

The Arab Citizens in Israel: Current Trends According to Recent Opinion Polls

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Introduction

The Arab citizens in Israel today comprise approximately 20 percent of the state's population. There are 1.38 million Arab citizens, as well as 300,000 inhabitants of East Jerusalem who are Israeli permanent residents, not citizens. While there are many public opinion polls and in-depth studies that examine the Israeli Jewish population, there is a dearth of public opinion polls investigating the attitudes of Arab citizens. The only poll that has focused on the Arab community in Israel in a systematic way over the last decade is the annual Index of Arab-Jewish Relations in Israel, conducted by the University of Haifa and the Israel Democracy Institute and overseen by Prof. Sammy Smooha. Other polls include Arab respondents and touch on issues pertaining to the Arab population, but do not focus exclusively on the Arab community in a systematic way. For this reason, the polls conducted by the Statnet statistical research institute in December 2014 and February and March 2015 represent an important contribution.¹ They shed light on an area that has not received sufficient critical attention and present a number of new findings, among them on questions that were

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not raised in previous polls, such as the attitudes toward terror attacks against Israeli targets and the status of the Temple Mount/al-Aqsa Mosque.

The importance of public opinion polls as a tool for analysis of current trends among the Arab minority and the implications of the findings for Israeli national security should not be underestimated. The field of the Arab minority in Israel, its relations with the Jewish majority against the backdrop of the Arab-Israeli conflict, and the prevailing trends within this community and their repercussions for national security has been neglected too long. This article will present the results of the polls, analyze them, and offer policy recommendations.

Statnet Poll, December 2014

In December 2014 Statnet conducted a comprehensive poll of the Arabs in Israel on several issues, including state and society, terror, and identity. The poll was conducted in Arabic by telephone and included approximately 700 respondents.

The poll highlights a number of trends with regard to the Arab attitudes toward Israel and Israeli society. Overall, the findings are largely in line with results of previous studies. When asked under which type of government they would rather live, 77 percent of the respondents said an Israeli government, and 23 percent said Palestinian government (figures 1 and 2). These results indicate that the vast majority of the community sees itself as a part of Israeli society. Smooha explains that “the Arabs in Israel over the past 65 years have become stakeholders in Israeli society and have a vested interest in being part of Israel and living here.”²

