

The Arab Voting Pattern and the Zionist Parties:
A Case Study of Labour, Likud, and Kadima
2001-2009

*Dissertation submitted to the Jawaharlal Nehru University in partial fulfilment of the
requirement for the award of the degree of*

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

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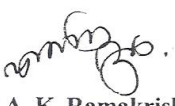

DECLARATION



I declare that the dissertation entitled "The Arab Voting Pattern and the Zionist Parties: A Case Study of Labour, Likud and Kadima, 2001-2009" submitted by me in the partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy** of Jawaharlal Nehru University is my own work. The dissertation has not been submitted for any other degree of this university or any other university.


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CERTIFICATE

We recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.


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Acknowledgments

Realization of a dream is certainly a collective endeavour. In the process, directly or indirectly, many people other than the one who nurtures the dream contribute towards attaining it. Therefore I take upon the opportunity to express my sincere gratitude to each one.

This dissertation would not have been possible without the guidance and the help of several individuals who in one way or another contributed and extended their valuable assistance in the preparation and completion of this study.

First and foremost, my utmost gratitude to my supervisor Prof. P. R. Kumaraswamy whose encouragement and sincere guidance inspired me throughout my dissertation. Even though he had other academic commitments, he constantly helped me on this dissertation.

I am extremely thankful to my friend and batch mate Muriel Potherat. It would have been impossible for me to complete this dissertation without her continuous support. Her careful editing and valuable inputs helped me to give a nice shape to my dissertation.

I would like to thank my parents and sisters, Priyanka and Aditi, for their patience and encouragement at every step of this research.

I also owe a lot to my friends, Amit Kumar Ravi, Navendu Shekhar, Nilabh Krishna, Kundan Kumar, and Rajiv Mishra who are always willing to lend a hand.

The errors and failures of this dissertation are all mine.

Date: 5 July 2012

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The establishment of the State of Israel brought a significant change in the political dynamics of the region. Its Declaration of Independence¹ aspired for religious tolerance and peaceful coexistence, but the Arabs in Israel have to struggle for equal rights. The Arab community which suddenly became minority from majority faced a lot of discrimination in the years preceding the Declaration of Independence. They were soon put under military restriction where they were deprived of many basic rights of freedom. In terms of political rights also, Israeli Arabs were not allowed to form their own political party. In terms of religion and language as well, Arabs and Arabic became minority in Israel.

Apart from political rights, the socio-economic conditions of the Israeli Arabs have never been satisfactory and when compared with the Jews, they have lagged behind in every sector. During the initial phase, the biggest challenge was to protect the rights of Israeli Arabs who were given equal status. However, the persistent threat from the Arab countries and periodic wars made Israeli authorities more sceptical about the intentions and loyalty of their Arab citizens. This resulted in the authorities placing various restrictions on the Israeli Arabs with a noticeable absence of Arab parties to represent the voice of Arabs and their rights.² Moreover, Arabs in Israel have faced many issues related to discriminatory laws. On one hand, Arabs have suffered from multiple immigration problems in the past. On the other hand, Jews have reaped benefits from laws like ‘law of return’, which was enacted two years after the independence and which gives immediate citizenship to any Jew who migrates to Israel from the Diaspora.³

Since the first elections held in January 1949, Mapai, the forerunner of the Labour party, had a separate list through which Arab members could contest the proportional representation

¹*Declaration of Independence*, Tel Aviv, 14 May 1948, <http://stateofisrael.com/declaration/>, accessed on 26 June 2012.

²Mark A. Lewis, “Historical setting: Israel Arabs, Arab land, and Arab refugees”, in Helen Chapin Metz, (ed.) *Israel: A Country Study*, Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress (1988), [http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+il0032\)](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+il0032))

³Mark Tessler and Audra K. Grant, “Israel's Arab Citizens: The Continuing Struggle”, *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 555, Israel in Transition (January 1998), p. 99.

based elections. The Arab population had no choice but to vote for the Arab list affiliated to the dominant party. Between 1948 and 1966, the formation of separate Arab parties was not possible due to various social conditions as well as political restrictions. The options of the Arab electorates were limited to communist parties which did not face harsh measures because of their moderate approach.⁴

The communist party *Maki* took a particular interest in the welfare of the Arab minority and opposed the military administration of the Arab-inhabited areas.⁵ It fought the discrimination against Arab citizens, whether by the military authorities or by Labour Party affiliated trade union *Histadrut*. Later, dissatisfied with its party, the Arab faction formed a new party called *Rakah*. Gradually, small parties like Democratic Front for Peace and Equality kept on working under the framework of the communists.

Various attempts were made to present an Arab political front, which eventually resulted in the formation of Arab Democratic Party (ADP) just before the 1988 Knesset elections and this marked a new phase among the Israeli Arabs. The formation of ADP can be attributed to the decline of Labour Party and the Arab dissatisfaction with it. The signs of decline of the Labour Party were visible from the 1965 elections when share of votes polled by Labour, its Arab affiliates and the left leaning *Mapam* fell steadily. These parties polled 54 percent of the vote and secured 67 out of 120 Knesset seats, yet their share of Arab votes fell considerably.

In January 1988, Israel's first independent Arab party was formed under the leadership of Abdal Wahab Darwishe. One of the reasons for the formation of this Arab party, apart from the growing dissatisfaction among the Israeli Arabs, was the outbreak of the Intifada in December 1987 and the support given by the Israeli Arabs to the Palestinians in the occupied territories. In addition to pursuing their struggle for progress and equality, the Israeli Arabs supported the Intifada through material assistance and a measure of political activism.⁶ Since 1988, many Arab parties came into existence and have been contesting the Knesset elections. While *Ta'al* (Arab Movement of Renewal), *Balad* (National Democratic Assembly)

⁴There were some attempts to form a pure Arab political party during the initial days. The most important was *al-Ard* which was established in 1960. The government initially refused to give the legal status. Later, on the with intervention of Supreme Court *al-Ard* was allowed to function. However, *al-Ard* had to fight many legal battles with the government and in 1965 the party was finally banned; *Ibid.*, p. 102.

⁵Ilana Kaufman, *Arab National Communism in the Jewish State*, University Press of Florida (1997), pp. 27-28.

⁶Alexander Bligh, "The Intifada and the New Political Role of the Israeli Arab Leadership", *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 1 (Jan., 1999), p. 138.

showed radical viewpoints, United Arab List and Hadash (Democratic Front for Peace and Equality) remained moderate.

In the 2003 elections, the total number of Israeli Arab members who entered the Knesset was twelve including four members who were elected on the list of Zionist parties (two each from Labour and Likud). In 2006, the number of members from the Arab parties rose to ten and three Arab members from the Zionist list (two from Labour and one from Kadima) were elected and this brought the total of Arab MKs to 13. In the 2009 elections, the number of Arab members went up to 14 and this was the highest number till date. Eleven Israeli Arab members came from Arab parties and three from the Zionist parties (one each from Likud, Kadima and Israel Beitenu). Later this number went up to 15 when Raleb Majadele entered into the Knesset on the Labour list as a replacement for Yuli Tamir. Thus, in spite of the rise of Arab parties, the Zionist parties still managed to get a fair amount of Arab votes from the Arab sector of Israel. Though the percentage of votes have gone down since 1988, even two decades after the formation of the ADP and the presence of other Arab options, mainstream Zionist parties manage to get around 20 to 30 percent of votes from the Arab sector. In the last three elections, the Zionist parties secured one-third to one-fourth of the total Arab votes.

The proposed research will examine and analyse factors responsible for the Israeli Arabs voting for the Zionist parties. This research has been limited to the study of the Zionist parties Labour, Likud and Kadima and the three Knesset elections held in 2003, 2006 and 2009. The 2003 Knesset elections were the first ones after the al- Aqsa Intifada.⁷ By then, all hopes were lost over the Oslo peace process. The Arab parties were aggressively campaigning against the Zionist parties and some Zionist parties campaigned to ban Arab parties. Though there was a relative drop in the Arab turnout, the election was not as dramatic as it was predicted. This fall in the turnout was proportionately more significant within the Jewish sector than in than in the Arab sector. The Zionist parties still managed to secure around 30 per cent of votes of which Labour, Likud and Meretz combined share was more than 20 per cent.

The 2006 Knesset elections were not as difficult as the 2003 elections but they had a new entrant, the centrist Kadima which won the largest number of seats. It also managed to get a

⁷The al-Aqsa Intifada, *BBC News*, 29 September 2004. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/3677206.stm, accessed on 20 June 2012.

great deal of Arab voters. Most of the Arab voters were those who were disillusioned by the policies of Likud. The Labour Party got around 12 per cent of the Arab votes and Kadima got nine per cent. The Likud could only manage less than one per cent and Meretz got around 1.5 per cent of votes. In 2009, a different trend was seen in the Arab voting pattern. The Israeli Arabs were dissatisfied with the government over the Gaza war.⁸ The situation became more complicated due to the radical reactions of the Arab parties. Many Arab Knesset members supported Hezbollah during the Second Lebanon War⁹ and Hamas during the aggression against the Gaza Strip in December 2008.¹⁰ Such a trend intensified the existing rift between Jews and Arabs within Israel. The elections saw a decline in the Arab votes for Zionist parties. The Labour Party got the biggest setback and Kadima gained the votes that were lost by Labour while Likud managed to get fewer Israeli Arab votes.

One reason to explain this trend is that a big section of Israeli Arabs felt that voting for Arab parties which promote separatism, would only increase the social and economic gaps between the Jewish and Arab populations. Moreover, an open support to organisations like Hezbollah and radical methods taken up by some Arab Knesset members create a deeper wedge between Arabs and Jews in Israel.¹¹ This trend hampers the development measures¹² taken up by the government to improve socio-economic condition of Arabs. The general demand for the improvement of socio-economic condition of Arabs has forced a sizeable population of Arabs to rethink their support for Arab parties. Voting for Zionist parties could help them to address their issues on a larger platform. Moreover, a large number of votes go to Zionist parties partly because these parties, Labour, Likud and Kadima (since 2006 elections), field Arab candidates to attract Arab voters. These parties reserve Arab seats in their elections list. Thus,

⁸Yehuda Ben Meir, "Operation Cast Lead: Political Dimensions and Public Opinion, Strategic Assessment", *The Institute for National Strategic Studies*, Tel Aviv, Volume 11, No. 4, (February 2009), <http://www.inss.org.il/publications.php?cat=21&incat=&read=2634>, accessed on 12 June 2012.

⁹ The Second Lebanon war started 12 July 2006, shortly after the formation of new government and become the source of huge embarrassment for Israel. It was 34-day long conflict between Hezbollah in Lebanon and Israeli Defence Force, see: Shlomo Brom and Meir Elran, *The Second Lebanon War: Strategic Perspective*, Institute of National Security Studies, Tel Aviv University, Tel Aviv (2007).

¹⁰Hisham Naffa, "The Palestinians in Israel: A View from Haifa", *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 38, No. 3 (Spring 2009), p. 56.

¹¹Hillel Frisch, "The Palestinians are Part of the Old Arab Order", *BESA Centre*, Perspectives Paper No. 158, (5 January 2012).

¹²*Prime Minister's office*, Press release, Archives (21 March 2010), <http://www.pmo.gov.il/PMOEng/Archive/Press+Releases/2010/03/spokestart210310.htm>, accessed on 20 June 2012.

for Israeli Arabs, it becomes easier to bring reforms through the Arab candidates represented by the mainstream parties. Hence a large part of the population votes for these Zionist parties including the right wing Likud.

Another reason is the composition of religious groups among Arabs and their voting preferences. An initial research suggests that Christian Arabs prefer secular or mainstream parties than the exclusively Arab parties.¹³ The initial research suggests that Druze, who have traditionally been aligned with Zionism, serve in the army, and repeatedly declare their support for the Israeli state, are also inclined towards Zionist parties.

Proportional Representation System

Proportional representation system is a concept used in the political system to elect members of the Parliament or legislative assembly.¹⁴ Under this system, the number of seats won by a party or group of candidates is proportionate to the number of votes received. 'Israeli legislators (MKs) are elected through a state-wide system of voting, in which the entire country is treated as a single electoral district. Israelis cast a vote for a single list of candidates.'¹⁵ However, in Israel, there is a threshold limit and all the parties that cross the election threshold are represented in the Knesset in proportion to the number of votes they received. Thus, only those parties which cross the threshold limit, are represented. This threshold limit has been increased from time to time as it started at one per cent of total valid votes for the first elections, went to 1.5 per cent for the 1996 Knesset elections and to 2 per cent for and since the 2006 Elections.

The concept of PR system, as it is popularly called, particularly in the set up like Israel, gives a wide opportunity to the smaller parties to enter the Knesset. That is one reason why this kind of system is strongly supported by smaller parties. The rationale behind this is that the PR system gives a wider range of representation and since smaller parties are also able to enter into the parliament they favour this system. However, this system has kept the Israeli

¹³Hillel Frisch, "The Arab Vote in the Israeli Elections: The Bid for Leadership", *Israel Affairs*, Volume 7, numbers 2 & 3 (Winter/Spring 2001), p. 162.

¹⁴Douglas J. Amy, *Proportional Representation: The Case for a Better Election System*, (pamphlet) Northampton, MA: Crescent Street Press (1997).

¹⁵Alex Bain, "Israel Flawed Electoral System: Obstacle to Peace and Democracy", *Middle East Institute*, Policy Brief, No. 32, (February 2011), p. 4.

politics in an unstable mode since its inception. As a result of this wider representation, smaller parties have entered into the Knesset and played a crucial role in the formation of various governments.¹⁶ Often these smaller parties have blackmailed the big parties in their promise to give support to the coalition. The example of the 18th Knesset makes it evident. Likud which was the second largest party, with a vote share of only 21 per cent, formed the government with the coalition of Labour, Yisrael Beitenu, and Shas. ‘As a consequence, while the three smaller right-wing parties received 10 ministerial positions (along with significant veto power over policy), the largest party Kadima was left out of power.’¹⁷

Such bargaining is not new to the Israeli political system. In every elections smaller parties come out to support the coalition for the some gains. The coming chapters will highlight how smaller parties have been instrumental in the collapse or formation of a coalition.

Zionism and Zionist Parties

Zionism is a national movement of Jews which holds up the concept of Jewish national state.¹⁸ It is a form of nationalism where Jews protect their culture and support the existence of the state of Israel.¹⁹ Although the term Zionism existed in the 19th century, it gained currency in the first quarter of the 20th century. Zionism as an ideology has many dimensions such as General Zionism, religious Zionism, green Zionism, to name only a few.²⁰ However, all these different dimensions are unanimous on one issue which is the concept of homeland for the Jewish people.

The conception of Zionism itself arose on the ideology of the existence of an ancient Jewish kingdom of Israel referred as ‘Ancient Israel’ and sometimes called as the United Monarchy of David and Solomon in the eastern Mediterranean region.²¹ The prolonged statelessness and sufferings during the Diasporic experiences culminated in the form of the longing for a

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 5.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 5.

¹⁸Walter Lacquer, *The History of Zionism*, Tauris Parke, London/ New York (2003), p. 384.

¹⁹Oscar Kraines, *Government and Politics in Israel*, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston (1961), p 63.

²⁰Zionism, *Jewish Virtual Library*, <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsourc/zion.html>, accessed on 26 June 2012.

²¹John Rose, *The Myth of Zionism*, Pluto Press, New York (2004), p. 7.

Jewish national home in the land of their ancestors. The political parties in Israel which believe in the concept of Zionism are termed as Zionist parties. Among the major mainstream parties Labour, Likud, and Kadima all three fall into this category. Among others, National Religious party (NRP) and Meretz are also Zionists with different objectives. The distinction becomes more apparent when one compares these parties with other religious parties in Israel. Ultra orthodox parties such as Degel Ha'Torah and Agudat Israel, which jointly contest the Knesset elections as United Torah Judaism, are anti-Zionist and do not accept the cabinet positions in the government because such an act signifies their recognition of a Jewish state which does not comply with the Jewish religious laws (Halacha). The other religious party, Shas is orthodox but non-Zionist in its orientation.

Political Parties in Israel

The political parties in Israel can be divided into four categories. They are Left, Centre, Right, and the Arab parties. Since the establishment of the State of Israel, many political parties were created and disintegrated. Some merged into another party to form a bigger party. However, there were only few major parties which survived and grew stronger.

The Labour party, Meretz (erstwhile Mapam) and Maki fall in the category of Left bloc. Labour party was the erstwhile Mapai which was the major party till the arrival of Likud in the Israeli politics. Labour party was the first party to recognise the Arab community in Israel and organise a separate list for it.²² Maki was the Israeli communist party and went through many change and splits. The roots of present day Hadash can be traced to Maki, a party with the objective of Jewish- Arab unity. Shinui and Kadima can be put in the category of centrist parties. Shinui was a centrist party which gained massive votes in the 2003 Knesset elections but disintegrated after 2006 elections. Kadima, formed in 2006 by Ariel Sharon, was the largest party in the 2006 and 2009 Knessets.

In the right wing bloc, one can be put Likud, Yisrael Beitenu, and religious parties. Likud was formed by Begin. The latter formed a government in the aftermath of the 1977 elections with the help of religious and right wing parties. Among the religious parties, National Religious party (NRP), United Torah Judaism, and Shas are the major parties and this 'religious bloc

²²Don Peretz, *The government and Politics of Israel*, Westview Press, Colorado (1983), p. 95.

maintains consistent strength between 12- 15 per cent of the electorate.²³ The fourth and final bloc is of the Arab parties. The Arab parties first appeared on the political stage in the 1988 elections. There are few major Arab parties which have shown consistent appearance in the Knesset. Parties like Hadash, Balad or National Democratic Alliance (NDA), United Arab List (UAL) fall in this category.

The Israeli Arab Population

In 1945 and 1946, the population of the British mandate was of 1.8 million. The Muslims were around one million, the Jews 528,000, and the Christians 135,000.²⁴ However, after the 1948 war between Israel and Arabs, only 170,000 Arabs were left in Israel which further decreased to 156,000.²⁵ In 1948, 82 per cent of the Israeli population was Jewish, and almost all of the rest were Arabs. In 2007, 76 per cent were Jews, 19 per cent were Arabs, and 5 per cent were non-Arab Christians and persons of other religious denominations whose religion is not recorded in the population registry.²⁶

During the first decade of the existence of the Israeli state, Nazareth was the largest Arab town. The Arab population of Nazareth in 1958 was around 25,000. ‘Most Arabs lived in Western and Lower Galilee and the Mount Carmel area.’²⁷ ‘The second region where Arabs were concentrated was the “Little Triangle” in the centre of the country bordering Jordan.’²⁸ Around 20 per cent of the Arab population lived in this area, which was ceded to Israel by Jordan as per the Armistice Agreement signed in Rhodes in 1949.²⁹ Apart from these two localities, Haifa and Jerusalem (the western and new part of the city which remained with

²³*Ibid.*, pp. 112-113.

²⁴*A Survey of Palestine*: Prepared in December, 1945 and January, 1946 for the Information of the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry, Vol. 1, Government of Palestinian/British Mandate (1945-46), p. 46, <http://www.palestineremembered.com/Articles/A-Survey-of-Palestine/Story6582.html>, accessed on 22 June 2012.

