

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.

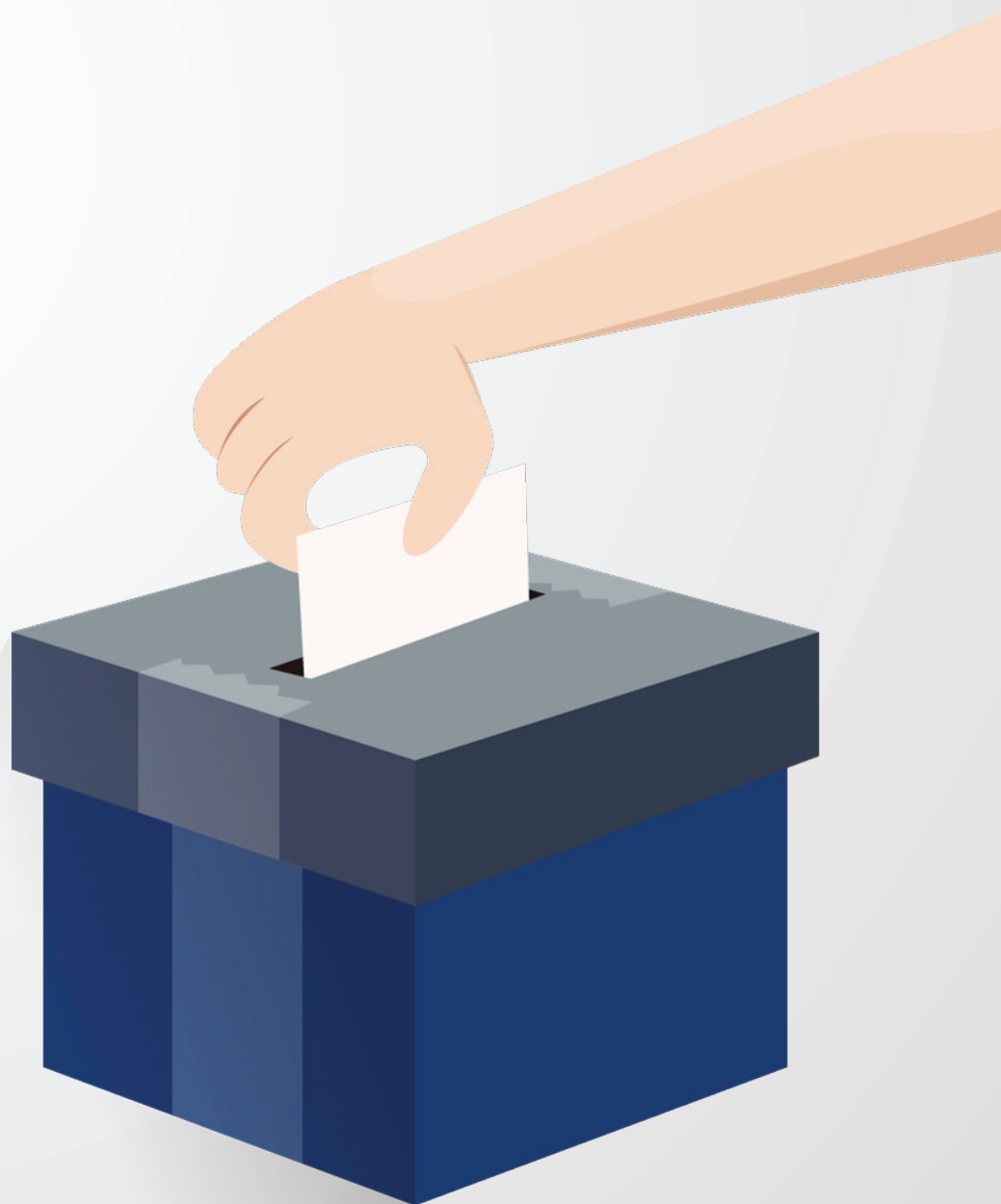
- In the majority of mixed cities, the clan affiliation holds little political weight and does not play a significant role in voter turnout rates and patterns.
- It can be inferred that the dynamics in mixed cities are primarily influenced by political and nationalist sentiments rather than communal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



# Introduction

## 1. General introduction

The military administration governing Arab society in Israel ended in 1966; at the time there were two Arab urban municipalities that had obtained municipal status prior to 1948.<sup>1</sup> After 1966 there were 38 Arab villages with local councils and 17 villages that were included in Jewish regional councils.<sup>2</sup> As we will detail further in this document, local and municipal systems have since changed considerably.<sup>3</sup> The Arab local authorities are engaged in a fiercer and more consistent financial and administrative crisis than local authorities that serve the Jewish public.<sup>4</sup> This crisis increases Arab authorities' reliance on government budgets and grants due to the lack of independent sources of income.<sup>5</sup> These circumstances impede efforts to develop Arab authorities in terms of economy, society, education, human capital and more.

Arab localities' municipal status can be divided into three main categories: local councils, urban councils and regional councils. The vast majority of Arab citizens in Israel resides in 68 Arab local authorities; 13 of the 85 localities (85 including the Druze localities) have the municipal status of city.<sup>6</sup> In addition, four localities are defined regional councils. In this context, it is noteworthy that most of the Arab localities in southern Israel lack any municipal status and are known as "unrecognized villages". The majority of the residents of 25 Bedouin tribes in the northern Negev reside in 35 rural communities without municipal status.

## 2. Empirical background

In late 2023, Israel's population was approximately 9,662,040, of which 21.1% or 2,038,800 are Arabs. The State of Israel's official statistics notably include Arab residents of East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights. Residents of the Golan Heights and East Jerusalem do not hold Israeli citizenship and are considered "permanent residents". Permanent residents are eligible to vote for local authorities and are not allowed to vote for Knesset representatives.<sup>7</sup>

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1 Majid Al-haj and Henry Rosenfeld, *Arab Local Government in Israel*, Routledge, 2020. (Hebrew)

2 *Ibid.*, p. 239-238.

3 *Ibid.*

4 Injaz Center, *Local Arab Authorities' Sources of Revenue – a Comparative Study*, 2022, p. 55 (Hebrew).

5 *Supra* note 1, p. 21.

6 The 85 Arab local authorities include the Druze and Circassian authorities. It is noteworthy that Kafr Qara was declared a city on May 2023,<sup>10</sup> yet on the Ministry of Interior's website it still appears as a local council.

7 By law, eligibility to vote in municipal elections requires a person to be at least 17 years old on election day and registered in the registry of residents as a resident of the authority. The right to vote in municipal elections is broader than the right to vote in Knesset elections. Eligibility to vote in the latter requires voters to be 18 years old, compared to 17 in municipal elections, and extends only to citizens, compared with municipal elections, in which permanent residents are eligible to vote. As such, most residents of East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights are eligible to vote in municipal elections. For political and ideological reasons, voter turnout among permanent residents is not high, including the desire to refrain from normalizing relationships with Israel by way of the local authorities subject to the Ministry of Interior and the rest of the government ministries.

**Table 1: Population of Israel according to population group and legal status.<sup>8</sup>**

Population group	Population size	Percentage of the country's population
Jews	7,101.3	73.5%
Arabs	2,038.8	21.1%
Of whom are Arab citizens of Israel	1,658.9	17.2%
Others <sup>9</sup>	521.9	5.4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>9,662.0</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Arab society in Israel is approximately one-fifth of the national population and resides in 2.5% of the country's area. Arabs in the country are dispersed across numerous localities within 85 distinct local authorities, where elections are held, shaping their community, demographics, and physical environment.<sup>10</sup> Participating in these elections and internal politics are a very important arena for all of Arab society in Israel,<sup>11</sup> and the voter turnout rates for local authorities reflect that they dramatically exceed the voting rate among the Arab population in general elections.<sup>12</sup> We shall address that later on.

The academic and professional research, as well as policy papers published by Injaz Center, reflect that Arab society resides in small to medium localities in terms of size (area and population). Most Arab communities are on the margins of Israel's society, economy and geography. The Arab population and Arab localities are located in three main geographic areas: Galilee (north), Triangle (Haifa and central Israel (and) and the Negev (south).

**Table 2: The Arab population according to the municipal status of the Arab localities in which they reside<sup>13</sup>**

The municipal status of the locality	Number of Arab citizens that reside in the locality	Percentage of the total
City	533,000	37%
Local council	785,000	55%
Regional councils	49,000	3%
Without municipal status	72,000	5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,439,000</b>	<b>100%</b>

<sup>8</sup> Khalaily, M., Badran, A. and Arik Rudnitzky. Statistical Report on Arab Society in Israel: 2023. Jerusalem: The Israel Democracy Institute, 2024 (Hebrew).

<sup>9</sup> "Others" includes non-Arab Christians and persons unclassified by religion.

<sup>10</sup> Including the local councils in the Golan Heights. For further reading see Noga Shani and Laila Swaid, The Arab Local Authorities' Sources of Revenue: A Comparative Study. Nazareth and Haifa: Injaz Center and Sikkuy-Aufuq, 2022 (Hebrew).

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Mohannad Mustafa, Local Elections in Israel 2018: Identity and Political Struggles, Journal of Palestinian Studies, Issue 118 - Spring 2019. (Arabic)

<sup>13</sup> Khalaily, M., Badran, A. and Arik Rudnitzky. Statistical Report on Arab Society in Israel: 2023. Jerusalem: The Israel Democracy Institute, 2024 (Hebrew)

Localities' municipal status in Israel is usually linked to the number of residents. Since most Arab communities are small to medium in terms of demography and area, 68 communities were granted the status of a local council, 13 of the 85 localities received the status of city and 4 were defined as regional councils. The table above does not include the Arab citizens who reside in mixed localities (mixed cities and Arab localities in mixed regional authorities) in addition to the Arabs who reside in Jewish localities. According to this cross-section, 86.7% of the Arab citizens reside in Arab localities with an independent municipal status.

### 3. Road map

This review deals with the municipal elections in Arab communities in the State of Israel. Through it, the results of the municipal elections in Arab communities are presented, while addressing the various prominent trends in the elections over two rounds on February 27, 2024 (first round) and March 10, 2024 (second round), including the implications of postponing the original election date on the election results and local democracy. This paper emphasizes the characteristics of local politics: voter turnout rates and patterns. The mapping and the analysis aims to support relevant parties to closely study the nature of the selection of representatives in local elected bodies and the implications of the elections on their status and the characteristics of the management of Arab local authorities.