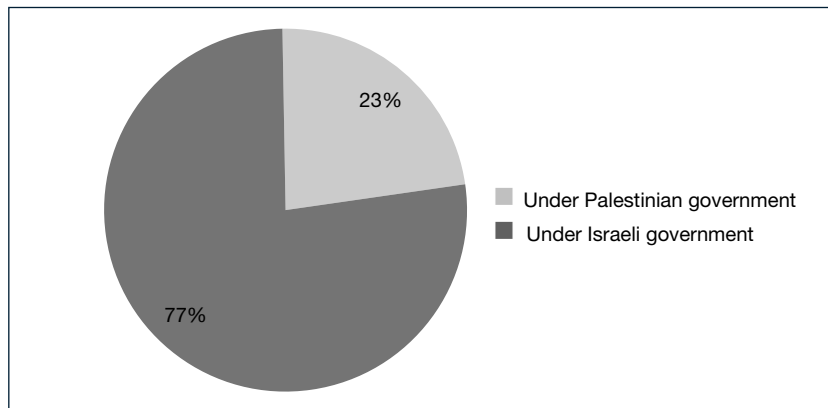


Figure 1. Preferred Government of Arab Citizens, December 2014

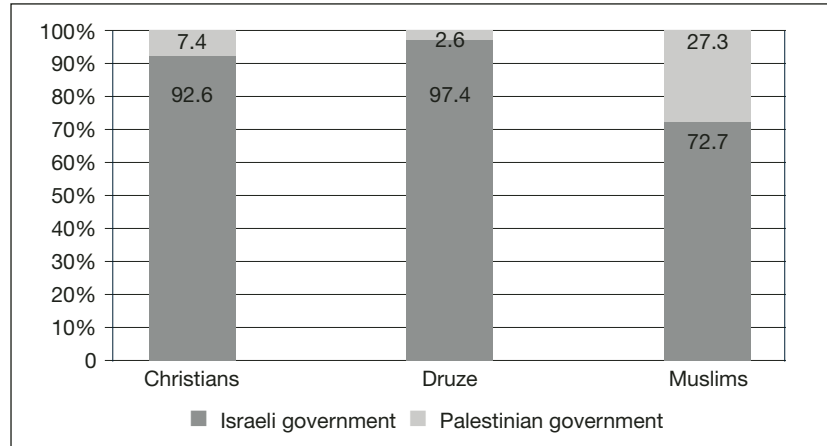


Figure 2. Preferred Government of Arab Citizens, December 2014: Breakdown

Nevertheless, the Statnet poll shows a genuine feeling of discrimination among the Arab community within Israel. Thirty-nine percent of respondents believe there is discrimination in Israeli institutions, and 53 percent believe there is only partial equality. Only 9 percent believe Israeli institutions are completely equal and fair (figure 3). These findings confirm previous studies (table 1). The Index of Arab-Jewish Relations in Israel 2012 showed that 70.5 percent of Arabs believe the government treats Arabs as second class citizens.³ A 2011 Brookings poll found that only 3 percent of Arabs said there was full equality, 57 percent said there was legal equality but institutional and social discrimination, and 36 percent said there was apartheid. In addition to institutionalized discrimination, Arab citizens are also living under the impression that Israeli Jewish society espouses racist attitudes toward Arabs.⁴ The large majority of respondents (86 percent) believe that Israeli society is moderately racist or very racist toward Arabs, while 14 percent believe that there is only a small amount of racism against Arabs. These results are largely in line with the results of previous polls. The 2007 Konrad Adenauer Program for Jewish-Arab Cooperation at the Moshe Dayan Center at Tel Aviv University poll found that 75 percent of respondents felt there was discrimination on a national, economic, social, and cultural level.⁵

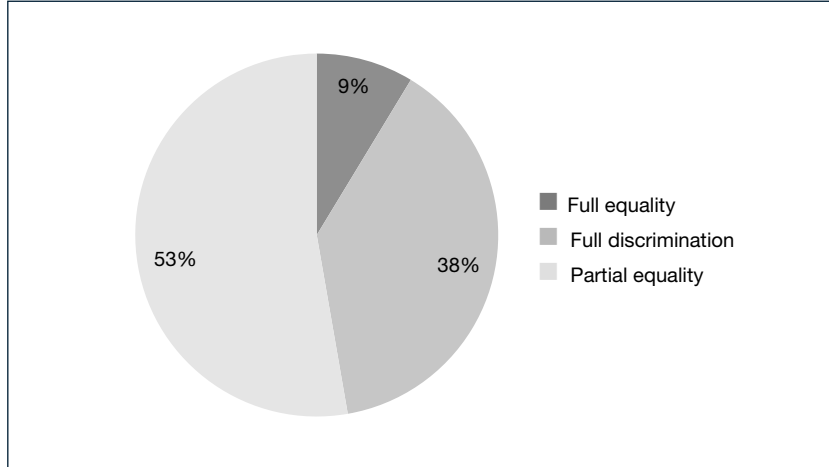


Figure 3. Sense of Equality among the Arab Community, December 2014

Table 1. Beliefs on Israel’s Attitudes towards Arab Citizens (percent)

Poll	Institutional/General Discrimination	Complete Equality
Statnet	39	9
Adenauer Program	75	
Arab-Jewish Relations Index	70.5	
Brookings	57	3

The poll also presented attitudes towards terror attacks. Most respondents (70 percent) condemned the fall 2014 terror attacks in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, but 30 percent thought Israeli policies bore responsibility for the attacks (figures 4 and 5). There was also an interesting correlation between education level and the tendency to blame Israel, with more respondents with higher education casting the blame on Israel. In the same context, a large majority of respondents (84 percent) were convinced that Israel was acting with the intention of harming the historic status quo on the Temple Mount (al-Haram al-Sharif, or al-Aqsa Mosque) in Jerusalem, as some terror attacks and violent demonstrations occurred against the background of the growing tensions around this holy site. Still, 75 percent believed that Arab leaders should condemn the attacks, and only 14 percent believed that they should not. The questions on terror attacks are particularly noteworthy, as previous polls among the Arab population in Israel had avoided this topic.