²⁵“The Arab Population in Israel”, *Statistilite no. 27*, Central Bureau of Statistics, State of Israel (November 2002), p. 2.

²⁶“Israel in Statistics, 1948-2007”, *Statistilite no. 93*, Central Bureau of Statistics (May 2009), p. 2.

²⁷Rebecca Mayer, “The Development of the Islamic Movement in Israel”, *Institute for Israeli- Arab Studies*, Vol. 3, Issue 6 (44) (August 1993), p. 3.

²⁸Sami Hadawi, *Israel and the Arab Minority*, New York: Arab Information Centre (1959), p. 3.

²⁹Mayer, “The Development of the Islamic Movement in Israel”, p. 3.

Israel since May 1948) were two more towns with a sizeable Arab population during the 1950s.

Table 1.1: Comparison of total fertility rate by religion, 1955-2001

| | Jews | Muslims | Christians | Druze |
|------|------|---------|------------|-------|
| 1955 | 3.64 | 7.96 | 4.85 | 6.58 |
| 1960 | 3.49 | 9.31 | 4.61 | 7.88 |
| 1965 | 3.47 | 9.87 | 4.74 | 7.61 |
| 1970 | 3.41 | 8.95 | 3.62 | 7.46 |
| 1975 | 3.21 | 7.75 | 3.35 | 6.85 |
| 1980 | 2.76 | 5.98 | 2.68 | 6.09 |
| 1985 | 2.85 | 4.86 | 2.12 | 4.47 |
| 1990 | 2.69 | 4.70 | 2.57 | 4.05 |
| 2001 | 2.54 | 4.60 | 2.50 | 3.1 |

Adopted from: “Statistical Abstract of Israel”, CBS, 1955-1990; also Calvin Goldscheider, “Arab Israelis: Demography, Dependency, and Distinctiveness”, *Asian and African Studies*, 1993, p. 67; also “The Arab Population in Israel”, *Statistilite no. 27*, Central Bureau of Statistics, State of Israel (November 2002), p. 6.

During the military rule over the Arab-inhabited areas (1948-1966), the health and medical issues were affected and it resulted in a high infant mortality rate.³⁰ However, the Arab population of Israel never declined but rather increased with a slow pace. There are a few features in the Arab demographic changes which could be observed in the five decades which followed the establishment of Israel. These demographic issues have been a bone of contention in the Arab- Israeli relations. The first feature is that since the 1970’s, while the younger generation of the Jew population is moving ‘dangerously’ toward the zero population growth, the Arab Israeli population is growing significantly.³¹ The second feature is that while the demographic growth rate of Jews is mainly due to the immigration waves after the establishment of the Israel,³² the Arab population growth is the direct result of the decline of

³⁰Calvin Goldscheider, “Arab Israelis: Demography, Dependency, and Distinctiveness”, *Asian and African Studies*, 27 (1993), p. 65.

³¹*Ibid.*, p. 65.

³²Two growth waves can be highlighted in which Jews immigration was highest. The first growth wave in which immigration was high was between 1948 and 1952. In this period, around 500,000 Jews migrated to Israel from Arab countries. The second high growth wave is between 1990 and 1991. During this period around 400,000

the mortality and fertility rates.³³ The fertility of Israeli Arabs increased till 1965 and decreased later, indicating thus improved social and educational conditions. However, when compared to the Jews, the fertility difference was still high (table 1.1).

The third issue is related to the internal migration and the urbanization of the Israeli Arabs. Till the abolition of the military rule in 1966, the Israeli Arabs were restricted from moving freely within Israel but after 1966, they were free to move. This change gave Israeli Arabs an opportunity to look for better facilities in the cities and small urban centres. The population of Arabs in Haifa in 1948s was of 62,000 but only 3,566 remained after the establishment of the Israel.³⁴ After the end of the military rule, the Arab population of Haifa increased to 8,000, in 1972 it reached 75,000 and in 1983, the population of Arabs rose to 36,500.³⁵ The migration indicates the rural-urban migration processes because of the better opportunities created in the cities.

As highlighted by table 1.2, the Arab population kept increasing throughout the decades. The other reason why the Arab population started to increase with a healthy rate after the June war was because of the improved social, economic, and health conditions which were providing better fertility rate. As Israeli Arabs were free to move after the abolishment of the military rule, they could also involve themselves in trade and commerce within the territory. If Jews and Arabs were interacting at the political level, there were still very limited interactions between Jews and Arabs based on social motives.

Among the Israeli Arabs, Christians were better off than Muslims and Druze but among all the three communities, Muslim Arabs had the worst social and economic conditions.³⁶ Christians' social and economic conditions were better throughout the six decades of the Israeli establishment. Among the total population of Arabs, the Muslims currently represent 80 per cent of it. Conversely, their population was not as high in 1948. As can be seen in the

Jews migrated from the former Soviet Union. For details see: Total Immigration by Graphs, *Jewish Virtual Library*, <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Immigration/imgraph.html>, accessed on 26 June 2012.

³³Goldscheider, "Arab Israelis: Demography, Dependency, and Distinctiveness", p. 67.

³⁴*Ibid.*, p. 75.

³⁵"Localities and Population, by District, sub District, Religion and population Group", *Statistical Abstract of Israel*, 2.7, Central Bureau of Statistics (2008), p. 2.

³⁶*Statistilite no. 27*, pp. 1-12.

table 1.2, Muslims represented around 69 per cent of the total Arab population in 1954. This shot up after 1967 for the reasons discussed above, and henceforth increased with a decent pace particularly in the 1970's. One of the reasons was the improved social and economic conditions and better fertility rate after the abolishment of the military restrictions.

Table 1.2: The Arab population, 1948-2001

| Year | Total Arab population (in thousands) | Percentage of Muslims | Percentage of Arabs in the total Israeli population |
|-------------|---|----------------------------------|--|
| 1948 | 156 | NA | NA |
| 1954 | 192 | 69 | 12 |
| 1961 | 247 | 69 | 15 |
| 1967 | 390* | 73 | 15.5 |
| 1972 | 472 | 76 | 16 |
| 1976 | 555 | 77 | 16 |
| 1982 | 684 | 77 | 16.3 |
| 1987 | 794 | 77 | 17 |
| 1989 | 843 | 78 | 18.2 |
| 1990 | 875 | 77 | 18 |
| 2001 | 1100 | 82 | 19 |

Source: Central Bureau Statistics Yearbooks, 1948-1990; also Calvin Goldscheider, "Arab Israelis: Demography, Dependency, and Distinctiveness", *Asian and African Studies* (1993); also "Israeli Population Statistics", *Jewish Virtual Library*, http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Society_&_Culture/demographics.html, accessed on 27 December 2011; also "The Arab Population in Israel", *Statistilite no. 27*, Central Bureau of Statistics, State of Israel (November 2002), p. 3.

*The Arab population increased suddenly after the 1967 war when east Jerusalem became part of Israel.

Demographic Divisions since 2003

The Arab population just before the elections of 2003 was 1.2 million, around 19 percent of the total population.³⁷ By the fall of 2002, the Arab population located in the Northern district was the highest among the six districts of Israel. The Northern district had a population of 596,000 on the eve of the 2003 elections. This means that almost half of the Arab population

³⁷*Ibid.*, p. 2.

in Israel live in the Northern district. The next most Arab populated district in Israel is Jerusalem.³⁸ At the time of 2003 elections, the population was 237,000, which is less than one-fourth of the total Arab population in Israel and less than half of the Arab population in the Northern district. However, even the Haifa district has substantial Arab population with a number indicating 196,000, which constitutes 14 per cent of the population. The Arab population in the Southern and Central districts is 137,000 and 126,000 respectively. The most striking feature of the Arab demographic divisions is that only 16,000 people live in Tel Aviv district which constitutes one per cent of the total Arab population in Israel.³⁹ This is also surprising because this goes against the cosmopolitan culture of Tel Aviv when compared to a religious city like Jerusalem.

The Israeli Arabs comprise three prominent religious groups namely, Druze, Muslims and Christians; 82 per cent of the total population are Muslims, 9 percent are Druze and 8 per cent are Christians.⁴⁰ There are differences in the geographic distribution of the three religious groups. According to the government figures of 2003, almost all the druzes live in the Northern district (80 per cent) and in the Haifa district (19 per cent). The extent of the concentration of Christians in these two districts is 70 per cent and 13 per cent respectively while significant numbers also live in the Jerusalem district (11 per cent), in the Central district (3 per cent) and in the Tel Aviv district (3 per cent). Muslims are more widely distributed among the various districts; 40 per cent live in the Northern district, 21 per cent in the Jerusalem district, 15 per cent in the Haifa district, 12 per cent in the Central district, 11 per cent in the Southern district and one per cent in the Tel Aviv district (table1.3).⁴¹ These districts are further divided into different localities. These localities are based on the ethnic-religious population living into it. By the end of 2002, there were around 119 localities in which the Arabs represent almost the entire population. In these localities, 71 per cent of Arabs live, while another 24 per cent live in eight localities which have been defined as “mixed” localities by the Central Bureau of Statistics. The “mixed” localities are: Jerusalem, Tel Aviv-Yaffo, Haifa, Lod, Ma’alot-Tarshiha, Nazerat Illit, Akko and Ramla (figure1.1). One

³⁸Arab population in Jerusalem includes areas annexed by Israel following the June 1967 War.

³⁹“Government of Israel Official Document on Population and Localities by Districts and Sub- Districts”, *Statistical Abstract of Israel 2003*, Central Bureau of Statistics data, State of Israel (2003), p. 2.

⁴⁰*Statistilite no. 27*, p. 2.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, p. 5.

per cent of the population lives in some Jewish localities and the remaining population lives in Southern localities which are not defined by the Ministry of Interior.⁴² Around 4 per cent, mostly Bedouins in the south of the state, live in places that are not defined by the Ministry of the Interior as localities.

Table 1.3: Arab population, by district, 2003*

| | Total | Jerusalem district | Northern district | Haifa district | Central district | Tel Aviv district | Southern district |
|----------------------------------|--------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Population (000) | 1,302 | 237 | 596 | 190 | 126 | 16 | 137 |
| Population (%) | 100 | 19 | 46 | 14 | 10 | 1 | 10 |
| % increase | 3 | 3.1 | 2.5 | 2.5 | 3.0 | 2.9 | 5.5 |
| %Arab of total population | 19 | 29 | 52 | 23 | 8 | 1 | 14 |
| %Muslims of all Arabs | 82 | 95 | 71 | 81 | 97 | 77 | 100 |

*Source: Government of Israel, The Population of Israel 2003, *Statistilite no 50* (2003), p. 1.

Out of all 116 Arab localities, nine are cities, 74 are local authorities and 33 are rural villages belonging to regional councils. These 119 localities increased in 2003 to 122 Arab localities in the end of 2003. All the 122 Arab major and minor localities lie in the six districts of Israel. Nazareth has the largest Arab population of Israel. Apart from Nazareth, there are eight more Arab-dominated cities.⁴³

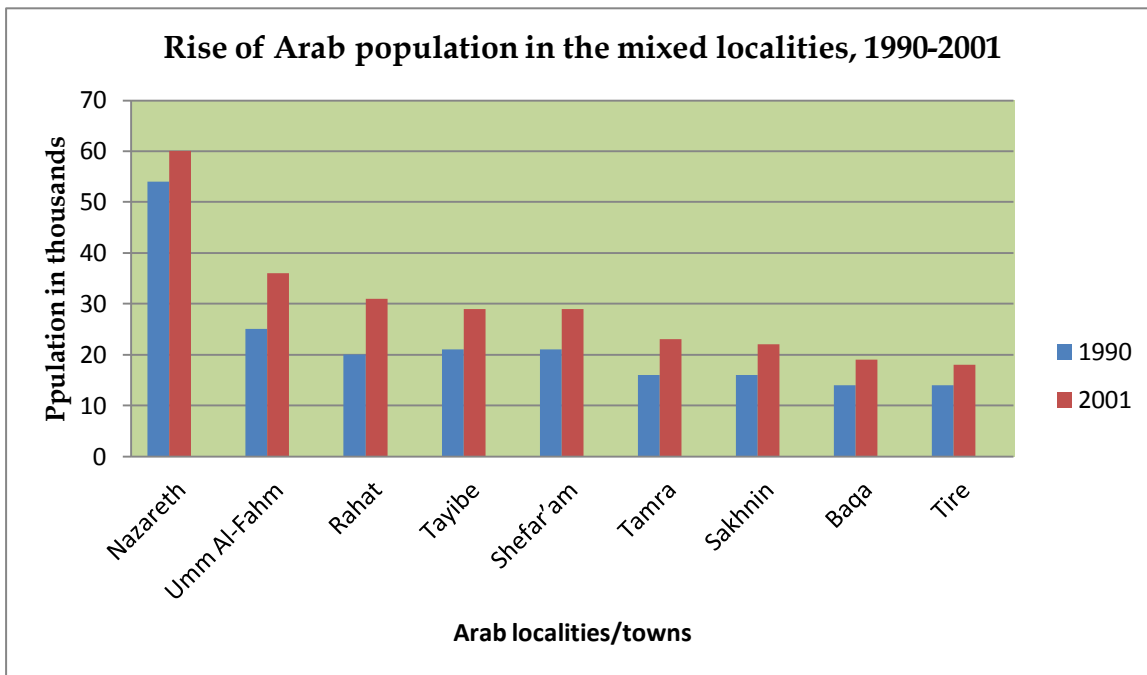
Among the religious groups, the Muslims and Druze reside mainly in the areas where they are in majority. Until recently, this was also the case with Christians but in the recent decades with the low population growth, they have become in minority in many regions.⁴⁴

⁴²Government of Israel Official Document on Population and Localities by Districts and Sub- Districts, Statistical Abstract of Israel (2003). p. 2

⁴³Government of Israel, "The Population of Israel 2003", *Statistilite no. 50* (2003), p. 1.

⁴⁴*Statistilite no. 27*, p. 3.

Figure: 1.1



*Source: "The population of Israel 2002", *Statistilite no. 27*, Central Bureau of Statistics, State of Israel (November 2002), p. 3.

Comparing the 2002 Arab population data to the past decades, it appears that the rate of increase of Arab population in Israel is the highest of the world.⁴⁵ The population is increasing with the rate of around three per cent. The graph below shows the rise of population in the mixed localities. This demonstrates that in every mixed locality, the Israeli Arab population is increasing with a very high pace. Thus, a close analysis can now be done on the basis of the above data about the voting behaviour of Arabs in these districts.

Survey of the Literature:

The review of the literature is divided into three broad themes. The first theme deals with the demographic division of Arabs and their socio-economic advancements before and after the outbreak of the Al Aqsa Intifada in September 2000. The second theme deals with the voting pattern of Arabs till 1999 Knesset elections. The third theme deals with the voting pattern of the Israeli Arabs since 2003.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, p. 2.

The Arab Community in Israel:

At the end of May 2011, the Arab population in Israel stood at 1.587 million people or 20.5 per cent of the total population. Israel is divided into six districts, namely, Northern district, Haifa district, Tel Aviv district, Jerusalem district, Central District and the Southern district. According to the 2008 data, 44 per cent of the total Arab population resides in the Northern district, which constitutes 53 per cent of the district's population. Nineteen per cent of the Arabs live in the Jerusalem district which is around 31 per cent of its population. In the Haifa district, the population of Arab is 14 per cent, whereas in Southern district it is 12 per cent. The Central district constitutes ten percent and a mere one per cent population lives in Tel Aviv district.⁴⁶

The social and economic conditions are one of the factors which account for a sizeable Arab votes for the Zionist parties. The developments of socio-economic condition of the Arabs and greater access to economic and political resources had some repercussions on the elections. There is a constant improvement in the education, health and housing sectors. Though the Arab parties find them inadequate and insufficient, there has been an upward movement of the graph when compared with the previous years. In the health sector, since the early 1980s, the life expectancy of the Arab population has increased by nearly four years. From 2000 to 2003, the life expectancy of Arab males was 74.6 years, and that of Arab females 78.0 (3.3 and 3.8 years lower than the life expectancy of Jewish males and females, respectively). In 2003, the infant mortality rate of the Arab population was 8.2 deaths per 1,000 live births whereas it was 24.2 in 1980. The infant mortality rate of the Arab population of Israel is much lower than in the neighbouring Arab countries and in the Palestinian Authority: 102 deaths per 1,000 live births in Iraq, 38 in Egypt, 27 in Lebanon, 26 in the Palestinian Authority, 22 in Jordan and 18 in Syria.⁴⁷

In terms of education also, in the past three decades, there has been a dramatic rise in the level of education of the Arab population. In 1970, half of this population had up to five years of schooling and in 2008 they had almost ten years of schooling. The Arab school system in Israel has undergone many changes: an increase in the number of students and educational

⁴⁶State of Israel, "The Arab population of Israel", Central Bureau of Statistics, *Statistilite no. 102* (2008), p. 1.

⁴⁷*Statistilite no. 50*, p. 2.

frameworks and improvements in the quality of teaching and the level of education.⁴⁸ Not only at the primary and secondary levels but also in pre-school, the condition of the Arabs is changing. More and more Arab students are joining schools at an early age and there is a growing awareness among the Arab population of the importance of early education which eventually gives them a better opportunity to get employment.

The Knesset Elections 1948 -1999

The first Knesset elections were held in 1949, the Arabs living in the new Israeli territory were confused and suspicious about the elections and intentions of the Israeli government.⁴⁹ The major party of the first elections was the Ben-Gurion led Mapai, the forerunner of the Labour Party. It was a left of the centre party which had a separate list for Arabs with an objective to attract the Arab votes. The other major parties were the communist *Maki* which was formed just a few months before the first Knesset elections and by the communist members of Jew and Arab community and the left-leaning Mapam. In the first Knesset elections, there were around 33,000 Arab voters and almost 80 per cent voters exercised their votes. Mapai got around 10 per cent of votes and its Arab list secured 51 per cent of Arab votes. The communist *Maki* secured around 22 percent.⁵⁰ Other parties like General Zionist secured 3.6 per cent of votes.⁵¹

By the second Knesset elections, there was an increase in the population of Arabs because of some minor territorial changes. Mapai was the biggest party in Israel and with the second Knesset elections, it expanded its activities among the Arabs.⁵² The Arab participation was higher in this election and Mapai could secure around 12 per cent of votes whereas Maki got 16 per cent and Mapam managed to obtain 5.6 per cent of votes. Mapai emerged as the largest party and along with its Arab list, it secured 66.5 per cent of Arab votes. In the third Knesset elections, Mapai along with its Arab list maintained the lead with a huge margin in terms of Arab votes. However, in the next two elections, Mapai lost its relative lead and most

⁴⁸ Sikkuy, *The Equality Index of Jewish and Arab Citizens in Israel*, Jerusalem: Sikkuy (2008), p. 40.

⁴⁹ Mayer, "The Development of the Islamic Movement in Israel", p. 1.

⁵⁰ Ilana Kaufman, *Arab National Communism in the Jewish State*, University Press of Florida (1997), pp. 27-28.