The key data underlying this review are extracted mainly from data published on a designated website established by the Israeli Ministry of Interior. They were then verified and confirmed through systematic examination by Injaz's team and senior ranking officials in Arab local authorities, as well as comparing data from previous elections, by examining the past and present, and attempting to understand central trends and voting patterns: consistency, continuity, and change. The research includes references to voter turnout, level of competitiveness, degree of political fragmentation, characteristics of the electoral system, the identity and political affiliation of the winners and losers. The results do not stand alone but indicate underlying societal dynamics within the Arab community that influenced the outcomes presented subsequently. It should be noted that the importance of this mapping is evident, as local elections impact the quality of local governance, discourse, national politics, the formulation of government plans for Arab society, and so forth. Additionally, the fact that candidate selection also influences local policy formulation, project management, and appointments to professional positions.

It should also be emphasized that this research aims to map and analyze the outcomes of the 2024 local elections in Arab communities. Such mapping and analysis enable comparisons with other systems, whether between different systems, time periods, electoral frameworks, or outcomes across various locations. This mapping will yield deep insights into Arab society overall and the role of Arab local authorities amidst existing challenges and beyond.

## 4. Local democracy and urban politics

Participating in elections reflects the citizens' priorities and the importance they attribute to government systems, their level of trust in institutions and leaders, and the effectiveness and efficiency of their participation in politics. Meaning the sense of "civil capability" and citizens' ability in practice to affect the fundamental issues that guide the locality's leadership, policy and the resulting priorities, and the decisions that directly affect the residents' lives and quality of life. Voter turnout rates in democratic systems reflect the level of legitimacy of the institutions and leaders, how representative government institutions are (there is more presence for social categories in the municipal community) and faith in the ability of elected officials and professional ranks to create change in the civilians' lives.

One of the areas of special attention is linked to the Arab citizens' political participation. Local and national elections, particularly because they are cyclical, are considered sufficiently broad and clear empirical proof for reflecting the nature of these processes. Therefore, the results of elections for local authorities reflects the central political forces but also more profound currents that characterize Arab society in Israel and how such changes influence the way local authorities function, and the relationship with the central government.

The research about elections in Israel suggests that different groups treat the various types of elections differently. It is important to note that among Jews, national elections are considered the highest priority yet minor among Arabs in Israel, while local elections are considered the highest priority and importance among Arabs and minor among Jews, and this is indicated by the number of candidates and voter turnout rates.

In the past years, the importance of the Arab local authorities has become clearer. This is evidenced by the struggle between political and social forces and actors over positions of power in local government, manifested by a great deal of competition during local elections.

A high level of competition among the various political actors and officials results from several factors despite the phenomenon of increasing violence and crime in society: 1) Marginalization and exclusion of the Arab representatives from national politics; 2) the ability of actors who aspire to lead to have an immediate and direct effect; 3) the increase in government budgets earmarked for Arab local authorities; without disregarding the fact that 4) local authorities are the largest employer in Arab society. Naturally, institutional and legislative changes affect the citizenry's political behavior and lead to segmentation because of changes to the formal rules that require political actors in the public sphere to adjust.

In this context we note that in 1975 the change to the method of local elections was completed. According to the new method, the council head is elected directly through general, secret and equal elections, separate from the elections for the local authorities.<sup>14</sup> A candidate must secure at least 40% of the legitimate votes to be elected. Additional changes were made to municipal elections, including separating local and national elections, and holding elections for local authorities every 5 years. The central government's weakness in the early

<sup>14</sup> This is considered the first constitutional change in Israel.

1970s drove this change and not changes in local politics.<sup>15</sup> In addition, the law granted the mayors of local authorities much greater power at the expense of council members and professional ranks within councils. Changing the system had additional implications. In Jewish society, the national parties grew weaker and were replaced by independent parties.<sup>16</sup> In Arab society, the political parties organized accordingly and managed to increase their power, at least during the elections held after the change (Khalaily, 2021). Broadly speaking, casting two ballots enabled the appearance of “oppositional local authorities”, where the head of council does not hold a majority within the council and therefore must surrender to local parties’ demands in order to approve the budget. Matters became even more complicated in Arab society given the high levels of competition and the internal political division, which make building urban coalitions challenging and crystalizes the tension between the public interest and the particular interests of the political actors represented in the local council. These developments impacted the local leadership’s political, social and professional background and ability to function. We shall address the way Arab local authorities operate and function later.

## 5. Characteristics of the local politics

Research focusing on the local arena has argued that the dominant forces are mainly clans and social groups but an examination of this arena reflects that this is not necessarily so, and clans do not account for everything. There have also been many changes to clan structures that should be addressed. The changes to Arab local governance in Israel have mostly been measured by examining local authorities’ status as a modern institution in a traditional society or as a society in the midst of a transition. These studies describe a binary situation in which traditional and modern forces championing social change compete over key positions in Arab local authorities. This approach is erroneous, limited and is unable to provide a compelling explanation for the developments in the local arena. As mentioned, Arab local governance is considered highly important, and according to data collected by the Israeli Institution for Democracy for the “Democracy Index” and the index “Jews and Arabs - A Conditional Partnership” the local authorities receive the most trust by Arab society compared to the rest of the governing bodies.<sup>17</sup> More specifically, it is evident that in terms of representation levels as conveyed in the question about trust, attention and responsiveness, Arab society expresses a clear preference for local authorities over the government and its various ministries.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Eisenkang-Kane, Perla. *Fundamental of Local Government: Regime, Politics and Local Government*, Ra’anana: Open University, 2004 (Hebrew).

<sup>16</sup> Brichta, Avraham. *Don’t Shed a Tear: Weakening of Parties in Local Government*, in Korn, D. Editor. *The End of Parties, Israeli Democracy is in Distress*, Tel Aviv: HaKibbutz Hameuchad Press, p. ,273-263 2001(Hebrew).

<sup>17</sup> The data was taken from the Israeli Democracy Index headed by Prof. Tamar Hermann and published by the Israel Democracy Institute in Jerusalem, reflecting the Arab public’s opinions regarding government institutions in 2023-2003.

<sup>18</sup> Finkelstein, Ariel. *Residents’ Positions regarding Local Authorities Compared with the Government*. The Israeli Center for Democracy, Jerusalem, 2023 (Hebrew).

## 6. Competition and political division

A hallmark of the local elections in the Arab localities in Israel is the level of competition and interest in elections. This competition is reflected by a high voter turnout, a large number of mayoral candidates and a large number of parties competing for representation in the local house of representatives. The level of competition does not reflect the level and quality of local and municipal democracy in any way. On the contrary, this competition reflects the level of division, fragmentation and political polarization in the Arab localities. In normal circumstances, political competition is necessary for any democratic regime. Political competition offers citizens many alternatives and they may choose the one that suits them best, and it guarantees changes in government, introducing younger candidates into the system and refreshing government ranks.

Competition in municipal elections in the Arab localities increases voter turnout rates, precludes a decision during the first round of elections, enables runoff elections in many Arab localities, and accounts for the creation of divided local houses of representatives featuring a large number of parties with very few mandates each. This situation affects the ability of the elected mayor to establish a municipal alliance and coalition. The existence of many small lists interferes with daily management of the authority, blackmails decision-makers, introduces corruption and promoting particular interests at the expense of the public interest.

## 7. Elections for Arab local government in 2024: Continuity and change

We will begin by looking at the unique characteristics of the 2024 municipal elections. For the first time in several election campaigns, the political atmosphere was not lively and there were no activities encouraging political activism. The Arab political system and its incumbent leaders and candidates experienced genuine upheaval following the outbreak of the war and the Minister of Interior's decision to delay the elections from the end of October 2023 to February 2024. Despite the relatively quiet atmosphere in the Arab localities, municipal elections are still the most important event for the Arab citizens. And yet there was no election atmosphere – no digital campaigns and billboards, popular and mass assemblies. Moreover, some of the candidates who expressed a desire to run received threats from powerful parties and withdrew their candidacy.<sup>19</sup>

As evident in the table, all 84 Arab localities with official municipal status held elections in 2024 without exception, compared with 76 during the previous elections in 2018.<sup>20</sup> We note that in the past, elections were held in just some of the municipalities. Others did not hold elections because of fixed-term nominated oversight committees, which precluded the public from electing its representatives. For example, in 2008, some of the localities held elections in 2009 because they were included in the 2003 plan for merging authorities. The

<sup>19</sup> Mr. Musab Dukhan is a prominent example for this. He withdrew his candidacy in the elections for Nazareth's mayor after he was shot and wounded. For further reading see TOI Staff, Anti-crime mayoral candidate, two others shot in Nazareth, Times of Israel, 16.09.2023.

<sup>20</sup> This figure includes the localities in the Golan Heights: Majdal Shams, Buq'ata, Ein Qiniyye, Mas'ade and Ghajar. Excluding these localities, the number of localities is 80. There is a prominent political problem in the Golan Heights, and calls to boycott elections by the spiritual, political and religious leadership.

plan was revoked in 2008, and elections were postponed for several months in order to maintain proper and democratic process.

The total number of seats in Arab local authorities is currently 950 (council members) compared to 840 during the previous elections in 2018.<sup>21</sup> This increase of 100 seats is due to the population growth in the Arab localities and the increase in the number of persons eligible to vote. The larger the local house of representatives, the more representative, attentive and democratic it tends to be.

There were 326 mayoral candidates in Arab localities in 2024, an average of 2.8 candidates per post. This number is high compared to Jewish and mixed local authorities. Needless to say, the number of candidates in Arab localities has decreased over time. In 2013 there were 4.9 candidates on average, decreasing to 3.7 on average in 2018, and increasing to an average of 3.8 during the 2024 elections. Clearly, in some localities there is a single candidate, and this phenomenon is relatively new. As noted, in 7 of the 85 Arab local authorities there is a single candidate: Basma, Ghajar,<sup>22</sup> Kafr Yasif, Mazra'a, Rameh, Tur'an, and Yanuh-Jatt. Investigating this phenomenon reveals two contradictory trends: In some of the localities the residents are very satisfied with their mayor and there is consensus and therefore no competing candidates, as chances of winning are very low. However, in other localities this phenomenon is related to the increase in violence and crime in Arab localities.