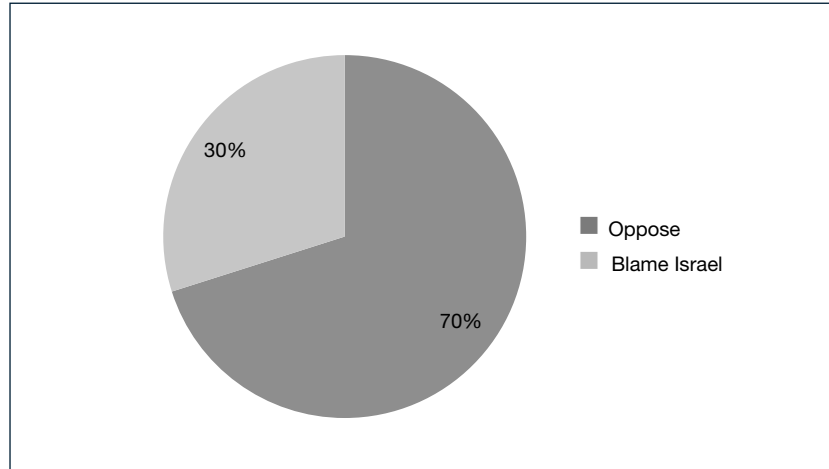


Figure 4. Attitudes of Arabs to Terrorist Attacks, December 2014

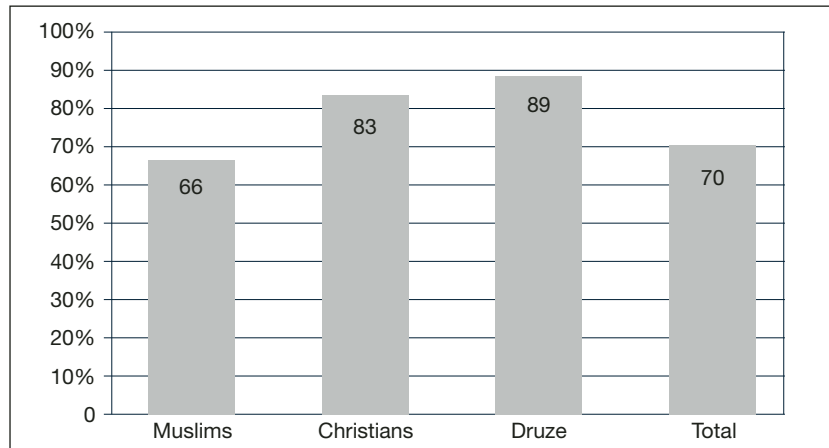


Figure 5. Attitudes of Arabs Opposed to Terrorist Attacks, December 2014: Breakdown

Throughout the years research about Arabs in Israel has painted a picture of a torn society, with an identity split between “Israelization” on the one hand and “Palestinization” on the other. The Statnet poll reinforces the notion that the identities of the Arab community are multifaceted. Thirty-three percent of respondents did not identify as either Israeli or Palestinian, 31 percent identified as Palestinian, 30 percent identified as Israeli, and 7 percent identified as both Israeli and Palestinian. These results