⁵¹ Jacob M. Landau, *The Arabs in Israel*, Oxford University Press (1969), p. 71.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 72.

of its votes were captured by Mapam. Mapai's Arab votes fell to 50 per cent in the fifth Knesset elections and Mapam and Maki shared the votes lost by Mapai.

The sixth Knesset elections brought new trends with a new party Rakah emerging from its parent party Maki and securing around 22 per cent of votes whereas its parent party lost drastically since it even failed to secure one per cent of Arab votes. Mapam also declined with nine per cent of Arab votes. Alignment formed by the merger of the Labour Party and other parties got the maximum number of Arabs vote share with around 50 per cent of Arab votes.

The seventh Knesset elections were the first elections after the June war. The various Zionist political parties in these elections brought many packages for the Arab inhabitants or majority places which included features like equality for Arabs, village developments, employment etc.⁵³ The share of the Labour party started declining while Rakah, the communist faction of Maki, gained around 25 per cent of votes. The eighth Knesset elections saw the decline of Labour-led alignment whereas Rakah again proved that its support in the Arab sectors was increasing in leaps and bounds. The next elections which were held in 1977 saw a new phase in the Israeli politics. The newly formed Likud party fared well and ended twenty nine years of Mapai/Alignment rule. Likud could not secure much Arab votes but it succeeded in forming the government. However, Rakah/Hadash secured 51 per cent of Arab votes, which was their best performance till date.⁵⁴ The Labour-led Alignment continued to decline even in the Arab sectors.

The tenth Knesset elections saw the lowest Arab participation, largely because of the call for boycott of elections by the PLO and several others. Likud increased their votes in the Arab sector (an increment of 250 per cent).⁵⁵ The Rakah/Hadash lost from many Arab sectors but Labour/Alignment improved their performance when compared from the last elections. The 11th Knesset elections happened under the background of the 1982 Lebanon war. The Likud which witnessed a rise of Arab votes from the last two elections also experienced a decline from eight per cent to five per cent. By this time, there was a general understanding among Arabs that they have to launch a separate party. Though it took Arabs few more years to form

⁵³ Jacob M. Landau, *The Arab Minority in Israel, 1967-1991: Political Aspects*, Oxford University Press (1993), p. 131.

⁵⁴ Kaufman, *Arab National Communism in the Jewish State*, p. 93.

⁵⁵ Ori Stendel, *The Arabs in Israel*, Sussex Academic Press (1996), p. 24.

Israel's first Arab party, the stage was set for the Arab leaders to think about a separate Arab party. The ADP was formed as the first exclusively Arab party in Israel.

The 1988 elections were the first elections with a separate Arab party participating. All the major Jewish parties suffered a loss in the Arab sector as most of the Arab votes went to ADP. Since then, the Arab parties are increasing their strength in numbers and seats in the Knesset. In the 1992 elections, the ADP won two seats in the Knesset.⁵⁶ The next elections brought reforms in the Israeli electoral system and paved the way for the direct election of the prime minister. Thus, now voters were required to cast two votes, one for the Knesset and one for the Prime Minister. This provision gave the Arab parties an opportunity to play a bigger role in the Prime Minister election. However, even though the Arab parties have increased their strength in the Knesset since 1988, there are still around twenty five to thirty percent votes which go to the Zionist parties.

Arabs' Voting Pattern since the 2003 Knesset Elections

The Arabs, accounting for 20 per cent of the population of Israel, constitutes one of the most important sections in Israel. They are always looked down upon by the majority and often their support to the Palestinian cause and their progress is seen as betrayal and anti-national. The support to organisations considered inimical to Israel by the Arab leaders and Arab Knesset members creates a further chasm. Under these circumstances, a radical response from the Zionist parties is evident. This normally happens before the Knesset elections where right wing parties attack Arab parties and demand a ban on all Arab parties.

Under such circumstances, it is logical that the Israeli Arabs would vote for the Arab parties but a sizeable percent went to Zionist parties like Labour, Kadima, Meretz and even Likud. The 2003 elections were the first Knesset elections after Al-Aqsa Intifada. For the first time in the history of the state, Israel's Arab citizens embarked on a wave of violence at a time when the Oslo peace process came to an end. Thus, the results of these elections were very important for both Zionist parties as well as Arab parties. In the elections, 7.5 per cent of the Arab electorate voted for Labour and 8.4 per cent voted for Likud (this is higher than the Arab votes for Labour). If one adds Meretz's 4.1 per cent, the total Arab votes that went to Zionist

⁵⁶ Rekhess, Elie, "The Arab Minority and the 1992 election: Integration or Alienation?", in Efraim Karsh and Gregory Mahler, *Israel at the Crossroads: The Challenge of Peace*, British Academic Press, London (1994), p. 150-167.

parties (Kadima was not formed in the 2003 elections) comes out to be 20 per cent.⁵⁷ This means that one-fourth of the Arabs were still voting for the Zionist parties. The percentage goes even higher if one adds the votes to those Zionist parties which could not cross the threshold limit. Thus, around 30 per cent of Arabs voted for Zionist parties, a significant fact in the light of the al-Aqsa Intifada which created a big divide between Arabs and Jews in Israel. The votes for Labour and Meretz can be justified but a large section of Arabs voting for the right wing Likud needs a close scrutiny.

In the 2006 elections, Kadima emerged as the largest party in the Knesset winning 29 seats. It emerged as the centrist party and got the second largest share of Arab votes among the non-Arab parties in its first elections. However, Arabs still voted for Labour (which got the maximum share) and Likud (though it got the lowest number of Arab votes but more than Meretz and Shas).⁵⁸ The Labour party got around 20 per cent of valid votes and Kadima got nine per cent. The Likud could only manage one per cent and Meretz got around 1.5 per cent of votes. The most striking feature was that the religious Shas party could manage around 2,000 Arab votes in the Arab hinterland. This means that around 30 per cent Arab voters chose Zionist parties over Arab parties. These trends project that despite various controversies, there is a sizeable section of Arabs voting for these Zionist parties.⁵⁹ The impressive performance of Shas in the Arab sector needs to be analysed while studying Likud, Labour and Kadima.

In the 2009 elections, the percentage share of Arab votes for Zionist parties fell from around 30 per cent to 20 per cent and in this, Labour Party suffered the biggest setback. These elections also saw a very low Arab turnout and the percentage fell to 54 per cent.⁶⁰ Moreover, they observed a new trend among Arab voters who shifted their votes from left to centre Zionist parties. The Arab voters of Labour party shifted their loyalty towards Kadima. The most dissatisfied voters voted for Arab parties and a few gave a chance to Likud as it staged a massive comeback in the 2009 elections. Even in other sections, one could find the decline of

⁵⁷*The Palestinian Arab Minority and the 2009 Israeli Elections*, The Mossawa Centre, The Advocacy Centre for Arab Citizens in Israel (2009), p. 25.

⁵⁸Hillel Frisch, "Stability Amidst Flux: The Arab Parties Come of Age in the 2006 General Elections", *Israel Affairs*, Vol. 13, No.2 (April 2007), p. 375.

⁵⁹Elie Rekhess, "The Arab Minority in Israel and the seventeenth Knesset Elections: The Beginning of a new Era?", in Asher Arian, Michal Shamir (ed.), *The Elections in Israel 2006*, New Jersey (2008). p. 163.

⁶⁰Mossawa (2009), p. 12.

the Labour party; for example Kibbutzim, a traditional and secure stronghold of Labour and Meretz, split their vote; 31 per cent Kadima to 31 per cent Labour with a notable decline of Meretz to 18 per cent. Kadima helped sway left-wing voters away from Labour and Meretz and attracted those Arab votes which went to the traditional left-Zionist parties.

The decline of the Zionist left is as significant as the overwhelming shift to the centre-right for the Israeli Arabs, whose status as equal citizens of Israel will continue to be threatened by the emergence of extreme right-wing blocs in the government. The leftist ideological affiliations between Arab parties and the Zionist left, it seems, have lost relevance. The Operation Cast Lead, radicalization in Israeli Arab towards the Jews and other Arab related issues, to name a few, were responsible for decline of Arab votes for the Zionist parties.⁶¹

The initial research also suggests that there are many reasons for the Arab support of Zionist parties. These reasons include a general improvement of social and economic conditions of Arabs in Israel and that their condition is better than their Arab counterparts in other countries in the region, especially regarding issues like education, housing and social factors.

Rationale and scope

The main objective of the proposed research is to study the Arab voting pattern and to bring out newer perspectives of Arab voting pattern in three Knesset elections vis-à-vis Labour, Likud and Kadima. The initial research suggests that Arab voting patterns have been investigated by a few scholars but in a very fragmented way. Most of the studies are restricted to the Arab votes for Arab parties however fewer researches examine Arab votes for Zionist parties. No extensive research regarding this topic has been carried out till date. The primary task of this research is to fill the gap and to construct a new perspective of the topic. Around 20 to 30 per cent of Arab people vote for Zionist parties, which also includes religious parties like Shas. Thus, it is very essential to study the behaviour of Arab votes for the Zionist parties and to study the socio-economic aspects behind these trends.

Moreover, the period taken for the study is from 2001 to 2009 as 2001 represents the first Knesset elections after the Al-Aqsa Intifada and the collapse of the Oslo process. This also saw for the first time large scale violence among the Israeli Arabs and became a symbol of the Arab frustration with the government as well as its inability to protect their interests.

⁶¹ Mario Sznajder, "The Elections in Israel", *Mediterranean Politics* (Med. 2010), p. 182.

Thus, the Al-Aqsa Intifada became a watershed for the Arab movement and in the wake of the uprising some Arab groups called for the election boycott. The 2001 direct elections of the prime minister saw a low Arab turnout but this is discussed briefly as the purpose of the research is to study Zionist parties and Israeli Arab votes. The 2003 elections also saw the effect of the second Intifada and the Arab parties tried to exploit the fallout of the Intifada. However, against the general belief, the Zionist parties got around 30 per cent of the Arab votes. This trend makes the research interesting and challenging. In the process of research, the period between the elections will also be looked at so as to construct arguments to understand and examine the trend. While discussing about the Zionist parties, the research has been limited to the three major Zionist parties that is Labour, Likud, and Kadima. However, the left oriented party Meretz also finds mention but the research is limited to the three mainstream Zionist parties.

Research questions:

1. What are the factors that influence Arab voting pattern in the Knesset elections?
2. What are the political methods through which Zionist parties attract Arab votes?
3. Have the Arab candidates who get elected on the Zionist parties list succeeded in fulfilling the aspirations of Arab citizens?
4. How far the Palestinian question affects the Arab voting patterns in the Knesset elections?

Hypotheses:

1. The Arabs who vote for the Zionist parties are influenced by their concerns about the improvement in education, housing, standard of living, health facilities.
2. By voting for the Zionist parties sizeable Israeli Arabs have expressed their no-confidence in Arab parties.

Research methods:

The study is both analytical and descriptive and as in any research work, it has attempted to discuss the phenomena and address the main outcomes. Even two decades after the formation of a distinct Arab party a significant segment of Arab population continued to support mainstream Zionist parties. This pattern is visible in the Knesset elections held in 2003, 2006

and 2009. In examining the Arab voting pattern, the research has looked at the following parameters: changing socio-economic conditions of Arab community, multiplicity of Arab parties, differences over internal external issues and the relative advantage enjoyed by the Zionist parties. The research has studied each of the elections separately and attempted to discuss the factors behind the trend of those elections. Socio-economic and political aspects have been studied with all the elections and a comparison has been made regarding the improvement of Arab conditions in these sectors. Data for this research are largely secondary but includes statistics published by the government of Israel as well as non-official publications. Public opinion surveys of the Arab community were also used to examine the underline causes.

Chapters

Chapter Two on *Israeli Arabs as a Political Community, 1948-2001* is divided into three parts. The first part deals with the socio- economic progresses of Israeli Arabs from 1948 to 2001. The next section discusses about the elections and the Israeli Arab voting pattern. This section itself is divided into three parts. The first part discusses elections and trends between 1948 and 1965. The second part discusses elections between 1969 and 1984 and the third between 1988 and 1999. The rationale behind the division is the end of military restriction and the Six-Day war. The second division highlights the formation of the first sole Arab party. The three prime minister elections have been discussed separately.

Chapter Three on the *Sixteenth Knesset Elections, 2003* highlights the Israeli Arab votes for Labour and Likud and what are the factors in which Arabs vote for Zionist parties against the background of the Al Aqsa Intifada. This chapter also discusses the background of the sixteenth Knesset elections and most importantly, it examines the Al Aqsa Intifada and its impact on the elections. However, this chapter separately discusses the improvement of socio-economic conditions of Israeli Arab in 2003 and how it took precedence over the other causes like intifada and the issue of Palestine. This chapter also looks at the calls for boycott by the Arab organisations and the Israeli votes for the Arab parties.

Chapter Fourth on *Seventeenth Knesset Elections, 2006* discusses the causes and consequences of the rise of Kadima party with respect to Arab citizens of Israel. Like other chapters, this one also highlights the socio-economic improvements between 2003 and 2006. The background of the seventeenth Knesset, opinion polls, and the Knesset elections has been

discussed. The role of Gaza disengagement plan and its effect on the political equations are briefly analysed. In the end, the call for boycott and performance of Arab parties which was above expectations have been discussed.

Chapter Fifth on *Eighteenth Knesset Elections, 2009* examines the huge disappointment of Israeli Arabs vis-à-vis the Zionist parties. The vote share of Zionist parties fell to the lowest point and many traditional Arab voters of Zionist parties either decided not to vote or to vote for the Arab parties. The reason was the second Lebanon war and the war with Hamas in Gaza. The decline of Left parties was also the highlight of the 2009 Knesset elections. While dealing with the Knesset elections it discusses the resurgence of Likud, as it staged a massive comeback and contributed to the further decline of Labour party.

The last Chapter is the conclusion which summarizes the findings of the research and verifies the hypotheses.

Chapter 2

The Arabs as a Political Community, 1948-2001

As of 2011, the Arab community consists of 20 per cent of the Israeli population but in 1948 when Israeli State was established the circumstances were a little complex. The exact population of Arabs was difficult to assess because of the large scale migration to and from the neighbouring Arab countries. The number of Israeli Arabs in 1948, as estimated by the Central Bureau of Statistics, was around 156,000.¹ This increased in the following decades due to rapid population growth in the Arab sector and became important for the political parties as Arabs grew in numbers and came to represent around one-fifth of the Israeli population.

In 1948, thousands of Arabs suddenly became the part of Israel. Besides the Arab elite who went to neighbouring Arab states, thousands of Arabs of British Mandate were forced to flee their homes and become refugees in the West Bank, Gaza Strip and other neighbouring countries. At the same time, a sizeable Arab population stayed behind and became de facto Israeli citizens. The biggest question for the Israeli Arabs was how to cope with the new political and social reality. The same dilemma was faced by Israel. Although the Declaration of Independence guaranteed freedom of religion and independence, the real question was how to implement it.² However, those principles came into conflict with the security situation and confrontation with the neighbouring Arab states. Hence, Israel imposed severe military restrictions upon them.

Furthermore from being the majority in British Mandate they were unexpectedly and forcefully transformed into a minority.³ While the actual Arab population was gradually increasing, their share was fluctuating due to immigration of Jews from the Diaspora. For

¹“The Arab Population in Israel”, *Statistilite* no. 27, 2002, Central Bureau of Statistics (2002), p. 1.

²*Declaration of Israel's Independence, 1948*, Tel Aviv, 14 May 1948, <http://stateofisrael.com/declaration/>, accessed on 23 May 2012.

³According to an estimate before the 1948 war, in the present Israel there were around 800,000 Arabs but after 1948 war only 156,000 Arabs were left in the new Israeli territory. See: Emile Touma, “The Political Coming-of-age of the ‘National Minority’”, *Journal of Palestine*, Vol. 14, No.2, Special Issue: The Palestinians in Israel and the Occupied Territories, University of California Press (Winter, 1985), p. 74.

long, the Arabs of historic Palestine who fled their homes in 1948 as well as the residents of the West Bank and Gaza Strip relied on the Arab countries for political leadership. It was only after the formation of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in 1964 and more particularly after Al Fatah joined the movement in the aftermath of the June war that an independent Palestinian leadership emerged. Surprisingly, the Palestinians remained indifferent towards the Israeli Arab mainly because of internal challenges and problems PLO was facing during the initial phase.⁴ Under such circumstances the Israeli Arabs had to deal and manage the authorities on their own.

The rise in the population of the Israeli Arabs did not guarantee them better social and economic conditions and the improvement in their social and economic conditions was not very impressive, under the military rule. During this phase the Israeli Arabs were at mercy of the military administration for the health and social issues. However after the military restrictions were removed in 1966, social economic conditions of Israeli Arab community saw an upward movement. Moreover, the political parties also started paying more attention towards them through. This chapter discusses the Israeli Arab participation and their preferences in the Knesset elections between 1948 and 1999 and the three direct elections to the prime minister and their voting pattern vis-à-vis the Zionist parties and to Israeli Arab parties from 1988. Furthermore, this chapter will also highlights the social and economic problems and advancement during the same period.

Social and Economic Conditions of Arabs, 1948- 2001

During the five decades following the establishment of the state, the Israeli Arabs have experienced various phases in their social, economic and political conditions. They saw the phase of the military rule followed by a greater Arab consciousness leading to the formation of an independent Israeli Arab party. Their political advancement was relatively much ahead of their social and economic development. As can be noticed, Arabs became part of the Israeli political system. When Arabs formed their own political party in 1988, they obtained a new political voice and assimilation into the democratic culture of Israel could be assumed. However, their development in social and economic sectors was not as rapid as in the political area. The gap between the Jews and the Arabs is still large even though this had decreased slightly. This section will describe the social and economic advancement,

⁴Emile Sahliyeh, "The PLO and the Israeli Arabs", *Asian and African Studies*, 27 (1993), p. 85.

preferences and challenges faced by the Israeli Arabs during the five decades following the establishment of the State of Israel.

One can divide the Israeli Arab's social and economic conditions into education, health, poverty and employment opportunities.