**Table 3: Candidates and lists in elections for Arab local authorities 1993-2024<sup>23</sup>**

Election year	Number of local authorities	Number of seats	Number of mayoral candidates	Number of parties competing
1993	58	646	223	628
1998	59	667	234	717
2003	51	578	251	513
2008	53	655	212	578
2013	69	620	228	610
2018	76	840	281	810
2024	85	950	326	892

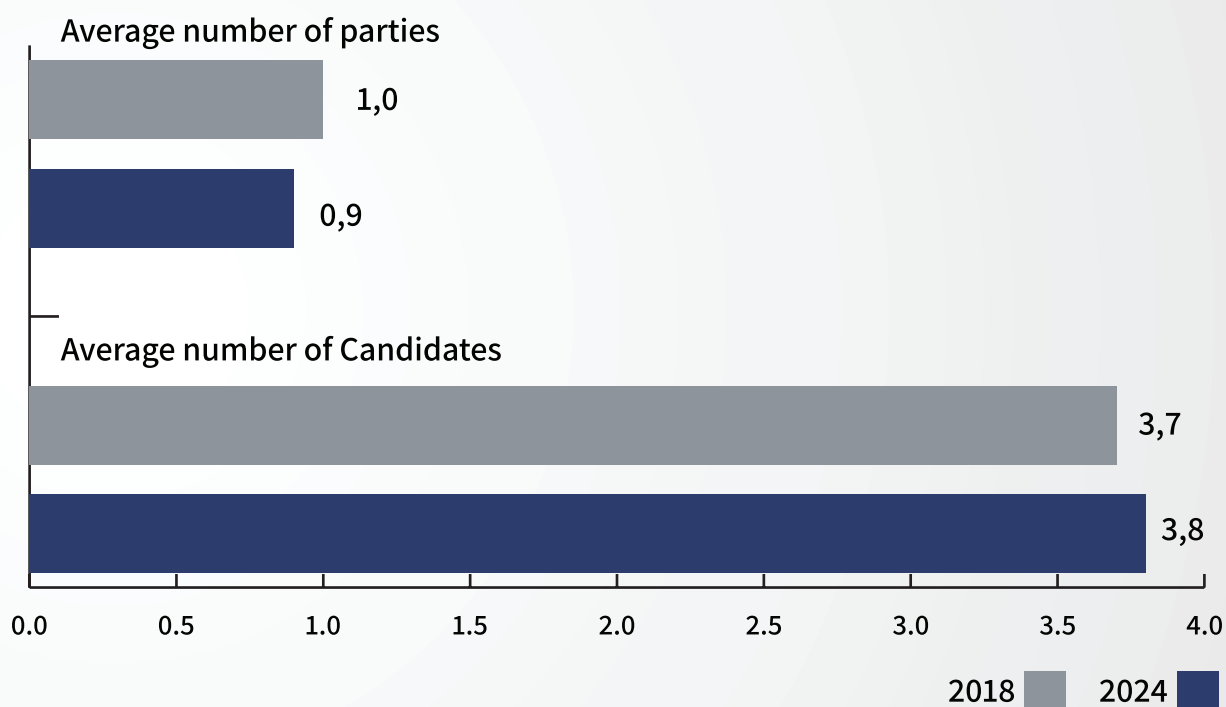
This competition is not unique to mayors: The local house of representatives is also flooded by parties competing over representation. In 2024, 892 parties competed for 950 seats, an average of 0.94 parties per seat, compared with 0.96 in 2018, and 0.98 parties per seat in 2003. This rate is higher than in Jewish localities and has far reaching implications on local authorities' ability to function and govern. Thus, the question arises: Is this democratization and internalization of democratic and liberal principles that leads to multiplicity, diversity and open

<sup>21</sup> The elected political ranks in the Arab local authorities include 85 mayors and 950 council members.  
<sup>22</sup> Ultimately elections were not held in Ghajar because there were no candidates beside the incumbent mayor, Mr. Ahmed Fetali and his party that ran for council. Therefore, the elections committee declared him mayor.  
<sup>23</sup> Data obtained from the site of the national elections supervisor, Ministry of Interior and Central Bureau of Statistics and analyzed by Injaz Centerf.



competition overpower? Such competition results in local houses of representatives whose heads are elected by a margin of just a few percent of the votes, and with many small parties that managed to overcome the electoral threshold. Such a house is comprised of fragments of parties, restricting the local authority's ability to operate and harming its ability to govern and its legitimacy in the eyes of its residents. Such a house deals a fatal wound to the local democracy and its ethical and political purpose.

**Figure 1: Political competition during local elections in Arab localities in Israel 2018-2024**



## » Heads of Local Authorities

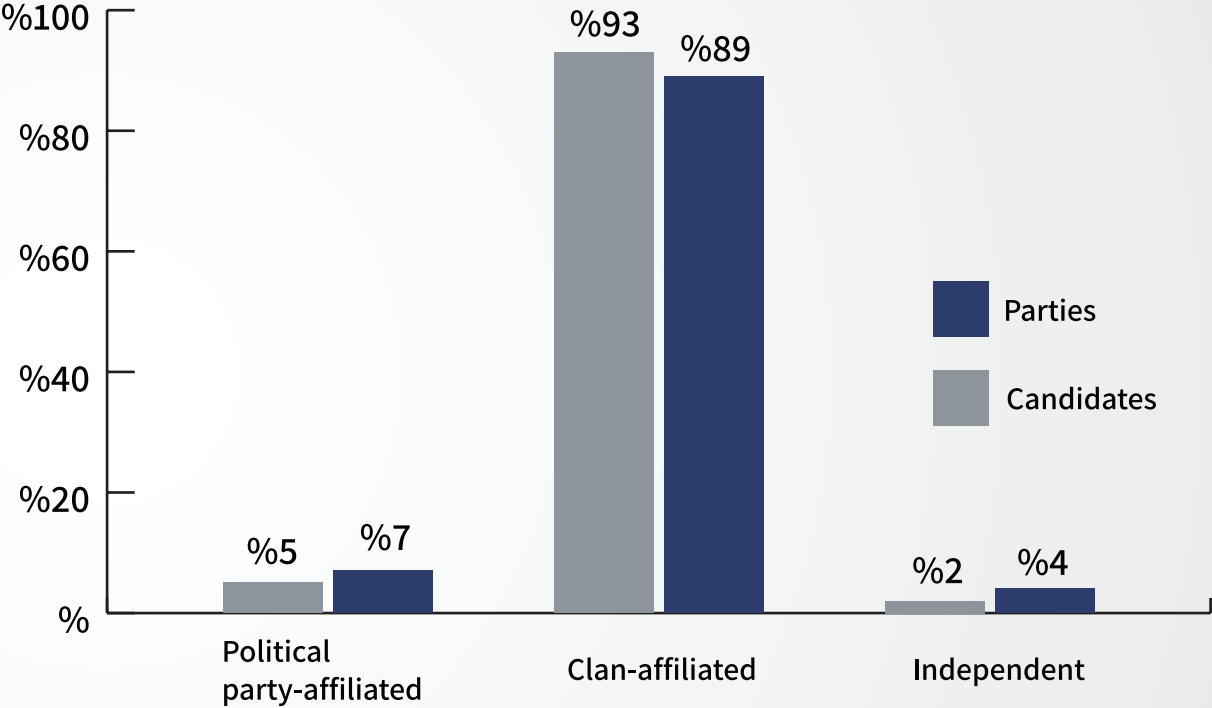
In local Arab politics, particularly in the local elections, there are three social-political forces, differing in their approaches, perspectives, vision, electoral power, public legitimacy and influence over local Arab government. The local-clan parties, the local-independent parties, and the local lists affiliated to national parties

The parties' organizing principle determines its identity and political background. Therefore parties might comprised of families and clans but whose organizing principle is not the clan. The reason for uniting under a single party is the desire to overcome the electoral threshold and be represented in the local house of representatives. Candidates have different backgrounds, including academia, business, spiritual life and culture but they fall under one of the three categories listed above.

Figure 2 reflects that the vast majority of candidates in local elections in Arab localities are affiliated with a clan. An examination of all the candidates indicates that 93% are supported mainly by their extended families and were even chosen

to represent their families by way of internal elections, primary elections or a decision of the family leadership or its distinguished members. In contrast, 5% of all the candidates are affiliated with national parties, official members of political parties in which they are active, closely related to, or were elected in the party's institutions and supported by it. 2% of all candidates are independent and chose to run independently and without any backing from a clan or political party.

**Figure 2: Distribution of political forces during the 2024 local elections**



## ➤➤ The Local Council

At the level of elected local authority councils or “local parliaments”, matters are not very different. 89% of parties competing for representation in local councils are affiliated with a clan while just 7% are affiliated with a political party. Ministry of Interior data that address the connection between local and national are inaccurate and erroneous. The Ministry of Interior’s refers only to use of the national party’s official symbol but this is not the case in Arab localities, where there are parties affiliated with political parties but do not use the national party’s symbol. This pertains mainly to Hadash and the United Arab List (referred to as Ra’am), two parties that compete in some localities through the same party as in the 1950s and 1960s, prior to the establishment of the current parliamentary platform. It is also based on local alliances and candidates’ desire to sever ties with the national arena. Therefore it is necessary to examine the parties thoroughly and verify with officials in national parties whether the national parties are affiliated with the local parties running on their behalf. Moreover, it became evident that 4% of the parties are independent, mainly involving young people and women and marginalized groups that decided to organize separately from the main groups in the municipal elections.

The decrease in the political parties’ power in past years is partly due to the fact that they have withdrawn and decided not to participate. This decrease

coupled with the gap (even if minor) in the number of parties per party candidates can be explained by a trade-off between parties with local and traditional forces. This requires each side to have a relative advantage in what it offers. In the case of local elections, the clans have a relative advantage in votes, recruiting ability and mass voting power. In contrast, the political parties have a relative advantage in their aspirations to govern and relations with government ministries, status and political vision. For a trade-off to be successful, each side must surrender part of what it holds. The party that holds the political power will surrender to the party that holds voting power in order to receive part of its votes. The party that holds voting power will surrender its votes for the benefit of another candidate. Such trade-offs result in preserving the parties' interests and reflect the decline in partisan ideology and rise in pragmatic and power-hungry politics. It demonstrates the parties' desire for support from local and traditional forces at the national level, and therefore they compromise on the local level, becoming more pragmatic and compromising in order to be able to govern. In this context, the political parties downplay their ideological platforms and become increasingly pragmatic and compromising in order to seize the reins of power, and in some cases parties agree to demands that contradict their political and social ticket and are therefore perceived as driven by interests and interested solely in winning elections and achieving the party's narrow interests at the expense of localities' broader interests.

