Pointless Representation

The Tyranny of the Majority in Proportional Electoral System

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Introduction

The decade long Arab-Israeli conflict in the Middle East has long captured the attention of politicians, diplomats, scholars, and the public in general. An incredible number of articles, books, and papers have been written on this conflict and on the relations between Israelis and Arabs. Everybody has heard something about the PLO, the Six Day War, human bombs and the Intifada. Journals are full of maps of Israel with suggested borders to divide Israel and create a future Palestine state. However, most of these accounts overlook an ignored player, the Arab-Israelis, who have found themselves trapped in the middle of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Since the foundation of the state of Israel, Arab-Israelis have always been considered citizens of Israel, and have always had the right to vote in Israeli parliamentary elections. Indeed, Israel has a democratic system, that gives equal political and civil rights to all its citizens and guarantees them freedoms of religion, speech, and the press, as well as free, open, and contested elections. Moreover, the Parliament, the core of Israel’s democracy, has always been elected with a proportional electoral system. This electoral system is supposed to create a representative body that is a mirror-like reflection of the various segments that compose the society. Therefore, through this system, minorities are presumed to have a voice in the management of the affairs of the state. In this way they can express their needs and interests, and can make sure that the government pursues not only the welfare of the majority but also that of the minority population. Indeed, it has worked for various minority groups in the Israeli society, such as the ultra-Orthodox, who, although in an underprivileged position, have been part of several government coalitions, and have participated to the shaping of the general policies of the state, thus being able to satisfy their demands and interests.

Many observers will argue, however, that Arab-Israelis have experienced a long history of discrimination. Despite the presence of Arab-Israeli representatives in the parliament, the Arab minority has not been able to participate fully in the nation-building and decision-making processes of the Israeli state. Consequently, many decisions of Israeli governments have not pursued the welfare of Arab-Israelis, and their interests and needs have been neglected many times. The goal of this paper is to analyze how, in the presence of the proportional electoral system, Arab-Israelis have been subjected to policies of discrimination. In particular, I will consider the role of the electoral system in the marginalization of the Arab minority’s voice. Which characteristics of proportional representation have turned their backs on the Arab-Israeli population? And why the proportional representation has not worked only for the Arab-Israeli minority? To answer these questions I will analyze the political life of the Arab minority, beginning with the creation of the Israeli state up until the 2001 election.

Israel is such a popular topic that it is possible to say everything and the opposite of everything. The history of modern Israel is foggy and full of conflicting historical truths, as the debate about Arab-Palestinians leaving voluntarily/being forcedly expelled in 1948-49 shows. Contradictory news comes out of Israel all the time. Depending on one’s stand or sympathy, pro-Israel or pro-Arab, opinions vary remarkably. This swinging mood regards also the condition of Arab-Israelis. Indeed, not everybody will agree that the Arab minority has suffered from discrimination. This paper assumes that the Israeli state has not always pursued the welfare of its Arab citizens, and most of the time their voice has been ignored in the Israeli political decision-making. However, from a methodological point of view, I need to point out that most of this paper is based on secondary resources. Therefore I do not exclude the possibility that this work will reflect some of the biases of the authors I have sourced.
I will argue that in the Israeli context the proportional electoral system reveals two paradoxes. Firstly, the political life of the Arab-Israeli population has been characterized by the weaknesses of its political awareness and political leadership, furthered by the activities of the Israeli government and Israeli main parties. The proportional electoral system, by allowing several possibilities of representations, has maintained these weaknesses, undermining the political weight of the Arab-Israeli population. Secondly, Israel is a liberal Zionist Jewish state, in which Arab-Israelis do not enjoy complete citizenship, since they cannot attend to the common good and do not participate in decisions regarding the nature of the state. The representation guaranteed by the proportional electoral system allows institutionalizing this uncompleted form of citizenship, revealing itself as a politically pointless representation, which does not guarantee protection against politics of exclusion and discrimination and leaves the Arab minority subjected to the tyranny of the Jewish majority population.

The paper is structured as follows. First, I will briefly introduce the characteristics of the Israeli electoral system and the mechanisms that are theorized to ensure the representation of minority groups. Second, I will briefly describe the conditions of life of the Arab minority in Israel and I will give some data on how Arab-Israelis have experienced discrimination. Next, the paper presents an excursus of the electoral patterns and political organizations of the Arab population. Finally, I conclude with an analysis of how the proportional electoral system has combined with other factors of Israeli politics to determine the marginalized status of Arabs in Israel.

Israel electoral system

Except for a brief time, Israel has been a parliamentary democracy since its establishment in 1948. As in any parliamentary democracy, the Israeli president, who is elected every seven years by the parliament (called Knesset) and has mainly a ceremonial role, assigns to a member of the Knesset, usually the leader of the largest party, the task of forming the government, which needs to be approved by the parliament. The Knesset is composed of 120 members who are elected using a proportional electoral system in a single nationwide constituency every four years. The proportional system entails a single round election in which Israeli voters have a single opportunity to choose the list of their favorite party. Seats are distributed proportionally among parties based on the number of votes they have received. Any party that receives more than 1% of the votes is entitled to representation. In 1992, this threshold, which in the Israeli system is the only obstacle for parties to participating in the allocation of seats, was raised to 1.5%.

Israeli electoral laws call for a closed list system, meaning that voters do not indicate the name of their preferred representative, nor can they choose the order of the candidates on the party list. Rather, they accept an entire list of names prepared previously by the party. The ballot does not indicate any names, but only the letter representing the party. Each list of candidates can contain up to 120 names equal to the number of the parliamentary seats. To form a list, a party needs only to collect 2,500 signatures and to leave a small pecuniary deposit, which is returned if the list is successful in obtaining representation. Israel electoral system has maximum district

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3 Between 1951 and 1973 Israel used the Hare quota, which is obtained by dividing the total number of valid votes by the total number of seats, with the formula of largest remainder. In the first election in 1949 and again since the 1973 election the highest average formula has been used.
magnitude (which indicates the average number of members elected in a constituency) since all the members of the Knesset are elected in a single district, which corresponds to the entire territory of the state, and thus the votes are counted on a nationwide basis.

In 1992 this system was modified for a brief period with the introduction of the direct election of the Prime minister, occurring at the same time as the election of the Knesset. Israeli voters were given two ballots; one for the Knesset and one for the Prime Minister. The goal of the reform was to reduce the number of parties and to make governments more stable. However, the reform did not yield the expected results. On the contrary, it has weakened the strongest parties. Indeed, once they voted for the Prime minister, voters felt free to disperse their votes among different parties, since they do no longer saw the need to vote with the goal of forming a potential government coalition. As a result, in 2001, Israel returned to the previous system.

Due to the high magnitude and a relatively low threshold, Israel has an almost pure proportional representation system. The principal aim of proportional systems is to allocate parliamentary seats among the political parties according to the number of votes they have received. In this way this electoral system guarantees what Hanna Pitkin calls descriptive representation, by creating representative bodies that reflect almost exactly the various political divisions of the electorate. Scholars have emphasized that descriptive representation has some costs. The main criticisms of this system include the fact that this system undermines the unity of the polity, that it implies an essentialist conception of social groups as fixed identities, and that it reduces accountability. However, sympathizers of proportional representation argue that resemblance and reflection are necessary to have true representation. Therefore fair representation implies the creation of assemblies whose composition gives an exact image of the country. The Israeli system is effective in fulfilling this mirroring function and the Knesset is like a map that reproduces the different opinions of the nation.

