Balad)	—	14
Shas	2.7	7.2

TABLE 7
A COMPARISON OF KNESSET RESULTS IN CITIES FOR MAJOR PARTIES,
1996-99
(in percentages)

<i>Party</i>	1996	1999
One Israel (Labour party)	12.9	5.6
Mafdal	1.1	1.0
DFPE	47.1	27.5
Likud	1.5	0.7
Meretz	7.4	3.8
United Arab List	24.6	34
UDA (Balad)	2.7	17.4
Shas	0.6	1.8

TABLE 8
A COMPARISON OF KNESSET RESULTS IN THE DRUZE SECTOR FOR
MAJOR PARTIES, 1996-99 (58 POLLS)
(in percentages)

<i>Party</i>	1996	1999
One Israel (Labour party)	40.3	21.7
Mafdal	7.0	1.9
DFPE	14.3	21.2
Likud	11.7	0.6
Meretz	12.1	4.4
United Arab List	5.1	4.9
Shas	4.2	3.4

THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN AS AN ISSUE IN PALESTINIAN POLITICS

The Israeli elections caught the PA and the PLO on the horns of a dilemma. The interim agreement was approaching its stipulated end on 4 May 1999, two weeks before the elections. Many Palestinians feared that if Arafat were to let this date pass and fail to announce the establishment of a Palestinian state, Netanyahu would successfully take the credit for stalling the peace talks and lowering Palestinian expectations. This claim would then improve his chances of securing another term in office. Just as in 1981 the Palestinians feared that a Likud victory would intensify a settlement drive to the point of no return, so in 1999, Palestinians were fearful that Netanyahu would initiate a renewed settlement drive that would turn the whole peace process including the final talks into a dead letter. These fears were magnified by the prospects of a lame-duck president in the United States and the fast-approaching American presidential elections which tend to distract Americans from international affairs. Elections also bring to

bear the clout of the vaunted American Jewish lobby, which Palestinians continued to perceive as blindly serving Israeli government policy.³⁴

On the other hand, the Palestinians feared that if Arafat did declare a Palestinian state on 4 May, this would hurt Barak's chances of winning. Yet even then, Palestinians reasoned, a Barak victory was problematic. No longer encumbered by an interim period prior to final negotiations, Barak would be in a position to continue low-scale but no less effective creeping settlement activities for which Labour governments in the past were well known.³⁵

A strong minority claimed that there was no dilemma to begin with; that in the event of a Netanyahu victory, the Americans would stop any settlement drive and force him to the negotiating table quicker than they would Barak.³⁶ But even among the majority who reasoned that Netanyahu was definitely worse, many felt that it was better to seize the moment, confront Israel, and declare a Palestinian state (and by implication declare the Oslo peace process null and void) rather than continue the interim period indefinitely as Israel uninterruptedly continued settlement.³⁷

It was this group that formed the clear majority in the central committee of the PLO that convened at the end of April 1999 in Gaza to debate this among other issues.³⁸ As always, Arafat had the last word. The critical date, 5 May, passed without a declaration and without serious incident, the PA sticking to its formal neutrality concerning the elections. The Palestinians were clearly hurt by raising the issue of Palestinian statehood and then failing to go through with their threat. When the PA tried orchestrating a 'day of rage' against Israeli settlement soon after 5 May, it soon discovered that just as the leadership was not willing to run risks, neither was the Palestinian man-in-the-street. Several hundred, rather than the anticipated tens of thousands, showed up at a border checkpoint after a week-long, intensive mobilizing campaign.

HOW PALESTINIANS AND ARABS ANALYSED THE ELECTIONS

Even Barak's victory did not offer much of a palliative to the Palestinians' sense of despondency.³⁹ The Arab and Palestinian press (whose locus has switched from Jerusalem to Ramallah since the establishment of the PA) had followed the campaign with unprecedented attention⁴⁰ and for the first time followed Israeli media practice of devoting a special section to Israeli election news and commentary. With such extensive coverage, it was impossible for Barak's hawkish past to go unnoticed, either his participation in cross-border operations as a young officer in a crack unit against the PLO in Lebanon, or his vote of abstention in the Knesset during the ratification of the Oslo Accords.

Barak was described as Rabin without Peres – that is to say, Rabin before Oslo – a person who would prefer almost at all costs to settle the interstate conflict with Syria at the expense of dealing with the Palestinians and giving up parts of the Land of Israel. Palestinian commentators noted, as did the Israeli press, that Barak kept his party's doves out of sight. Reactions to Barak after the elections were even more pessimistic. Barak was perceived as being motivated by the four 'no's – no to a Palestinian Jerusalem, no to the dismantling of the settlements, no to a return to the 4 June borders, and no to the physical return of Palestinian refugees.⁴¹ Little wonder that Palestinian commentators counselled to take a deep breath and prepare for an *intifada* before peace was to prevail.