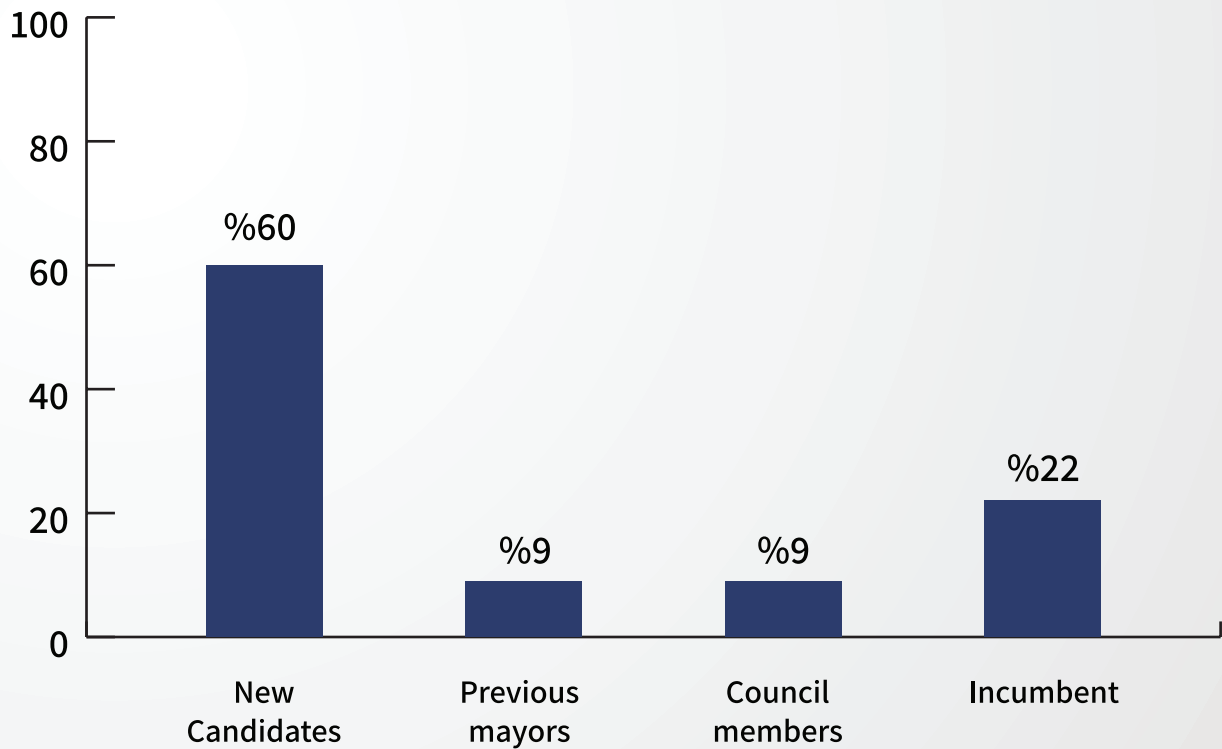
## Fictitious parties

In many cases, heads of local authorities win by a large margin but have much smaller achievements in the council compared to the other competing parties. Thus, the elected mayor's party receives a fraction of a percentage. This is frequently the case in Arab localities and referred to as "fictitious parties". There is political, institutional and social logic to the prevalence of this phenomenon, particularly in elections for local government in Arab localities. Firstly, the political logic is that it allows "leeway and freedom" by way of bartering votes among the candidates for mayor or head of local council and participating parties over representation in the council. In practice, the mayor or council head's party receives very few votes, no more than 1% and therefore does not meet the electoral threshold. The candidate releases his or herself from the commitment to one party and diverts the energy, resources and votes to other parties on condition that they vote for him or her during the mayoral election. Secondly, the institutional logic is related to the election system itself and to the laws governing elections. This means that if the mayor is elected but his or her party is not, the law permits adding an additional council member that is the head of council or mayor. As noted, "fictitious parties" enable the mayor or council head (if elected) to serve on the council although his or her party received few votes. This means that she or he wins another seat and strengthens a future coalition. It allows more power and helps evade having to rely on the other components in the local house of representatives. Finally, the social logic related to the position, status and prestige. Some candidates run only for head of council or mayor and do not wish to serve as council members. This means that some candidates do not agree to be council members because this is inappropriate for their status. In this case, either they serve as head of council or mayor or not at all.

## ➤➤ Competition between incumbent and new candidates

Analysis of the data from the 2024 municipal elections in Arab localities reflects that among the mayoral candidates, 73 are incumbent. This means that in 86% of the Arab localities, the acting mayor is running again. This data does not suggest that 73% of the candidates are incumbent but this is in fact the case in 73 localities. This means that 73 of 326 candidates currently serve as head of their local council. This data attests to one of the characteristics of local politics and the number of terms that mayors tend to serve. It is difficult to locate an instance in which a mayor decided to leave politics and public life after just one term; most try to govern continuously and for as many terms as possible. This creates disgust because there is no rejuvenation and the same personae accompany the local arena for many years without being replaced and without younger or other new candidates.

Figure 3: Distribution of the mayoral candidates in Arab local councils



In addition, given the relatively large number of candidates we chose to perform more advanced analyses to determine the candidates' identities. As noted, 22% of all candidates for heads of council in Arab localities are incumbent. Furthermore, 9% of the candidates previously served as head of council and sought to reclaim this title. As noted, they attempted to reclaim the position after not serving during at least the previous term 2018-2024. An additional 9% currently serve as public representatives in the local house of representatives and are responsible for various portfolios. These are mainly opposition members who ran for head of council, challenging the local coalition that led the localities and the local authority during the last term. A small minority managed to win the elections, and just one went on to serve as head of council. It is clear from the data that 60% of the candidates are new. The category "new" should not be inferred that they did not previously run or get elected to serve as council member in the

past. Some ran during previous elections and were not elected to serve as council head or local council member. And as stated, some candidates defined as new in this research are not new to the local municipal system and are not running for the very first time.

## ➤➤ Voter turnout rates and reasons for movement and change

As stated, voter turnout among Arab citizens in local elections in Arab localities is greater than the overall national average and higher than the average voter turnout in mixed cities. Furthermore, the average voter turnout in local elections for Arab localities is greater than the average Arab voter turnout for Knesset elections. High levels of competition (as demonstrated above) and the traditional social structure, including clans or groups affect the high voter turnout rates. Local government directly and immediately impacts the lives of the Arab citizens, and they therefore tend to participate in higher rates. In addition, the desire to secure material and symbolic resources (budgets and status) increases Arab citizens' voter turnout in local politics.

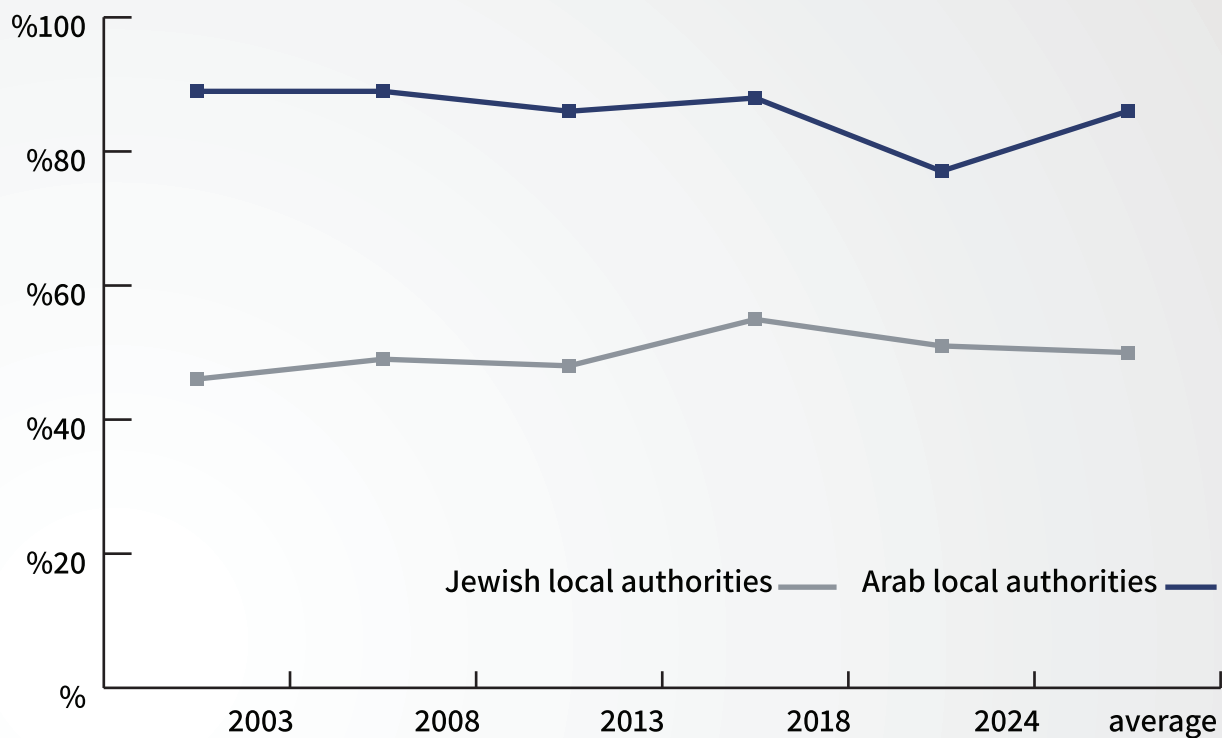
Part of this difference in voter turnout in national and local elections is related to the significant decrease among the Arab public. High levels of participation among Arab citizens who reside in the Arab localities is influenced by various causes. Given the financial and organizational challenges Arab local councils face and inability to satisfy their local community's desires and provide high-quality municipal services, it would be reasonable to assume that the importance of local government would plummet and voter turnout decline, but this did not transpire. Despite the difficult circumstances, chiefly the war and absence of election campaigns and active elections, voter turnout stayed especially high.

**Table 4: Voter turnout rate in elections for local government in Israel 2003-2024**

Voter turnout in elections for local government				
	Arab authorities	Jewish authorities	General	Difference
2003	89%	45.8%	49%	43.2%
2008	89%	48.6%	52%	40.4%
2013	86%	47.7%	51%	38.3%
2018	88%	55.1%	60%	32.9%
2024	77%	50.7%	49%	26.3%
Average	85.8%	49.6%	52.2%	36.2%

The table above reflects a huge gap in voter turnout in elections for Arab and Jewish local authorities. The gap during the 2024 elections is 26.3%, but the average gap in 2003-2024 is 36.2%. It is noteworthy that the gap during the early 2000s was greater and the decrease in voter turnout during the last elections is due to the war and other reasons that were discussed earlier.

**Figure 4: Arab citizens voter turnout in local government elections 2003-2024**



The figure above reflects a decline in voter turnout in local elections in Arab localities. Systematic analysis of the data shows that voter turnout among the Arab citizens fell 15% - from 91% in 1993 to 76% in 2024. The total average also decreased by 7% - from 56% to 49%.