According to Giovanni Sartori, the ultimate end of the proportional representation system is “representative justice.” Indeed, proportional representation serves three functions. First, it permits “sincere voting,” because it “encourages voters to freely express their first preferences.” Second, it prevents a minority in the electorate from attaining a majority of seats in the parliament, as can happen with majoritarian elections. Third, it guarantees the inclusion of minorities. Indeed, proportional representation is a permissive electoral system, in which it is relatively easy for a united minority to organize a party, run for election and obtain representation. In advocating proportional

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4 Actually, until the eighties, the previous system worked quite well due to the dominance of the MAPAI, today the Labor party, which was able to form stable coalitions until 1977 when it was defeated by the Likud party. However in the 1984 and 1988 elections, neither of the two major Israeli parties, namely Labor and Likud, was able to form a government, and therefore they agreed to form governments of national unity. In 1990 the Labor stepped out of the coalition, putting Israel in a three-month long crisis, during which neither party managed to form a new government. At the end Likud succeeded in forming a narrow coalition with the necessary support of small religious parties. The direct election of the Prime Minister was the answer to these deficiencies of the political system and had the goal of reducing the dependency of the Prime Minister on small extremist parties.


representation, John Stuart Mill went further in arguing that proportional representation not only guarantees true representation but also it bears true democracy, and it should be considered “the first principle of democracy.” What matters in the proportional system is that members of minority groups are present in the parliament. Indeed, the logic behind proportional representation implies that, once the representative body reflects all the interests of the society, all the opinions can come to light, and in this way the community in its totality participates in the deliberation process, determines the activities of the government, and controls its actions.

The Arab minority in Israel

The discrimination experienced by Arab-Israelis in their state suggests that proportional system may not necessarily achieve all of these functions. When the state of Israel was founded in 1948, 150,000/160,000 Arabs remained in the area, representing 13% of the total population. Today this proportion has growth to 19% (est.). Therefore, through the electoral system, which has been in place since the first election of the Knesset in 1949, Arab-Israelis should have been able to obtain an important voice in the parliament, corresponding to their numerical proportion, and to participate in the decision-making and nation-building processes of the Israeli state.

Indeed, David Ben Gurion, father of modern Israel, declared in 1947 that non-Jews in the Jewish state “will be equal citizens; equal in everything without any exception; that is, the state will be their state as well.” This same principle is found in the Declaration of Independence of May 1948, which, although lacking constitutional status, is recognized as a guideline for the behavior of the Israeli government. The Declaration affirms that the new state aims to “uphold absolute social and political equality of rights for all its citizens without distinction of religion, race, sex,” and recognizes Arab-Israelis as equal citizens called upon “to take part in the building of the state on the basis of full equal citizenship and on the basis of appropriate representation in all its institution.”

However, despite these principles of intention, the reality for the Arab population of Israel has been very different and they have been subjected to hostility on the part of their state. Indeed Israel has been built as a Jewish society. As declared by Ariel Sharon, former Prime Minister, “we came here not to establish a democratic state but to establish a Jewish state.”

The Zionist institutions were created to promote a Jewish society and were not intended to serve a state of both Jews and Arabs. In this regard the

8 John Stuart Mill, cit. in Pitkin, p. 63, note 19.
13 This fact is simply confirmed by national symbols such as the Star of David in the national flag and the national anthem, which in the first line states “a Jewish heart beats.” The Arab minority has difficulties in identifying in such symbols.
14 As’ad Ghanim, “Arab Participation in the Knesset: A Reconsideration and Examination of Alternatives,” Arab Politics in Israel at a Crossroads, Elie Rekhess, ed. (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 1996), p. 65.
Jewish National Fund, which owned a large amount of the land in Israel, was not allowed to sell land to the Arab population. The Jewish nature of the Israeli state is also officially declared in the Law of Return of 1950, which grants every Jew the right to immigrate to Israel. This law recognizes that Israel is the state of the Jewish people despite their citizenship or residency, and Jewishness is the criterion for inclusion instead of Israeli citizenship. In 1985 this peculiar character of the state of Israel has also been constitutionally anchored with an amendment of the Basic Law, which recognizes Israel as the state of the Jewish people (see below). In this way all citizens that are not Jews are excluded, whereas all non-citizens that are Jews are included.\textsuperscript{15}

The Jewish character of the state has combined with the endless Israeli-Arab conflict to stigmatize the Arab population of Israel. Indeed the conflict has caused national security concerns, which has been used as an excuse for policies of control and discrimination. In the dynamic of the conflict Arab-Israelis were considered a hostile minority and come to be understood as a security threat to the state. They have been compared to a fifth column that can not be trusted and that is too dangerous to be integrated. Even Arab-Israeli demographic growth, which is significant due to a high fertility rate of 4.2\% each year, has been perceived as a threat and has been labeled a “demographic demon” or “demographic danger.”\textsuperscript{16} As result, for security reasons Arab-Israeli sectors were subjected to military administration until 1966, under which Arab citizens were not permitted to leave their residence without a military permit and could be put in jail without being taken to courts. Moreover, in order to avoid the contradiction of having to shoot their brothers, Arab-Israelis were, and still are, exempt from the conscription in the Israeli army.

The Arab minority has been excluded from the political, economic, social, and military power centers of the state and has suffered socio-economic disparities. Indeed, until the government formed in 2001, no one Arab-Israeli has held the position of Minister, director general of a ministerial department, or judge of the Supreme Court. In most of the government departments and offices of industrial and agricultural firms controlled by the state, not many Arab-Israelis are employed. Furthermore, very few have obtained high positions in the private sectors.\textsuperscript{17} Discrimination has been formalized by the dealing of Arab-Israeli affairs through special agencies in the state departments. In these offices, which are not required by any law, Arab-Israeli issues are seen through a security lens and are put in hands of Jewish functionaries, most of whom do not speak Arabic.\textsuperscript{18}

The Arab minority has experienced discrimination due to the fact that many laws give preference to Jews using the term \textit{Jewish}, and, in addition, state resources have been distributed in unequal ways.\textsuperscript{19} For a long time, the Department of Interior provided funds almost exclusively to Jewish towns. For example in 1971-72 Arab-Israeli towns received

\textsuperscript{17} See Rouhana and Ghanem, “The Crisis of Minorities in Ethnic States: The Case of Palestinian Citizens in Israel,” p. 329.
\textsuperscript{19} Rouhana and Ghanem, p. 331.
only 1% of the grants provided to local authorities.\textsuperscript{20} The unequal distribution of resources can be seen in the education system. Schools for Arab-Israeli students have classes 20% larger, fewer teachers and lower salaries for instructors. Consequently Arab-Israelis drop out of school at a younger age and little more than half of post secondary age youth goes to college.\textsuperscript{21}

Moreover, the relations between the state and its Arab minority have deteriorated due to the practice of land confiscation. Since 1948, between 40% and 60% of the land owned by Arab-Israelis has been confiscated, and consequently the number of Arab villages has remarkably decreased.\textsuperscript{22} At the same time, the traditional agricultural economy has not been substituted by a modern Arab-Israeli economy. Indeed the state has not supported the development of an industrial base in the area where most of the Arab minority lives. Instead, Arab-Israeli workers have earned their salary in the services and industries developed in Jewish towns, where they are discriminated against in the labor market. Most Arab-Israelis are employed in manual lower status occupations and commute from their segregated villages to go to work in Jewish localities.\textsuperscript{23} As a result, the average income of Arab-Israeli families is 72% of that of their Jewish counterparts, and in 1993 the percentage of Arab-Israelis under the poverty line was 2.26 times that of Jewish population.\textsuperscript{24}

Why has the Arab population of Israel experienced discrimination despite the fact that the proportional electoral system should have given them the possibility to be represented in the Knesset? What did not work in the representation of Arab-Israelis in the Israeli parliament that made their voice insignificant or impossible to be heard? To answer this question below I consider the voting patterns and the developments of Arab-Israeli political organizations starting from the birth of modern Israel.\textsuperscript{25}

\textbf{Arab-Israel voting pattern and political organizations}

The Arab population that after the 1948-49 War became citizens of the state of Israel did not have particular experience with democracy and politics in general during

\textsuperscript{24} Data in Rouhana and Ghanem, p. 336.
\textsuperscript{25} The following account does not consider in details the recent occurrences of the Arab-Israel political life, beginning with the 1996 elections. New Arab-Israel parties, such as the National Democratic Alliance and the Islamic Movement, are not even mentions. However this deficiency does not compromise the argument of the paper.
the British mandate. Neither did it have a unitary political leadership. Indeed, politics was almost exclusively an urban affair characterized by few party workers belonging to important families. However, most of the Arab population lived in small rural villages, in which a traditional patriarchal society prevailed, characterized by strong family ties, ascriptive norms and religious orientations. Power was divided between the several leaders of the villages and the heads of the so called hamula -larger families kept together by kinship and various rights and obligations-, which were the most important social group. Moreover, the relations among the different leaders were characterized by deep rivalries.