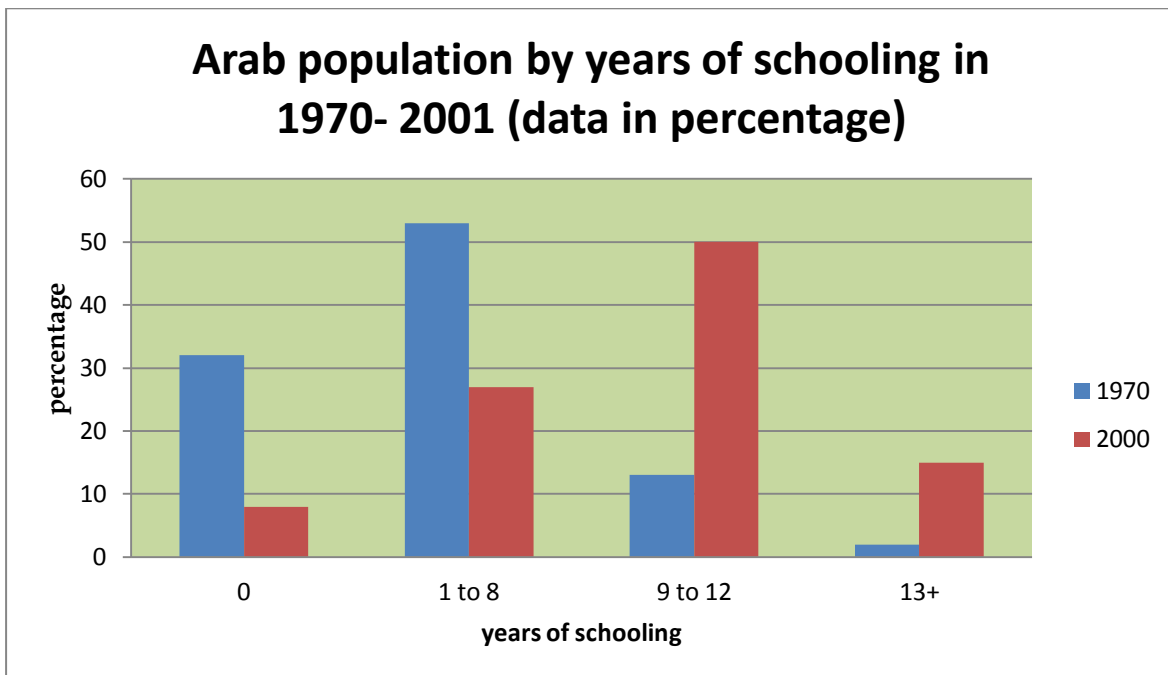
The education among Israeli Arabs should be discussed first since it is the field where Israeli Arabs have made drastic improvements as compared to other social indicators. 'Whatever the differences of opinion regarding military government, land seizure, or the rights of the minority, there seems to be an almost unanimous feeling that Israeli Arabs have made "great achievement" in education under Israeli rule'.⁵ In 1960, around 50 per cent of Israeli Arabs had no education of any kind. Whereas, only 13.9 per cent of Israeli Arabs went to school for five years and mere 1.5 per cent went to school for more than 16 years. Around 28 per cent of Israeli Arabs had 5 to 8 years of schooling. Within a decade Israeli Arabs schooling percentage increased and in 1970, 35 per cent of Israeli Arabs went to school between 5 to 8 years.⁶ At least half of the population had up to five years of schooling. The 1980s saw a rapid rise in the education level of Israeli Arabs. Only 18.9 per cent of Israeli Arabs were there who went to school. Whereas by 1980s, 2.2 per cent Israeli Arabs were now getting schooling for more than 16 years. Similarly, in 1990s education saw an upward movement and only 13 per cent Israeli Arabs were left in the category of non-schooling and more than three per cent were getting schooling for more than 16 years (Figure 2.1). By the end of the decade just seven per cent of Israeli Arabs were left in the category of non-schooling and around eight per cent Israeli Arabs were now getting more than 16 years of schooling (figure 2.1). According to official estimates, 'The rise in the level of education was highest among women, mostly due to the fact that their initial level of education was much lower than that of men.'⁷

⁵Sabri Jiryis, *The Arabs in Israel*, (Tr. in English) Inea Bushnaq, London (1976), p. 161.

⁶ Khawla Abu Baker, "Social and Educational Welfare Policy in the Arab Sector of Israel", in Alexander Bligh, *The Israeli Palestinians: An Arab Minority in the Jewish State*, Frank Cass Publishers (2003), p. 7.

⁷*Statistilite no.27*, p. 8.

Figure 2.1



Source: Central Bureau of Statistics, State of Israel, *Statistilite*, No.27, November 2002, p. 8.

In terms of health conditions, during the first decade, the health conditions of Arabs were not positive. The period till the 1960s was marked by a high death rate. Nevertheless, with better medical facilities after end of the military rule, the health indicators like total fertility rate, infant mortality rate, female infanticide etc. started decreasing and life expectancy started increasing. The Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) declined from 60 per thousand in the 1950s to 41 per thousand in 1975 and 16 per thousand in 1990.⁸ Similarly, the total fertility rate (TFR) also decreased because of awareness and better health facility. The mortality figures between 1960 and 1980 decreased from 6.6 per thousand to 4.2 per thousand.⁹ These two features highlight a healthy population growth.

Since 1948, life expectancy in the Arab population has increased by 27 years and reached 74.4 years for men and 77.7 years for women in 1996 which further increased to 74.9 of males and that of females to 77.9 in 2001.¹⁰ When compared to those of the Jewish

⁸Calvin Goldscheider, "Arab Israelis: Demography, Dependency, and Distinctiveness", *Asian and African Studies*, 27 (1993), p. 70.

⁹ Rebecca Mayer, "The Development of the Islamic Movement in Israel", *Institute for Israeli- Arab Studies*, Vol. 3, Issue 6 (44) (August 1993), p. 4.

¹⁰ Nurit Yaffe (ed.), *Indicators of Mortality*, Central Bureau of Statistics, State of Israel (November 1998), <http://www1.cbs.gov.il/www/statistical/mortality.htm>, accessed on 27 December 2011.

population of Israel, these indicators, though showing signs of ascent, lag behind. On the other hand, the Arabs of Israel are better off than the Arabs of the neighbouring countries. According to official estimates, 'At the end of the 1940s, the life expectancy of Arabs was fifteen years lower than that for Jews. By the 1970s, the gap had decreased to two to three years. Since then, it has remained almost unchanged'.¹¹

The poverty level is still a point of concern among the Israeli Arabs since the gap between the Jews and Arabs is huge. It is estimated that by the end of the 2001, around 50 per cent of the Arabs live below the poverty line whereas only 15 per cent of Jews face the same fate during the same period.¹² Nevertheless, this level is certainly much below than the level of 1950s where around 85 per cent of the Arabs lived below the poverty line.

The economy of Arabs between 1948 and 1970 was predominantly based on agriculture. During the military rule, the Arabs were not allowed to move and hence their opportunities in other sectors were very limited. They were thus depending on self-sustained agriculture with limited interaction with outer world. During the 1950s, 60 per cent of Arabs were engaged in agricultural activities. 'In the early 1970s, less than 20 per cent of Arabs were still working in the agriculture field. Those no longer employed in agriculture worked mainly in construction and services outside of the village'.¹³ In 1960s around 40-50 per cent Israeli Arabs were working in the agriculture sector. In 1970, this percentage came down to 28 per cent and in 2001 the Israeli Arabs working in the agriculture sector were only around five per cent.¹⁴ This also corroborates the argument that after the abolition of the military rule, the Arabs started migrating to the places and sectors with better opportunities. However, there was one major problem regarding employment which Arabs had to face in the last five decades. Arabs and Jews localities were distinctly segregated. The large part of the Arab population is living in the large and small villages with a distance from the Jew towns. The distance from the Jewish cities limits the job opportunities of Arabs seeking employment outside the Arab economy.¹⁵

¹¹*Stastilite*, No. 27, p. 6.

¹²Yosef Jabareen, "The Employment of Arabs in Israel", *Caesarea Economic Forum*, The Israel Democracy Institute (June 2010), p. 2.

¹³Mayer, "The Development of the Islamic Movement in Israel", p. 4.

¹⁴Onn Winckler, "Fertility Transition in the Middle East", in Alexeder Bligh (ed.), *The Israeli Palestinians: An Arab Minority in the Jewish state*, Frank Cass Publications (2003), p. 45.

¹⁵Sharon Rabin Margloth, "Labour Market Discrimination Against Arab Israeli Citizens: Can Something Be Done?", *International Law and Politics*, New York University, Vol. 36:845, (2004), p. 846.

This was more prominent during the military restrictions. Once restrictions were removed Israeli Arabs started moving to cities to look for better job.

Exposure to the level of services and goods in the Jewish sector also increased expectations and desires in the Arab villages. However, there is still a lack of employment for Arabs in the high technology industry and only one per cent of Arabs is employed in this sector. Moreover, only 2.4 per cent of the industrial zones are located in the Arab sectors.¹⁶ Thus, there is need for improvement in the sector of poverty and unemployment.

In terms of urbanisation, one can say that in this sector also Israeli Arab population grew rapidly. In 1951, only 26 per cent of the Israeli Arab population was living in the urban centres. However, in little more than two decades later, that is, by 1976 the urban population increased to 61 per cent, which further crossed the mark of 75 per cent in the 1990s.¹⁷

The Israeli Arab Community under the Military Restrictions, 1949-1966

Just after the 1948 war ended, the Israeli citizens of Arab were placed under the strict military restrictions on the pretext of security. Numerous laws were passed to restrict Arabs. The authorities considered Arabs as a major security problem and most areas where Arabs were living were placed under military control in 1949.¹⁸ The first legislative act empowered the Ministry of Defence to issue emergency regulations so as to restrict the Arab minority for security reasons. The defence ministry was authorised to establish defence areas and security zones which would put these areas under the total control of the military authorities.

The Arab dominated regions were divided into three zones which were put under the complete surveillance of the military structure. The movement of Arabs were monitored and they were not allowed to move freely. The first sector was the northern sector or the Galilee which comprised around 130,000 Arabs. The second sector was the central region or the little triangle which had around 35,000 Arabs. The third sector was the Beersheba district or Negev which comprised around 14,000 people.¹⁹ Under the military rule, nobody except authorized persons was allowed to enter the zone. Under these provisions, 93 out of 104 Arab villages in

¹⁶Yosef Jabareen, "The Employment of Arabs in Israel", p. 3.

¹⁷Fanny Ginor, *Socio-Economic Disparities in Israel*, Tel Aviv University, (1979), p. 49.

¹⁸Don Peretz, *The Middle East Today*, Greenwood Publishing Group, West Port CT, (1994), p. 330.

¹⁹Sami Hadawi, *Israel and the Arab Minority*, New York: Arab Information Centre (1959), pp. 4-5.

Israel were considered as closed areas out of which no one could move without a military permit.²⁰ Moreover, permanent residents were supposed to take a prior 14 days permission before leaving the area.²¹ Any person entering the military zone without permission could face imprisonment and fine by the established military courts. ‘They were required to take passes and subjected to army searches and seizures, arbitrary arrest without due legal process, expulsion from the country, and banishment to other villages in Israel’.²² These have to be viewed within the context of prevailing tensions between Israel and its Arab neighbours and periodic infiltration and sabotage attacks directed against Israel.

The military restrictions had an important impact on the social and economic condition of Arabs. The restriction of movement for Arabs limited their activities in the Jewish localities. The commercial activities were almost negligible. The insignificant contacts with the other communities facilitated Arabs’ departure from trade and commerce fields of work. They were also denied jobs in the Jewish communities and restrictions made it more difficult. ‘Military rule in the Arab localities, where most of Arab citizens lived, made it technically straightforward to deny them the capacity to commute to jobs in the Jewish localities.’²³ For Arabs, it was also difficult to get health and medical facilities. Those who required immediate health attention were given permission to leave their locality for a limited period. In case of extension of the stay of an Arab patient, he/she was asked to go back and apply again to the authorities.²⁴

The political participation, however, showed a different trend. The Arab participation in the Knesset elections since the first elections kept on increasing. Their participation particularly after the second Knesset elections surpassed the Jewish participation. Most of the votes went to the Arab list associated to the major party particularly Mapai. The polling trends showed that the Arabs were more willing to enter the Knesset through a major party than the smaller parties. Through it, they wanted to introduce reforms favouring the Arab population in Israel.

²⁰Mark A. Lewis, “Historical setting: Israel Arabs, Arab land, and Arab refugees”, in Helen Chapin Metz, (ed.) *Israel: A Country Study*, Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, (1988), [http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+il0032\)](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+il0032)), accessed on 27 December 2011.

²¹Hadawi, *Israel and the Arab Minority*, p. 5.

²²Peretz, *The Middle East Today*, p. 330.

²³Michal Shalev, “Jewish Organised Labour and the Palestinians: A study of State/Society relations in Israel”, in Baruch Kimmerling (ed.), *The Israeli State and the Society: Boundaries and Frontiers*, State of New York Press (1989), pp. 106-107.

²⁴Hadawi, *Israel and the Arab Minority*, p. 12.

The Arab electoral strength remained very great throughout the period of the military government. Moreover, the Arab list associated with Mapai dominated the Arab sector. It frequently won more than 50 per cent of the Arab votes and secured as many as six seats in the 1959 elections.²⁵ In parallel, Arabs under the military restrictions repeatedly complained to the international authorities about their mistreatment. The growing international pressure forced Israel to take some actions regarding military restrictions. In 1958, Israel showed signs of relaxing the restrictions. Later, as the security conditions improved further and as the pressure of within the Jewish population for the abolition of the military rule was growing, the military rule was finally abolished in 1966.²⁶ Arabs were officially free of the military rule when the Seventh Knesset elections took place in 1969.

The Knesset Elections 1948-1999: Trend, Political Parties, and the Arab Votes

The proportion representation system in Israel is often opposed by the big political parties because it gives ample scope for smaller parties to win seats and play a decisive role in the political system. But this system finds immense support within the smaller parties as it gives them a fair opportunity to enter into the parliament. The 'PR system', as it is popularly called, has many advantages as well as disadvantages. Israel is the most archetypical victim of the disadvantages of a PR system. Because of this PR system, since 1948 no political party could get a majority in the 120-member Knesset. Only the Labour (the then Alignment) could come closer to the majority in the 1969 elections when it managed to secure 56 seats in the Knesset. But the same PR system, as one shall observe, has benefitted a lot. In PR system since every single vote is important all the major political parties paid enough attention towards the Israeli Arab community.

The study of the Knesset elections can be divided into three parts. The first part will examine the Knesset elections from 1948 to 1965 and the second section will discuss the Arab voting pattern from the 1969 elections till the 1988 Knesset elections. The third and last section will peruse the elections from 1988 till 1999. The rationale behind the first section is the imposition of military restrictions. The second section would be studied under the background of the June War. The effect of the War on the Arab voting pattern was evident. The second section reflects the phase which saw a decline in the Arab voting percentage. The

²⁵Asa'ad Ganim, *The Palestinian- Arab Minority in Israel, 1948-2000: A Political Study*, State University of New York Press (2001), p. 41.

²⁶Peretz, *The Middle East Today*, p. 330.

third section deals with the formation of Arab parties and the challenges faced by the Zionist parties vis-à-vis Arab Democratic Party (ADP) in the Arab sector regarding the division of the Arab votes in the subsequent Knesset election.

The Knesset Elections, 1948-1965

The First Knesset elections were held in 1949 and were marked by utter confusion. The first Arab-Israeli war was over and the Arabs residing in the territory of Israel found themselves being governed by a new state law. Around 160,000 Arabs came under the fold of the Israeli territory. ‘These Arabs realized they were suddenly transformed from the majority culture into an unfavoured minority, bereft of the Palestinian elite which had fled during the war’.²⁷ When the First Knesset elections were announced by the Central Election Committee, the Arabs were bewildered about their role as a political community in the newly formed state Israel. The Arab community was apprehensive of the political parties participating in the First Knesset elections. Moreover, the Arabs in Israel were also not encouraged to form their own political parties.²⁸ ‘With the exception of the communists, all Jewish parties were originally Zionist groupings in pre- State days’.²⁹ The political parties were more inclined towards the concept of Zionism. ‘Their only concession has been to organize lists of Arab candidates allied with them as a vote catching tactic prior to elections’.³⁰ Thus, it was extremely difficult for Arabs to align themselves to any such association which was vehemently opposed by their other Palestinians who were then residing outside Israel.

The party which showed a sign of harmony and integration at the time of the first elections was the Ben-Gurion led Mapai, the forerunner of the Labour party. It was also the largest party in Israel and preferred to penetrate into the Arab sector through a list called Arab-Jewish Alliance of Palestinian Workers.³¹

²⁷Mayer, “The Development of the Islamic Movement in Israel”, p. 3.

²⁸ Hadawi, *Israel and the Arab Minority*, p. 36.

²⁹Jacob M. Landau, *The Arabs in Israel*, Oxford University Press (1969), p. 71.

³⁰*Ibid.*, p. 72.

³¹The Arab- Jewish alliance of Palestinian workers was established in 1929.

Apart from Mapai, the other major party was the Israel Communist party Maqi.³² This party was formed just a few months before the first Knesset elections by the communist members of Jew and Arab communities.³³ Although the party got the support of the Soviet Union, it was more dependent on the votes from the anti- Zionist Jewish immigrants, the educated Christians and the mobilised workers.³⁴ ‘Maqi’s platform for the 1949 elections, called for the foundation of an independent, democratic Arab state in the other part of historic Palestine; full equal rights for the Israeli Arabs; the return of the Arab refugees; and the abolition of the military administration and all travel restrictions.’³⁵ Other smaller parties which were contesting the first Knesset elections were the moderate Mapam, the religious parties, other smaller Jewish parties, as well as the extreme nationalist parties.

The first general elections were held on 25 January 1949. These elections saw 505,576 eligible voters on the voting list and 434,684 valid votes with 3,592 votes per seat in the Knesset.³⁶ Out of this number, around 33,000 were Arabs. The total turnout percentage of the Arab voters exercising their voting rights was of 80 per cent.³⁷ The biggest gainer of this election was with no doubt Mapai and its allies, namely the Workers’ Block and the Democratic List of Nazareth. It secured around 61 per cent of the total Arab votes.³⁸ The second largest party in terms of Arab votes was the communist party Maqi which secured around 22 per cent of Arab votes. Maqi’s overall performance was not very impressive though as it could only secure 3.5 per cent of valid votes.³⁹ The other political parties shared the rest of Arab votes. The Arabs got encouraged by these first general elections and formed

³²The communist party of Israel was formed in the 1920s along with the rise of communist movement in the world. The CPI- Maqi was the result of the merger of two parties the PCP (a Jewish party) and the National League for Liberation (an Arab party).

³³Ilana Kaufman, *Arab National Communism in the Jewish State*, University Press of Florida (1997), pp. 27-28.

³⁴*Ibid.*, p. 23.

³⁵Landau, *The Arabs in Israel*, p. 109.

³⁶Knesset Election Results, The State of Israel, http://www.knesset.gov.il/description/eng/eng_mimshal_res1.htm, accessed on 1 December 2011.

³⁷Andrea Carla, “Pointless Representation: The Tyranny of the Majority in Proportional Electoral System”, *The American Political Science Association* (2006), p. 24, <http://www.votelaw.com/blog/blogdocs/Pointless%20representation%20%20tyranny%20of%20the%20majority%20in%20proportional%20electoral%20systems.pdf>, accessed on 27 December 2011.

³⁸Landau, *The Arabs in Israel*, p. 111.

³⁹*Ibid.*, p. 111.

many associations, though under some restrictions. They even started associating themselves with major political parties in Israel. This gave a political future to the Arab minorities for the coming elections.

In 1949, as an outcome of the armistice agreement between Israel and the neighbouring Arab countries, Israel's political boundary changed slightly.⁴⁰ This resulted in a change of the Arabs' demography and an increase of the population of Israeli Arabs. Thus, in the second Knesset elections held on 30 July 1951 around 70,000 Arabs voted, a number which represents more than the double of the Arab votes compared to the first Knesset elections. The political parties were more than willing to accommodate Arabs in their political scheme of things. Since Israel was using a proportional representative system, Arab votes became more important for all political parties.