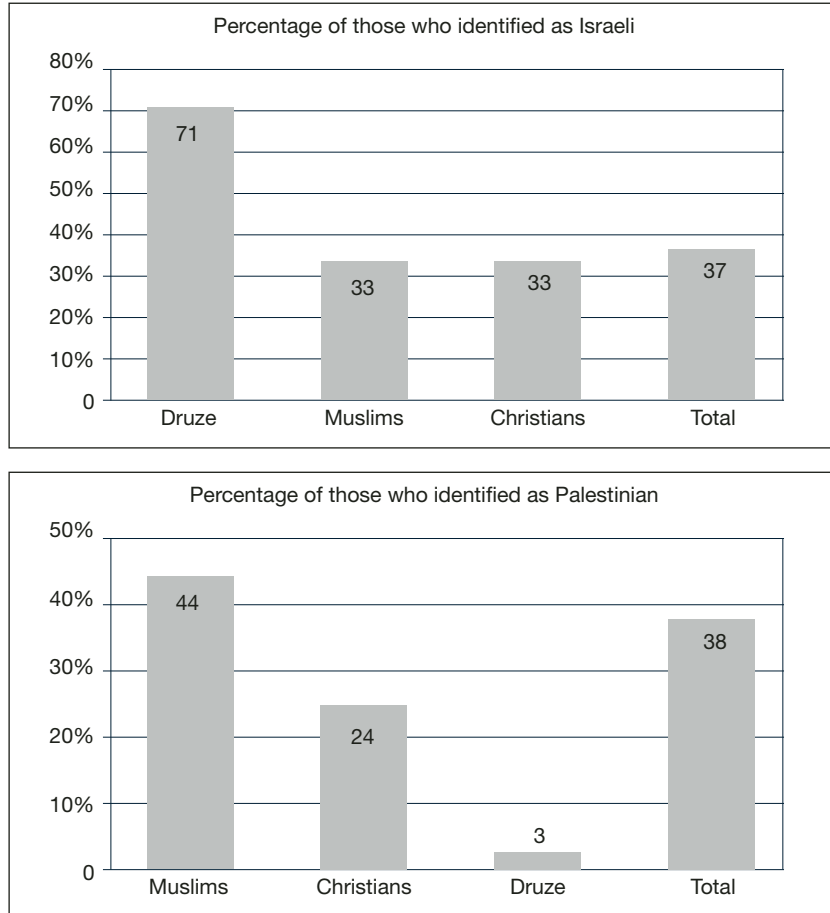


Figure 6. Self-Identification in the Arab Community, December 2014

suggest a complex, multi-faceted divided identity with many nuances and sub-identities. In comparison, the 2010 Brookings poll found that 22 percent felt the Palestinian element was the most important aspect of their identity, 12 percent said Israeli, 36 percent said Arab, and 19 percent said Muslim (table 2).⁶ The Index of Arab-Jewish Relations in Israel found that the number of respondents listing “Israeli” as their most important identity dropped from around 30 percent in 2003 to 12 percent in 2013.⁷

Table 2. Main Identities among the Arab citizens, Comparative Findings (percent)

Poll	Palestinian (most important)	Israeli (most important)
Statnet	31	30
Brookings	22	12

Another trend evident in the results of the Statnet poll is the noticeable difference in attitudes among Arabs themselves, or Arabic speaking citizens of various religious communities or sects. The most common and best known gap is between the Druze and the rest of the Arabic speaking community in Israel. While 71 percent of Druze identified as Israeli, only 33 percent of Christians and Muslims identified as Israeli (figure 6). On the issue of the Temple Mount there were likewise sectarian differences: 90 percent of Muslim Arabs, and – strikingly – 66 percent of Christian Arabs, and even 54 percent of Druze believe that Israel is acting to jeopardize the Temple Mount status quo. At the same time, while 47 percent of Muslims believed there was racism and 42 percent believed there was institutionalized discrimination, only 25 percent of Christians and 22 percent of Druze believed there was racism, and 31 percent of Christians and 19 percent of Druze believed there was institutionalized discrimination (table 3 and figure 7). These results reaffirm again that the Druze, as a community, have a much stronger attachment to Israeli identity, and that not only the Druze but also the Christians tend to have a more positive attitude toward the Israeli state and society than Muslims.

Table 3. Religious and Sectarian Attitudes, Statnet Poll, 2014 (percent)

Sector	Identify as Israeli	Israel harms Temple Mount	See Israel as racist	Believe there is discrimination in Israel
Druze	71	54	22	19
Muslim	33	90	47	42
Christian	33	66	25	31

These findings reaffirm the 2010 Brookings poll, which showed that among the Druze population, the most important identity was Druze (39 percent), followed by Israeli (31 percent), Arab (16 percent), and Palestinian (8 percent).⁸ The Brookings results imply that there is a correlation between religious and sectarian identities and attitudes toward the state. Druze respondents ranked Israeli identity the highest, as in the Statnet poll. In the Brookings poll, the Christians ranked Arab identity as most important

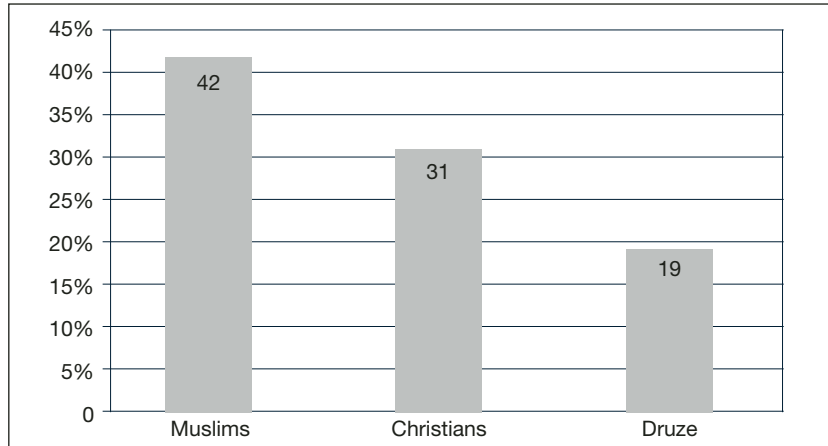


Figure 7. Sense of Institutional Discrimination among Arabs, December 2014

(53 percent), followed by Palestinian identity (15 percent), Israeli identity (12 percent), and Christian identity (9 percent). The Muslim community also ranked Arab identity highest (34 percent), followed by Muslim identity (27 percent), Palestinian identity (24 percent), and Israeli identity (10 percent). Significantly, Muslims ranked Palestinian identity higher than did Christians, as in the Statnet poll. The Statnet findings confirm results of previous studies, and show that there is a correlation between religious and sectarian affiliation and attitudes towards the Israeli state, Arab identity, and Palestinian identity.