Not even following the creation of the state of Israel did an Arab political leadership emerge. Many factors contributed to this fact. The defeat in the 1948-49 War caused a deep shock. Most of the urban centers where there was some Arab political activity, such as Nablus, remained outside of the Israeli borders, and most of the real political leaders went in exile. All the organization frameworks, the associations, the political parties, the youth movements, etc. were disintegrated. What remained was mainly a rural population left leaderless culturally and politically, which found itself transformed from a majority into a minority dispersed in several regions. This social-geographic fragmentation, the distance between Galilee, Negev and the Little Triangle, where most of the Arab-Israel population resided, and the absence of urban centers made political activity difficult and favored the prevailing of local particularism.

Indeed, the traditional local heads were unknown at the national level and were divided based on tribe, religion and territorial loyalties. This segmentation worked against would-be leaders that tried to extend their influence beyond the limits of villages and clans. Moreover, they had no experience of parliamentary elections and were not familiar with the language of the Israeli state and the rules of the new political system. In this regard they were not helped by the decision of the government to impose a military administration on the Arab sectors. The military rule, which lasted until 1966, brought corruption, dissention and maintained economic and political pressures. The Arab-Israeli population did not have access to opportunity structures and became dependent on the state authorities for the distribution of resources and employment possibilities. In this condition, lacking a national political reference, each head of hamulas tried to bolster his position and started to compete with each other, in this way blocking the rise of new forces that could threaten the traditional order and form a unitary leadership.

This situation was fostered by the activities of the Israeli establishment which employed divide and impera tactics to prevent the emergence of a united Arab identity and leadership. For example, the Israeli official statistics did not mention the term “Arabs;” rather they used expressions such as “Jews and non-Jews” or “Jews and minorities.” The state encouraged the segmentation of the Arab minority among family, regional and religious lines by providing more resources to specific targeted groups. This tactic has been particularly successful with the Druze community, which has always been loyal to the Israeli State and has tended to vote for Zionist parties.

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26 Before the 1948 war, in the territory that now form the state of Israel there were 750.000/800.000 Arabs, of whom only 150.000/160.000 remained/were not expelled. Data in Touma, “The Political Coming-of-Age of the ‘National Minority,’”, p. 74; and Karsh, p. 22.


28 See Stendel; and Landau, The Arabs in Israel.

29 Zayyad, “The Fate of the Arabs in Israel,” p. 93.

30 Kraus and Yonay, p. 530.
The main instrument used by the Israeli leadership to encourage the social segmentation of Arab community and its dependence upon the Jewish majority was the creation of the so called sponsored lists, which received the majority of Arab-Israeli votes in the Knesset elections from 1949 to 1969 (see Table 1). With the exception of the Israeli Communist Party and, since 1954, MAPAM, a small left wing party, Israeli parties did not encourage the Arab population to join their ranks. Instead, MAPAI, the main government party of Israel, which maintained the power until 1977, when it was defeated by the Likud, exploited the influence of traditional hamula authorities. In this way, it assisted the rise of some political personalities, which created Arab lists connected to the ruling party. These sponsored lists were dependent on the Jewish leadership of MAPAI, which determined their establishment, composition and point of view. Inside MAPAI an Arab Department was created, which had the goal of maintaining contacts with the Arab sectors and was in charge of selecting the candidates and administrating the electoral campaigns and finances of the Arab lists. The activities of these lists were subject to the dictates of MAPAI, and their leaders were substituted if they showed no loyalty to the Jewish government. Indeed Sayf al-Din Zu’bi, member of the Knesset elected in one of these Arab lists, declared that “Arab allies of Alignment (the name of MAPAI’s government coalition) in the Knesset were hardly ever consulted, though directed as to how to vote.”

In selecting the leaders of the sponsored lists, MAPAI tried to encompass the main divisions of the Arab society. Usually they were local elders and notables, belonging to wealthy families and leaders of dominant clans, which shared with MAPAI similar interests and were concerned with personal advancement. In exchange for the prestige of sitting in the Knesset they voluntarily limited their speeches and representative’s activity. At the same time they supported the Jewish ruling party in the hope of obtaining benefits to develop their local community. Indeed, their behavior aimed at achieving subsistence security for their hamulas, and their success reflected the poor social-economic situation of most of the Arab-Israeli population.

However, the sponsored lists were only a tool of MAPAI to obtain the support of the Arab minority, which was treated as an object of political activity. In fact, the head of hamulas who cooperated with the government were called adhnab -tails, meaning the tails of the regime. It was a patronage system, in which the Arab lists with the weight of the government were able to provide benefits in exchanges for votes. Most of the time, political support was garnered during meetings in private homes by means of promises of material improvement and personal favors, such as appointments to offices and granting of permits for building homes. Threats of losing employment or being deprived of permits were also used.

In this way, the leaders of the sponsored lists appealed only to their local electorate and focused only on local issues, paying no attention to broad political matters, and therefore refraining from assuming national leadership. Indeed, once elected, they spent most of the time in their village dispensing favors and exercising their power, instead of attending the Knesset. The sponsored lists were not actual political parties;

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34 In fact election years were called sanat al-marhaba, the year in which there were many visits, greetings and promises by Jewish establishment; election years were also called sanat al-’asal, the year of honey. See Stendel, p. 147.
rather they were personal lists established just before elections without ideologies or political lines which targeted a specific religious group or a specific community. The clearest example of how the Arab Members of the Knesset elected in sponsored lists did not represent the Arab-Israeli population came in 1962 when MAPAI compelled the Arab representatives from the sponsored lists to refrain from supporting a proposal for removing the military government in the Arab sectors, which was against the will of the entire Arab electorate.

Through their patronage system and the dispensing of local benefits the sponsored lists managed to obtain the majority of the Arab votes until the 1969 election, transforming the Arab-Israeli population into a reserve vote for MAPAI coalitions. In this way their existence encumbered the establishment of an independent Arab list. Actually, in the early years of the Israeli state, there were some attempts to create pure Arab parties, but all these efforts failed. The failures were due not only to the political inexperience of Arab politicians and the presence of the sponsored lists, but was also caused by the opposition of the Israeli government, which, although not officially, did all that it could to avert the Arab-Israeli population from banding together in an independent Arab party. This unofficial policy was announced by Amnon Lin, chief of the department for Arab affair in the Alignment, who declared that “there is great danger in the very existence of an Arab party not allied with any Jewish party … a nationalist party which does not identify with the state is liable to bring disaster.”

In this regard the story of the group Usrat Al-Ard -Family of the Soil- is instructive. In 1958, following clashes between Israeli police forces and Arab-Israeli demonstrators, the group Usrat Al-Ard appeared in the Israeli political scene. Al-Ard was a small elite group, but since its establishment it has proved active, managing to publish a journal for thirteen weeks. Al-Ard represented the effort to create an Arab nationalist organization free of foreign dependency, but linked to the Arab nationalist movement. Inspired by the pan-Arabism of the Egyptian president Gamal Abdel-Nasser, it claimed to represent Arabs in Israel and their nationalist aspirations. Al-Ard was an Arab movement from which Jews were excluded and whose goal was to change the Zionist nature of the state. Since it did not recognize the authority of the state, the movement called to boycott the elections for the Knesset held in 1959.

