

Research

Continuity or Change? Analyzing the Arab Local Authorities Elections of 2024

April 2024



انجاز آينج'ز INJAZ

Center For Professional Arab Local Governance (REG)
المركز المهني لتطوير الحكم المحلي للسلطات المحلية العربية
המרכז המקצועי לקידום הרשויות המקומיות הערביות ע"ר



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כל זכויות היוצרים שמורות למרכז אינ'אז - המרכז המקצועי לקידום הרשויות המקומיות ערביות ע"ר לשנת 2024
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جميع حقوق الطبع والنشر محفوظة لـ مركز انجاز- المركز المهني لتطوير الحكم المحلي للسلطات المحلية العربية للعام 2024



Executive Summary

1. General Data

- The total number of seats under Arab local authorities stands at 950 (members of councils), compared to 840 in the last elections in 2018. The increase in the number of seats in local elected bodies (110 seats added) is linked to the growth of the population in Arab communities and the increase in the number of eligible voters. The larger the local elected body, the tendency is for it to be more representative, attentive, and democratic.
- Over time, there has been a gradual decrease in the number of candidates within Arab communities. In 2003, the average number of candidates was 4.9, dropping to 3.7 in 2018, and slightly increasing to 3.8 in the current election cycle. Despite this decline, the average number of candidates in Arab communities remains higher compared to Jewish and mixed local authorities. As well, there is an average of 0.94 lists per mandate in Arab local authorities.
- In 86% of Arab localities, the incumbent head of authority is running again for the position. This indicates a desire on the part of the incumbents to maintain their power and not allow new forces to rejuvenate and change the system.
- 45% of incumbent heads of Arab local authorities managed to receive another term and continue to serve in their positions as heads of authorities. In contrast, 55% of the elected heads are new and replaced the incumbent heads of authorities.
- Among the new elected officials: 13% are former heads of authorities who served in the past, while 42% are newcomers. As mentioned, the forces of change have prevailed over the conservative forces. This trend indicates the residents' desire to choose new leadership that can promote and benefit Arab localities.
- 93% of candidates running for local government are primarily supported by their extended families. In contrast, 5% of all candidates carry a "party label" on their behalf. Moreover, 2% of all candidates who ran are independent. This data has implications for the approach of local leadership, which will be more local and more pragmatic.
- In some localities, there is a single candidate phenomenon, which is relatively new. Out of 85 Arab local authorities, 7 have a single candidate, all in the north. Further investigation into this phenomenon indicates two contradictory trends: in some localities, residents are very satisfied with the head of the authority, and there is consensus around him, so there are no competing candidates since the chances of winning are very low. In contrast, in other localities, this phenomenon is related to violence and rampant crime in Arab communities.

- The voter turnout of Arab citizens in elections for local authorities in Arab localities stood at 77%, which is higher than the national average. In addition, it is higher than the average voter turnout of Arabs in mixed cities. Moreover, the average voter turnout in local elections in Arab localities is higher than the average voter turnout of Arabs in Knesset elections.
- Heads of authorities who were involved in the National Committee for Heads of Arab Local Authorities and worked systematically to formulate governmental decisions and implement them gained renewed trust and an additional term.

2. Characteristics of Elected Heads of Local Authorities and the Electorate

- The percentage of heads of authorities who secured endorsement from their clan connections in the recent elections reached 85%.
- Heads of authorities who won and were elected through party institutions and were supported by those same national political institutions accounted for 8%.
- The percentage of independent heads of authorities stood at 7% in the current elections.
- The decrease in the percentage and number of party-affiliated heads of authorities primarily stems from the loss of candidates representing the Democratic Front (Hadash), as the local arena is one of its main pillars. Hadash is one of the older parties with local branches and competes in many local authorities. While other parties also have a presence, it is not to the same extent as Hadash.
- In the last two systems, the "Independent Stream" emerged as an alternative to parties and clan affiliations. This stream is mainly supported by academics, youth, and women and seeks to introduce new discourse and organizational patterns into local governance.



