

The following is a rough English translation of an article. You can read it in the original Hebrew here:
<https://newmedia.calcalist.co.il/magazine-05-01-23/m04.html>

"Israel's economy depends on the Arabs, and in the end, even the extremists will get it."

Dr. Nasreen Haddad Haj-Yahya, who was a partner in formulating the government's five-year plans for the Arab sector, fears an escalation following the "full throttle right" government but is confident that the economic boom in the sector will not be slowed down: "As much as they try to push us through regulations, the market forces are stronger."

Image Caption: Haddad Haj-Yahya. "Ben Gvir will bring more police officers and cameras, which will not really eradicate crime. What is required is a long-term holistic plan for the [Arab] sector"

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Dr. Nasreen Haddad Haj-Yahya (41) is an expert in the fields of integrating Arab citizens into the labor market and higher education institutions and was a partner in the formulation of the five-year government resolutions 922 and 550 for economic investment in Arab society. She is a partner at the Portland Trust, which deals with economic development in Arab population, a founding partner at NAS, a research company, a board member at the New Israel Fund, and until recently, she was the head of the program for the Arab society at the Israel Democracy Institute. She has master's degrees in education and social geography and a doctorate in social geography from Tel Aviv University.

"My activism is very much connected to the place where I grew up - Ramle. When I write about poverty and talk about an underprivileged population, that's where I'm coming from. I did not grow up with a golden spoon. I know that my family sacrificed a lot to send me to a private school in Haifa. And when I graduated high school, I was sent to work as a blue-collar worker. I couldn't actually afford to study at a university, my family couldn't afford the tuition fees. That's how I ended up working for eight years in a bank and studying Arabic in the process. My PhD was dedicated to Arab youth—I wrote it about the transition of Arab youth from high school to the job market, with the understanding that most of them have a very predefined track. Even though we are the first generation to get higher education we are not exposed to white-collar and high-tech industries and we do not have role models."

Interviewer: Your research from 2012 dealt with Arab youth. Your claim was that the lack of structured youth frameworks (unlike the Jewish path of high school- youth movements -army-university) is what leads young Arans to unemployment and crime.

Nasreen: "True. The situation of young Arab men and women in Israel is quite different. They do not serve in the army and therefore must integrate into the labor market at an earlier age when they are less mature. Their transition from puberty to adulthood is shorter and the demands on them cause difficulty and confusion. According to Israeli Central Bureau of Statistic (CBS) data, 38% of the Arab men aged 18-19, neither work nor study - that is, they are inactive. Only 41% work. For comparison, only 17% of non-Orthodox Jewish youth are defined as inactive.

Therefore, I am very proud that the State decided to invest more than 200 million NIS in young Arabs in Resolution 549, as part of an effort to reduce gaps between young Arabs and Jews, based on the conclusions of my doctorate. I do not research for the sake of research alone. It is very important to me to try to translate the

knowledge to government decisions. I focused mainly on young women, but in retrospect, I think I made a mistake: because a real revolution is taking place among women. We see Arab women conquering academia in Israel (ex. from 20% Arab academics in 2000 to 35% in 2018). They manage to integrate into various faculties and enter almost every field at the best universities. But for men, there has been a real decline in employment, even before COVID (the percentage of employed Arab men aged 20-24 dropped from 64% in 2012 to 60% in 2019)."

Interviewer: And what is the reason for this?

Nasreen: "Mainly decisions of political offices, such as opening the country to foreign workers from Turkey, Romania, and the Palestinian Authority. Along with the stagnation in education and other changes in the job market, this causes the removal of Arab men from the job market and pushes them towards crime and violence. In many ways, our men are the victims of their own gender. Our expectations of them are unfair - we expect them to bring money here and now, but the job market does not allow them to really make a living, especially for those who lack skills and education. 70% of young Arabs come from the periphery with limited employment. And they don't really manage to integrate into quality employment because of their education level, which remains low compared to Jews. Of course, this gap is also reflected in the allocation of resources. Even after Resolutions 922 and 550 we are witnessing a gap in per-pupil budgeting.

The Economic Development Authority has so far focused mainly on women, neglecting men. And in a patriarchal society like ours, this was a mistake, which will accompany us in the years to come. It will also prevent Arab women from continuing to progress because it will be difficult for them to live in a family unit, where their male partner is less educated and earns less. Therefore the empowerment of Arab men and creating better balance is urgently needed is really needed."

Interviewer: Are you afraid of regression in the field, now that the "full throttle right" government has been established?