However the request of Al-Ard to be registered as an association was not accepted by the Israeli authorities, because its goals were considered to be a danger to the state. An appeal to the Israeli Supreme Court also failed because of its refusal to recognize the state. A few weeks later the movement was banned and its leaders were arrested. In the Knesset only the Communist Party protested against the ban. Years later some former members of Al-Ard presented a slate of candidates for the 1965 Knesset election, but the Central Election Commission refused to register it, arguing that the candidates denied the existence of the Israeli state. In the rejected appeal, the Supreme Court declared that the movement exceeded the boundaries of the Israeli democracy because it wanted to subvert the Israeli state. In the following years the government kept on monitoring any symptom of political activity inspired by Al-Ard and in 1967 some of its members were arrested and received long sentences.

The failure/impossibility to form an all-Arab political group made space for the Israeli Communist Party, also called MAQI, and from 1965 RAQAH, which came to be considered as the only real representative of the Arab minority. Only MAQI/RAQAH...

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35 Cit. in Landau, *The Arabs in Israel*, p. 75.
managed to transcend the local segmentation and to emerge as an independent political leadership. However this process was delayed because of the above presented system of cooptation of the Arab-Israel population and the competition of the local hamulas’ heads. Moreover it took some time for Arab politicians to become aware of the importance of a broad political organization. Indeed, until 1961 MAQI did not obtain more than 23% of the votes of the Arab-Israel population, and a vote for it was in general considered as a protest vote against MAPAI and the alienating conditions of the Arab sectors.

However, during the fifties and sixties Arab society went through rapid socio-economic developments that shook the traditional socio-political structure. Although the process of industrialization and economic development experienced by the Israeli state did not involve the Arab sectors, the Arab minority came to be slowly integrated in the Israeli economy. Many Arab-Israeli workers, as result of rapid demographic growth and also of the expropriation of land by the government, left the agricultural sector and went through a process of proletarization. The outcome was increased economic prosperity, increased social mobility and increased penetration of Israeli/Western values in the Arab society, which caused the break-up of the previous framework of social institutions. Arab-Israeli salaried workers started to reduce their ties with the villages and their dependence on local authorities. This phenomenon was also caused by wider educational possibilities which produced Arab university graduates that could not find adequate employment.

In political terms these socio-economic transformations increased the political awareness of the Arab-Israel population, which reduced its dependence on the patronage system of the ruling parties and found the courage to struggle for its rights and to vote according to its real interests. This development was also due to the impact of external factors. First, the establishment in 1965 of the Palestine Liberation Organization inflamed the Arabs of Israel. Second, the 1967 War, during which Israel occupied East Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, reduced the isolation of the Arab-Israelis from Arab nationalist movements abroad and renewed ties with Palestinian organizations. Finally the 1973 War reduced the international prestige of Israel. Therefore, due also to the abolishment of the military government in 1966, there was a change in the political behavior and in the voting pattern of the Arab-Israel population, characterized by increasing nationalist sentiments and growing support for parties regarded as radical. This new political space permitted to MAQI/RAQAH to become the most important force representing the Arab interests from 1973 to 1981 (see Table 1).

Since the first Knesset election, MAQI was open to Arab politicians and was the only party without a Zionist ideology, and which spoke in favor of a bi-national state. Its members argued that they alone pursued the real interests of the Arab minority, asking for equal rights regarding the military administration, land expropriations, education and employment opportunities. It is necessary to point out that initially the Israel Communist Party believed in Jewish-Arab cooperation and it was in Jewish hands for a long time. Indeed, the party had a Jewish secretary general until 1990. However, despite its Jewish-Arab membership, MAQI developed the image of being an Arab nationalist party. This


image was reinforced in 1965, when the party split from its most Jewish elements and assumed the name of RAQAH.\footnote{Initially the leadership of the party was influenced especially by Christian Arab and obtained most support from Christian voters. After the split RAQAH started to focus on the Muslim community.}

RAQAH was the only party that could present itself as an Arab party and started to lay the foundation for becoming the most important force in the Arab sector. Focusing especially on salaried workers and intellectuals, RAQAH developed a strong party organization, opening in every village branches and cells, which, as opposed to the sponsored lists, were active among the Arab-Israel community every year between elections. Moreover, it published a newspaper, \textit{Al-Ittihad}, which is today the Arabic daily with the longest existence. In this way, the party struggled bitterly with MAPAI and its sponsored lists to obtain the support of the Arab voters. This struggle mirrored a split between a modern leadership in the larger village and towns who increasingly expressed nationalist tendencies and the leadership of traditional notables in the smaller villages that tended to be more moderate and continued to support the establishment.\footnote{See Stendel, pp. 92-109; Landau, \textit{The Arabs in Israel}, pp. 81-92; and Jacob M. Landau, \textit{The Arab Minority in Israel, 1967-1991} (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), pp. 113-116.}

As a result of the socio-economic developments and increasing nationalist sentiments described above, MAPAI and its allied began to lose votes compare to RAQAH. The Israeli Communist Party claimed the monopoly of the representation of the Arab-Israel population, which it presented as part of the Palestinian Arab nation, and emphasized that they had the support of the PLO. In the election of 1977, with the establishment of a wider front (Democratic Front for Peace and Equality - DFPE -, also called Hadash) RAQAH became the strongest party in the Arab sectors obtaining 51\% of the Arab vote, which brought five seats in the Knesset.

The 1977 elections were not only the highest peak for RAQAH, but also a turning point, since afterwards its support started to decline and by the 1981 elections it had lost one quarter of the previous support obtaining 38\% of the Arab votes. This result was caused by two factors. On the one hand, despite the increase of Palestinian nationalism, parochial loyalties and religious divisions persisted, and so many Arab-Israelis did not vote for Hadash to avoid uniting with rival hamulas or religious groups. Moreover, there was a lower rate of participation among the Arab minority (68\%) because the PLO had called a boycott of the election. On the other hand, the internal dynamics of Israeli politics had an important impact. Indeed, in 1977 the right-wing Likud obtained the majority of the votes, ending the dominance of the Alignment. The following years were characterized by sharp confrontations between the Likud and the Alignment, and, after four years of Likud government, MAPAI, which in 1973 had finally opened its doors to Arab-Israelis, increased its attraction. They did this by maintaining that it was better to vote for it against the Likud instead of voting for the Communist party, which however would have remained outside of government coalitions. This argument was partly successfully and Alignment increased its strength among Arabs.\footnote{It is interesting to note that also the Likud increased its Arab votes. This is due to the fact that through the control of the government it was able to distribute benefits in exchange of votes.} Incidentally, the 1981 elections signed the end of the sponsored list, since MAPAI preferred to attract Arab support directly and did not sustain any Arab list.\footnote{Some notables formed a couple of Arab lists, but they did not have any success since they did not pass the threshold of 1\%; a sign of the weakness of traditional political forces. This kind of lists disappeared from electoral campaigns in 1984. See Landau, \textit{The Arab Minority in Israel, 1967-1991}, pp. 139-141.}
The decline of RAQAH was also due to some of its internal features. Firstly, its leadership was characterized by dogmatic rigidity, which opposed democratic attitudes and impeded the rise of younger generations of leaders. Therefore, the party lacked young cadres that could draw youths and present the party as a revolutionary force. Secondly, it was an Arab party with a Jewish element. This ambivalent nature was mirrored in the contradiction between a nationalist line and support for integration and recognition of the Israeli state, which did not permit the definition of a clear political program. Thirdly, it was a communist party. As most communist parties, it was not considered autonomous, but it was seen as dependent on orders from Moscow. Indeed this link with the Soviet Union, which during the eighties invaded Afghanistan, a Muslim country, and permitted Russian Jews to immigrate to Israel, weakened the party.\(^{43}\) Moreover, because of its communist nature, its non-Zionist ideology and its increasing link with the PLO, RAQAH was never seen as a potential ally by the Jewish establishment, and so could never effectively influence Israeli policies. Indeed RAQAH did not have much hearing in the parliamentary works and maintained an oppositional stand in the Knesset, limiting itself to protesting against the government.