3. Competitive Environment and Low Candidate Support Rates

- Relatively low support percentages for candidates can be observed both in the first round (53%) and in the second round (55%) of elections. When candidate support rates are close to 50%, it can be inferred that the elections are competitive with high levels of rivalry and significant division. Rivalry and division disrupt the management of the authority and increase animosity among the various components of the local community.
- The percentage of localities without a decision in the first round stood at 22%. It should be noted that 18 out of 31 localities where elections were undecided in the first round were Arab. In other words, 58% of all localities that held a second round of elections were Arab localities. The absence of a decision in the first round exacerbates tension, fragmentation, and rivalry within local authorities and hinders the formation of internal unity and consensus among the various political players.
- This competitiveness creates a fragmented local elected body based on a large number of lists with a very small number of mandates (seats). This situation affects the elected head of authority's ability to form a municipal alliance and coalition. As a result of this composition, there are disruptive implications for the overall management of the authority, squeezing decision-makers, opening doors to corruption, and promoting particular interests at the expense of the general good and public interest.
- Competitiveness, rivalry, and division have significant implications for the ability of local leadership and its institutions to develop a comprehensive local identity for all residents and nurture a perception of the general good and communal interests.
- Internal fragmentation and division lead to the depletion of the democratic purpose and goal of municipal elections from any true content and essence, leaving local democracy as a procedure devoid of substantive and essential values and fostering competition among players for the authority's resources.

4. Political Parties in Light of Local Elections

- Only 5% of all candidates for heads of authorities carry party labels.
- The limited presence of political parties allows for a trade-off system vis-à-vis the clan-affiliated parties. Political parties modestly conceal their ideological platform and become more pragmatic and compromising in order to seize the reins of power, and in some cases, parties respond to demands that contradict their unique political ideology.
- There are lists affiliated with political parties but do not carry the party label of the national list.
- Parties modestly conceal their ideological and intellectual platform and become more pragmatic and compromising in order to seize the reins of power, and

in some cases, parties respond to demands that contradict their political and social platform, thus perceived as self-interest groups whose sole concern is winning elections and advancing the narrow interests of the party at the expense of the general interests of the community - this reality undermines the level of trust in political parties.

- Candidates affiliated with political parties try to independently compete and conceal their party affiliation as much as possible in order to increase their chances of being elected. This strategy is designed to bypass the negative attitude of the Arab public towards the political parties and the lack of trust they have felt in them in recent years. Their weakness is also evident in the post-election stage. After competing, they adopt the local rules of the game and form alliances and agreements with tribal and religious forces. As a result, they blur the differences between themselves and other players in the local arena.
- The division and internal discord also reverberate in national politics and voting turnout. As political parties engage in local elections and align themselves with specific factions, it may provoke the opposing side (whether triumphant or vanquished) to adopt a stance and retaliate against the political parties involved.
- Those who expected support from the political parties but did not receive it and lost in the elections may also retaliate against the political parties by abstaining from voting in parliamentary elections, which would result in a decrease in national voting rates and the political power of Arabs at the national level.

5. Clan affiliation in Local Elections

- The local arena undergoes expedited and contradictory processes of democratization: On one hand, the clan affiliations remain the strongest and most dominant force in Arab towns, yet on the other hand, it is crumbling and weakening from within.
- Examining the election results, especially in the second round, reveals a shake-up in the hierarchy within the clans and the authority of family heads and clans. Their ability to ensure consensus and unity within the clan structure has weakened. Internal and external power centers have marginalized the clans from both left and right, weakening their status and organizational and electoral power. In some cases, internal rifts and internal competition have led to fragmentation and the emergence of more than one candidate from the same clan, weakening its ability to seize power.
- The largest clans in Arab towns cannot ensure victory on their own, and historical alliances that sized were reinstated, requiring a systematic search for additional factors and players in order to win elections, such as coalitions with political parties or with small families.
- Clan-affiliated candidates cannot guarantee election solely because of their affiliation. Today, they are required to offer an attractive platform, embody personal qualities, and demonstrate exceptional management and leadership skills alongside their ability to forge alliances with other players and factors..



