



What is the “Joint List”?

The Joint List is a coalition of Palestinian political parties in Israel that was formed a few months before Israel's 2015 elections. It received much international attention as Palestinian citizens of Israel had the possibility, for the first time in Israeli history, to play a tangible role in the political orientation of their country.

What are The Joint List's views?

In March 2014, the Knesset, Israel's parliament, approved an electoral governance law, proposed by Avigdor Liberman (deputy of Yisrael Beiteinu, a far-right party), raising the electoral threshold of 2% to 3.25% of the votes. Officially, the bill's objective was to improve the government's ability to govern by limiting the number/proliferation of small parties in parliament. Isaac Herzog, leader of the Labour Party, has expressed concern over the governance act, holding that this type of law was motivated by a desire to exclude certain political parties and to end debate in the Knesset.¹ More precisely, Hana Sweid, MP of the Hadash, a mixed Jewish and Palestinian party with communist leanings, now part of The Joint List maintains that “The governance law disables the ideological, intellectual and political diversity within Arab society” and that the intention of Avigdor Liberman and his party was to drive the Palestinian parties out of the Knesset.²

Indeed, prior to the 2015 election, it appeared as though no Palestinian party in Israel would meet the electoral threshold and that as a result, none of them could have run in the 2015 elections. The Palestinian parties then agreed to form a coalition in order to maintain and even increase their presence in the Knesset. Since January 22nd 2015, The Joint List, headed by Ayman Odeh, brings together several parties and ideologies: Hadash, a Jewish-Palestinian communist oriented party; the United Arab List, an Islamist Party; Ra'am Ta'al with secularist and anti-Zionist tendencies; and Balad, a Palestinian nationalistic party.

The aims of The Joint List are mainly to 1) hold onto and gain “Palestinian” seats in the Knesset, 2) increase the political influence and the recognition of Palestinian Israeli rights, in particular the rights related to minority

status and finally, 3) mobilize abstainers among Israeli Palestinians.

The Joint List, despite its diversity, has proven to be an alternative to the ultranationalist side led by Benjamin Netanyahu and to the Zionist camp led by Isaac Herzog and Tzipi Livni.³ A commonality between the parties of the Joint List is their defence of the rights and interests of Israeli Palestinians. It positions itself as an opposition party to the government and has stated upon its creation its desire to keep out of government coalitions. Officially, the Joint List advocates the two-state solution between Israel and the Palestinians, along the 1967 frontiers, in which the capital Jerusalem would be shared by the two states.

What popular support does the Joint List have in Israel?

The Joint List primarily reaches the Palestinian electorate and the disillusioned supporters of Meretz, a left-wing party supporting the Palestinians in many of their demands in Israel.⁴ Thus the electorate of The Joint List is not entirely made up of Israeli Palestinians. The Joint List's electoral campaign of 2015 staked a lot on the Jewish electorate, especially since Hadash is a mixed party. During the March 2015 elections, the Joint List became the third largest political force in the Knesset, with 13 seats out of a total of 120, or approximately 10.5% of the votes. In comparison, the Likud, Benjamin Netanyahu's party, obtained 30 seats and the Zionist Union, a right-wing nationalistic party, 24 seats.

Did all the Palestinians vote for the Joint List?

Not necessarily. One can observe a certain distrust that Palestinians have towards Israeli policy, as a number of them preferred to abstain from rather than to participate in the elections.⁵ A boycott movement of the elections had in fact been initiated in the wake of the events of October 2000, during which 13 Israeli Palestinians were killed in popular protests.⁶ In 2001, only 18% of Israeli Palestinians took part in the elections due to this movement.⁷ In 2013, the boycott was still encouraged and only 56% of Israeli Palestinians turned out at the polls. In 2015, despite the Joint List's best efforts to mobilize those

who tended to abstain, the boycott retained a certain influence, and only 60% of Israeli Palestinians turning out to vote.

Although the Joint List's initiative has generally been well received in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, it is worth recalling that nearly 2,5 million Palestinians living in these territories under Israeli occupation are of voting age but still unable to make their voices heard in Israeli policy.

What place do Palestinians have in Israeli politics?

Since the creation of the State of Israel in 1948, the Israeli Palestinians have had their civil and political rights highly limited as a result of a number of discriminatory laws.⁸ Israeli citizenship status for Palestinians is strictly defined, and violates international law. Israeli citizenship is granted only to Palestinians who have lived in Israel without interruption since the creation of the state, systematically excluding all the Palestinians that fled at some point, even temporarily.⁹

As a result, Israeli Palestinians only represent about 20% of the citizens in Israel. Only one seat in the first Knesset in 1949 was held by a Member of Parliament from an Israeli Palestinian party. In 2015, only 13 MPs represented the interests of Israeli Palestinians, out of a total of 120 seats. Never in the history of modern Israel has a Palestinian party been invited to take part in a government coalition.¹⁰

How is the Joint List perceived by the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza?

In general, the initiative is welcomed by the Palestinians as well as by the leaders in the West Bank and Gaza. The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) considers the establishment of the Joint List as being the only positive aspect of the 2015 Israeli elections. According to the PLO, the Joint List could help strengthen the links between the Palestinians in the West Bank and those in Israel. This linkage would also be a historical step for the Palestinians in Israel, and the PLO hopes that the Joint List will help Palestinians gain greater recognition of their rights in Israel.¹¹

Also, Hamas encouraged Israeli Palestinians to cast their ballot for the Joint List in the 2015 elections. In so doing, Hamas expressed hope that the Joint List would win at least 20 seats and to be able to call for an end of the occupation and of a majority representation in the Knesset.¹²

The Palestinian authority also indicated its support of the Joint List, welcoming the initiative taken by the Palestinians in Israel.¹³

¹ Benoist, Chloé. « New Israeli laws could have detrimental effect on Palestinians ». Al Akhbar English. 12 March 2014.

² Benoist, Chloé. « New Israeli laws could have detrimental effect on Palestinians ». Al Akhbar English. 12 March 2014.

³ Buttu, Diana, As'ad Ghanem et Nijmeh Ali. « The Joint List in Israel's Elections: Palestinians in from the Cold? ». Al Shabaka. 11 March 2015.

⁴ Eldar, Shlomi. « Why Israeli Jews vote for Joint List? ». Al Monitor. 25 February 2015.

⁵ « Les Arabes, troisième force politique d'Israël ». Courrier international. 16 March 2015.

⁶ « Thousands of Israeli-Arabs mark October 2000 riots ». Jerusalem Post. 1^{er} October 2011.

⁷ Alsaafin, Linah. « Palestinian citizens of Israel split over election boycott, Joint List ». Middle East Eye. 17 March 2015.

⁸ To learn more, please consult the CJPME factsheet no. 128 *Vague de lois discriminatoires et antidémocratiques en Israël*, July 2011 and no. 169 *Les lois discriminatoires sous Benjamin Netanyahu*, April 2013.

⁹ « Fact Sheet: Discriminatory laws against Palestinians living in Israel ». Middle East Monitor. 8 December 2010.

¹⁰ Falez, Nicolas. « Législatives en Israël : les listes et les enjeux ». Radio France International (RFI). 16 March 2015.

¹¹ « PLO official calls united Arab list 'historic' ». The Times of Israel. 12 March 2015.

¹² « Hamas calls on Arabs to vote for Joint List ». Jerusalem Post. 17 March 2015.

¹³ Khoury, Jack. « Abbas endorses Arab Joint List in upcoming Knesset election ». Haaretz. 4 March 2015.