However the support for RAQAH symbolized a political maturation of the Arab-Israeli population, which started to realize the importance of its electoral weight and became aware of the advantages of political organization. This maturation found expression in other forms and organizations, through which Arab-Israelis expressed their civil strength. Indeed, in 1974, as a result of a report that showed the gap in the allocation of resources between Arab and Jewish local authorities, a Committee of Arab Local Council Heads was created, followed by the establishment of the National Committee for the Defense of Lands, which deals exclusively with matters relating to Arab lands.

The committees stood out with *Land Day*, a general strike called in reaction to the government’s decision to expand the limits of Jewish towns by expropriating lands from Arab villages. With the strike, which assumed violent form and during which six Arab-Israelis were shot and killed, the Committee of Arab Local Council Heads has competed for the role of leader of the Arab population, starting to deal not only with local matters but also with country-wide issues such as land expropriation and the struggle for equality, and asking for the recognition of Arabs as a national minority. Claiming to represent the aspirations of Arabs both in Israel and in the territories, the Committee has become a vehicle of protest and it was successful in organizing protests and strikes throughout the eighties. The activities of the committee mirrored the increasing democratization of the Arab-Israeli population, which has learned the rules of democracy and has begun to use democratic instruments such as legal demonstrations, sit-ins, and strikes.\(^{44}\)

This process has also assumed more radical forms, with the rise of Abna al-Balad - Sons of the Village - a group of nationalists from the major towns that expressed a Palestinian identity and identified with the PLO. The goal of the group was to establish a secular democratic state in a greater Palestine, and, as in the previous experience of Al-Ard, challenged the sovereignty of the Zionist state. As in the case of Al-Ard, Abna al-Balad’s members, who called a boycott of the Knesset elections because they were considered useless, were prosecuted by the Israeli government.\(^{45}\)

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\(^{44}\) Ibid. 101-105; Stendel, pp. 139-147; and Touma, pp. 79-82.

The activities of the Committees and the rise of Abna al-Balad signified the increasing nationalist tendencies of the Arab minority, who was not satisfied with the communist nature of RAQAH. Indeed in 1984 a new nationalist party, the Progressive List for Peace (PLP) challenged the claim of RAQAH to be the only party with a national image. The PLP was founded by non-communist Arab intellectuals, who presented a nationalist program focusing on an Arab-Palestinian identity and aimed to obtain equality and fight discrimination. PLP questioned the monopoly of the communists by emphasizing their independence from Moscow and by placing an Arab candidate at the top of their electoral list. In the 1984 election, the PLP obtained 18% of the Arab votes and two seats in the Knesset, contributing to the decline of RAQAH, which obtain 33% of the votes (see Table 1).

The increasing nationalism of the Arab-Israeli population and in particular the rise of a non-communist nationalist party worried the Israeli establishment, which tried to stop this dynamic and to keep Arab-Israelis politically dormant by passing a new amendment to the Basic Law in 1985. The new section 7 A of the Basic Law disqualified certain lists from participating in the Knesset by stating that “a list of candidates shall not participate in the elections for the Knesset if its aims or actions, expressly or by implication, point to one of the following: 1) denial of the existence of the state of Israel as the state of the Jewish people …” This law permits to disqualify any proposal that contests the Jewish nature of state, and in this way prevent Arab-Israelis to change the Jewish character of Israel by participating in the Knesset election. As emphasized by Tawfiq Toubi, member of the Knesset for the communist party, saying that the state of Israel is the state of the Jewish people amounts to saying that 19% of its citizens do not have a state. It is interesting to note that proposals to refer to “denial of the existence of the state of Israel” alone or to “state of Jewish people and its Arab citizens” were rejected.

The PLP managed to avoid being banned from the 1988 election. However, its support declined because the party did not develop an appropriate organizational structure and presented in the second position of its electoral list the name of a retired Jewish general, which did not attract many Arab votes. During the eighties the political tendencies of the Arab minority went through not only a process of nationalization but also of Arabization, mirrored in the rise of the Arab Democratic Party (ADP) in 1988, which further split the Arab vote. Founded by Abd el-Wahhab Daroushe, a former member of MAPAI, now called Labor Party, ADP was the first all-Arab party with no Jewish members that entered the Knesset without being affiliated with any Zionist party. This new political formation presented itself as an independent party, which appealed only to the Arab-Israelis without looking for the support of the Jewish voters. ADP brought out the contradiction of RAQAH and the PLP of claiming to be the voice of the Arab people and at the same time maintaining a Jewish-Arab partnership. Indeed, under the influence of ADP and because the decline of the communist ideology reduced the basis for a Jewish-Arab cooperation, this process of Arabization influenced also


47 Cit. in Anton Shammas, “Palestinians in Israel,” *Arab Politics in Israel at a Crossroads*, Elie Rekhess, ed. (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 1996), p. 20.

48 Shammas, p. 21.

49 Stendel, p. 129.
RAQAH, which had always presented itself as more of an Arab party and in 1990 for the first time nominated an Arab member as leader of the party.

The approach of the ADP contained another innovative element. Although a nationalist party, its main priority was to struggle for equal rights instead of fostering national aspirations. For this purpose ADP presented itself as a moderate party, which maintained open the option of joining a government coalition.\textsuperscript{50} In contrast to the sterile opposition of RAQAH and the PLP, Daroushe’s actions were not limited to protests and boycotts of the government; his goal was to influence Israeli policies. As pointed out by Ian S. Lustick, the rise of the ADP, which obtained 11% of the Arab vote and one seat in the Knesset, signified a change in the voting pattern of the Arab-Israelis.\textsuperscript{51} Arab voters aimed not only to maximize the access to material resources (like with the vote for the sponsored lists or MAPAI) or to register protest (like with the vote for RAQAH), but also to affect the government. The Arab minority looked for a new role “as an active political force rather than as an unprotected subject of exploitation or a repository of protests.”\textsuperscript{52}

This phenomenon also mirrored two facts. First were the changes in Arab-Israeli identity, which on the one side, as result also of the beginning of the Intifada in 1988, has emphasized increasing Palestinian elements, and on the other side has accepted Israeli citizenship. Second were the developments of the Israeli political dynamics, characterized by increasing divisions between the Likud and the Labor party, which opened political space for Arab parties, which were not more systematically ostracized and started to see themselves as players in the formation of a left government. An example of this new attitude towards Arab voters is given by the fact that in 1988 the electoral pools were based for the first time on Arab samples.\textsuperscript{53}

In 1988, under this new conditions, RAQAH and the PLP joined Daroushe’s position, abandoning their unproductive radical positions and declaring their willingness to form a bloc to prevent the formation of a right-wing government and to support a coalition headed by the Labor party, which would have pursued the peace process in Middle-East and assured equal rights to Arab-Israelis.\textsuperscript{54} However, despite the presence of six Arabs in the Knesset (four from Hadash, one from the PLP and Daroushe), Arab parties were not accepted in government coalition and a government of national unity between Labor and Likud was formed. This failure was also due to the divisions and rivalries between the Arab political leaders. Indeed, RAQAH, the PLP and the ADP failed to unify under a single list and even to reach a surplus vote agreement, which would have regulated the counting of the votes not utilized. This factionalism dispersed votes and caused the lost of two seats.\textsuperscript{55}

These dynamics were repeated in the 1992 elections. Through the Oslo process and the agreement between Israel and the PLO the Arab-Israeli population internalized further its Israeli elements and at the same time they were no longer considered disloyal because of their Palestinian identity. Once again the Arab parties, pressured by Arab leaders outside of Israel and by the need to pass the threshold quota, which was raised to 1.5%, claimed to join a common Arab list in order to form a block that would support a Labor government. Once again the internal rivalries, the ideological differences and the


\textsuperscript{51} Lustick, “The Changing Political Role of Israeli Arabs,” p. 120.