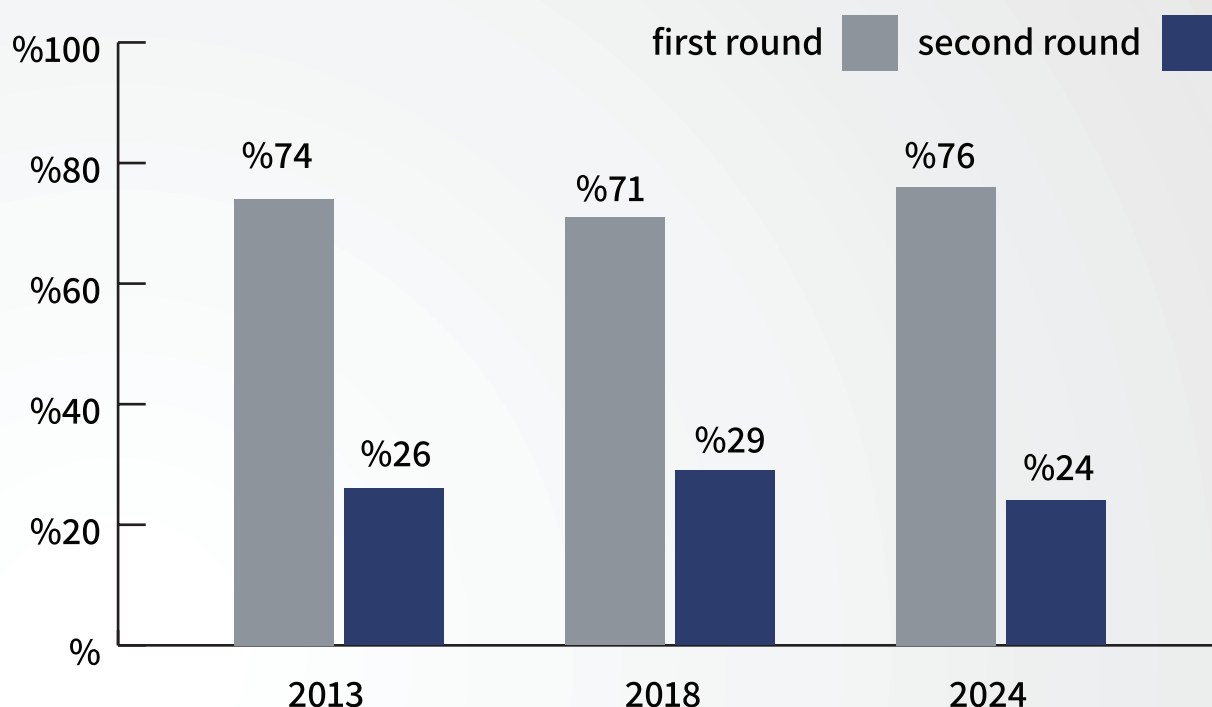
Voter turnout in runoff elections in Arab localities was 67.5% compared to the overall voter turnout - 46.1%.<sup>24</sup> Mapping the localities with a rotation agreement in place and then conducting a weighted recalculation reflects a different story. That the voter turnout rate in Arab localities - taking into account the above localities - was 74%, similar to the voter turnout during the first round of elections. The lowest voter turnout was 4.7% in Mashhad and the highest was 87.3% in Julis.

## ➤➤ Democratic resolution and political fragmentation

The regression in voter turnout is a global phenomenon reflected in all types and levels of political participation, and most prominently in voter turnout. Despite the decrease in residents' faith and satisfaction, local government remains an important and crucial site of influence for Arab citizens. It is reflected in the number of candidates and parties competing and high voter turnout. The existence of multiple parties and candidates increases competition, increases polarization and division and does not allow elections to be decided in one round. The law requires a candidate to receive at least 40% of the votes during the first round to decide the elections. It is impossible to decide elections during the first round in Arab localities, where there are 3.8 candidates on average.

<sup>24</sup> This percentage includes the two localities with rotation agreements in place: Mashhad and Kafr Kanna. Rotation agreements are between two candidates who obtained the highest number of votes during the first round and include sharing the term. According to the agreement, each candidate serves for approximately half the term.

Figure 5: Distribution of the localities with runoff elections 2018-2024



The phenomenon of undecided elections during the first round is evident in a quarter of the Arab local authorities. Although there is decline in the number of localities where elections were not determined during the first round of elections in 2024, this is still a large share of the Arab localities. According to the figure, the share of localities where elections were not decided during the first round is 22%, compared with 29% during the previous elections. It is noteworthy that 18 of these 31 localities were Arab localities. This means that 58% of all localities where runoff elections were held are Arab. In this specific context we wish to note that in two of the 18 localities (in the north: Mashhad and Kafr Kanna), candidates reached a rotation agreement for sharing the term and in this sense elections were formally held.

This decrease can be explained mainly by the fact that elections were postponed, aiding some of the candidates, and increasing the number of localities with a single candidate. Indecisive results during the first round impact the overall administration of the local authority. Between the two rounds, parties that manage to overcome the voter threshold attempt to blackmail both candidates who manage to receive the highest number of votes. Any powerful party presents a list of demands and requests to both candidates and takes advantage of the new bargaining position created between the election rounds. This state of affairs restricts the local authorities' ability to operate and govern. Moreover, there is a new phenomenon emerging in light of the changes and profound currents in Arab society during recent years. It is linked to the decline in the status of clans and in clans' ability to secure responsiveness and submission from all its members. In this context we note that if clan heads who lose during the first round of elections decide to support one of the candidates during the runoff elections, this decision is not binding for the rest of the clan's members, and their recruitment during the first round differs greatly from the runoff elections. Evidence for this is declarations made by candidates who lost the first round of elections in support of one of the candidates during the runoff elections and the lack of obedience or response by their supporters.

## Support rates for candidates

We also examined the support rate for candidates during the first round of elections, focusing on candidates who managed to win the elections during the first round. From our perspective, support rates reflect a combination of competition, polarization and political division. Therefore the closer to 50% the support rate for a candidate is, we deduce that elections are competitive with high polarization and division. Low support rates harm the legitimacy of the head of council and the ability to administer and lead. As noted, low support rates harm representation and therefore harm the interests of all the residents and social groups in a locality.

**Table 4: Support for candidates elected for head of council during the first and second round of elections in 2024.**

	Support rate – first round	Support rate – runoff elections
Minimum	41%	50.7%
Maximum	99%	98.8%
Median	53.8%	55.8%
Average	58.1%	60.2%

The table above shows support for candidates who succeeded in being elected head of the local authority and determined the elections in both rounds. It is evident that the internal variance is greater among candidates in the different localities; the candidate who managed to win the elections with the lowest support rate was 41%, while the candidate who won with the highest rate was 99%. In contrast, the candidate with the lowest support rate during the runoff elections received 50.7% of votes, while the highest support rate was 98.8%. The minimum support rate during the first round reflects the legal requirement for fulfilling this position, while during runoff elections because the race was between two candidates, the minimum requisite was 50% and over. In contrast, data regarding the highest levels of support during the first round reflects which localities had a single candidate with no competition, while in runoff elections it reflects which localities had a rotation agreement between the candidates.

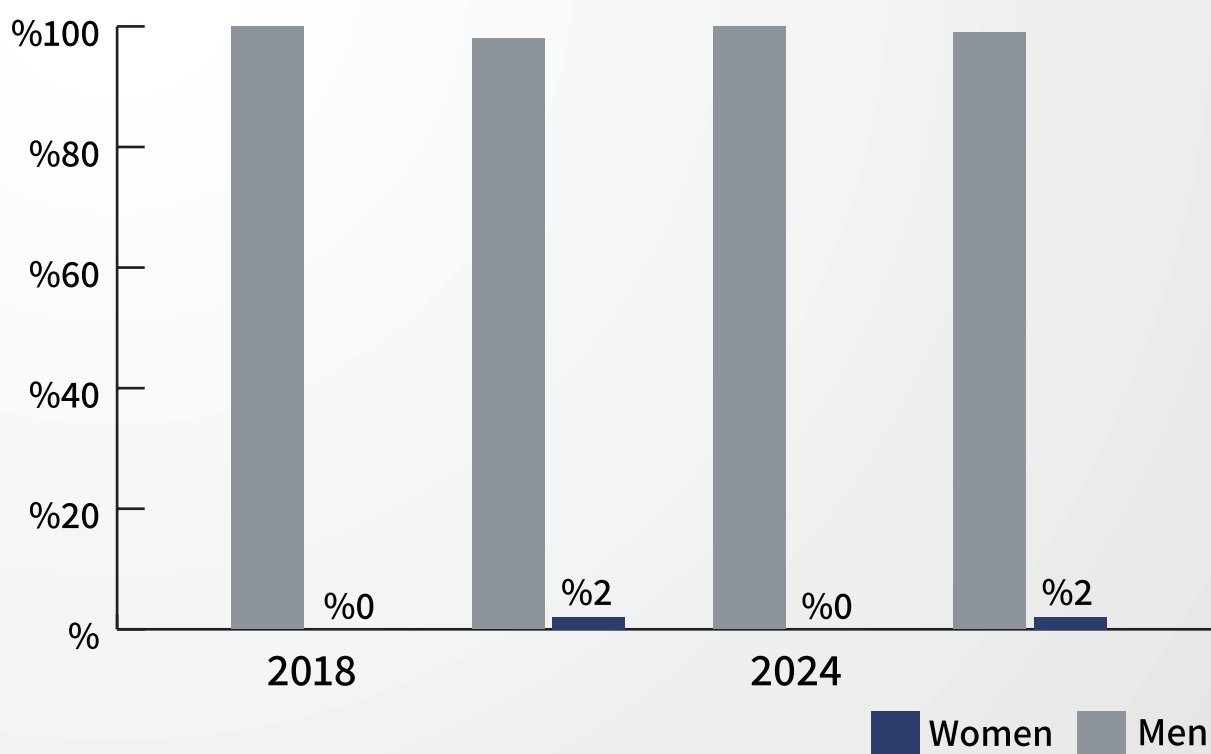
It is also evident that average support for elected heads of authority during the first round of elections was 58.1% while the median reached 53.8%. In contrast, the average support rate in runoff elections was 60.2% while the median was 55.8%. The median best reflects this specifically, as during the first round there were 7 localities with single candidates winning over 90% of the votes while during the runoff elections there were 2 of 18 localities with a rotation agreement and a single candidate. Therefore it is evident that lower support rates for heads of council reflect the competitiveness, deep political division and high degree of polarization in the Arab localities in Israel.