Statnet Polls, February and March 2015

In advance of the national elections, Statnet conducted two additional polls. With 825,000 Arab citizens in Israel registered as voters, the Arab vote seemed a substantial factor in the overall March 17, 2015 elections. The polls' 500 respondents comprised a representative sample of the different geographical regions, religions, and family ties of the Arab community – as often whole families vote for the same party. The February 18, 2015 poll estimated, based on the two questions of whether the respondents voted in 2013 and whether they plan to vote in 2015, that the voter participation rate would be 62.4 percent (as opposed to 56 percent in 2013). In the poll of March 14, 2015, the estimation of the voter participation rate was 63.4 percent (very near the actual percentage of Arab voting in the elections). In addition, among those who said that they did not vote in the past but

would vote in 2015 or are undecided, 58 percent cited the formation of the Joint List as their reason for voting.

The polls also presented substantive results regarding the voting preferences (figure 8). The majority of respondents (78 percent in February, 81.4 percent in March) said they planned to vote for the Joint List (comprising Hadash, Balad, Ta'al, and Ra'am), followed by the Zionist Camp (6.5 percent in February, 4.4 percent in March), Meretz (5 percent in February, 3 percent in March), and Likud (2.8 percent in February, 2.7 percent in March). In the February poll this translated into 12.4 mandates for the Joint List, 1.1 mandates for the Zionist camp, and 0.8 mandates for Meretz, while in March 14 poll the forecast was for 13.6 mandates for the Joint List. The results suggest that Jewish parties stood to receive a total of 3.3 mandates from Arab votes. The actual voting results showed a voter turnout of 63.5 percent, slightly higher than the poll predicted, and that 82.4 percent of Arab citizens voted for the Joint List, 4.9 percent voted for the Zionist Camp, 2.6 percent for Meretz, and 1.5 percent for Likud (table 4).⁹

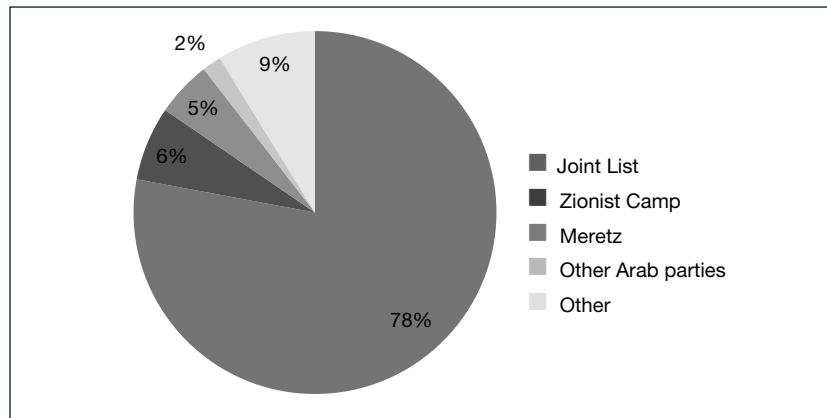


Figure 8. Voter Preferences in the Arab Community for the 20th Knesset, without the undecided, February 18, 2015

Table 4. Voting Patterns, 2015 (percent)

	Joint List	Zionist Camp	Meretz	Likud
Forecasted 1 month prior to the election	78	6.5	5	2.8
Forecasted 3 days prior to the election	81.4	4.4	3	2.7
Actual Results	82.4	4.9	2.6	1.5

The majority of voters (58 percent) said that they wanted their party to recommend Isaac Herzog to form a coalition – a telling finding, given the fact that in recent elections Arab parties abstained from recommending a Jewish candidate to form the coalition. Only 7 percent wanted their party to recommend Netanyahu (figures 9 and 10). In addition, 64 percent of respondents wanted the Joint List to be part of the coalition – an unprecedented finding given the declaration by the leaders of the Joint List that they would not join any coalition (but might support it from the outside). Twenty-eight percent even said they supported being a part of any coalition, 30 percent supported being part of a government only with Herzog as Prime Minister, and 3 percent said they wanted the Joint List to be a part of a government with Netanyahu as Prime Minister. These findings suggest strong support for the Joint List, as expected, but also for Herzog as Prime Minister. Given the December findings regarding institutionalized discrimination and confidence in the government, these recommendations are not surprising.