\textsuperscript{52} Lustick, p. 120.


\textsuperscript{54} Stendel, p. 132.

\textsuperscript{55} Al-Haj, p. 147.
personal ambitions prevailed and Arab politicians were not able to create a single bloc. As a result Hadash lost many votes and the PLP, which was blamed for the failed unity, did not pass the threshold. Indeed many Arab-Israelis were disappointed and the voting turnout among the Arab minority was only 70% (see Table 1). Moreover the failure to form a unified list created a gap between the Arab leaders and the Arab voters and reflected in the support for Zionist parties, which obtained more than 50% of Arab votes. In this regard, not only did the Labor party again propose the argument that only through establishment parties could Arab-Israelis pursue their interests, but there was also a revival of the traditional formula based on hamulas’ heads. In this way, the Likud developed a strong connection with the Druze Arabs, and Jewish religious parties used their control of the Ministry of Interior to penetrate the Arab community and obtain the support of some traditional leaders.56

However, most of the Arab-Israeli population expressed an instrumental vote that permitted to the Labor leader Yitzhak Rabin to form a government coalition with the external support of the Arab members of the Knesset. Indeed, Hadash and the ADP concluded an agreement with the Labor party to pursue the full integration of Arab-Israelis and to create a committee to deal with issues of Arab education and employment and to nominee an Arab Minister. This agreement remained only a state of intention and did not bring any real benefits to the Arab minority, except having prevented a Likud government. Therefore this quasi coalition arrangement, in which the Arab parties gave only tacit support without being part of the government coalition, proved to be problematic and frustrating.57 Indeed, as colorfully described by journalist Uzi Benziman, it seemed that “Arabs had become a political mistress - good for providing services but unfit for marriage.”58 Arab-Israelis remained politically marginalized and their pragmatic approach was not fruitful in the parliamentary politics, because they were excluded from the Israeli nation-state building and a government based on their support was not considered legitimized.59

The electoral reform introduced for the 1996 election with the direct election of the Prime Minister increased further the importance for the major parties to obtain the votes of the Arab-Israeli population, which became essential for the victory of the Labor candidate Ehud Barak in 1999. Moreover the changing in the election system permitted Arab-Israelis to express their Israeliness and at the same time their identity as members of national minority.60 Indeed Arab-Israelis, after having voted for the Labor candidate as prime Minister, felt free to vote for Arab parties, increasing in this way the representation of Arab parties and their coalition potential.61 However, at the same time the new system

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56 Ibid., pp. 146-148.
57 Ibid., pp. 154-158.
58 Cit. in Elie Rekhess, “Introduction: Arab Politics at a Crossroads,” Arab Politics in Israel at a Crossroads, Elie Rekhess, ed. (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 1996), p. 11.
61 In the 1996 election the Arab vote has been furthered split by the decision of the dominant members of the Islamic Movement to run for the Knesset. This religious group has started to emerge in the early eighties as result of disillusionment with Arab secular political bodies. However until 1996 it run only in municipal elections and it maintained a low profile at the national political level. Its presence represents a new pattern, which has further intensified the internal competition of the Arab-Israeli community. The moderate wing of the Islamic Movement formed an alliance with the ADP, and together they run under the name United Arab List (UAL). See Stendel, pp. 134-139; Landau, The Arab Minority in Israel, 1967-1991, pp. 36-43; Jamal, p. 82; As’ad Ghanem and Sarah Ozacky-Lazar, “Israel as an Ethnic State: The Arab
made parties more marginal and therefore the Arab representative were unable to become part of coalition policies and remained marginalized. For example Barak, despite having received the majority of Arab votes, did not consult with Arab party leaders before forming his government coalition.\footnote{Jamal, p. 68.}

Therefore the Arab-Israeli population has become increasingly frustrated because they feel that they do not enjoy full status and are still perceived as an internal threat. These sentiments have been aggravated by the failure of Camp David and by the violent ending of demonstrations in October 2000, in which 12 Arab citizens were killed. The fact that this incident happened under the Labor government, which is supposed to be more open and sensitive to Arab-Israeli needs, has had an important impact on the sentiments of the Arab minority. In the words of Azmi Bishara, at the time one of the Arab members of the Knesset, “the mask concealing Jewish racism has fallen, exposing what is festering in the depths of Israeli Jewish society.”\footnote{Bishara, “Reflections on October 2000: A Landmark in Jewish-Arab Relations in Israel,” p. 56.} As result of this sense of marginality the Arab-Israeli population has lost faith and has started to question the significance of their vote within the Israeli political system. Indeed in the 2001 election for the Prime Minister, the majority of Arab-Israelis, which usually have had a high level of turnout, largely abstained from voting (only 19% voted), guaranteeing the victory of the Likud candidate Ariel Sharon.\footnote{Jamal, pp. 55-103.}

As pointed out by Amal Jamal, this abstention did not arise from apathy.\footnote{Jamal, p. 59.} The Arab parties have proposed to boycott the election in order to express their distrust and to give a signal to the Labor party that it cannot do as it pleases and that it needs the Arab vote to gain power. The previous Arab involvement was due to trust in the democratic system, considered as a mean to bring changes. Representation, although deficient, gave a feeling of exercising some kind of influence. Now the Arab minority and its leaders, most of whom have been raised as Israeli citizens inside Israeli society, consider political participation as an instrument to obtain not only equal access to power but also involvement in defining the common good. Arab-Israelis aspire to become involved in the political life in the hopes of changing their inferior status. In this regard, abstention has arisen from considerations of long-term interests as a means to exercise citizenship. This political behavior has been successful because on the one side it has embarrassed Israeli democracy, which is one of the sources of national pride, and on the other side it has also presented Arab citizens as a collective group, which aspires to fully participate in the decision-making process.\footnote{Ibid., pp. 88-96.} It is not by accident that Sharon nominated an Arab minister for the first time in Israeli history. In this regard, as pointed out by Bishara, the importance of this fact is not so much in the appointment; rather the significance is in the fact that Sharon made this nomination not only for reasons of image, but because “he felt obliged to do so.”\footnote{Bishara, “Reflections on October 2000: A Landmark in Jewish-Arab Relations in Israel,” p. 67.}

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
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\bibitem{1} See Jamal, p. 68.
\bibitem{2} Bishara, “Reflections on October 2000: A Landmark in Jewish-Arab Relations in Israel,” p. 56.
\bibitem{3} Jamal, pp. 55-103.
\bibitem{4} Jamal, p. 59.
\bibitem{5} Ibid., pp. 88-96.
\end{thebibliography}
Conclusion: The Tyranny of the Majority in Proportional Electoral System

Israel is defined as a democracy and its democratic character derives from the fact that its political system is based on representative government. A system is considered a representative government when it holds regular elections, which are genuine, freely contested, and characterized by widespread participation. A representative government is connected to the idea of democracy because it is supposed to act on behalf of the people.