As in the previous elections, the major party was Mapai, hence it had the strongest base in the Arab electorate. When Mapai came to power following the preceding elections, it paid attention to the Arab community. This helped Mapai to penetrate the core Arab sector. To achieve this goal, Mapai was assisted by three Arab lists namely Agriculture and Development, the Democratic List of the Arabs of Israel, and Progress and Work. As predicted, Mapai again secured a maximum number of Arab votes in the elections. In the 1951 elections, the number of eligible voters was 924,885 with 687,492 valid votes and the threshold limit was one per cent.⁴¹ Within this number, 70,000 were the Arab voters, which was more than twice the number of Arab voters in the previous elections. The percentage of Israeli Arab turnout increased from 79 per cent in 1949 to 86 per cent in 1951.⁴² Mapai and its allied Arab list secured 66.5 per cent of Israeli Arab votes showing a rise since the 1949 Knesset elections.⁴³

⁴⁰The Armistice agreement of 1949 was signed between Israel, Egypt, Syria and Jordan. The agreement established demarcation line between the borders of Israel and the West Bank known as Green line. For details see: The Armistice Agreements, Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, <http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Foreign+Relations/Israels+Foreign+Relations+since+1947/1947-1974/Israel-Egypt+Armistice+Agreement.htm>, accessed on 25 May 2012.

⁴¹Knesset Election Results, The State of Israel, http://www.knesset.gov.il/description/eng/eng_mimshal_res2.htm, accessed on 10 December 2011.

⁴²Ori Stendel, *The Arabs in Israel*, Sussex Academic Press (1996), p. 149.

⁴³Landau, *The Arabs in Israel*, p. 115.

The second largest party in terms of Arab votes was Maqi. After the First Knesset elections, Maqi's main political agenda was aligned with the Palestinian demands. It supported the Palestinian state and this was one of the major reasons why Maqi could not get enough backing outside the Israeli Arab community. Maqi asked for the city of Nazareth to be united with the Palestinians along with other Arab major localities.⁴⁴ Maqi's electoral base in the Arab sector suffered a loss when compared with the last elections as it could secure only 16.3 per cent of Arab votes.⁴⁵ Since the First Knesset elections, Maqi concentrated all its energy to work in Nazareth, a largest Arab locality, which reaped benefits in the second Knesset elections as the majority of their votes came from Nazareth.

The third political party which slowly carved its place in the Arab sector was Mapam. In the 1949 elections, Mapam won a mere 0.2 per cent of Arab support. In 1951, it went up to 5.6 per cent. Among the other political parties, the General Zionists was the biggest gainer as it increased its Arab share considerably from 3.6 to 9.8 per cent.⁴⁶

By the end of the term of the Second Knesset, the Israeli parliamentary system strongly evolved into a powerful political structure in the country's democracy. During the progress of the Second Knesset elections, the issue of Arabs was discussed in detail. The problems of infiltration across the border and increasing militant attacks on the Israeli population kept the Knesset engaged.⁴⁷ The opposition targeted the ruling Mapai for not taking adequate measures to tackle such problems which was coming from the other side of the border and was supported by the Israeli population of Arabs. Moreover, the passage of the citizenship law in 1952 created a more complex situation as all the non- Jews were required to prove their Palestinian residency.⁴⁸ The Third Knesset elections were held against this background.

The third Knesset elections were held on 26 July 1955. During their campaign, political parties, particularly Mapai, Maqi, and Mapam, attracted Arabs through their manifestos. In this regard, they even opened their party for Arabs. 'The first Zionist party which took a clear

⁴⁴Kaufman, *Arab National Communism in the Jewish State*, p. 28.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, p.81.

⁴⁶Landau, *The Arabs in Israel*, p. 115.

⁴⁷Highlights of the Second Knesset, *Jewish Virtual Library*, <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsourc/Politics/knesset2.html>, accessed on 3 December 2011.

⁴⁸ *Nationality Law, 5712-1952*, <http://www.israellawresourcecenter.org/israellaws/fulltext/nationalitylaw.htm>, accessed on 23 May 2012.

position on the matter was Mapam (the United Workers' Party), which opened its rank for Arabs on an equal footing with its Jewish members' as early as 1954.⁴⁹ This was not the case of Mapai which rejected the idea of opening the party's doors to Arabs till 1973 and continued to fight the elections with a separate list.⁵⁰ Many Arabs left Mapai's Arab list alleging the former's lack of interest towards the Israeli Arab community.

Prior to the elections, all the parties, excluding the extreme right wing, showed interest in the Arab community. Mapai highlighted its party's achievements and benefits it brought for the Arab community in Israel. It constructed the Arab list in such a way that it could attract a maximum Arab votes. Thus, in the final Democratic List for Israeli Arabs, the first three candidates were a Muslim, a Greek Catholic, and a Druze.⁵¹ The cadre of Maqi also concentrated its full energy in the Arab sector.

In the Third Knesset elections, the electorate was 1,057,795. Out of this number, 86,723 were Arabs, among whom 77,750 exercised their voting rights. The voting participation of Arabs rose to the outstanding percentage of 91.⁵² The increased percentage of Arabs indicated their growing awareness about their rights in the Israeli democratic setup. Mapai and its Arab allies got the maximum Arab share of votes. Mapai and their Arab allies secured around 63 per cent of Arab votes. The Arab's willingness to vote for the major party in order to have a say in the matters related to them, gave Mapai this big lead. Mapam percentage share also increased to 7.4 mainly due to the loss of Maqi in the Israeli Arab voting share. Maqi secured around 15.6 per cent of votes in the Third Knesset elections.⁵³ Mapam increased their votes from their last election. The other smaller parties like the General Zionists could not repeat their performance and failed to secure any seat from their Arab list.

The Fourth Knesset elections were held in 1959 after the chaotic phase of the Third Knesset elections. The Third Knesset mandate was mainly dominated by the events related to the Sinai Peninsula. The outbreak of the Sinai campaign⁵⁴ and the Kafr Qasim shooting⁵⁵ were a

⁴⁹Ganim, *The Palestinian-Arab Minority in Israel, 1948-2000: A Political Study*, p. 40.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, p. 40.

⁵¹Landau, *The Arabs in Israel*, p. 118.

⁵²Stendel, *The Arabs in Israel*, p. 149.

⁵³Kaufman, *Arab National Communism in the Jewish State*, p. 81.

⁵⁴Sinai campaign was the result of series of developments between Israel and Egypt relations and the 1956 Suez crisis. Combined forces of Israel, Britain and France prevented Egypt from blocking the Suez Canal.

few highlights during the Third Knesset. Apart from those episodes, the Wadi Salib⁵⁶ riots in Haifa, first violent outbreak in Israel, also kept the Knesset engaged.⁵⁷ In 1959, the Arabs could manage to secure as many as six seats in the Knesset, all through the Arab list backed by Mapai.⁵⁸

In the Fourth Knesset elections, which was held on 3 November 1959, the electorate increased to 1,218,483 and the Arab eligible voters were 94,193.⁵⁹ The overall voting percentage was 81.6 per cent with an Arab voting of 88.9 per cent, which was slightly lower than for the preceding elections.⁶⁰

In its election manifesto, Mapai presented a report card showing the Arab progress in various fields under its government. It also made efforts to strengthen its ties with the Arab lists. However, their efforts could not reap high results as Mapai slid down to 52 per cent of Arab votes, ten per cent less than previous elections.⁶¹ Even the Communist Maqi failed to increase its percentage of Arab votes as the decline of their popularity was evident before the elections. It could only gather 10 per cent of Arab votes.

Like in the previous elections, Maqi's loss became Mapam's gain as most of the Arab votes of Maqi went to Mapam. Mapam doubled its Israeli Arab voting share and secured around 14.4 per cent of Israeli Arab votes. This change was inevitable as Mapam worked hard since 1954 to change its image and present itself more moderate party among Arabs. It also opened their doors for Arabs as early as 1954. Other smaller parties could not manage to gain enough votes to even secure one Knesset seat.

⁵⁵Kafr Qasim massacre happened in a small Arab village called Kafr Qasim situated at the Green Line border. The Israeli border police was involved in the shootout which killed around 50 Arabs. Later, the Israeli court found the officers involved in the shootout guilty. They were sentenced to 15-17 years of imprisonment. However, their sentence was later reduced to 5 years. They ended up in serving a very short term. This created uproar in Israel particularly from the supporters of Arabs.

⁵⁶Wadi Salib is an Arab locality near Haifa. The riots occurred as a protest against the discrimination. The protests were led by Jews against the Labour government. It later sparked unrest and series of widespread vandalism and violence.

⁵⁷Highlights of The Third Knesset Elections, *Jewish Virtual Library*, <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Politics/Knesset3.html>, accessed on 10 December 2011.

⁵⁸Ganim, *The Palestinian- Arab Minority in Israel, 1948-2000: A Political Study*, p. 41

⁵⁹Landau, *The Arabs in Israel*, pp. 126-128.

⁶⁰Stendel, *The Arabs in Israel*, p. 149.

⁶¹Sabri Jiryis, *The Arabs in Israel*, Monthly Review Press, London, 1976, p. 298.

The Fourth Knesset (1959) could not last for long and collapsed in less than two years. There was very limited economic progress in the Arab sector which created discontent among Israeli Arabs. The Lavon affair⁶² also kept the Knesset engaged in its brief tenure.⁶³

In the Fifth Knesset elections, held on 15 August 1961, '1,037,030 Israeli voters representing 81.3 per cent of the eligible electorate went to the polls to elect 120 members'.⁶⁴ The total number of the electorate was 1,271,285, out of whom 105,154 were Arabs.⁶⁵ The total of Arab votes in the Arab district were 71,723, and adding Arab votes from all districts, the percentage votes goes to around 85.5.⁶⁶ 'Eleven different lists obtained the necessary one per cent of the vote' to enter the Knesset.⁶⁷ Mapai suffered a huge loss from the Arab sector and so did Mapam. The share of both the parties fell from their previous figures and they secured only 50.8 and 11 per cent, respectively. On the other hand the communist Maqi was the real winner for the Arab electorate. The year proved to be 'a turning point in the history of support for the communist party among the Arabs'.⁶⁸ It increased their support by 122 per cent, from 8,813 in 1959 to 19,802 in 1961.⁶⁹

The Fifth Knesset completed its full term in 1965. The government's new economic policy and discrimination on the grounds of ethnic origin were the two particularities of the Fifth Knesset.⁷⁰ Meanwhile, the major party of Israel, Mapai split into two. The breakaway group was led by the veteran Ben-Gurion who formed a new party Rafi (Israeli Workers List). It also sponsored an Arab list called the List of Peace. Although it could not get enough time to

⁶²Lavon affair refers to an incident where highly trained Egyptian Jews were sent to Egypt to spy for Israel. They were caught and tried in Egypt. However, the government officials refused to recognise them as the agents of Israel. This sparked a lot of protests from the opposition. The Lavon affair kept Israeli Knesset engaged for nearly 20 years.

⁶³The Highlights of Fourth Knesset, *Jewish Virtual Library*, <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Politics/Knesset4.html>, [Accessed on 10 December 2011].

⁶⁴Scott D. Johnston, "Election Politics and Social Change in Israel", *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 16, No. 3 (Summer 1962), p. 309.

⁶⁵Landau, *The Arabs in Israel*, p. 143.

⁶⁶Sabri Jiryis, *The Arabs in Israel*, Monthly Review Press, London (1976), p. 298.

⁶⁷Johnston, "Election Politics and Social Change in Israel", p. 309.

⁶⁸Kaufman, *Arab National Communism in the Jewish State*, p. 90.

⁶⁹Landau, *The Arabs in Israel*, p. 134.

⁷⁰Highlights of The Fifth Knesset Elections, *Jewish Virtual Library*, <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Politics/Knesset5.html>, accessed on 10 December 2011.

prepare for elections, it managed to secure 10 Knesset seats. Mapai came up with a coalition called Alignment and won 45 Knesset seats. Maqi also suffered from the party split and one section broke away from the parent party and formed its own party known Rakah. This newly formed party focussed mainly on Arabs. It was the first and only party 'which could present itself in the image of an Arab party'.⁷¹

The total number of eligible voters in the Sixth elections was 1,499,709 which included 129,902 Arab voters. The voting turnout was 83 per cent and 87.8 per cent overall and of the Israeli Arabs respectively.⁷² Alignment along with its Arab allies received 50.1 per cent of Arab votes. The biggest disaster came for Maqi which could only get 549 votes and hence could not even get one seat in the Knesset for the first time. The breakaway Rakah won 22.6 per cent of Arab votes.⁷³ Mapam went further down by winning only 10.3 per cent of Arab votes (table 2.1).⁷⁴ The Ben-Gurion- led Rafi could gather only little Arab support. Other minor and religious parties' votes were negligible to find a place for discussion.

This phase of Knesset elections (1949-1965) were held when Arabs were placed under the military restrictions. However, there are a few significant trends which were seen during this phase of the elections.

The first and most important development was the recognition of the importance of the Arab votes by the Zionist parties. This was a big development because under the PR system, no party could afford to neglect twenty per cent of the population which was voting with the rate of around 80 per cent. This also helped in the improvement of the condition of Arabs as the political parties, particularly the ruling Mapai, brought many reforms to attract Arab votes.

The second important development was the outstanding voting turnout of Arabs. With the subsequent Knesset elections, the Arab voting turnout improved. This reached a zenith when the turnout touched 92 per cent in 1955 elections (see table 2.1). This showed the Arabs' willingness to participate in the democratic process and to be a part of the political system. Moreover, it was also observed that young Arab voters were more enthusiasts about the

⁷¹Landau, *The Arabs in Israel*, p. 141.

⁷²Stendel, *The Arabs in Israel*, p. 149.

⁷³Kaufman, *Arab National Communism in the Jewish State*, p. 94.

⁷⁴Jiryis, *The Arabs in Israel*, p. 298.

elections as compared to the old voters. Arabs also showed no inclination towards the religious parties and their votes were strictly limited to the secular parties.

Table 2.1: Arab voting pattern under the military restriction, 1949-1965
(Data in percentage)

| | Arab voting turnout | Mapai and its Arab allies | Maqi | Mapam | Other political parties |
|--|---------------------|---------------------------|--------|-------|-------------------------|
| 1st Knesset elections (25 January, 1949) | 79.3 | 61.3 | 22.2 | 0.2 | 16.3 |
| 2nd Knesset elections (30 July, 1951) | 85.5 | 66.5 | 16.3 | 5.6 | 11.6 |
| 3rd Knesset elections (26 July, 1955) | 92.1 | 62.4 | 15.6 | 7.3 | 14.7 |
| 4th Knesset elections (3 November, 1959) | 88.9 | 52 | 10 | 14.4 | 25.5 |
| 5th Knesset election (15 August, 1961) | 85.6 | 50.8 | 22.7 | 12 | 15.5 |
| 6th Knesset elections (1 November, 1965) | 87.8 | 50.1* | 22.6** | 10.3 | 18.1 |

*Figures without Rafi **Figures of Rakah

Source: Jacob M. Landau, *The Arabs in Israel*, Oxford University Press (1969), p. 65.

The Knesset Elections, 1969-1984

The Seventh Knesset elections (1969) took place against the backdrop of two important developments. Firstly, the military restriction imposed on the Arab population in 1948 was abolished. This was the result of the growing opposition within Israel and due to pressure from the international community. The second development was the June War which had an impact on the Arab population and its voting pattern.

The Seventh Knesset elections were held in 28 October 1969 after the Sixth Knesset completed its full term. There is no doubt that the main event of this Knesset was the June War. Soon after it, the Prime Minister Levi Eshkol announced the unification of Jerusalem.⁷⁵ This caused further tension in the Arab community which just came out of the military restriction. The Arab population of the occupied territories to accept Israel as their country and those from East Jerusalem, Golan Heights refused to participate in Israeli elections at any level.⁷⁶ The subsequent elections after the June War saw a fall in the voting percentage of Arabs whereas the same Arab votes rose at an unequalled pace during the 1950s and 60s.

The Seventh Knesset elections were held in this context. 1,758,685 voters, including Arabs, were eligible for casting their votes.⁷⁷ However, the valid votes out of the total number were only 1,367,743. Alignment led by Israeli Labour Party (ILP), which was the coalition of erstwhile Mapai,⁷⁸ Mapam and other smaller parties, succeeded in securing 56 seats. When added to its Arab lists, Alignment reached 60 seats which is till date the best performance by any political party or coalition.⁷⁹

However, even after such a grand alliance, the ILP led Alignment saw a decline in the Arab sector as most of its votes were captured by Rakah, which was now seen by Arabs as their own party. Although Alignment's Arab list won 40 per cent of the Arab votes, Alignment itself could not win more than 16 per cent of the Arab votes. On the other hand, Rakah won 29 per cent of the Arab votes.⁸⁰ During this phase, the main competition to gather Arab votes was between the communist Rakah and the ILP-led Alignment. On one hand, Rakah slowly gained trust within the Arab communities. On the other hand, Alignment and its Arab lists lost command over the Arab population. The next few elections experienced the same trend.

⁷⁵Highlights of the Sixth Knesset Elections, *Jewish Virtual Library*, <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsourc/Politics/Knesset6.html>, accessed on 27 December 2011.

⁷⁶Jacob M. Landau, *The Arab Minority in Israel, 1967-1991: Political Aspects*, Oxford University Press (1993), p. 131.

⁷⁷Seventh Knesset, Knesset Election Results, *The State of Israel*, http://www.knesset.gov.il/description/eng/eng_mimshal_res7.htm, accessed on 27 December 2011.

⁷⁸In 1968, Mapai re-emerged with its breakaway faction, Rafi and was named as Israeli Labour Party and formed a coalition with parties like Ahdut HaAvoda and fought elections in the name of Alignment.

⁷⁹The Arab lists of Alignment were Kidmah Ufituah and Shituf Ve' ahvah.

⁸⁰Landau, *The Arab Minority in Israel, 1967-1991: Political Aspects*, p. 137.

The Eight elections in 1973 were again marked by the October War. The elections were delayed because of the war and the ruling alignment was criticised by the opposition because of its failure in the early stage of the conflict and for Egyptian surprise. However, the biggest debate was over the assassination of Israeli sportsmen in Munich by the Arab terrorist organisations. This created a gulf between Arabs and Jews in Israel. The emerging concept of Arab nationalism was also one of the highlights of this period.

In the Eight Knesset elections, Rakah kept on gaining strength and Alignment's share of Arab votes also kept on falling down. Rakah got 37 per cent of Arab votes which was a giant step in the Israeli political system vis-à-vis Arabs. The Labour led Alignment could secure a mere 12 per cent of Arab votes and their Arab allies also could only get 27 per cent of Arab votes.⁸¹ The participation of Arabs was around 79 per cent.⁸² However, the number of eligible voters in this election was 2,037,478. The valid votes were around 1,566,855.⁸³

The Ninth Knesset elections, which were held on 17 May 1977, brought a significant change in the Israeli political system. For the first time, the left parties Mapai/Alignment/Labour was replaced by a right wing Menachem Begin led Likud. It remained a dominant force in the Israeli political system throughout the 1980s. Likud won 43 Knesset seats and formed the government with the help of the National Religious Party (NRP), Agudat Yisrael, and Shlomozion. The rise of Likud also indicated the turn of Israeli society towards a centre-right political system. In terms of Arab votes also, Alignment along with its Arab allies declined. It could only gather 10 per cent of Arab votes and their allies also failed miserably, securing only 16 per cent of votes. Rakah on the other side, kept on adding some Arab support. Rakah won 51 per cent of total Arab votes and became a dominant party in the Arab sector.⁸⁴ Likud also got around three per cent of Arab votes, which was slightly better than preceding elections. The Ninth Knesset elections (1977) saw 2,236,293 eligible voters out of which 1,747,820 were the valid votes.⁸⁵ The Arab voting percentage fell further to around 76.3 per

⁸¹Carla, "Pointless Representation: The Tyranny of the Majority in Proportional Electoral System", p. 24.