Nasreen: *"The economic momentum of Arabs citizens of Israel will not stop. We are much more empowered than before. Before the Second Intifada and the Or Commission, we still had to convince decision-makers that there are gaps between Arabs and Jews. Today we are no longer in this place. The professionals in all government ministries, including the Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Economy, understand that there are gaps and that they must be reduced. It doesn't matter if the official is right-wing or from the liberal-democratic camp. It is no longer a matter of left and right.*

Thanks to lots of research and work over the past decade, everyone understands the importance of economic integration of Arab Citizens. Therefore, I believe that, despite the anti-democratic legislation, budgets will continue to flow toward the economic integration of Arab society."

Interviewer: Even Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich was recorded saying that he is not opposed to the flow of funds to the Arab society, if not for concerns relating to visibility. In other words, the far right also understands that this is to their advantage.

Nasreen: "True, and this reinforces what I claim. Our meeting with the decision-makers is not a trivial matter. A decade and a half ago, who would have thought that Arabs would sit around the table? And in the last election, the discourse on Jewish-Arab partnership was a very central issue. Therefore, for me, the budgets are the easy part. The problem lies in thinking that money can buy us - a very patronizing thought that has not proven true since the founding of the State. Because what value is the money and status of a talented Arab doctor, who

earns tens of thousands of shekels a month, if he cannot purchase an apartment in a "Yishuv" (community) because of "Incompatibility with the characteristics of the 'Yishuv'"? Or if his children cannot swim in the pools in Jewish communities in the Galilee, because they "only serve local residents"?

Our core ambition is to promote all citizens in Israel and abolish the Nation State Law. We want to be seen as native. I am not waiting for the State of Israel to give me permission, but yes, there is an expectation that the same hand that gives the budgets will look at us as equals, and not as second-class citizens."

Interviewer: The new government may stop the budgets for the Arab society.

Nasreen: "Netanyahu would not dare to do this, he is not stupid and understands that it will lead to a civil intifada. We are not far from there. There is a connection between our socio-economic situation and the violence that is rising in our communities. Therefore, they will continue to address crime and violence. The goal of the five-year plans for the Arab society is ultimately to lead to quiet in the Israeli economy, and therefore I believe that the budgets will continue to flow. But I am also certain that, at the same time, Netanyahu will continue to promote anti-democratic legislation that will particularly harm the Arab public, as he has done for the past decade."

And how will the appointment of Itamar Ben Gvir as Minister of National Security affect Arab society?

Nasreen: "They will try to use the budgets they receive to bring in more police forces, install cameras... actions that will not really solve the problems. What is required is to build a long-term and holistic plan for the population."

Interviewer: Ben Gvir and Smotrich talk about the need to take back the reigns, for example in the Negev.

Nasreen: "This is a recipe for disaster. What is lacking in the Negev is not governance, but better conditions. We need to give a sense of horizon to the young Bedouin so that he does not run amok on the roads. We are not born lawbreakers. The conditions in which these young people live push them to crime, and those who are affected by this are first and foremost us Arabs, more than Jews. Ben Gvir will redefine the relationship between the State and the Arab public, something that will only lead to escalation."

Interviewer: What about the amendment to the discrimination law? Aren't you afraid that they will suddenly decide that Arab women cannot be employed in shopping malls, or that Jewish doctors will not be able to treat Arab patients?

Nasreen: "We must not accept racist attitudes masquerading as religious beliefs. The main purpose of the amendment begins and ends with encouraging discrimination. There is a deep chasm between this and the values of real Judaism. It is a shame that we are making giant strides towards countries like Afghanistan. But at the end of the day, the economy in Israel cannot exist without the Arabs. Both the medical sector and the industrial sector depend on us. As much as they try to push us into a corner with laws, the market forces are much stronger, and in the end even people with very extreme world views will understand this."

Interviewer: So you think that despite the right-wing government, things will continue as usual.

Nasreen: "Yes, in many cases it will be more symbolic. And equal rights do not exist today in any case. So racists will gain legitimacy and motivation to attack Arabs and be racist against Arabs, and anti-democratic legislation will be promoted. But on the other hand, Arabs will be used on the economic side, as menial workers. No one will give that up."

Interviewer: You are very gloomy and pessimistic.

Nasreen: "My message is that the situation is difficult and there is reason for anxiety for all of us and for everyone who wants to live in a democratic and egalitarian society, but also that it is important to remember that in recent years a quality infrastructure has been built here. Both the Arab civil society and the Jewish civil society are much more professionalized. Philanthropy, mostly from American Jewish communities, pours significant resources into reducing gaps. Quite a few government decisions have passed and there are more Arabs involved in decision-making processes in the public sector. There is, of course, awareness among decision-makers to promote the Arab population.

I refuse to look at things only through the perspective of the current government, because this story is bigger than it. This is my home, it will continue to be my home until the end of my life and will probably be the home of my daughters and granddaughters as well. The Jewish public in Israel must understand that the Arab public is not an enemy. We have many common interests, and it is worth collaborating with us not just for the economic cost, there is a need to acknowledge our right to exist."