Furthermore, the Israeli political system, through the use of the proportional electoral system, has provided descriptive representation, which is considered fairer because it is supposed to guarantee the inclusion of all segments of the society. Indeed, between the 1951 election and the 1999 election, the Arab-Israeli population maintained a very high rate of electoral participation, the number of Arab members in the Knesset has ranged from a minimum of six to a maximum of ten, and some of them, especially RAQQAH members, present a high degree of continuity (see Table 1). In general, descriptive representation is praised because it gives voice to the points of view and perspectives of all the social groups into the representative bodies. Representative governments that resemble their entire constituencies can represent better the full range of experiences and conditions in the society, and in this way they are believed to be more able to resolve conflicts between opposite claims referring to the common interest in the welfare of the whole community.68

However, the case of Israel shows that an automatic harmony of interests cannot be counted on, because an ideal final common goal does not always exist.69 In fact, Arab-Israelis have enjoyed formal equality rather than full equality, and have not been able to influence Israeli policies and shape the nature of the state. This political condition of the Arab-Israelis is related to two paradoxes that the proportional electoral system reveals in the Israeli context.

1) First, the above excursus on the Arab-Israeli political patterns and organizations has emphasized several factors: the social-religious segmentations of the Arab-Israeli population, the cooptation by the Israeli mayor parties of Arab leaders and Arab voters, the political tactic of the Israeli government to impede the formation of an Arab national leadership, the impossibility for the Communist party to represent effectively Arab-Israeli interests, and the political divisions of Arab politicians. All these factors have combined with the proportional electoral system to maximize the weakness of Arab-Israeli representation. Taking advantage of the regional and religious factionalism and the absence of strong leadership among the Arab-Israeli population in the early years of the Israeli state, a system of cooptation was created. In this way, Israeli majority parties managed to obtain the support of Arab-Israelis in exchange for favors and benefits, directly with the argument that only government parties can provide material resources, and indirectly through the creation of the sponsored lists. The existence of these lists impeded the development of an independent Arab political organization. This outcome has also been obtained through the intervention of the Israeli government, which has discouraged Arab political activities, hindering the establishment of an Arab nationalist leadership. The result has been a tactic of divide ed impera, which

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68 See Pitkin; and Dario Castiglione and Mark E. Warren, “Rethinking Representation: Seven Theoretical Issues,” paper prepared for the Midwest Political Science Association Annual Conference Chicago (2005), n.p.
69 Pitkin, p. 217.
has encouraged social segmentation of the Arab society and has further increased the divisions along family, religious and regional lines. In a Knesset elected with the proportional electoral system, the leaders of the various segments of the Arab society were guaranteed a prestigious but insignificant seat in the parliament so long as they agreed to obey the ruling power.

This situation left the Communist party as the only real representative of the Arab minority. However, MAQI/RAQAH was not able to exercise this role effectively. Even at its peak the party did not achieve more than 51% of the Arab vote. There are three main reasons for this outcome. First, the communist ideology was not able to attract that part of the Arab-Israeli population that did not agree with communist ideals. Moreover, the universal approach of communism caused the party to maintain a dual membership, which gave the impression that the party did not focus exclusively on the Arab community. Second, like all the communist parties linked to the Soviet Union in western democracies, RAQAH was not fit to form a government coalition and in this way to have a real voice in the decision-making process of the state. This lack of coalition potential was also due to its non-Zionist nature and its increasing ties with the PLO. As result, the vote for RAQAH remained a protest vote. Third, the proportional electoral system did not give to the Communist party the necessary tools to monopolize the Arab vote. Indeed, this kind of system is not a zero-sum game, with winners and losers. Gains for one party do not cancel the vote for other parties, and all the votes are counted and get representation. Consequently the success of RAQAH did not impede for long time the existence of the sponsored lists. This has been the first paradox of the proportional electoral system for the Arab-Israelis. For a minority characterized by weak political awareness and weak political leadership - protracted by the activities of the Israeli government and Israeli main parties - too many possibilities for representation have undermined a united stronger representation.

In the 1980s, the Arab-Israeli population became aware of the importance of their electoral weight. A new leadership of intellectual and practical politicians realized the weakness of an approach based on the communist ideology and attempted to establish an all-Arab party. However, this attempt has not been pursued only from within the Communist Party, but also has assumed external forms with the creation of the PLP and later of the ADP. The rise of various Arab parties mirrors the division of the Arab sectors, due especially to the absence of a clear conception of the status of Arabs inside Israel. After 1948 Arab-Israelis were isolated from the rest of the Arab populations of the region and were left without tools to nurture their culture. In this regard, the Israeli state made all what was in its hands to obliterate any signs of identification with the Palestinian identity. At the same time Israel granted citizenship but refrained from integrating its Arab minority into the Israeli national identity. This left room for a process of Re-Palestinization, which was completed in early 1980s, and was mirrored by the rise of the PLP. At the same time, this tendency to identify with Palestinians has joined with the desire to be integrated into Israeli society, which is illustrated by the establishment of the ADP.

Once again, the paradox of the proportional electoral system has permitted the split of the Arab vote based on these cleavages, reducing the political weight of the Arab-Israeli population. Proportional systems not only permit to minorities groups to get representation, but also stimulate the formation of new groups and encourage the
politicization of the various divisions within groups.\textsuperscript{70} Since it is relatively easy to present a list, the permissiveness of the Israeli electoral system has allowed Arab political entrepreneurs to organize separate parties. Moreover, missing a strong and recognized leadership, the divisions and rivalries among the Arab leaders have prevailed. Arab parties have preferred to compete with each other instead of unifying or even entering in surplus-vote-agreements, causing the dispersal of votes and the loss of seats in the Knesset. With a minority characterized by feeble political awareness and divisions of the political leadership, in combination with the activities of the Israeli government and Israeli main parties, the proportional electoral system has contributed to maintain the weakness of Arab-Israelis’ political voice.

2) Second, as illustrated by the political dynamics during the 1990s, at the core of the problem lies the Jewish nature of the state of Israel, and the refusal of Israeli major parties to come to terms with the Arab minority, which have again combined with the Israeli electoral system in a perverse way that has excluded and discriminated against the Arab-Israelis. Even if Arab-Israelis unified in a single electoral block, their highest political objective could only be the formation of a blocking majority, but a nationalist Arab party could not be part of a government coalition, because this role is reserved for Jews only.\textsuperscript{71} In this regard, is it useful to refer to G. Shafir and Y. Beled’s brilliant analysis of Israeli society.\textsuperscript{72} According to the authors, Israeli society is characterized by the simultaneous presence of three alternative citizenship regimes and different corresponding understanding of citizen rights: the republican regime, which relates rights to contribution to the common good (which is the Zionist cause); the ethno-nationalist regime, which relates rights to being Jewish; and the liberal regime, which recognizes equal rights to individual citizens. These three citizenship regimes imply different degrees of incorporation in the society among the various social groups that form the Israeli society, such as Ashkenazi, Mizrachim, Orthodox Jews, women, and Arab-Israelis. Arab-Israelis are accepted as citizens of Israel only with regard to the liberal regime, and consequently they cannot attend to the common good and express opinions about the nature of the state. Indeed, besides the fact that as said above the reformed Basic Law defines the state of Israel as the state of the Jewish people, surveys show that most Israeli Jews believe that being Israeli means being Jewish, and according to public opinion pulls a significant percentage of the Jewish population is in favor of transferring the Arab-Israeli population out of the country.\textsuperscript{73} Because of this maimed citizenship, Arab-Israelis can exercise individual rights of the liberal citizenship status as long as do not conflict with the prevailing notions of the common good of the society, and of the nature of the state. As summarized by N. Sultany, Arab-Israelis are “citizens without citizenship.”\textsuperscript{74}

This condition distinguishes Arab-Israelis from other ethnic and religious minority groups in Israel, such as Mizrachim, ultra-Orthodox and recent immigrants coming from former communist countries, which are in an underprivileged position


\textsuperscript{71} Ghanim, “Arab Participation in the Knesset: A Reconsideration and Examination of Alternatives,” p. 66.

\textsuperscript{72} See Gershon Shafir and Yoav Peled, \textit{Being Israeli} (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002).