## Gender representation – local democracy?

Analysis of the elections results clearly shows a regression in political representation for women compared to the previous elections. Proper and equal representation for both sexes, men and women alike increase the legitimacy and faith in public institutions and bodies, and can promote women’s particular issues, topics and needs in local governance. Although there is an equal right to vote and run, and as such women have an equal right to apply to be candidates, in practice the situation reflects the existence of a large gap both in terms of participation and representation. Underrepresentation of Arab women is reflected in the local arena more than in the national arena,<sup>25</sup> contradicting the statement that local politics are closer and more accessible to women than men.<sup>26</sup> The political representation of women in Arab local authorities reflects a dangerous trend in the status of women and democratic values. The number and percentage of the Arab women in Arab society running and achieving representation is much lower both than on the national level among Arabs and on the local level among Jews.

**Figure 5: Gender representation in local houses of representatives in Arab local authorities 2013-2024**



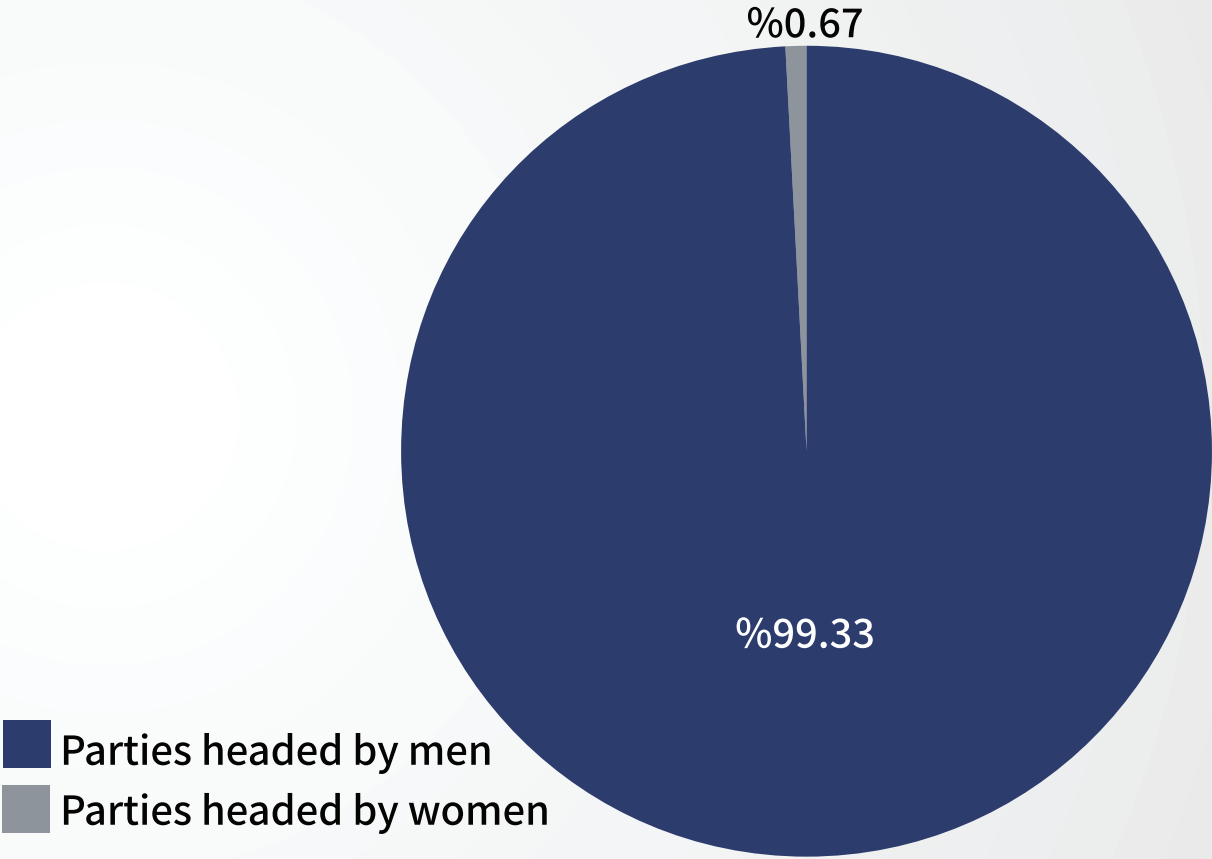
Analysis of the results shows that 0% of the Arab women served as mayors both in 2018 and in 2024. Moreover, in 2024 1.5% of all members of Arab local councils are women compared to 2% in 2018. There is no need to elaborate on the conclusion from the election outcomes that Arab women are not adequately and properly represented in municipal politics. This low representation is a function

<sup>25</sup> The Knesset Research and Information Center, Equal Representation for Women in Local Government – Collected Data following the 2018 Local Elections, 2018 (Henceforth RIC - Equal Representation for Women in Local Government, 2018).

<sup>26</sup> Abu Oksa Daoud, Political Representation of Palestinian Women in Local Government. The Palestinian Magazine of Research. Pages 125-100. Volume 62) 16). Spring 2005 (Arabic). Henceforth: Abu Oksa Daoud, Political Representation of Palestinian Women in Local Government).

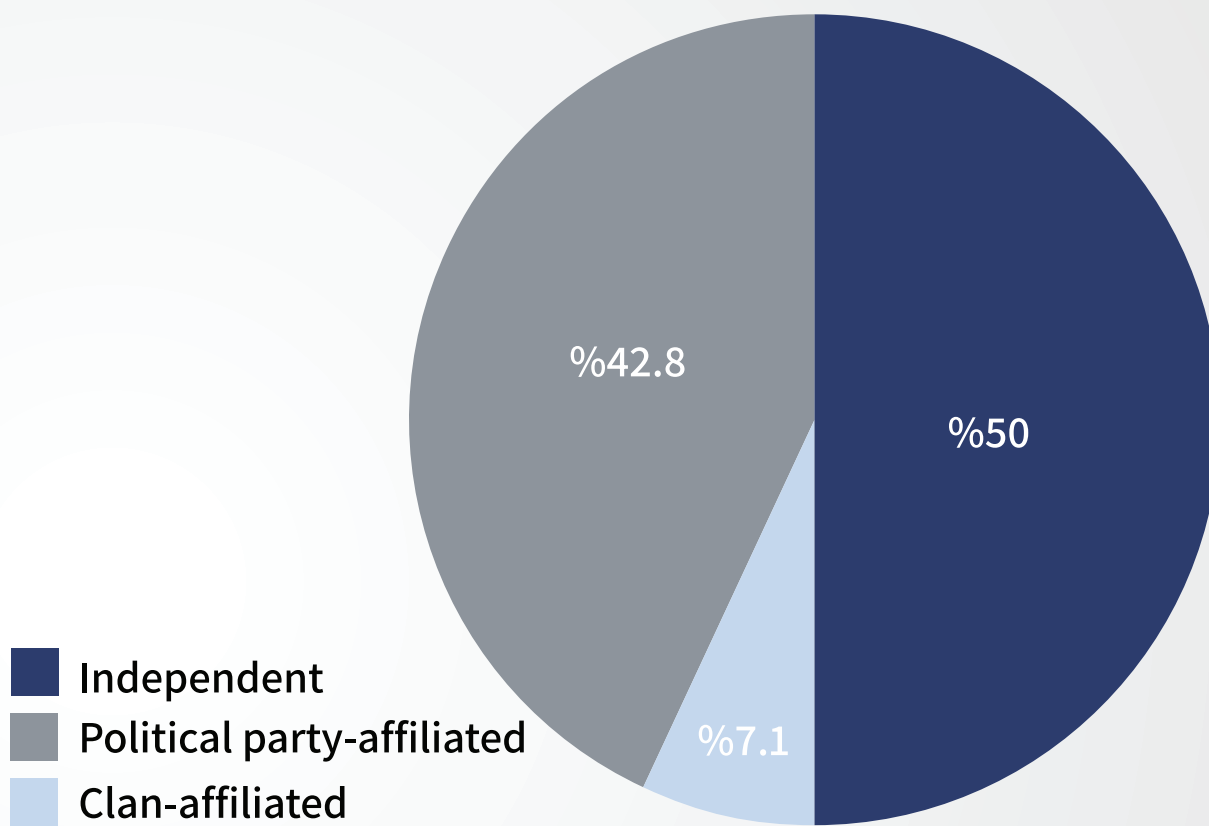
of very low candidacy rates as well as clan considerations that do not benefit the Arab women. The data show that just 6 of 892 parties were headed by Arab women, of which 50% were political parties and 50% were independent.

**Figure 6: Gender identity - heads of the parties running for local houses of representatives 2024**



A more profound examination of the women candidates who achieved representation in local houses of representatives in Arab local authorities reflects three main spheres of influence: political parties, independent parties and clan-affiliated parties. It is evident that the clan-affiliated parties block or hinder women's entrance to the political sphere, reflecting their undemocratic goals and essence which systematically exclude women. A sampling of the internal makeup of the clan-affiliated parties shows a small presence of women among the candidates, and if they are even in these parties they are mainly located in unrealistic places. According to the figure, 50% of the women who achieved political representation are from independent parties, 43% from political parties, and 7% from local clan-affiliated parties. Thus, the parties that propell women to leadership positions and support them are mainly national political parties or independent initiatives on behalf of women and young people protesting and making a statement against the prevalent trends in political organization in the Arab localities.