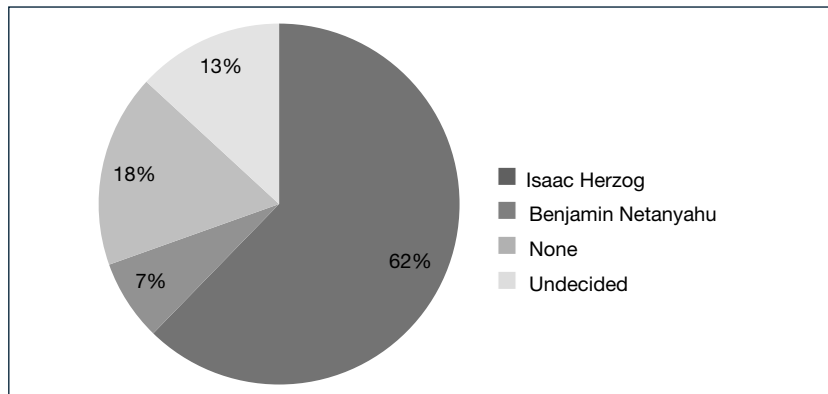


Figure 9. Arab Voter Recommendations for Prime Minister, February 18, 2015

The February 2015 poll reinforces the findings of the December 2014 poll and other surveys in regard to the stark difference in the voting patterns of members of different religious communities, their trust in institutions, and the importance they attach to various issues. As in the 2014 poll, the 2015 poll found that there are notable differences between the religious groups within the Arab community. The highest voting participation rate was forecasted for the Muslim population (63.7 percent), followed by Christians (60.6 percent) and the Druze (56.9 percent). In addition to the difference

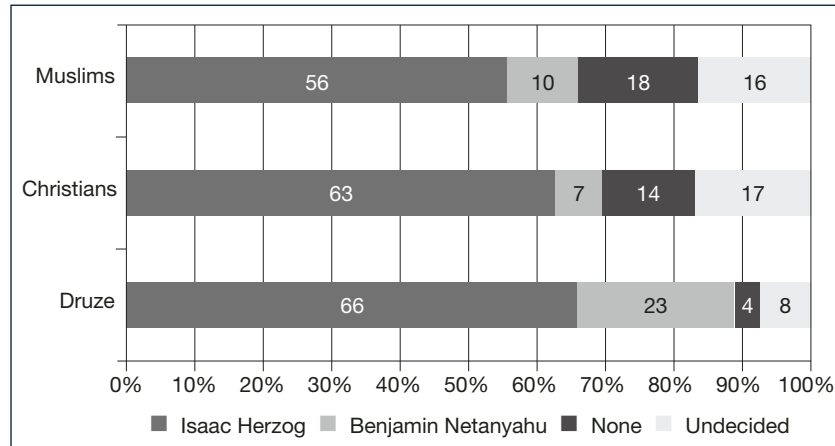


Figure 10. Arab Voter Recommendations for Prime Minister, February 18, 2015: Breakdown

in the number of people intending to vote, there is also a difference in the voting choices between the different religious groups. While 77 percent of Muslim Arabs said they would vote for the Joint List, 58 percent of Christians and only 15 percent of Druze intended their vote for the Joint List. While 33 percent of Druze said they would vote for Jewish parties, only 4-6 percent of Muslims and 8-15 percent of Christians were expected to vote for Jewish parties. Again, these differences likely arise from the different levels of integration and engagement with the Jewish population.

In terms of confidence in institutions, 48 percent of respondents believed that Arab MKs worked very little or little to promote the interests of the Arab community. This statistic indicates great dissatisfaction with the representatives. When asked what is more important for the Israeli Arab community, 70 percent said that improving the economic status of Arabs in Israel was most important, while only 30 percent said that solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was most important. These statistics are very much in line with the attitudes of Israeli Jewish citizens, most of whom place economic concerns over the peace process as a voting consideration. Thus, for example, a January 2015 election poll conducted by Bizportal found that 36.1 percent of the Jewish population listed the cost of living as the most important issue in the 2015 campaign, while only 13.1 percent said that the Israeli-Palestinian peace process was the most important.

In conclusion, the February 2015 poll showed large support for the Joint List, the center left parties, and Herzog as Prime Minister, and further

strengthens the findings of previous polls in regard to religious differences, national priorities, and confidence in the government and the establishment.