⁸²Landau, *The Arab Minority in Israel, 1967-1991: Political Aspects*, p. 133.

⁸³Seventh Knesset, Knesset Election Results, *The State of Israel*, http://www.knesset.gov.il/description/eng/eng_mimshal_res8.htm, accessed on 27 December 2011.

⁸⁴Andrea Carla, "Pointless Representation: The Tyranny of the Majority in Proportional Electoral System", p. 24.

⁸⁵Seventh Knesset, Knesset Election Results, *The State of Israel*, http://www.knesset.gov.il/description/eng/eng_mimshal_res9.htm, accessed on 27 December 2011.

cent which was less than the last Knesset elections and was also for the first time behind the Jewish participation in the elections.

The Tenth Knesset elections were held on 30 June 1981 and Likud again became the largest party. Nevertheless, the Alignment regained its lost votes and was just one seat behind Likud's 48. There were around 2,490,014 eligible voters in the Tenth elections and 1,937,366 votes were declared valid during the counting. The Arab participation saw a very different trend in this election. The voting turnout in the Arab sector plunged to 69.7 per cent, whereas in the Jewish sector, it remained constant at 78.5 per cent. The 69.7 per cent turnout was the lowest in the history of Arab participation in the Israeli political system. It is believed that this trend was partially because of the call of boycott of elections by a few Arab organisations such as the Sons of the Village based on the PLO's appeals for boycott of the Israeli elections.⁸⁶

The elections saw the decline in the Arab votes of Rakah, mainly due to the constant attack of the Sons of the Village accusing them to neglect the Arab causes. Rakah won around 38 per cent of Arab votes whereas Alignment won around 26 per cent of Arabs votes, added to 12 per cent of votes secured by its Arab allied parties. This trend was also significant in the Knesset elections. Firstly, Alignment's Arab share was reinforced, which also helped them to secure 47 seats in the Knesset. The second trend was that Alignment won more votes than its Arab allies for the first time in the history of the political system. Likud and NRP also increased their Arab share of votes by securing eight and four per cent of votes, respectively.

The 1980s also witnessed Israel's more stringent measures towards the Arabs particularly the population of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. This generated a chain reaction among the Arab population of Israel. The Arab organisations in Israel campaigned harshly against the policies of the Israel Defence Forces (IDF). Moreover, the ascent of the right wing Likud also created anxiety among the Arab population of Israel.

Two events which irked the Arab population of Israel were the Operation Peace for the Galilee⁸⁷ and the massacre of Sabra and Shatila.⁸⁸ Both the events were targeted against the

⁸⁶ Landau, *The Arab Minority in Israel, 1967-1991: Political Aspects*, p. 140.

⁸⁷ Operation Peace in Galilee was the response by Israeli forces in wake of the attacks by the radical Arab organizations from the Southern Lebanon to the Israeli territory in 1982. The counter attack was launched by IDF on 6 June, 1982.

Palestinians. The Operation Peace for the Galilee first got some consensus among the Israeli public but later it was found that there were lot of disagreements regarding this action.⁸⁹ The massacre of Sabra and Shatila also invited strong internal as well as international criticisms.

The response from the Arab population was radical and Arab organisations started campaigning against the government. ‘During operation Galilee the Sons of the Village stepped up their anti- government efforts, shoulder to shoulder to the progressive national movement and the other extremist organisations and even the communist led Hadash’.⁹⁰ This paved the way for the formation of the sole Arab party. Although in the Eleventh Knesset elections, no Arab party could come to unity to fight elections, they succeeded to do so in the Twelfth Knesset elections. The Eleventh Knesset elections saw Alignment again emerging as the largest party in the elections. It won 44 seats and a total of 35 per cent of the Israeli votes.⁹¹ It received around 23 per cent of Arab votes whereas the communist Rakah received 33 per cent of Arab votes.⁹² The ruling right wing Likud declined in the Arab sector and reduced its Arab votes from eight to five per cent.⁹³ The religious NRP maintained its Arab vote share at four per cent. Other Zionist parties gathered around 17 per cent of the Arab votes. The new political party, Progressive List for Peace⁹⁴, which was formed in 1984 after the merger between the Jewish Alternative Movement and other smaller parties of Nazareth, received massive Arab votes. It secured 18 per cent of Arab votes and won two Knesset

⁸⁸Sabra and Shatila were two Palestinian refugee camps in Beirut, Lebanon. The massacre took place in September 1982 when Lebanon was engulfed with civil war. The Lebanese Christian Phalangist militia was responsible for the massacre. However, since the camp was surrounded by the IDF, they were also held responsible for allowing Phalangist men to enter the camps and massacre Palestinians. There was a widespread protest and condemnation of Israel for their irresponsible role. Scores of Israeli citizens protested against the massacre and the role of the Israeli government.

⁸⁹Highlights of the Tenth Knesset, Jewish Virtual Library, <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Politics/Knesset10.html>, accessed on 27 December 2011.

⁹⁰Stendel, *The Arabs in Israel*, p. 120.

⁹¹Election to the Eleventh Knesset, Knesset Election Results, *The State of Israel*, http://www.knesset.gov.il/description/eng/eng_mimshal_res11.htm, accessed on 27 December 2011.

⁹²Carla, “Pointless Representation: The Tyranny of the Majority in Proportional Electoral System”, p. 24.

⁹³Hillel Frisch, “Between Instrumentation and Separatism: The Arab Vote in the 1984 Knesset Elections”, in D. J. Elazar and Shmuel Sandler (ed.), *Israel's Old Couple: The 1984 Knesset Elections and the National Unity Government*, (1990), pp.119-34.

⁹⁴Progressive List for Peace was a left-wing political party in Israel formed from an alliance of both Arab and Jewish left-wing activists.

seats.⁹⁵ The 1984 elections saw the Arab voting percentage again increasing to 75 per cent. The total number of eligible voters was 2,654,613 and among this, 2,073,321 were the valid votes with one per cent of threshold limit.⁹⁶

This election also saw a unique system of government as for the first time, both Alignment and Likud joined hands to frame a unity government. Two governments were formed, first by Alignment's Simon Peres for two years and the second by Likud's Yitzhak Shamir.⁹⁷

The trend in the first half of this phase indicated the rise of the right wing parties particularly Likud and the decline of Mapai/Alignment. The share of the latter also fell in the Arab sector while the former carved a small place in the Arab sector. However, in the second half of this phase, Labour party regained its lost position. The Tenth and Eleventh Knesset elections clearly pointed out Labour's comeback. It was defeated by Likud in the 1970s but came back strongly in the 1981 Knesset elections and became the largest political party in the 1984 elections. 'Its emergence in 1984 as the strongest political party and its constant lead in the opinion polls since the inception of the national unity government' demonstrated its increasing strength.⁹⁸

The trend regarding the Arab participation in the Knesset elections was not very convincing. The participation percentage went down and touched a very low record in the Tenth Knesset elections. One trend which can be observed in this phase of Knesset elections was the Arab support swung in favour of breakaway Communist party Rakah. In the first phase of elections, from 1949 to 1965, Arabs were more inclined towards Mapai and its Arab list. However, in the second phase, the Arabs moved towards Rakah, irrespective of its status of a non-major party in Israel.

⁹⁵ Landau, *The Arab Minority in Israel, 1967-1991: Political Aspects*, p. 133.

⁹⁶ Election to the Eleventh Knesset, Knesset Election Results, *The State of Israel*, http://www.knesset.gov.il/description/eng/eng_mimshal_res11.htm, accessed on 27 December 2011.

⁹⁷ Highlights of the Eleventh Knesset, Jewish Virtual Library, <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsourc/Politics/Knesset11.html>, accessed on 27 December 2011.

⁹⁸ Daniel J. Elazar and Shmuel Sandler, "The Two Block System: A New Development in Israeli Politics", in D. J. Elazar and Shmuel Sandler (ed.), *Israel's Old Couple: The 1984 Knesset Elections and the National Unity Government*, Jerusalem Centre for Public Affairs (1990), <http://www.jcpa.org/dje/articles3/isrpolls84-intro.htm>, accessed on 27 December 2011.

Table 2.2: The Arab voting pattern during 1969- 1984 (data in percentage)

| | Arabs voting % | Alignment ^ | Arab lists | Rakah | Likud * | NRP ** | PLP *** | Other Zionist parties |
|---|----------------|-------------|------------|-------|---------|--------|---------|-----------------------|
| 7th Knesset elections (28 October, 1969) | 85 | 16 | 40 | 29 | 1 | 9 | - | 4 |
| 8th Knesset elections (31 December, 1973) | 79 | 12 | 27 | 37 | 3 | 9 | - | 3 |
| 9th Knesset elections (17 May, 1977) | 75 | 10 | 16 | 51 | 3 | 5 | - | 10 |
| 10th Knesset elections (30 June, 1981) | 69 | 26 | 12 | 38 | 8 | 4 | - | 11 |
| 11th Knesset elections (23 July, 1984) | 75 | 23 | - | 33 | 5 | 4 | 18 | 17 |

Data compiled from: Andrea Carla, "Pointless Representation: The Tyranny of the Majority in Proportional Electoral System", *The American Political Science Association* (2006), pp. 23-24. Also: Jacob M. Landau, *The Arab Minority in Israel, 1967-1991: Political Aspects*, Oxford University Press (1993), p. 133.

^Alignment was formed by Mapai, Mapam, and a party called Ahdut ha Avoda.

*Likud was Herut in 1969. In 1973 Likud was formed after the merger of Herut, the Liberals and the Free Centre.

**NRP is National Religious Party, a right wing religious party.

***PLP, Progressive List for Peace, was formed in 1984 as an Arab- Jew party

Another change which could be noticed was the rise of the radical Arab parties and their onslaught on the Israeli government because of the various actions taken against the Palestinians in the occupied territories. This helped a lot in diverting the view of the Israeli Arabs and gaining their support. It gave an ample opportunity to the Arab parties to come up with their own organisation. They succeeded with the formation of the ADP just a few months before the 1988 elections.

The Knesset Elections, 1988-1999

This period was the most challenging one for the Zionist parties because of the emergence of the sole Arab party Arab Democratic Party (ADP) and later on, the appearance of other Arab parties which cornered the majority of Arab votes in the years to come. The year 1988 proved

to be a watershed for the Arab parties in Israel and took Israeli democracy into a different trajectory. The year saw the emergence of an Arab political party based on purely Arab demands in the Knesset. 'Until 1988, the Zionist parties did not face any competition from the Arab parties in terms of ideology and elections. But now they have to face opposition not only from the Arab-oriented parties like Hadash, Progressive List for Peace, but also from the sole Arab parties.'⁹⁹

The outbreak of the first Intifada in the occupied territories exploded the frustration of Israeli Arabs and gave Arab organisations an opportunity to exploit the conditions. The uprising against the Israeli Defence forces by the Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank was mainly because of the actions of the Israeli rule. Government's failure to bring out any significant developments for Palestinians in the occupied territories raised the dissatisfaction. Thus, when the Intifada emerged, the Arab organisations were fast to capitalize on the arisen situation. The Israeli Arabs also extended their support to Palestinians during the Intifada.

In addition to pursuing their own struggle for progress and equality, Arabs in Israel supported the Intifada through material assistance and measures of political activism. They provided food, money, medicine, and clothes to Palestinians in the territories. They also participated in protests and strikes, many of which were organized by the Democratic Front for Peace and Equality (DFPE) and Progressive List for Peace (PLP). 'The Intifada focussed its attention on questions of peace, security, territory, and relations with the Arabs; all these were high on the list of public concern according to pre-election polls.'¹⁰⁰

The ADP was founded by Abdal Wahab Darwishe who was earlier a member of the Labour party.¹⁰¹ In its first outing, the ADP managed to get one seat in the Knesset but secured 27,012 votes, a total of 11 per cent of Arab votes and 1.2 per cent of the total votes. This also prepared the grounds for many other Arab political parties to participate in the future Knesset elections.

The voting percentage of Israeli Arabs in the 1988 elections (Twelfth Knesset) declined, mainly because of the Intifada. Nevertheless, the voting in the Jewish sector increased to 80.3

⁹⁹Prakash Desai, Arab Political Parties in Israel's Politics, *Third Concept* (November 2001), p. 14.

¹⁰⁰ Don Peretz and Sammy Smooha, "Israel's Twelfth Knesset Election: An All-Loser Game", *The Middle East Journal*, Vol. 43, No. 3, (Summer 1989), p. 389.

¹⁰¹Rebecca Weiner, Arab Democratic Party, *Jewish Virtual Library*, <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Politics/adp.html>, accessed on 27 December 2011.

per cent in comparison with the Arab sector where voting percentage was just around 73 per cent.¹⁰² The voting share of almost all the Zionist parties fell in this election. Alignment saw a change in the composition as Mapam left the coalition. Alignment was renamed as Ma'arach. Mapam secured four per cent of the Arab votes in the elections independently. Labour party got 18 per cent of the Arab votes whereas Likud secured around 7.2 per cent of Arab votes mainly on the basis of its support from the Druze community.¹⁰³ The communist party Hadash, the former Rakah, obtained 34 per cent of the Arab votes whereas PLP's share in the Arab votes was 14 per cent.¹⁰⁴ 'About 41 per cent of the Israeli Arab votes went to Zionist or the Jewish parties, a loss of about seven per cent since the 1984 elections'.¹⁰⁵ Other parties like Shinui, Ratz, MAFDAL got two, four and three per cent of Arab votes, respectively.¹⁰⁶

The number of eligible voters in the Twelfth Knesset elections (1988) was 2,894,267 out of which 2,283,123 were the valid votes.¹⁰⁷ This time also, Likud and Labour (Alignment) secured almost identical number of seats. Likud got 40 seats and Labour 39 seats, a reverse of the 1984 elections. Another successive unity government was formed but this time Likud dictating the terms as it secured maximum seats in the twelfth Knesset elections. This government lasted for 15 months and subsequently Likud formed the government with a narrow majority.

During the Twelfth Knesset, the government offered a peace initiative, opened its talk to the Palestinians and discussed about the future of the Palestinian in the occupied territories.¹⁰⁸ The Madrid conference and subsequent recognition of the state of Israel by the PLO was the turning point of the relations between the Palestinians, Jews and Israeli Arabs. The full decade was marked by the peace talks following the Madrid conference and therefore, when thirteen Knesset elections were announced there were some hopes improving relations

¹⁰²Landau, *The Arab Minority in Israel, 1967-1991: Political Aspects*, p. 133.

¹⁰³Joseph Ginat, "The Elections in the Arab Sector: Voting Patterns and Political Behaviour", *The Jerusalem Quarterly*, Number Fifty-Three, (Winter 1990), p. 32.

¹⁰⁴Carla, "Pointless Representation: The Tyranny of the Majority in Proportional Electoral System", p. 24.

¹⁰⁵ Peretz and Smooha, "Israel's Twelfth Knesset Election: An All-Loser Game", p. 402.

¹⁰⁶*Ibid.*, p. 403.

¹⁰⁷Elections to the Twelfth Knesset Elections Results, *The State of Israel*, http://www.knesset.gov.il/description/eng/eng_mimshal_res12.htm, accessed on 27 December 2011.

¹⁰⁸Highlights of the Twelfth Knesset, *Jewish Virtual Library*, <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsourc/Politics/Knesset12.html>, [Accessed on 27 December 2011].

between the Israeli Arabs and the Jews. The 1992 Knesset elections took place against this backdrop.

As a result of the peace process and new rays of hope, the Thirteenth Knesset elections in 1992, saw the Israeli Arabs support for the Zionist parties rebounding to 52 per cent.¹⁰⁹ The elections saw an increase in the number of eligible voters which was 3,409,015 with 2,616,841 for the valid votes. The turnout was 77.4 per cent which was the second lowest turnout in the Israeli Knesset elections. Labour emerged as the largest political party in the election securing 34.7 per cent of votes and 44 seats in total which was followed by Likud's 32 seats with 24.9 per cent of the votes.¹¹⁰

In the 1992 elections, political parties can be divided into two categories: the first category can be called the victorious Labour bloc or the left bloc which included, apart from Labour party, Israeli Arab parties like ADP, Hadash, and the new communist list (Rakah). The second category was the nationalist bloc led by Likud, the right, and the right religious parties. The Labour bloc secured 81 per cent of Arab votes while the Likud got 19 per cent of the Arab votes.¹¹¹ The Arab turnout in the 1992 elections fell to 70 per cent which was also the second lowest turnout after the 1981 elections. The Labour party got around 21 per cent of Arab votes whereas Likud secured eight per cent of Arab votes in the elections.¹¹² Meretz received around 10 per cent of the Arab votes whereas parties like MAFDAL and Shas got five per cent each.¹¹³

Among the Arab parties, ADP got 15 per cent of the votes and secured two seats in the Knesset. Although the Communist-dominated Hadash got the maximum of Arab votes by securing 23 per cent of Arab votes, it was much lower than the previous elections. PLP went down to nine per cent from 14 per cent in the 1988 elections.¹¹⁴ In total, the Arab parties got

¹⁰⁹Ganim, *The Palestinian- Arab Minority in Israel, 1948-2000: A Political Study*, p. 41.

¹¹⁰Elections to the Thirteenth Knesset Elections Results, *The State of Israel*, http://www.knesset.gov.il/description/eng/eng_mimshal_res13.htm, accessed on 27 December 2011.

¹¹¹Sammy Smootha and Don Peretz, "Israel's 1992 Knesset Elections: Are They Critical?", *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 47, No. 3 (Summer 1993), p.446.

¹¹²Elie Rekhess, "The Arab Minority and the 1992 election: Integration or Alienation?", in Efraim Karsh and Gregory Mahler, *Israel at the Crossroads: The Challenge of Peace*, British Academic Press, London (1994), p. 154.

¹¹³ Smootha and Peretz, "Israel's 1992 Knesset Elections: Are They Critical?", p. 447.