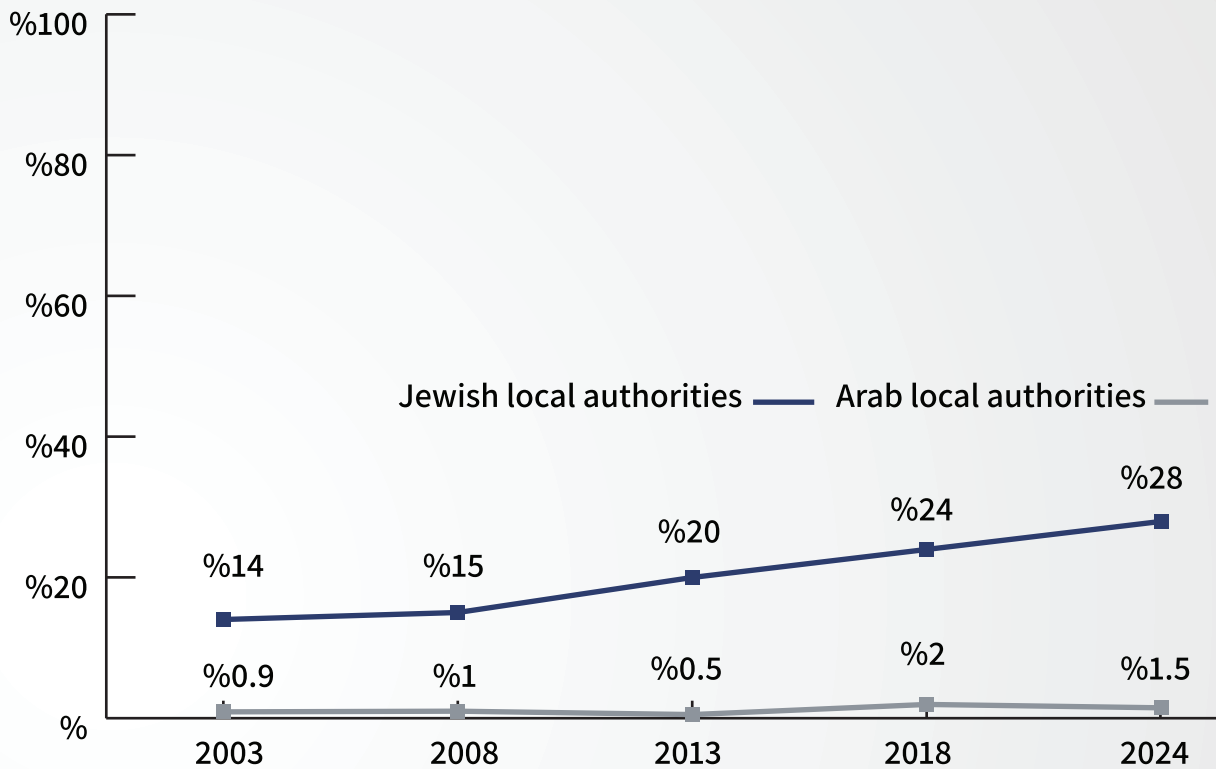
Figure 7: Political background – women represented in Arab local authorities 2024



Accordingly, it can be deduced that the institutional incentives granted to parties elected that commit to representation of women do not alter the power balance and the situation in the Arab localities, and do not greatly contribute to promoting women to positions of leadership.<sup>27</sup> We can see few parties in which women are represented, a minority of women candidates, a minority of parties headed by women, and consequently small and limited representation of women in local houses of representatives. Representation of women in local government is important, not just ethically. While the principle of representation conforms with democratic values and encourages women to meaningfully enter the public sphere, it may contribute to promoting a policy sensitive to the particular needs of women and provide responses to these needs

<sup>27</sup> This refers to Amendment no.12 to the Local Authorities Law (Funding of Elections) (henceforth: Amendment no. 12). This amendment provides increased funding by the state to parties if at least one-third of its members are women at the qualifying time. According to the data, it is extremely doubtful whether this amendment has a direct influence on political representation of women in the Arab local authorities.

**Figure 8: Gender representation in local authority councils in Israel by population group 2003-2024**

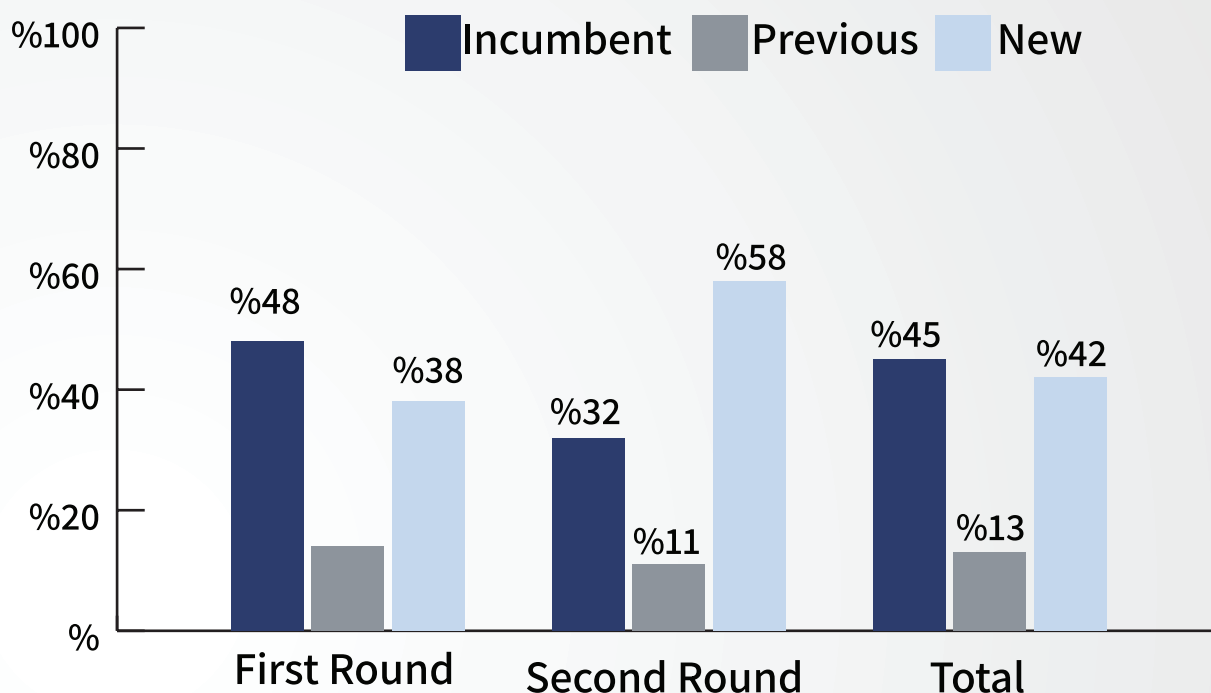


There is a large gap in representation of women in councils in Arab local authorities compared to Jewish ones, and this gap is growing over time. In 2003, political representation of women in Arab local authorities was under 1% compared with 14% in Jewish local authorities (a 13% difference to the advantage of Jewish authorities). In contrast, in 2024 women’s representation in Jewish local authorities was 27.5% compared with 1.5% in Arab local authorities (a 26% difference to the advantage of Jewish authorities). Political representation for women is low in both the Jewish and Arab local authorities but the situation in Arab authorities begs discussion and special intervention measures to increase representation for women and reflect their unique needs in the daily work of local authorities.

## ➤➤ Continuity or changes in government

The events of October 7, 2023 and the government’s decision to postpone municipal elections from late October 2023 to late February 2024 fatefully impacted public priorities, competition and the campaign atmosphere for local government elections in Israel, particularly in Arab localities. Delaying elections was a lifeline in some localities for certain candidates, while in others it tangibly harmed other candidates.

**Figure 9: Continuity, contiguity and change among mayors of Arab local authorities**



According to figure 9, in 45% of the Arab localities, the incumbent mayors managed to secure an additional term and continue to serve in their position as mayor. In comparison, 55% of elected mayors are new and have therefore replaced incumbent mayors. Of the newly elected mayors, 13% served in this position previously and 42% are new to the position. This means some candidates made a “comeback” and thereby challenged incumbent heads of local authorities.

During the first round of elections, incumbent heads of local authorities managed to stay in office for another term despite the competition. In 36% of localities, new candidates were elected and incumbent mayors lost the elections or chose not to participate. In addition, in 14% of the localities it seems that previous heads returned to serve in this position after being elected. It is also evident that in half of the localities there is continuity in the leadership of local authorities.

It is noteworthy that in the 2018 elections, 51% of the mayors elected were new while 49% continued for another term, after serving a term which began in 2013. In 2018 no analysis was performed regarding the identity of the mayors reelected for the position. The greatest change took place during the 2008 elections, when just 31% of incumbent heads managed to stay in office, compared with 69% new heads. The main reason for the minor differences in the 2024 elections is the war - delaying elections from October 2023 to February 2024 and the war’s fateful implications on the public’s positions.

Figure 10: The identity of mayors who won the elections 2018-2024

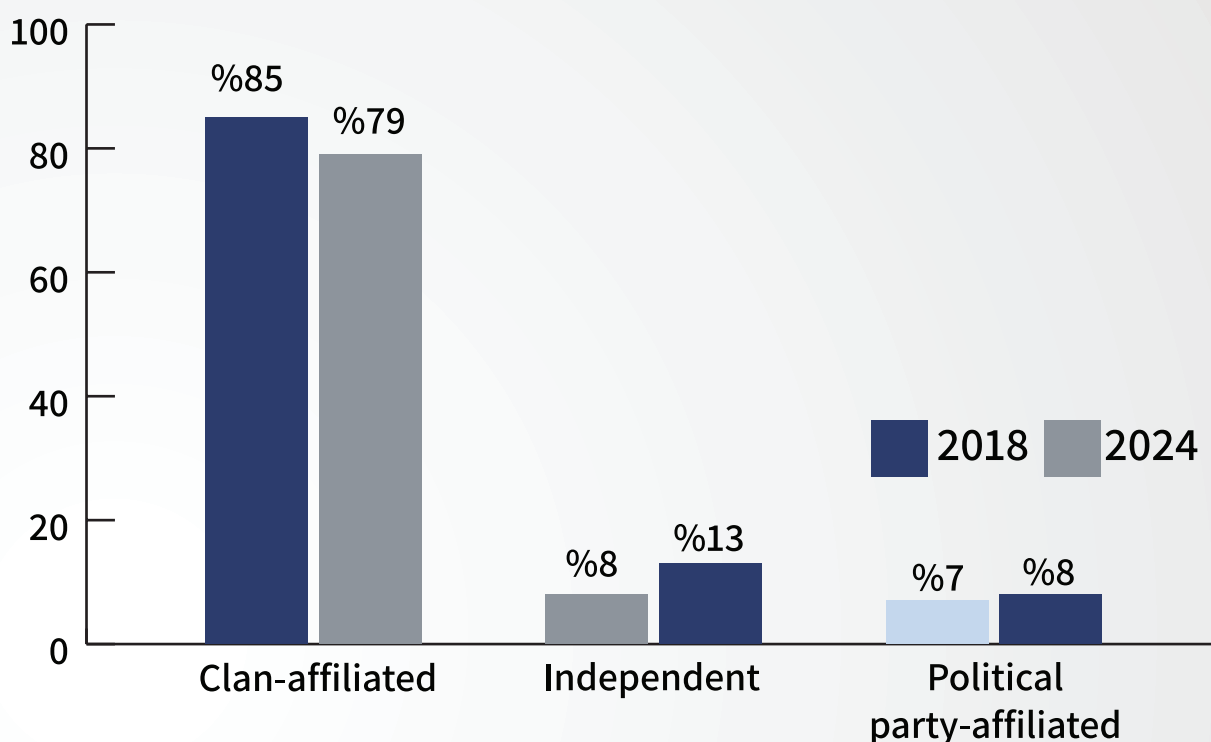


Figure 10 demonstrates that mayors who won the elections belong mainly to clan frameworks. As noted, they were chosen by a certain clan in a localities or through a clan arrangement and bloc and received support from these social and community organizations. The rate of mayors supported by clans during the 2024 elections was 85% compared with 79% during the previous elections in 2018. At the same time, mayors who won and were selected by party mechanisms and supported by national political institutions were 8% compared with 13% during the 2018 elections. There was a meaningful decrease in the number of mayors who belong to Hadash, a party that experienced a blow during the last election. Mayors who are no affiliated with clans or national political parties who ran independently and based on their personal decision via local parties are also present. Independent mayors challenge both clan and political party structures and were 7% in the current election compared with 8% during the previous election in 2018.

