



Inter-Agency Task Force on Israeli Arab Issues

2018 Local Elections – Preliminary Results in Arab Society

November 2, 2018

Municipal elections in Israel were held on October 30. Local elections determine mayors and heads of local and regional councils, as well as local council representatives who run as part of lists, with each list attaining seats in proportion to its share of votes.

In Arab society, local elections are widely regarded as more consequential for daily life than national elections and draw greater voter participation. Some of the more anticipated issues in this cycle were (i) the prospect of high turnover of Arab mayors and heads of council (what this would indicate about internal dynamics in Arab society and potential consequences for government-funded economic development programs); (ii) outcomes for [Arab women candidates, who ran in record numbers](#); (iii) results in mixed cities where some [prominent campaigns ran on platforms reinforcing Jewish-Arab divisions and mistrust](#); and (iv) elections-related violence in Arab municipalities.

While it is too early to delve into deeper insights, the preliminary outcomes in the key areas above are summarized below, along with election results for the largest Arab cities. A more in-depth update on insights and trends indicated by results is forthcoming.

Preliminary Results¹

Of 79 Arab municipalities, 76 held elections. Three (Taibeh, Baqa Al-Garbiye and Jatt) held special elections held in 2015 and did not participate in this cycle.

- **Voter participation:** In Arab municipalities (home to around 80 percent of the population) average voter turnout was roughly 85 percent, similar to past municipal election cycles, compared to national voter turnout of around 57 percent (a 6 percent increase from 2013, attributed to the fact that election day was, for the first time, a day off).
- **Candidate participation:** There were 281 Arab candidates for mayor and head of council, an average of 3.7 per 76 offices. This is out of 703 candidates in Israel overall, or 40 percent of all candidates (twice the population ratio of Arab society).
- **Turnover:** In races for mayor and heads of council, preliminary results show that incumbents won in 19 races (25 percent) and new mayors and heads were elected in 30 (39 percent), five of whom had held the office before. Of the 76 municipalities with incumbents, 57 ran for reelection (75 percent) while 19 did not re-contend (25 percent).
- **Second Round:** In 27 municipalities (35 percent) no candidate received more than 40 percent of the vote and runoff elections will be held in two weeks.

¹ SOURCES: [Ministry of Interior](#), [INJAZ](#), [The Abraham Initiatives](#), [Sikkuy](#).

- **Women candidates:** An estimated 400 women ran for elected office (most for council seats), representing 10 percent of all Arab candidates. This is up from 270 women, or 4 percent of candidates in 2013. In addition, 13 women ran at the top of local lists, while in 2013 only a single woman did so. Preliminary results show that 21 were elected and will serve full terms as council members and five will serve half terms through rotation agreements. This is up from 16 women elected in 2013.
- **Mixed cities:**² A number of Jewish parties in mixed cities campaigned [on controversial, divisive platforms reinforcing Jewish-Arab divisions](#). Only one candidate running such a platform, Afula's Avi Elkabetz, won. In contrast, Arab or joint Jewish-Arab lists for local council representation achieved a notable share of seats in Tel Aviv-Jaffa (a total of 6 of 31 seats), Lod (an unprecedented 6 seats) and Ramle (4 out of 19 seats).
- **Golan Druze:** Four Druze municipalities in the Golan Heights, where the majority of residents are permanent residents rather than citizens, [were supposed to hold elections for the first time](#). In these towns, previously managed by the Ministry of Interior, 14 candidates for heads of council initially came forward. Most [withdrew their candidacy towards election day](#) due to pressure from the community and its religious leaders to boycott the elections. One municipality cancelled elections, another had only one candidate, and two held elections with minimal voter turnout.
- **Election-Related Violence:** Despite efforts by [The Abraham Initiatives](#), the Council of Arab Mayors and [local groups](#), numerous pre-election clashes occurred in Nazareth, [Kfar Manda](#), Tour'an and additional localities, with street fights, property damage, and at least two dozen people arrested. Following the publication of results, [dozens of violent incidents broke out in Arab communities](#) (including Iksal, Sakhnin, Tamra, Kfar Yassif and Ar'ara in the Negev), with fist fights, tear gas, cars torched and gunfire.