¹¹⁴Carla, "Pointless Representation: The Tyranny of the Majority in Proportional Electoral System", p. 24.

five seats in the Knesset which was instrumental in forming the government with Labour. While not willing to take them coalition partner, the government of Rabin (later on headed by Shimon Peres) depended upon the Arab MKs for their block majority.¹¹⁵

Two significant events happened before the Fourteenth Knesset elections in 1996, which decided much of their fate. The first element was the assassination of the Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in 1995, which evoked massive criticism from the Arab population and the second element was the new system introduced in the electoral structure of Israel. For the first time, two separate ballots would be cast simultaneously: one for the political party chosen by the voter to represent him/her in the Knesset, and the other one for the prime minister.¹¹⁶

The Fourteenth Knesset elections saw a voting turnout of 79.3 per cent. The Zionist parties, left as well as right lost their Arab votes when compared to the previous elections. Labour again won the maximum number of seats in the Knesset, but at a lesser level than for the 1992 elections. In spite of the assassination of their leader Rabin, Labour could not gather much support from the Arab population and their voting percentage went down to 16 per cent from 20 per cent in the Thirteenth Knesset elections.¹¹⁷ One reason why Labour could not benefit from Rabin's assassination was because the Labour party did not make any effort to 'make use of Rabin's assassination and blacken Netanyahu and the right wing incitement which led to the murder.'¹¹⁸ The spate of violence and military campaign against Hezbollah in early 1996 considerably angered the Arab voters.

Likud's performance in the Arab sector, along with the right wing parties dwindled. Likud, Shas and NRP combine won a total of 5.3 per cent of the Arab votes. The breakup percentage shows that Likud and NRP received one per cent of Arab votes each, whereas Shas received

¹¹⁵Daniel J. Elazar and Shmuel Sandler, "The 1992 Knesset Elections Revisited: Implications for the Future", *Jerusalem Centre for Public Affairs*, <http://www.jcpa.org/dje/articles/elec92-future.htm>, accessed on 27 December 2011.

¹¹⁶Elections in Israel 1996 Background, Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *The State of Israel*, <http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/History/Modern+History/Historic+Events/Elections+in+Israel+1996+-+Background.htm>, accessed on 27 December 2011.

¹¹⁷Sarah Ozacky-Lazer and As'ad Ghanem, *The Arab Vote in the Elections to the Fourteenth Knesset, 29 May 1996*, (English Tr.) Judy Krausz, Moshe Dayan Centre for Middle Eastern Studies, Tel Aviv University, Data and Analysis no. 5 (June 1997), p. 23.

¹¹⁸Benny Morris, "Israel's Elections and their Implications", *Journal of Palestinian Authority Studies*, 26, no. 1, (Autumn 1996), p. 75.

just 0.9 per cent of votes.¹¹⁹ Remaining right and right religious parties could receive 2.4 per cent of total Arab votes.

In case of Arab parties, the United Arab List (UAL), a merger of Arab parties including ADP, won 25.4 per cent of the Arab votes. When compared to the ADP, which received around 15 per cent when it ran alone in the 1992 elections, the performance of UAL was very impressive. UAL won a total of four seats. The left– Meretz increased their tally slightly by winning 10.5 per cent of the Arab votes.¹²⁰ ‘The Democratic Front for Peace and Equality (DFPE - Hadash), an alliance of the Communist party (Rakah) and several other leftist and Israeli-Arab groups, regained the strength it had lost in recent elections, capturing about 40 percent of the Israeli-Arab votes, up from 25 percent in 1992’.¹²¹ The DFPE won 5 seats in the Fourteenth Knesset elections, which represented 3 seats more than during the 1992 elections.

The Fourteenth Knesset extensively dealt with the peace progress with the Palestinians. However, ‘in light of the difficulties in the operation of the Coalition, including difficulties in passing the State Budget for 1999, the Knesset passed on 4 January, 1999, a law for the early dissolution of the Knesset’.¹²²

The early elections were called in 1999 would soon become a feature in the Israeli political system. The Fifteenth Knesset elections gave the most fragmented result in the Israeli democracy. One Israel, a coalition of Labour, Gesher, and Meimad, got 26 seats with 20 per cent of votes. This was Labour’s worst performance in the Israeli political history, though enough to get the maximum seats in the Knesset. The right wing Likud got just 19 seats in the elections but the most surprising performance was given by Shas which secured 17 seats in the elections, the best that it could achieve so far.

The Arab parties’ performance was mixed in comparison with the preceding elections. The Arab participation in the elections was of 75 per cent. UAL won five seats, one more than for

¹¹⁹Don Peretz and Gideon Doron, “Israel's 1996 Elections: A Second Political Earthquake?”, *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 50, No. 4 (Autumn 1996), p. 542.

¹²⁰Ozacky- Lazer and Ghanem, *The Arab Vote in the Elections to the Fourteenth Knesset, 29 May 1996*, p. 12.

¹²¹Peretz and Doron, “Israel's 1996 Elections: A Second Political Earthquake?”, p. 541.

¹²²Highlights of the 14th Knesset, *Jewish Virtual Library*, <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsourc/Politics/Knesset14.html>, accessed on 27 December 2011.

the 1996 elections whereas Hadash went down to three seats from five in their last outing.¹²³ The Arab votes for UAL increased to 31 per cent. Hadash could get only 22 per cent of votes and as a result, their number of seats decreased in the elections. Azmi Bishara led United Democratic Alliance (UDA), later known as Ba'lad, won 17 per cent of Arab votes and secured two seats in the Knesset.¹²⁴ This was the highest percentage of Arab votes these parties ever drew. The total votes Arab parties received were 69.5 per cent including other Arab parties which could not make it to the Knesset.¹²⁵

Among the Zionist parties, Meretz got around 5.2 per cent of Arab votes whereas Centre party got 1.8 per cent of Arab votes. Among others, Shas secured 4.2 per cent of votes and Am Echad and other Zionist parties received 2.7 and 13.2 per cent, respectively.¹²⁶

The Labour party received just eight per cent of the Arab votes, which were the lowest till date. One reason which could be attributed to the split voting could be that the 'Arab- Israeli after having voted for the Labour candidate as Prime Minister, felt free to vote for Arab parties, increasing in this way the representation of Arab parties and their coalition potential'.¹²⁷

Thus, this phase of Knesset elections saw Arab parties emerging at the national platform and giving a tough competition to the Zionist parties. As the result, the Arab share of the Zionist parties fell drastically. The share of Labour party in the Arab votes itself fell from 23 per cent in 1984 elections to 8 per cent in the 1999 Knesset elections. The right wing Zionist parties share became negligible. Most of these votes went to the Arab parties which slowly created a strong base in the Arab sector. In the 1999 elections, the Arab parties received around 70 per cent of the Arab votes, whereas 30 per cent of the Arab votes were distributed among the Zionist parties.

¹²³Elections in Israel 1999 Final results, Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *The State of Israel*, <http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/History/Modern+History/Historic+Events/Israeli+Election+Results-+May+1999.htm>, accessed on 27 December 2011.

¹²⁴Carla, "Pointless Representation: The Tyranny of the Majority in Proportional Electoral System", p. 24.

¹²⁵Hillel Frisch, "The Arab Vote in the Israeli Elections: The Bid for Leadership", *Israel Affairs*, Volume 7 , Numbers 2 & 3 (Winter/Spring 2001), p. 154.

¹²⁶*Ibid.*, p. 154.

¹²⁷ Carla, "Pointless Representation: The Tyranny of the Majority in Proportional Electoral System", p. 16.

Table 2.3: Arab votes in the Knesset elections, 1988-1999**(Data in percentage)**

| Knesset elections * | Voting % | Labour | Likud | Shas | NRP | Meretz | Hadash | ADP | UAL |
|--|-----------|--------|-------|------|-----|--------|--------|-----|------|
| 12th Knesset elections | 73 | 18 | 7.2 | - | 3 | - | 34 | 11 | - |
| 13th Knesset elections | 70 | 21 | 8 | 5 | 5 | 10 | 23 | 15 | - |
| 14th Knesset elections | 77 | 16 | 1.4 | 0.9 | 1 | 10.5 | 40 | - | 25.4 |
| 15th Knesset elections | 75 | 8 | 1.8 | 4.2 | - | 5.2 | 22 | - | 31 |

Source: Andrea Carla, "Pointless Representation: The Tyranny of the Majority in Proportional Electoral System", *The American Political Science Association* (2006), pp. 23-24. <http://www.votelaw.com/blog/blogdocs/Pointless%20representation%20-%20tyranny%20of%20the%20majority%20in%20proportional%20electoral%20systems.pdf>, accessed on 27 December 2011; Jacob M. Landau, *The Arab Minority in Israel, 1967-1991: Political Aspects*, Oxford University Press (1993), p. 133; Ori Stendel, *The Arabs in Israel*, Sussex Academic Press (1996).

*12th Knesset elections were held on 1 November 1988, 13th Knesset elections were held on 23 June 1992, 14th Knesset elections were held on 29 May 1996, and 15th Knesset election were held on 17th May 1999.

**United Democratic Alliance (UDA) participated in the 15th Knesset elections. UDA or Balad is an Arab party led by Azim Bishara. In past it fought elections with DPFE (Hadash) but in 1999 Knesset elections UDA fought alone. They received 17 per cent of the Arab votes.

Prime Minister Elections and the Arab Votes, 1996, 1999 and 2001

The fourteenth Knesset elections (1996) saw a significant change in the Israeli political system. A new system of direct election of prime minister was devised. Under this system, prime minister was elected directly by the citizens of Israel through a separate ballot. The elections of the prime minister were to be held along with the Knesset elections. To be elected as the prime minister one must secure atleast 50 per cent of valid votes.¹²⁸ This system was

¹²⁸ Elections in Israel, 1996, *Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, <http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/History/Modern+History/Historic+Events/Elections+in+Israel+1996+-+Background.htm?DisplayMode=print>, accessed on 25 May 2012.

continued for three elections and was discontinued in 2001 after it failed to achieve the stability it sought to attain and attracted heavy criticism from the political scientists.

The major reason to introduce this system was to reduce the bargaining powers of smaller parties. Since till now Israel never saw a party getting simple majority and smaller parties were often seen to put unreasonable demands to form a coalition. This increased the instability in the government. It was presumed that such system would give prime minister an independence from any such bargaining.¹²⁹ The prime minister election in 1996 saw 79.3 per cent of total voting per cent. The Arab voting per cent in this election was 77 (table 2.4). Two candidates fought for the prime minister's post, Simon Peres and Benjamin Netanyahu.

Labour's candidate Simon Peres was defeated by Likud's Benjamin Netanyahu. He lost the race for the prime minister by just a margin of 0.9 per cent. However, Simon Peres received overwhelming Arab votes. He secured 94.5 per cent of the valid Arab votes (88 per cent of the total Arab votes), whereas Netanyahu could only get 5.2 per cent of the valid Arab votes. The maximum votes for Peres came from large villages where 96.9 per cent Arabs voted for Peres. For Netanyahu, maximum Arab votes came from the Druze community where he secured around 21 per cent votes (table 2.4).¹³⁰ There was a striking feature observed in this election. Arabs voted overwhelmingly for Simon Peres but the Labour party's Arab voting share in the Knesset elections fell down. This was mainly because these Arabs who voted for Peres in the prime minister election preferred Arab parties once the objective of choosing prime minister of their choice was done. That was one justification of sudden increase in vote share of the Arab parties in the fourteenth Knesset elections. The 1996 elections also saw many Arab religious groups like Islamic Movement contesting Knesset elections. Earlier such religious groups were present in the municipal elections but since 1996 it started contesting in the Knesset elections. This further split the Arab votes.

¹²⁹ Peretz and Gideon, Israel's election: A Second Political Earthquake", p. 544.

¹³⁰ Ilana Kaufman and Rachel Israeli, "The Odd Group Out: The Arab Palestinian Votes in the 1996 Elections", in Alan Arian, Michal Shamir, *The Elections in Israel, 1996*, State University of New York Press (1999), p. 104.

Table 2.4: Arab votes (valid votes) in the prime minister election

| Year | 1996 election | 1999 election | 2001 election |
|---------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|--|
| Simon Peres | 94.5 | - | - |
| Benjamin Netanyahu | 5.2 | 5.7 | - |
| Ehud Barak | - | 94.3 | 75 (only 18 percent Israeli Arabs voted) |
| Ariel Sharon | - | - | 25 |

*Sources: Alan Arian, Michal Shamir, *The Elections in Israel, 1999*, The State University of New York, Albany (2002); Alan Arian, Michal Shamir, *The Elections in Israel 1996*, State University of New York Press (1999); Andrea Carla, "Pointless Representation: The Tyranny of the Majority in Proportional Electoral System", *The American Political Science Association*, (2006), pp. 23-24.

The second prime minister election was held in 1999 and was not as straight as the 1996 elections. For the prime minister election five candidates filed nomination papers. Azmi Bishara, National Democratic Alliance, Yitzhak Mordechai (Center), Ze'ev Benjamin Begin (National Unity), Ehud Barak (Labour/One Israel), and the incumbent prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu (Likud).¹³¹ However, two participants, Yitzhak Mordechai, and Ze'ev Begin withdrew their names before the elections. Azim Bishara was reluctant to withdraw. This meant that the prospects of Ehud Barak getting majority of Arab votes were very less. Moreover, since the Arab votes would get divided it would have strengthened the position of right wing Netanyahu for the prime ministerial post. Thus, pressure was put on Azim Bishara to pull out from the elections which he did just two days before the elections. Once, Azim Bishara pulled out, it opened the way for Ehud Barak to secure majority of Arab votes. As the result of Bishara's pull out Barak secured 94.3 per cent of Arab votes which eventually helped him winning the prime minister election. Netanyahu could only secure 5.7 per cent of Arab valid votes which was almost same as in 1996 prime minister election. The Arab voting trend was similar to the 1996 elections. Arabs supported the Labour candidates giving overwhelming share of votes but at the same time they did not vote for Labour party in the Knesset elections. Instead they preferred Arab parties in order to increase in the

¹³¹ The Elections in Israel May 1999, *Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, <http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/History/Modern%20History/Historic%20Events/Elections%20in%20Israel%20May%201999%20-%20Special%20Update>, accessed on 26 May 2012.

representation of Arab parties and their coalition potential.¹³² Moreover, this was also an expression of Arab protest against Netanyahu's government. 'This landslide was nourished by expectations among the Arabs for revival of the peace process started by Rabin government and continuation of the policies favouring equalization of socio-economic conditions of Arabs with the general population'.¹³³

The 2001 special prime minister election is significant in many sections. This election happened under the background of many emerging complexities in the political structure of Israel vis-à-vis Arabs. First, the breakdown of Camp David talks lost all hope for any possibility of an amicable solution between the Israelis and Palestinians in the near future. Secondly, the breakdown of al- Aqsa Intifada in the occupied territories created a suspicion between both the communities. As a result some Israeli Arab organisations called for the boycott of the elections. Under this background when Ehud Barak submitted his resignation on 10 December 2000, Israel moved towards for the first time a separate special prime minister election.

In 2001 prime minister election, there were only two candidates. Labour's Ehud Barak and Likud's candidate Ariel Sharon. Latter defeated former with a comfortable margin by securing 62 per cent of total votes. The boycott of Israeli Arabs probably also went against Ehud Barak who could just secure 38 per cent of the total votes (table 2.4).

Ehud Barak's loss was directly linked to the boycott of Arabs from the elections. The voting participation of Arabs fell down to mere 18 per cent, which was lowest in the history of any elections in Israel. In the last two prime minister election it was observed that around 95 per cent of Arabs were voting for the Labour candidate. This constituted around 15-16 per cent of the total population of Israel. Thus, the boycott of Arabs was not the sole reason for the defeat of Barak but their presence certainly would have made the prime minister election more competitive.

Barak's total loss of support from Israeli Arabs was also because of his failure to react during the al-Aqsa Intifada. In one incident the Israeli police's harsh reaction to the Israeli Arabs' riots in October, following the outbreak of the al-Aqsa Intifada killed 13 Israeli Arabs. Barak

¹³²Carla, "Pointless Representation: The Tyranny of the Majority in Proportional Electoral System", p. 16.

¹³³ Asad Ghanem & Sara Ozacky-Lazar, "Israel as an Ethnic State: The Arab Vote", in Alan Arian, Michal Shamir (ed.), *The Elections in Israel 1999*, The State University of New York, Albany (2002), p. 134.

failed to take immediate actions which infuriated Israeli Arabs. Although Barak apologised just before the elections, his apology was considered too late and a political tool to gain Arab support in the elections.¹³⁴ Moreover, during the Camp David agreement Barak's government failed to come down to any agreement which increased the frustration among Israeli Arabs. However, there were also few other reasons why Barak had to face the anger of Israeli Arab voters. In 1999 Prime Minister election, the Israeli Arabs voted for Barak overwhelmingly and they expected Barak to include a few Arab MK's into his coalition. Moreover, he took support from Shas, a party not very supportive of Israeli Arabs. This step was considered as a betrayal by the Israeli Arabs as Azim Bishara's full out and call to support Barak was not respected. In 1999 election, Israeli Arab constituted around 400,000 and Barak won by 350,000 votes.¹³⁵ Thus, Barak's win in 1999 election was much depended on the votes of Israeli Arabs. This frustration of Israeli Arabs with the Labour party increased many fold particularly after the al-Aqsa Intifada.

This was the reason why Israeli Arabs refused to endorse the candidature of Ehud Barak. All the three Arab parties refused to support Barak. The Israeli Arabs constituted around 500,000 votes but only 18 per cent of this number went to vote. Out of 90,000 (18 per cent) which went to vote, 25 per cent voted for Ariel Sharon. This clearly indicates the disillusion of Israeli Arabs from Ehud Barak's promises which he made during the election campaign.

The prime minister election was scrapped in March 2001 after the Knesset voted in favour of the resolution to dissolve the direct elections. The major reasons were that the direct elections gave immense power to the smaller parties as it has been discussed in the case of Azmi Bishara in 1999 election. The idea to reduce the bargaining power of smaller parties and to make prime minister independent of the horse trading was defeated and the candidates for the elections became more dependent on the smaller parties to shift their voters. Moreover, it was also observed that the prime minister took decisions without even consulting its own party. The absence of party consensus in making decisions created further turbulence in the internal structure of political parties. Thus, the direct elections were scrapped and 16th Knesset elections were held in the old format.

¹³⁴ Dov Waxman, "A Tragic Hero: Decline and fall of Ehud Barak", *Journal of International Affairs*, Volume VI, Number 2 (June-July 2001), p. 8.

¹³⁵ The Palestinian Arab Minority and the 2009 Israeli Elections, *The Mossawa Center*, The Advocacy Center for Arab Citizens in Israel, Haifa 2009 (March 2009), p. 10.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that there were different set of patterns which were observed during the elections. The first phase (1948-1966) saw the phase of military restrictions in which Arabs had very limited contacts with other citizens of Israel. However, the voting pattern saw high rate of participation in this period. This characteristic indicates that there was a sense of willingness to participate in the political structure of the country. The second phase (1966-1988) saw the abolition of the military rule and Arabs could move freely throughout the territory of Israel. The participation of Arabs in the political system also increased, though the voting percentage saw a fall. There were some grievances among the Arabs about government incapability to address their concerns. This period also saw many wars which eventually increased the gulf between the Arabs and Jews and in the process increasing the level of frustration among the young Arabs.

The third phase (1988-1999), saw the emergence of first Arab party just before the 1988 elections and many others joining the political stage in the subsequent elections. Another important feature was the start of the peace talks between Israel and the Palestinian leadership and ultimately, the collapse of the peace talks by the end of the decade. The socio- economic indicators in the period from 1948 to 1998 also showed significant growth. All the indicators showed an upward thrust. Similar observation can be made with population which increased many folds. Better medical facilities and an improved level of education brought significant changes in the demography which started moving up with a healthy pace.