Analysis of Findings

The notable differences in electoral preferences, identity, and ideology between religious and sectarian groups can be attributed to several factors. Druze are much more integrated into Jewish society as a whole and come into contact with more Jews mainly due to the mandatory military service, which was introduced in 1956 as a result of the close ties between members of the Druze community and Jews since the British Mandate period. This integration is evident, as shown in the polls, in terms of self-identity, identification with the Jewish state, and political inclinations, i.e., the firm support of Zionist parties. The differences in opinion between Muslims and Druze were also evident in the November 2014 riots in the village of Abu Snan. The death of 22-year old Khayr al-Din Hamdan, shot to death in the Galilee Arab village of Kafr Kana by an Israeli Police special patrol squad, sparked a series of demonstrations in which Arab citizens waved Palestinian flags and checkered keffiyes (known as a Palestinian symbol); as a result, clashes erupted in Abu Snan's high school between pro-Palestinian Muslim students and pro-Zionist Druze students, who are about to be inducted to the IDF.¹⁰

Christians have likewise shown greater tendency than Muslims to support Zionist parties, even though their vast majority (some 70 percent) still supported the Joint List in the last elections. Christians and Druze also reported feeling less discrimination than Muslims, and these two findings may very well be linked. Some Christians feel alienated within the Arab community as Islamization spreads and "Arab" is equated with "Muslim."¹¹ In 2010, 82 percent of Arabs in Israel were Muslims, Christians were 10 percent, and 8 percent were Druze.¹² Christians and Druze are thus minorities within a minority, which may add to their feelings of alienation from the Muslim majority and marginalization as social groups. This in turn may lead to a greater drift toward Jewish society.

It is also important to note the cultural and ideological differences between the three groups. Christians tend to share more cultural norms with secular Jewish society. One example of this is that Christians have legitimized women's employment faster than have Muslim and Druze, and have generally achieved higher education levels and a higher socioeconomic status.¹³ Christian education and socioeconomic levels are, on average,

higher than among Muslims, Druze, and even the Jewish majority. Thus, for example, in 2012, 61 percent of the Christian high school graduates earned matriculation certificates, according to Israeli university requirements, as opposed to 51 percent among Jews, 45 percent among Druze, and 35 percent among Muslims.¹⁴ The differences in culture, demography, socioeconomic status, and other areas are demonstrated by the gaps seen in the polling results.

The polls also portrayed a lack of trust in the Israeli state and the Jewish society. The December 2014 Statnet poll showed that the large majority of respondents believe that Jewish society is racist, and significant numbers believe that Israeli institutions are discriminatory. The reasons for these sentiments are undoubtedly numerous and complex. During Operation Protective Edge, conflicts between citizens showed how much racist sentiment seethes under the surface of Israeli society, when thousands of racist posts, violent assaults, and other attacks against the Arab community occurred, perhaps encouraged by Foreign Minister Avigdor Liberman's call for a boycott of Israeli Arab shops during the war.¹⁵ Similar if not identical trends were espoused by Arab citizens toward Jewish citizens at the same time. The December poll came after these months of intense racism. The poll was also conducted in the aftermath of the national home bill, which aroused severe criticism even among vehement supporters of the Israeli establishment, such as some leaders of the Druze community, and was deemed by respondents as highly discriminatory. Though previous polls indicated similar findings with regard to discrimination, these events may have exacerbated feelings of inequity.

The lack of contact between Jews and Arabs may strengthen the feelings of inequality and discrimination. Though Jews and Arabs meet in public spaces such as malls and hospitals, the groups are largely isolated and live in homogenous communities. The public infrastructure, socioeconomic status, employment, and other opportunities available to Arab communities are far below the standard of Jewish cities. This may explain opinions on inequality as well as the lack of confidence in the ability of Arab MKs to advance the interests of the Arab community, even after the last elections.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The polls show overwhelmingly that the Arabs citizens in Israel, despite their firm belief in the institutional and social discrimination against them, are eager to remain Israeli citizens and be part of the fabric of Israeli society.

Serious handling of the inequality issues, in public resources, occupational opportunities, education, and more, should be considered by policymakers as a way to decrease the sense of inequality that threatens to destabilize Israeli society. While polls only indicate the sentiment of citizens and are not always a completely accurate depiction of the reality on the ground, the large numbers of Arabs who espouse a genuine feeling of discrimination should serve as a warning to Israeli policymakers. In addition, the differences within the Arab community between different religious and sectarian groups emphasize that this is not one cohesive community that should be treated in a unidimensional way. The discrepancy in voting patterns highlights this quite clearly. The Arab community is highly heterogeneous and apparently becoming more so, and therefore the government needs a more nuanced approach that takes into account the different segments of the population and the growing discrepancy between nationality and sectarianism. At the same time, positive trends, such as the condemnation of terror attacks against Jews, should not be ignored.