## ➤➤ Mixed cities

An estimated 8% (approximately) of the Arab citizens live in mixed cities. A mixed city is an urban area where groups of different ethnicities or religions reside. In the Israeli context, a mixed city is defined as a city in which Jewish and Arab populations reside together. These cities have an overwhelming majority of Jewish residents and a distinct minority of Arab residents. Israeli law makes no special reference to mixed cities.

The mixed cities are an arena for daily encounters between the Jewish and Arab population. The relationships between these groups have changed and developed and this has influenced their organizing patterns and political power. Analysis of the 2024 election results reflects that 26 Arabs are represented on mixed-city councils. Their rate and number declined from 28 in 2018. The increase

that occurred in 2013-2018 can be explained by the establishment of the Joint List Party and the political atmosphere in support of unity and increasing Arabs' power in all public spheres. The decrease this year can be explained by several reasons: 1) The war and its consequent political atmosphere, which impacted morale and political motivation among the citizenry; 2) A decrease in voter turnout as a result of the social-economic situation Arabs experience in mixed cities and the gradual change in their lifestyle conditions; 3) The Joint List disbanded; 4) The political atmosphere resulting from Operation Guardian of the Walls in 2021; 5) The rise of an ultra- right wing government that sponsors what is known as Torah Nucleus. Since 202, tension, fear and even hostility are characteristic in the spaces of mixed cities.

**Table 5: Arab representation in councils in mixed cities 2013-2024**

City	2013	2018	2024
Haifa	3	2	4
Acre	5	5	5
Lod	4	6	4
Ma'alot-Tarshiha	3	4	4
Ramle	4	4	4
Tel Aviv Jaffa	1	2	1
Nof Hagalil	3	3	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>26</b>

Analysis of the election outcomes according to the representatives and parties' political background reflects that over half of the Arab representatives are independent (55%) while 45% are candidates on behalf of a political party, or alliances between political parties and independent parties and urban publics. It is evident that in most mixed cities, clans do not carry political weight and do not play a significant role in voter turnout and voting patterns. However, in a few cases the clan background has an electoral influence over assigning candidates in various parties. Thus it can be concluded that the politics in the mixed cities is more political and national than clan and community-based.

**Table 6: The identity of Arab public representatives in mixed-city councils 2024**

City	Affiliated with a political party	Independent
Haifa	3	1
Acre	3	2
Lod	0	4
Ma'alot-Tarshiha	0	4
Ramle	3	1
Tel Aviv Jaffa	1	0
Nof Hagalil	2	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>12(45%)</b>	<b>14(55%)</b>

Analyzing the political weight of the Arab representatives in the mixed cities shows that 17% of all representatives in the mixed cities are Arabs, a decrease compared to one-fifth in the previous elections. This decrease will of course impact the division of portfolios, areas of responsibility, authority and power positions Arabs can receive as part of coalition agreements.

**Table 7: Representation of Arabs in mixed-city councils**

City	Arabs	Jews
Haifa	4	31
Acre	5	17
Lod	4	19
Ma'alot-Tarshiha	4	15
Ramle	4	19
Tel Aviv Jaffa	1	31
Nof Hagalil	4	17
<b>Total</b>	<b>26(17%)</b>	<b>149</b>

An analysis of the Arab representatives by gender reflects greater representation for women in the mixed cities than in Arab local authorities. The election results show that 19% of all Arab representatives in the mixed cities are women, compared with 81% men. Women are just 1.5% of the representatives in Arab local authorities, compared to 27.5% in Jewish local authorities. We note that representation for women increased from 11% in the 2018 elections in the mixed cities. This matter of representation for Arab women can be explained by the fact that local politics in the mixed cities are founded on political and national values, while in Arab local authorities local politics are based on primordial and clan values. As stated previously, clans exclude the women and do not enable them to progress in the public sphere, while political parties succeed in promoting women to the fore and to leadership positions in the public sphere, even though it does so less than expected.

**Table 8: Gender identity of Arab public representatives in mixed-city councils 2024**

City	Women	Men	Total
Haifa	1	3	4
Acre	1	4	5
Lod	1	3	4
Ma'alot-Tarshiha	0	4	4
Ramle	1	3	4
Tel Aviv Jaffa	0	1	1
Nof Hagalil	1	3	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>26</b>





# Discussion and conclusions

## ➤➤ High priority elections

The decline in the public's faith in the political and institutional mechanisms decreases political participation, particularly voting in national and local elections. While the declining voter turnout among the Arab citizens is more obvious in Knesset elections, in local elections it is slow and nearly imperceptible. Arab local politics are characteristically competitive and include various and diverse actors, averaging four mayoral candidates per post and one party competing over every seat in the local house of representatives (see data above). This competition increases voter turnout, along with other things. One reason this arena is so important for the Arab public is that elections directly affect Arab citizens' everyday life; Arab citizens feel they can influence the municipal arena, less so in the national arena. These result in high voter turnout both compared to the Jewish local authorities (see figure above) and when compared to Arab voter turnout in national elections. A high voter turnout reflects higher levels of perceived legitimacy of the institutions and leaders, indicating how representative government institutions are (there is more presence of social categories in the municipal community) and demonstrates higher levels of faith in public representatives and professional ranks to bring change to the lives of residents.

As a result of this competitiveness, elections are not decided during the first round and in many localities runoff elections are held for the two candidates who won the greatest number of votes during the first round. Competition among the various political forces, evident in the large number of mayoral candidates coupled with the large number of parties competing for representation in the local council challenges to forming and managing local coalitions. Competition also challenges an authority's general ability to function, its relationship with the residents and its ability to govern and carry out decisions. It also invites blackmail, unprofessional appointments and corruption.

## ➤➤ The national and the local

Local elections have exposed the power of the primordial structures and their special ability to organize and recruit electoral support. Clan structures adapt to new circumstances, free of the bonds of party ideology. They reinvent themselves in any situation and adopt innovations occurring outside the clan system in order to continue to stay relevant for the public. Elections in general, not just their results, have called attention to the weakness political parties and the national structures are experiencing. This weakness is expressed in various ways, evident during the early stages of campaign, not just at the stages of competition and victory. It is noteworthy that very few candidates and local parties affiliated with

national parties participated in the elections. Furthermore, candidates who belong to specific parties attempt to run independently and conceal their affiliation to national parties in order to increase their chances of being elected. This strategy is designed to avoid the negative reputation parties have in Arab society, and the lack of faith in them during the past years.

National parties' weakness is also demonstrated during the post-campaign stage. Meaning, after running for office, candidates affiliated with national parties adopted the local practices and forged alliances and agreements with clan and group-based organizations. Concurrently, they blurred the differences between themselves and the other actors in the local arena. The small number of the localities where national parties competed coupled with the agreements reached reflects the ideological and political crisis national parties are experiencing, their declining ability to recruit voters and their low relevancy in public opinion. Finally, it is difficult to ignore that election results reflect the decrease in national parties' political representation of at the level of elected mayors and council members.

The parties' weakness and sparse representation has fateful implications on the composition of the National Committee for Heads of Arab Local Authorities, its function, the identity of its chair, its impact on national politics and its strategies for operating vis-à-vis government offices. It also influences the delicate relationship between the National Committee for Heads of Arab Local Authorities and the High Follow-Up Committee for Arab Affairs. If the Committee does not include mayors affiliated with national parties or independent-professional candidates, the council's power over national politics will diminish, as will its ability to participate in formulating government resolutions for Arab society. It will affect its pragmatism, and will contribute to the effort to separate the National Committee for Heads of Arab Local Authorities and the High Follow-Up Committee for Arab Affairs

## **Accountability: Residents, local leadership and function**

Mayors who were involved in the National Committee for Heads of Arab Local Authorities, systematically worked to formulate and implement government resolutions 922, 549, 1279 and 550 and who functioned well at the local level received a vote of confidence to serve another term. Some were unrivaled, yet if they did face competition they still managed to win during the first round of elections. We interpret this data as reflecting that the mayors' work in the national arena influences their power and status in their own locality, and residents regard them as national - not just local - leaders.

The local arena is very dynamic. Tepid trust in and little satisfaction with the way the local leadership functions caused changes systemwide. Over half of the mayors were replaced, other candidates elected in their place.

Simultaneously, mayors who did not fulfill their constituents' expectations and did not succeed in promoting a system of high-quality urban services were defeated in elections. The defeat of incumbent mayors revealed the residents' ability to punish public representatives in the ballot box and elect new figures to lead their localities. In most of the Arab localities, incumbent mayors ran for an additional term. Many of them did not manage to stay in power, and this demonstrates that the public desires change and a new local leadership. One of the



mediating factors that tempered the urge and desire for change was the outbreak of war and the decision to delay elections. The absence of a public political campaign given the war worked to the advantage of the incumbent mayors and to the disadvantage of their competition. This is substantiated by the turnover rates for mayors and support rates for candidates during the first round of elections.

Examining the election results, particularly the runoff elections, reflects a relative decline in status of clans broadly speaking, and specifically a decline in clan heads and clans' authority. Their ability to secure consensus and unity among the clan weakened. Internal and external positions of power outflanked clans and weakened their status and their electoral and organizational power. In some of the cases, we began identifying internal fissures and competition that led to division. This was followed by several candidates from a given clan competing rather than one, weakening the clan's ability to take power. Moreover, the largest clans in the Arab localities cannot secure their victory on their own and so historical alliances were revisited in a systematic effort to search for additional players to be able to win the elections. The local arena is experiencing contradictory trends: Clans are still the strongest and most dominant force in the Arab localities, but they are fracturing and beginning to implode. The status of clans, traditional functions and ability to ensure adherence among their membership are all declining.



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