Results in Major Arab Cities:

- **Nazareth:** Incumbent Mayor Ali Salam, a controversial figure in Arab society due to [vocal criticism of Arab MKs](#), won with 65 percent of the votes despite being challenged by well-known businessman Walid Afifi. Afifi was supported by a coalition of national political leaders, from Ayman Odeh of Hadash to Haneen Zoabi of Ballad, in a public and contentious campaign described by some as [populist \(Salam\) vs. elite \(Afifi\)](#). Nazareth is the largest Arab city in Israel with over 75,000 residents and largely considered the capital of Arab society.
- **Rahat:** In Israel's second-largest Arab city, Faiz Abu Zahiban of the Southern Islamic Movement defeated incumbent [Mayor Talal Alkrenawi](#). Abu Zahiban, a former schoolteacher and Imam in one of the most popular mosques in Rahat, served as mayor between 2008-2013, and was vocal in his support for controversial issues in the community such as [collection of illegal weapons](#), [education for Bedouin girls](#) and even [family planning in Bedouin society](#). Rahat is a Bedouin city in the Negev region with more than 67,000 residents. It is also Israel's poorest locality.
- **Um El Fahem:** In the third-largest Arab city with more than 55,000 residents, there will be a runoff on November 13 between the incumbent Mayor Khaled Aghbariyaa and Adv. Samir Mahmeed. Mayor Aghbariyaa was first elected in 2008 under the Islamic Movement (northern branch). He ran again as an independent in 2013, while the Northern Branch of the Islamic movement

² According to the Israeli Bureau of Statistics, a "mixed city" is where more than 10 percent of registered inhabitants are Arabs. There are five cities traditionally referred to as mixed cities: Akko (Acre), Haifa, the neighborhood of Jaffa in the Tel-Aviv-Jaffa municipality, Ramla, and Lod. In addition, new mixed cities have been forming due to Arab families moving into nearby all-Jewish cities (Nazareth Illit, Karmiel and Afula are some examples).

boycotted local elections. When it became clear he was going to win, the Movement threw its support behind him at the last moment. In 2015 the [Northern Branch was declared illegal](#) but nonetheless promoted its own candidate, Dr. Samir Subhi, a school principal.

- **Sakhnin:** In an upset, incumbent Mayor Mazen Ghanayem was defeated by local physician Dr. Safuat Abu Riya, who attained 53 percent of the votes to Ghanayem's 47 percent. Mayor Ghanayem is a prominent public figure in Israel, who chaired the Arab Mayor's Forum (a coordinating body that, among other things, represents Arab localities' interests to the central government). He has served two consecutive terms as mayor. Dr. Abu Riya ran against Ghanayem also in 2013, and was supported by the Jewish-Arab "Democratic Front" Hadash party. Sakhnin has approximately 30,000 residents.
- **Shefar'am:** The incumbent mayor of this northern city of 41,000, Amin Anabtawi, was defeated by a large margin by Orsan Yassin. Yassin had been mayor from 1998-2008, is a member of the Likud party and was seen [as a controversial figure at the time](#) due to his criticism of Arab political leadership and promotion of national service for Arab youngsters, [among other factors](#).
- **Kfar Qassem:** Incumbent Mayor Adv. Adel Bdir won the election and will remain in office. Bdir formerly worked in Adallah, the Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights. Since his election, he has been [working to bring the high tech industry to the city](#) to make Kfar Qassem the second Arab high tech hub in Israel, advancing the local economy and employment opportunities. Kfar Qassem is a city in the Southern Triangle region with approximately 23,000 residents.
- **Tira:** Tira is also in the Southern Triangle area with around 25,000 residents. Incumbent mayor Ma'amoun Abed Elhay defeated his opponents and will remain for an additional term, his third in office. Abed Elhay is the son of Tira's legendary mayor Tereq Elhay (who was mayor from 1973-1993). He has a law degree from Tel Aviv University and a second degree from Bar Ilan University.
- **Tamra:** Located in the Lower Galilee, this city with around 33,000 residents is heading for a second round of elections, with incumbent Mayor Dr. Suheil Diab running against Mussa Abu Romi, a former mayor from the Southern Islamic Movement. The two also faced each other in a second round also in the previous local elections in 2013.
- **Kalansawe:** This city in the Sharon area, with around 22,000 residents is also heading for a second round between incumbent Mayor Abed El Basat Salameh and Ahmed Kashkush.

A more detailed update on the local election campaigns and results and what they indicate about internal dynamics and trends in Israel's Arab society is forthcoming.