The Israeli leadership must address these issues in both verbal and practical fashion. Affirmative acts on the ground can demonstrate to the Arab population that the Israeli government and society are bent on full equality and integration of the Arab citizens into many aspects of life within the Israeli society. Moreover, there is a sense of a changing mood within the Arab citizens in Israel. The results of the elections and the emergence of the new leader of the Joint List, Ayman Odeh, and his pragmatic attitudes, seem to provide the Jewish majority and the new government with a possible fresh environment. This should be utilized smartly in order to reinvigorate the relations between the national majority and the national minority in Israel. The first steps must be declaratory, as demonstrated by President Rivlin these past few months, but rhetoric alone will not suffice. A new and different perspective must be taken, one that recognizes the rights and grievances of the Arabs in Israel, and takes concrete long range basic steps to correct the failures of the past. It can and must be achieved, despite – and perhaps because of – the heightened anti-Arab sentiments within large segments of the Jewish population. It is necessary for the stability and wellbeing of Jews and Arabs, who are destined to live together in Israel.

Notes

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- 1 Statnet is a statistical research institute specializing in the Arab community in Israel and operated by Arab statisticians. Established by Yousef Makladeh in 2003, it has gained reputation as a reliable source of polling information for political, academic, business, and research bodies.
- 2 Ariel Ben Solomon, "Israel's Arabs Growing More Extreme in Views on State, Poll Shows," *Jerusalem Post*, June 26, 2013, <http://www.jpost.com/Diplomacy-and-Politics/59-percent-of-Israeli-Arabs-say-intifada-is-justified-317751>.
- 3 Sammy Smooha, *Still Playing by the Rules: Index of Arab-Jewish Relations in Israel 2012*, Israel Democracy Institute and University of Haifa, <http://www.idi.org.il/media/2522696/Arab-Jewish-Index-2012-ENG.pdf>.
- 4 Shibley Telhami, "The 2011 Public Opinion Poll of Jewish and Arab Citizens of Israel," December 1, 2011, Brookings Institution, <http://www.brookings.edu/research/reports/2011/12/01-israel-poll-telhami>.
- 5 "The Peace Index," Israel Democracy Institute and Tel Aviv University, www.peaceindex.org.
- 6 Shibley Telhami. "2010 Israeli Arab/Palestinian Public Opinion Survey," Brookings Institution, http://www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/reports/2010/12/09-israel-public-opinion-telhami/israeli_arab_powerpoint.pdf.
- 7 Smooha, *Still Playing by the Rules*.
- 8 Telhami, "The 2011 Public Opinion Poll of Jewish and Arab Citizens of Israel."
- 9 Arik Rudnitzky, "Analysis of the 20th Knesset Election Results for Arab Israelis," *Bayan* no. 5, May 2015.
- 10 Itamar Radai, "Muslim and Druze in Israel: National and Sectarian Identities in Conflict," *Tel Aviv Notes* 9, no. 5, March 10, 2015, <http://www.dayan.org/tel-aviv-notes-9-no-5-march-10-2015>.
- 11 Lars Hansel, "Christians in Israel: A Complex Question of Identity," *KAS International Reports*, http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas_21321-1522-2-30.pdf?101208143454.
- 12 "The Arab Population in Israel: Facts and Figures 2012," http://brookdale.jdc.org.il/_Uploads/dbsAttachedFiles/Myers-JDC-Brookdale-Facts-and-Figures-on-Arab-Israelis-March-2012.pdf.
- 13 Yuval P. Yonay, Meir Yaish, and Vered Kraus, "Religious Heterogeneity and Cultural Diffusion: The Impact of Christian Neighbors on Muslim and Druze Women's Participation in the Labor Force in Israel," *Sociology* (2014), <http://soc.haifa.ac.il/~yaish/papers/Yonay.pdf>.

- 14 Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, Christmas 2013 – Christians in Israel, http://www.cbs.gov.il/reader/newhodaot/hodaa_template.html?hodaa=201311353.
- 15 Nadia Hilou et al., “Operation Protective Edge: Implications for Jewish-Arab Relations in Israel,” in *The Lessons of Operation Protective Edge*, eds. Anat Kurz and Shlomo Brom (Tel Aviv: Institute for National Security Studies, 2014).