\textsuperscript{74} Cit. in N. Rouhana, Nabil Saleh, and Nimer Sultany, “Voting Without Voice,” \textit{The Elections in Israel – 2003}, p. 239.
compared to the majority Ashkenazi secular population. Even the political life of these minority groups are characterized by various degree of factionalism, and the attempt of the main Israeli parties to absorb their electorate, although not in the form subjected by the Arab-Israeli population. For example, in the 1988 election, three parties contended for the representation of the ultra-Orthodox vote and, as pointed out by A. Arian and M. Shamir, the electoral competition among them was characterized by ethnic tension and personal rivalries, which entailed deception, threats and accusation of election fraud. However, these parties differ from Arab-Israeli parties because they have always been considered potential allies in government coalitions. For example, since its creation in 1984, Shas, which represents ultra-orthodox Mizrahim Jew, especially those emigrating from North African countries, has been part of several governments, both led by Labor or Likud (in 1984, 1988, 1992, 1996, and 2001). Moreover, through the participation in government coalitions, these parties could assume the control of important offices, such as the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Education, which provide the resources necessary to institutionalize their political power.

The proportional electoral system cannot invert the condition of the Arab-Israeli minority; actually it allows for the institutionalization of its maimed form of citizenship. Indeed, in this electoral system, the major Jewish parties do not necessarily need the Arab vote to obtain representation and to win elections. Consequently they do not need to include the Arab-Israeli population in their political programs. Instead, only after the election, do Jewish parties consider the political spectrum of the Knesset and decide whether or not they need the external support of Arab parties. Since coalition decisions are postponed after the election, the main Israeli parties (mainly Labor) do not need to approach Arab-Israeli candidates. In this way the proportional system offers the Arab-Israeli minority an *isolated* representation, in the sense that Arab-Israeli politicians are not involved in any political bargain. Through this isolated representation, the proportional electoral system allows for the exercise of political rights within the liberal citizenship regime, maintaining the exclusion from those rights that derive from enjoying the republican and ethno-nationalist citizenship regime, namely the rights to decide the common good and the nature of the state. Therefore the proportional system has embedded in the electoral process the Arab-Israelis’ maimed citizenship. This is a second paradox of the proportional electoral system: in the Israeli context, guaranteed representation expresses a politically pointless representation.

The proportional electoral system used in Israel favors descriptive representation, which is praised because it guarantees the presence of all segments of the society in the representative institutions. It has been emphasized that this result is obtained at the cost of increasing the fragmentation of the society, crystallizing the borders among groups, and reducing the accountability of representatives. However, in the case of Israel, which is characterized by politics of discrimination against the Arab-Israeli population despite the constant presence of Arab representatives in the Knesset, a different problem of the proportional electoral system, and of descriptive representation in general, is highlighted, which has been ignored by scholars: descriptive representation may not guarantee political power to minorities and may be pointless despite the presence of free and fair elections and committed accountable representatives.

Indeed, Arab-Israelis have always had political rights, could always vote, and have always had political organizations that pursue their interests. Freedom House has

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always given Israel a minimum rating of “2” regarding political rights, and has awarded Israel a “1” since 1993.\(^{76}\) However, as pointed out by Anne Phillips, it is necessary to “look at how political representation works in existing conditions, and whether arrangements that might seem to embody general principles of fairness none the less favor particular groups.”\(^{77}\) Indeed, the Arab minority has not gained much by electing representatives seriously committed to pursue their interests. The simple presence of Arab members in the Knesset, guaranteed by the proportional system, has not produced significant results. Independent Arab parties have never had coalition potential and only recently have started to exercise extremely limited blackmail potential. In this way Arab-Israelis have been excluded by the decision-making process and have been subjected to the tyranny of Jewish parties. These have formed a permanent majority which has made all political decisions, including those regarding the Arab-Israeli population. The most perverse example was the vote to maintain the military rule in the Arab sector in 1962, which even some Arab representatives felt compelled to support. In this regard, it is interesting to point out that even a more official “politics of presence,” as called by Phillips, based on reserved seats would not have yielded better results.\(^{78}\)

The case of Israel confirms Phillips’ assertion that guaranteeing the presence of Arab members in the Knesset does not automatically bring popular control and political equality. In fact, equality is not just a question of recognizing formal principles of even-handedness and equal starting positions. On the contrary, it is a question of effective power and effective influence on outcomes.\(^{79}\) In this sense equality does not derive from formal representation; rather it comes from substantive participation and inclusion of those affected by the collective decisions.\(^{80}\) In this regard, full representation of the Arab minority requires their participation in the shaping of the general policies of their state by electing representative that are capable to act effectively and are allowed to attend to the common good and express opinions regarding the nature of the state. Full representation requires full citizenship.

To conclude, I want to draw attention to the intentional abstention of the majority of the Arab-Israeli population from the 2001 election. Arguing in favor of an effective form of representation, David Plotke affirms that “the opposite of representation is exclusion. And the opposite of participation is abstention.”\(^{81}\) While the first two statements agree with the argument of


\(^{78}\) See Phillips. The political experience of Arab-Israelis might have been different if Israel had used the plurality system. In fact, in winner-take-all system the victory can be decided by one or two percentage points. Thus, small parties with a unified block of voters can threaten the winning chances of the major parties, and therefore they have crucial blackmail leverage, which can force governments to pursue their interests. In this regard, see Sartori, “The Party-Effects of Electoral Systems,” p. 18. However, the brief experience of the direct election of the Prime Minister has not caused many changes, and has not brought Arab parties in government coalitions. Therefore this supposition cannot be confirmed. It is also possible to hypothesize that preferential electoral systems, such as the alternative vote or the single transferable vote, in which voters rank candidates in the order of their preferences on the ballot, and so “encourage the formation of electoral coalition by constituents” before the election, would have increased the bargaining power and political conditions of the Arab-Israeli minority. See Benjamin Reilly, Democracy in Divided Society (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 22. For the impact of preferential voting systems in divide societies see Benjamin Reilly, Democracy in Divided Society.

\(^{79}\) Ibid., p. 21.

\(^{80}\) See Phillips; Pitkin; and Castiglione and Warren, “Rethinking Representation: Seven Theoretical Issues.”

\(^{81}\) David Plotke cit. in Castiglione and Warren, p. 2.
this paper, the case of the Arab-Israelis contradicts Plotke’s last assertion. Indeed, as said above, abstention was a calculated decision made by the Arab-Israeli population and politicians, which on the one hand has emphasized the fact that most Arab-Israelis consider the Knesset to be an ineffectual arena, and on the other hand has sent a strong message to the Jewish party, especially the Labor party. As emphasized by Bishara, boycott has not meant giving up the civil right to vote but “to make it more meaningful” and to strengthen the political weight of the Arab minority. The case of Israel shows that abstention is a form of participation, which perhaps can bring about a better outcome than the kind of representation experienced for decades by the Arab-Israeli population.

Table 1: Arab vote from 1949 to 1992

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arab voters</th>
<th>Breakdown of Arab vote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation %</td>
<td>N. of Knesset Members</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>ADP</th>
<th>SDNP</th>
<th>General Election</th>
<th>Other Arab</th>
<th>Total Arab</th>
<th>Other 1</th>
<th>Other 2</th>
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<td>17</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>16</td>
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<td>-</td>
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<tr>
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<td>90</td>
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<td>22</td>
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<td>8</td>
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<td>22**</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>31</td>
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</table>


* In 1996 the ADP form an alliance with the moderate wing of the Islamic movement and started to run under the name United Arab List (UAL).

** In 1996 Hadash cooperated with a new Arab political formation, the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) led by Azmi Bishara, expression of the nationalist stream in the Arab-Israeli society. In 1999 the cooperation was dissolved and the NDA obtained 17% of the Arab vote.