Despite their focus on the ramifications of the Israeli election as it affected them, Palestinians across the green line and Arabs across the borders were also willing to look at the Israeli election in its own light. Unsurprisingly, in the age of the Internet, instant communications and media translation, their conclusions did not differ significantly from Israeli commentators. Dhia Rashwan from Egypt's prestigious al-Ahram Centre of Political and Strategic Studies, writing in *al-Khalij*, a weekly published in the United Arab Emirates (and reprinted in the Palestinian *al-Ayyam*), claimed that the Israeli economy's low rate of growth was the most important single factor behind Barak's victory.⁴² A social democratic government, she added, would improve relations with the European Community, Israel's main trading partner, which is presently composed of 15 states, 13 of which are governed by social democratic governments, with beneficial effects for Israel's economy. The second most important factor was ethnic. Netanyahu clearly favoured the Ashkenazim and lost out heavily among the Sephardim. Campaign strategy and tactics were also crucial. On both counts Barak did better than Netanyahu; One Israel's election campaign was especially skilled in portraying Netanyahu as part of a party of extremists compared to One Israel as a party for all. According to Rashwan, Netanyahu paid dearly for his endorsement by Yisrael Beiteinu, which split the Russian immigrant vote and lost him the support of Yisrael B'aliya. Tactically, his election campaign was hopeless, made worse by the departure of his American electoral adviser before the elections. Finally, acrimonious relations with members of his own party such as Mordechai, Olmert, Livnat, Begin and Sharon contributed to Netanyahu's downfall. She concludes that all these factors indicate that this was not a referendum on peace 'as so many in the Arab world see it'.

Her last assertion seems patently wrong, as reflected by Na'im al-Ashab's article, among many others, which appeared in the same newspaper (*al-Ayyam*) on the very same day, expressing similar conclusions regarding both the reasons for Barak's success and the

ramifications of the elections for the Palestinians.⁴³ He noted little change between left and right camps, increased religious–secular polarization, and increasing Ashkenazi–Sephardi tensions. Like Rashwan, he was pleased at the resounding defeat of the ‘Complete Land of Israel’ dream. Nevertheless, basing himself on four articles that appeared in *Ha’aretz*, he counselled Palestinians not to have any illusions. In fact, he opens his article by saying that the interest devoted to the Israeli elections and relying on change within Israel is in inverse proportion to Palestinian and Arab perceptions of their own strength. The current preoccupation with Israeli elections was thus an indication of weakness.

CONCLUSION

Israel’s election reform, by strengthening the executive at the expense of the Knesset, has reduced the importance of the Arab parties and enforces their marginality. The system encourages the prime minister to stick to the political centre and, therefore, to maintain Israel’s ‘republican’ nature as a state of the Jews, if not a Jewish state. The strengthening of the executive then leaves the Arabs on the periphery of Israeli politics. Even in the weakened Knesset they fare worse, if only because they have to compete with more encapsulated and resource-hungry sub-sectors. In the past three elections, marginality has led to greater support among Arab voters for Arab parties with more radical platforms, but to little avail. Since electoral reform has probably reinforced the sector’s marginality, there is no guarantee that, even if peace agreements are concluded with Syria and the Palestinians, the situation will change radically.

NOTES

1. Knesset Election Results, www1.knesset.gov.il/asp/election/results.asp.
2. Yosef Algazi, ‘Me’uhadim Neged Netanyahu’, *Ha’aretz*, 19 May 1999. The Peace Studies Centre in Givat Haviva publicized a poll in the Arab sector where the average expectation of the participation rate of eligible voters among those polled was 87.3 per cent (*al-Quds*, 3 May 1999).
3. *Ha’aretz*, 19 May 1999. Since one of every four new eligible voters in these elections was an Arab (24.6 per cent to be exact), despite the huge influx of Russian immigrants in the past decade, their effective participation in Israeli elections in the future is likely to increase significantly.
4. Umar Masalha, ‘Qira’a Fi Nata’ij al-Intikhabat al-Isra’iliyya lil-Knesset al-Khamisa Ashra’, *al-Siyyasa al-Filastiniyya*, Vol. 36 (Summer 1999), p.18.
5. www1.knesset.gov.il/asp/election/results.asp.
6. Gidon Levy, ‘Mi Hem Kulam’, *Ha’aretz*, 30 May 1999.
7. On the potentially decisive impact Arab voters were likely to have, see Salman Natur, ‘Fil Masalat al-Sharqiyya’, *al-Quds*, 27 January 1999.
8. *Ha’aretz*, 15 June 1999.
9. Danny Rabinowitz, ‘Nazrat Zequqa leShalom’, *Ha’aretz*, 13 July 1999.