6. Women's Representation

- From the data, it emerges that only 6 out of 892 lists were led by Arab women, with 50% of them being political national party lists and 50% independent.
- A deeper analysis of all the women who won representation in local elected bodies in Arab local authorities reveals three main spheres of influence: national political party lists, independent lists, and clan-affiliated lists. It can be observed that clan-affiliated lists obstruct or hinder women's entry into the political sphere, indicating their undemocratic purpose and nature, systematically excluding women.
- Clan-affiliated lists act as barriers, impeding women's access to the political arena. This underscores their undemocratic nature and purpose, as they systematically sideline women.
- A sample examination of the internal composition of clan-affiliated lists shows a low presence of women among the candidate lists, and if they are within those lists, they are mostly in unrealistic positions.
- 50% of the women who won political representation come from independent lists, 43% from national political party lists, and 7% from local clan-affiliated lists. In other words, the lists that push women into leadership positions and support them are mostly nationwide political organizations or independent initiatives by women and youth in protest against the prevailing political organization patterns in Arab communities.
- In 2003, women's political representation in Arab local authorities stood at less than 1%, compared to 14% in Jewish local authorities (a 13% gap in favor of Jewish authorities). In contrast, in 2024, the representation of women in Jewish local authorities stood at 27.5% compared to 1.5% in Arab local authorities.

7. The local Arab political landscape in mixed cities

- The number of Arabs who have succeeded in obtaining representation in local elected bodies decreased from 28 representatives in 2018 to 26 in 2024.
- Our analysis attributes this decline to several factors: the impact of ongoing warfare and its political fallout, the breakup of the joint list, the political aftermath of the events surrounding "Operation Guardian of the Walls" in 2021, and the ascent of an ultra-right-wing government coalition endorsing religious agendas.
- Election results show that 19% of all Arab public representatives in mixed cities are women, compared to 81% men. The representation of women in Arab local authorities stands at 1.5%.
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- 55% of the representatives are independent, while 45% are candidates from national political party lists or alliances between national political parties, independent lists and urban constituencies.

- In the majority of mixed cities, the clan affiliation holds little political weight and does not play a significant role in voter turnout rates and patterns.
- It can be inferred that the dynamics in mixed cities are primarily influenced by political and nationalist sentiments rather than communal or clan affiliations.

8. Local Election Results and Their Impact on the National Committee for Heads of Arab Local Authorities

- The weakness of national political parties and their limited representation has significant implications on the composition of the National Committee for Heads of Arab Local Authorities, its functioning, leadership, its influence on national politics, its strategy vis-à-vis government ministries, and the delicate relationship between the National Committee for Heads of Arab Local Authorities and the High Follow-Up Committee for Arab Affairs.
- The lack of involvement of political party leaders and independent-professional figures in the National Committee for Heads of Arab Local Authorities will affect the committee's influence on national politics, its role in shaping government decisions concerning Arab society, and its commitment to maintaining a distinct identity separate from the High Follow-Up Committee for Arab Affairs.
- Heads of authorities who were involved in the National Committee for Heads of Arab Local Authorities and worked steadily to formulate governmental decisions and implement them: 922, 549, 1279, and 550, performed well at the community level, gained renewed trust, and secured another term. Some of them had no contenders, and if they did, they succeeded in deciding the elections in the first round. Our explanation for this data is that the national activities of the heads of authorities influence their power and status in their communities, and residents perceive them as national leaders, not just local leaders.

As a result of the complex reality characteristic of Arab local authorities, Injaz Center recognizes the pivotal role that the National Committee for Arab Local Authorities is poised to play in the upcoming period, potentially even becoming decisive. This committee is expected to undergo foundational, specialized, and visionary processes to address tensions, divisions, and political discord within Arab communities. Specifically, the committee is tasked with spearheading a fresh approach to activity, one rooted in collaboration and synergy among civil society organizations, political parties, Arab Knesset members, and governmental bodies. This collaborative effort aims to enhance the quality of life for the Arab populace, safeguard collective interests, and cater to the unique needs of Arab society.