10. *Al-Ayyam*, 12 November 1998.
11. *Al-Sinnara*, 12 December 1998.
12. *Al-Sinnara*, 31 December 1998.
13. *Al-Sinnara*, 3 April 1999.
14. In the period preceding the elections there were two such incidents: the killing of a boy as part of a feud between extended families in Makr, and large-scale violence between neighbours in the village of Mazra`a. See *al-Ittihad*, 12 May 1999 and 28 April 1999, respectively.
15. *Ha'aretz*, 2 August 1999.
16. Husaisi Beeri, 'Haalimut vехаАпартеид BeIsrael', *Ha'aretz*, 4 August 1999.
17. On 5 April, thousands demonstrated in the village of Umm al-Sahali near Shfaram on the Nazareth-Haifa road to protest against the demolition of three houses. Umm al-Sahli is one of 40 or so villages unrecognized by the state and therefore not provided with adequate services. Shfaram had tried in the past to incorporate this village without success. Two days later, the Higher Follow-Up Committee for Arab Affairs, the highest unofficial body in the Arab sector, called for a general strike in the Arab sector. In the ensuing demonstrations 20 citizens and an equal number of police were wounded. Minister of Internal Security Kahalani accused the Islamic Movement of inciting the violence. *Al-Ayyam*, 4 April 1998; *al-Quds*, 6 April 1998.
18. *Ha'aretz*, 14 February 1999.
19. *Al-Ayyam*, 22 March 1999.
20. *Al-Ayyam*, 22 March 1999.
21. For an entirely different reading of the Centre party's defeat, see Mazal Mu'alam, 'Meigra Rama leBira Hamikta', *Ha'aretz*, 18 May 1999.
22. A particularly bitter attack was voiced in an interview of Abd al-Malik Dahamsha, who headed the rival UAL, in *al-Ayyam*, 8 April 1999.
23. Azmi Bishara, 'Ma Ma'ani al-Dimuqratiyya al-Filastiniyya', in Musa Budeiri *et al.*, *al-Dimuqratiyya al-Filastiniyya: Awraq Naqdiyya*, Ramallah: Muwatin, 1995, p.142.
24. Nevertheless, the 'American' way including primaries, private funding and interest group support for candidates is continuing unabated. See Avraham Diskin, 'Resek Miflagot', *Ha'aretz*, 18 May 1999.
25. *Al-Sinnara*, 13 March 1999.
26. *Ha'aretz*, 23 May 1999.
27. *Ha'aretz*, 18 February 1999.
28. Yosef Elgazy, 'Keminhag Haeskimosim', *Ha'aretz*, 2 March 1999.
29. *Al-Ayyam*, 9 May 1999.
30. Latif Husri, 'Shas shel HaMigzar haAravi', *Ha'aretz*, 27 May 1999.
31. They are Gush Halav, Kfar Yasif, Mi'iliya, Ilbun, Fasuta, Rama, Tarshiha and I'blin.
32. *Al-Ayyam*, 23 December 1999.
33. *Al-Ayyam*, 12 November 1998.
34. Salim Nassar, 'Hal Yusa'idu Ta'jil I'lan al-Dawla al-Filastiniyya: 'Ala Isqat Netanyahu', *al-Hayat*, 30 January 1999.
35. Mamduh Nofal, 'Hawla Ta'jil I'lan al-Dawla wa Ta'thiruhu Ala al-Intikhabat al-Isra'iliyya', *al-Ayyam*, 15 March 1999.
36. Sakhr Habash, member of the central committee of the Fatah movement, *al-Quds*, 18 March 1999.
37. *Ibid.*
38. Mamduh Nofal, 'Dawrat al-Majlis al-Markazi wa'Istihqaq al-Rabi' min Ayar wa ma Ba'duhu', *al-Siyasa al-Filastiniyya*, No. 23 (Summer 1999), p.28.
39. Danny Rubinstein, 'Lo Mehahavat Ehud', *Ha'aretz*, 19 May 1999.
40. Na'im al-Ashhab, 'Mulahazat Awwaliya 'Ala Nata'ij al-Intikhabat al-Isra'iliyya', *al-Ayyam*, 23 May 1999.
41. Khalil al-Shkaki, 'Fawz Barak: Ta'thirat Muhtamala 'Ala Amaliyat al-Salam', *al-Siyasa al-Filastiniyya*, No. 23 (Summer 1999), p.20.
42. Dia Rashwan, 'Isra'il: 'Awamil Dakhiliyya Rafa 'at Barak Nahwa al-Qimma', *al-Ayyam*, 23 May 1999.
43. Naim al-Ashhab, 'Mulahazat Awwaliya 'Ala Nata'ij al-Intikhabat al-Isra'iliyya', *al-Ayyam*, May 23, 1999. In fact, all three commentaries that appeared on that day in *al-Ayyam* were plainly suspicious of Barak's possible moves regarding the peace process.