Chapter 3

Sixteenth Knesset Elections, 2003

Since its establishment, the political system of Israel has evolved into a very complex structure. The political system which follows a proportional representative model, though favoured by smaller parties, has given the country a long era of political instability. Since its inception, no political party could gain a simple majority and the 2003 elections were not different. However, it brought certain elements of surprise for the citizens in general and political observers in particular. Not only the Ariel Sharon-led Likud emerged as a clear winner but it also threw open many new features. Many surprising elements make these elections one of the most significant elections in the recent years.

The 2003 Knesset elections brought Likud into power with a larger parliamentary representation and paved the way for the decline of Labour thereby raising the debate about whether or not the Israeli society is moving towards the right. The victory of Sharon and Likud was already predicted by the opinion polls conducted before the elections.¹ These elections also marked the return of the old system in which the prime minister would be chosen from the dominant party rather than elected directly.² The Sixteenth Knesset elections were significant also because it was the first parliamentary elections after the outbreak of the al-Aqsa Intifada. The al-Aqsa Intifada which marked widespread violence became very important for both Zionist parties and Israeli Arab parties. For the Israeli Arab parties, it was an opportunity to exploit Israeli Arab votes after their resentment over the Intifada and anti-Arab policies of Sharon since his elections in February 2001. For the right Zionist parties, it was an opportunity to take advantage of the chasm created between the Israeli Arabs and the Jews after the Intifada.

However, the trend which these elections witnessed was not only the loss of the Zionist left but also the defeat of extreme right wing parties. The right wing religious parties such as

¹ Cameron S. Brown, "Israel's 2003 elections: a victory for the moderate right and secular centre", *Middle East Review of International Affairs (MERIA)*, vol. 7, no. 3 (March 2003), p. 2, <http://meria.idc.ac.il/journal/2003/issue1/jv7n1a7.html> accessed on 20 October 2011.

² Don Peretz, Rebecca Kook, Gideon Doron, "Knesset Election 2003: Why Likud Regained Its Political Domination and Labor Continued to fade out", *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 57, No. 4 (autumn, 2003), p. 4.

Shas, which surprised everyone with its impressive performance in the fifteen Knesset elections, suffered losses even in its strong hold areas, losing around 30 percent of its supporters.³ Thus, a proper assessment is required before concluding any presumption about whether by voting for Likud the Israeli society is moving towards right.⁴ Even within the Likud, the loss of Netanyahu in the primaries suggests that the public of Israel was more inclined towards the centrist or right-centrist orientated parties than the right wing.⁵ Under this backdrop, the Israeli Arab parties⁶, riding on the support of Israeli Arabs who were dissatisfied with the Zionist parties, also fought elections but they lost few seats in the Knesset and their number came down to eight in the Sixteenth Knesset.⁷ This chapter will discuss in detail the Israeli Arab voting pattern in the 2003 Knesset elections and the effect of al- Aqsa Intifada on their preferences vis-à-vis Zionist parties.

The Road to the Sixteenth Knesset Elections

In 2002, Ariel Sharon was forced to announce the elections for Sixteenth Knesset, some eight months prior to the scheduled date, as he was left with a minority government. This was due to the departure of the Labour from the coalition over the issue of the amount allocated for the Jews settlement areas from the national budget.⁸

During the primaries themselves, both Likud and Labour were facing a dilemma in fielding the candidates. On one hand, within Likud Ariel Sharon was challenged by the more right wing group headed by former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, whose main election agenda was security after the Intifada and strict actions to deal with it. On the other hand Labour was dealing with a tripartite struggle between ‘the pro-forma leader of the party,

³Michal Shalev and Gal Levy, “The winners and losers of 2003 : Ideology, Social Structure and Political Change”, in Alan Arian, Michal Shamir, *The Elections in Israel, 2003*, Transaction Publications, New Jersey (2005), p. 167.

⁴Efraim Inbar, “Winning the Centre”, *Jerusalem Post*, (9 Feb. 2003), <http://www.jpost.com/Cooperations/Archives>, accessed on 23 October 2011.

⁵Brown, “Israel’s 2003 Elections: A Victory for the Moderate Right and Secular Centre”, p. 2.

⁶The Arab parties/coalition on which secured votes above the qualifying threshold limits (1.5 percent) were United Arab List, Balad, Hadash.

⁷Central Election Committee Report, Government of Israel, <http://www.knesset.gov.il/elections16/eng/index.htm>, accessed on 23 October 2011.

⁸Peretz, Kook, and Doron, “Knesset Election 2003: Why Likud Regained Its Political Domination and Labor Continued to fade out”, pp. 594-595.

Binyamin Ben-Eliezer, Haim Ramon, a long time Labour leader, and former Haifa Mayor and a new comer to the national politics, Amram Mitzna.⁹ It was believed that Amram Mitzna had substantial Israeli Arab support and later, it became one of the bases of his victory during the primaries.

The Sixteenth Knesset elections came after the al-Aqsa Intifada which represented the second wave of violence in the occupied territories. The al-Aqsa Intifada broke forth when the Oslo peace process between Israel and the Palestinian leadership was coming to an end. This eventually fuelled the dissatisfaction of the Israeli Arabs. The Israeli Arabs lost trust in the government, particularly by the policies of the government. Later on, under the leadership of Ariel Sharon the dissatisfaction among Israeli Arabs grew bigger. Moreover, the way Israeli Arab parties campaigned against the policies of the government brought out the disappointments among the Israeli Arabs. Their low turnout in the 2001 prime ministerial election already mirrored their discontent with the government and the failure of the Oslo peace process. Under this background, when the right wing parties raised the issue to preventing Israeli Arab parties from contesting the elections citing security laws the Israeli Arab voters became more sceptical about the intentions of right wing parties.¹⁰ The Central Elections Committee (CEC) banned the Israeli Arab parties, a decision which deepened the gulf between the Israeli Arab voters and the right wing. However, the verdict of the Supreme Court revoking the ban vindicated the Arab stand.¹¹

The non-cooperative attitude of the right wing political parties forced the Israeli Arab parties to campaign immediately and more radically against them. They were quick to call for the elections' boycott as they did in the prime ministerial election in 2001. The prominent ones were Abna al-Ba'lad (the Local Sons) and the (northern) Islamic Movement.¹² As a result of the boycott, the Arab turnout went down. Although this turnout was much higher than 2001 prime minister's elections, the turnout when compared to 1999 Knesset elections saw a decline.

⁹*Ibid.*, p. 595.

¹⁰Hilliel Frisch, "The Influence of the al-Aqsa Intifada on the Arab Vote in the 2003 General Elections", *Israel Affairs*, Vol.10, No.4 (Summer 2004), p. 132.

¹¹Itai Hermlin, "The Supreme Court Defended the Democracy", *Haaretz* (October 13, 2003), www.haaretz.co.il, accessed on 23 October 2011.

¹²Frisch, "The Influence of the al-Aqsa Intifada on the Arab Vote in the 2003 General Elections", p. 131.

Among the Zionist parties, Labour had the biggest support of Israeli Arabs. Since the 2003 elections were the first parliamentary elections after the Intifada, the dissatisfaction among the Arabs against the Labour party was high. Among other reasons, Labour was part of the grand coalition¹³ in the 2001 Sharon's government, and Israeli Arabs saw the Labour party as a part of the Sharon's policies. Thus, Labour during the elections tried to campaign more extensively in the Arab sector, so as to lessen the dent which was created in the last couple of years. Their candidate for the prime minister post was also someone who was popular in the Arab sector of Israel. The desire of Labour to get more support from the Israeli Arabs was manifest in the elections campaign of the Labour party. It promised, for instance, a speedy withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and most of the West Bank with or without negotiations after offering unconditional peace negotiations. The party even offered to abandon several Jewish settlements if it would come to power.¹⁴ Such statements stress the uneasiness experienced by Labour, particularly when it did not try to make any such efforts at the time when it was part of the coalition under Sharon.

If Labour was trying to win back the Israeli Arab voters, the Likud was facing a serious internal crisis. The biggest dilemma of the Likud was about the approach it should adopt during its elections campaign. Following the outbreak of the al-Aqsa Intifada, the right wing strongly raised the issue of security. One section of the Likud was against the adoption of a soft approach in dealing with the Palestinian leadership. This section was largely supporting the candidature of Benjamin Netanyahu for the prime ministerial post in the 2003 elections. The right wing became more suspicious about the intentions of Ariel Sharon. 'While Sharon expresses his support for a negotiated peace solution with the Palestinians based on a two-state solution, most of Likud's central committee and members of cabinet, including Benjamin Netanyahu, the former foreign minister and the party's number two, oppose this position unequivocally.'¹⁵ Sharon has also accepted in principle the Quartet's 'roadmap' for peace¹⁶, which increased opposition within the party. Thus, Likud was going through a phase

¹³Yassi Mekelberg, "Doves Vote Hawk: The January 2003 Elections in Israel, Middle East Programme", *The Royal Institute of International Affairs*, Briefing Paper no.3 (March 2003), p. 2.

¹⁴Peretz, Kook, and Doron, "Knesset Election 2003: Why Likud Regained Its Political Domination and Labor Continued to fade out", p. 595.

¹⁵ Mekelberg, "Doves Vote Hawk: The January 2003 Elections in Israel", p. 4.

¹⁶Quartet road map for peace was a peace plan between Israeli and Palestinian authority. The proposal was presented by the U.S., Russia, EU, and the UN. The proposal gave a clear cut phase, time line, target dates

of strong internal oppositions. The victory of Ariel Sharon during the primaries indicated that the public was more inclined towards the right or centrist approaches than the extreme right. The loss of Shas and the rise of Shinui¹⁷ in the 2003 elections are further proofs of this general trend prevailing among the Israeli population.¹⁸

Shinui, which was to play an important role in forming the coalition after the elections, campaigned strictly on the lines of secularism. During its 2003 campaign, Shinui cleverly presented itself as a balancing force between Likud and Labour in a prospective secular unity government.¹⁹ ‘Shinui campaigned for a secular coalition of Likud, Labour and Shinui and promised that the party would not join a Likud-led coalition if the religious parties were included.’²⁰ The religious parties openly opposed the secular parties, Shas being one of the biggest rivals of such centrist approach.

However, apart from the issue of security espoused by the right wing parties, one of the major issues which were a source of concern for the Israeli population and an important factor during the elections was the economic crisis. The country was going through one of the worst economic crises. According to the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics, the economy experienced a one per cent negative growth in 2002. ‘For the first time in the country’s history, economic growth contracted for two years in a row. Recession hit all sectors of the economy hard.’²¹ Towards the end of the year, revenues in the retail sector declined by 4.5 per cent, manufacturing output in the hi-tech sector slumped by 8.5 per cent, while exports fell by 3.5 per cent.²² The condition of unemployment was even worse as it reached double-

aiming the progress in the field of social, economic, and political fields with the target of final settlement of Israel- Palestine conflict by the end of 2005.

¹⁷Shinui is the political party which was formed in 1973 after the war. Shinui combined centrist views on the peace process with strident rhetoric opposing the religious parties.

¹⁸The trend of the Israeli society changed because of their general dissatisfaction over the Shas' demands which include high budgets allocation to the religious institutes and increasing demands for exemptions of more yeshiva students from military service.

¹⁹Peretz, Kook, and Doron, “Knesset Election 2003: Why Likud Regained Its Political Domination and Labor Continued to fade out”, p. 596.

²⁰André Blais, John H. Aldrich, Indridi H. Indridason and Renan Levine, “Do Voters Vote For Government Coalitions?: Testing Downs' Pessimistic Conclusion”, *Party Politics*, vol. 12 number 6 (2006), Sage Publications, p. 694.

²¹Mekelberg, “Doves Vote Hawk: The January 2003 Elections in Israel”, p. 2.

²²Economic and Financial Data for Israel, Central Bureau of Statistics, <http://www.cbs.gov.il/imf/dsbbir.htm>, accessed on 26 October 2011.

digit and poverty level crossed the one million people. The rising social and economic problems, added to the issue of security which emerged after the al-Aqsa Intifada, increased the indignation among the citizens of Israel. Thus, although the opinion polls predicted Likud's edge over Labour, the conditions were evenly poised on the eve of the elections.

Surveys and Opinion Polls before the Elections

When the 2003 elections were announced by Ariel Sharon, Israel was going through a phase of internal as well as external problems. Internal problems like economy, unemployment, welfare were troubling the citizens of Israel for a long time and were accentuated by external problems such as the al-Aqsa Intifada and the security issue. Thus, the opinion among the public was swinging between the two extreme ends. Before the elections, various surveys and polls were carried out but none of them could reflect the true opinion of the Israeli citizens. The real trend among the Israeli citizens could only be identified through their opinion about various issues related to both Israel's internal and external problems.

A survey regarding the security and Palestinian issues carried out by the Dahaf Institute, showed that 63 per cent of Israelis favoured the 'unilateral withdrawal' and 69 per cent favoured the evacuation of all or most of the settlements in exchange for a peace agreement.²³ Similarly, a survey done by the Tami Steinmetz Centre for Peace Research at Tel Aviv university claimed that while 70 of the population was sceptical about the feasibility of peace with Israel's Arab neighbours in the coming years, around 75 per cent considered themselves supporters of the peace process.²⁴ However, opinions and surveys regarding their preference of votes were not as clear as on the concerns relevant to the external matters. When asked "Who in your opinion can better advance the peace process with the Palestinians while safeguarding Israel's vital interests?", 55.2 per cent responded that Sharon was the most suitable candidate as compared to only 16 per cent who chose Mitzna.²⁵

On the other hand, not surprisingly, the Arab citizens of Israel perceived Mitzna as the one prepared to make more concessions in the framework of advanced stages of peace

²³Mekelberg, "Doves Vote Hawk: The January 2003 Elections in Israel", p. 3.

²⁴Ephraim Yaar and Tamar Hermann, *Peace Index*, The Tami Stinmetz Centre for Peace Research, Tel Aviv University (July 2002), p. 7, <http://spirit.tau.ac.il/socant/peace/peaceindex/2002/files/JULY2002e.DOC>, accessed on 31 October 2011.

²⁵Yaar and Hermann, *Peace Index*, p. 4.

negotiations with the Palestinians.²⁶ Sixty-five per cent supported Mitzna in comparison with 30 per cent of Arabs supporting the prime ministerial candidacy of Sharon.

When questions were asked about the preferable coalition, the Israeli public opted for a stable government rather than a specific party. The public preferred an alliance that would give stability and for that, they even preferred a coalition other than their choice.²⁷ However, around 60 per cent of the public indicated that it wanted two big parties to cooperate in the government²⁸ and ‘the public showed a clear preference for a secular Likud-Shinui-Labour coalition, based on the preference for Labour joining the government.’²⁹

Elections, Political Parties and Results

The Sixteenth Knesset elections took place on 28 January 2003 with the participation of 3.14 million of Israeli voters. The voting percentage, though less than for the last couple of Knesset elections, was not as low as 2001 prime minister elections. Around 65.8 percent³⁰ of eligible voters cast their votes, which was distinctively lower than the 80 percent voting in earlier elections. However, as predicted by the political analysts, considering the background of the al-Aqsa Intifada and the extremely low turnout in the 2001 elections, the voting percentage can still be considered as high. The qualifying threshold was 1.5 percent and this transformed into 47,226 votes³¹ that were essential for a list to enter the Knesset. Before the elections, the CEC discussed 13 petitions to disqualify candidates and parties. It ruled to disqualify Ahmed Tibi from the Hadash-Ta'al list, as well as Azmi Bishara³² from the Ba'lad party. Such actions also corroborate the smear campaigning done by right wing parties

²⁶*Ibid.*, p. 4.

²⁷John Aldrich, André Blais, Indridi Indridason, Renan Levine, “Coalition Consideration and the Vote”, in Alan Arian, Michal Shamir, *The Elections in Israel, 2003*, Transaction Publications, New Jersey (2005), p. 152.

²⁸Mekelberg, “Doves Vote Hawk: The January 2003 Elections in Israel”, p. 6.

²⁹Yaar and Hermann, *Peace Index*, p. 5.

³⁰Elections for the 16th Knesset, Government of Israel, <http://knesset.gov.il/elections16/eng/about/menu.htm>, accessed on 30 October 2011.

³¹ *Israel Foreign Ministry Affairs*, Government of Israel, <http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/History/Modern%20History/Historic%20Events/Results%20of%20Elections%20to%20the%2016th%20Knesset%20-%20Jan%2028->, accessed on 30 October 2011.

³²Jalal Bana, “Trial for MK Azmi to begin Wednesday in Nazareth”, *Ha'aretz*, 26 February 2002, <http://www.haaretz.com/news/trial-for-mk-azmi-bishara-to-begin-wednesday-in-nazareth-1.51930>, accessed on 6 November 2011.

against the Arab parties in Israel. The Supreme Court later quashed the decision of the CEC and allowed the two Arab parties to participate in the elections.

Since the formation of Likud in the late 1970s, the major political battle has been between the right wing Likud and the Left Labour. The right religious party Shas which gave an impressive performance in the last elections could not inspire confidence among the citizens of Israel because of its ultra religious stand in most of the subjects discussed by the government.³³ The opinion polls were also not very impressive for Shas and political observers predicted a very low seat share for Shas. The prediction for Shas was so bad that, at the beginning of the election campaign, most polls gave Shas around eight Knesset seats, much lower than its previous score in 1999 Knesset elections.³⁴

The other major party Shinui presented a centrist approach and had a very clear agenda to keep religious parties away from the power and thus, its election campaigning was centred on this idea. During the campaign, ‘Shinui’s key promise was to form a government coalition without the ultra orthodox religious parties.’³⁵ After the elections, thirteen political parties qualified to enter the Knesset. Likud emerged as a clear winner though way behind the majority (Table3.1). It swept 38 seats which was way ahead the pre poll prediction and thus giving a big surprise to the political observers. Labour got the biggest setback as it just managed to secure 19 seats.³⁶ The decline of Labour was predicted long back and pre poll trends gave Likud a little edge in the elections. The religious camp, as predicted by the opinion polls, could not perform well as compared to the 1999 Knesset elections.³⁷

The biggest gain was made by the centrist Shinui, which won 15 seats drastically improving the six seats it won in the previous elections. It was set to become the major ally of the Likud in forming the government in times to come. If right religious parties were fading out, so were the left parties. Not only Labour suffered the loss but also Meretz, a prominent left

³³Shas was the part of the government during the Sharon’s grand coalition government.

³⁴Brown, “Israel’s 2003 Elections: A Victory of Moderate Right and Secular Centre”, p. 4.

³⁵Shmuel Sandler, M. Benjamin Molloy, Jonathan Rynhold, *Israel at the polls 2003*, Routledge publications, New York (2005), p. 68.

³⁶For election data source: The Sixteenth Knesset, Government of Israel, http://www.knesset.gov.il/history/eng/eng_hist16_s.htm, accessed on 30 October 2011.

³⁷Asher Arian and Michal Shamir, “On Mistaking a Dominant Party in a Dealignment System”, in Asher Arian and Michal Shamir, *The Elections in Israel, 2003*, Transaction Publication, New Jersey (2005), p. 16.

party, got major setbacks in their stronghold sectors. They could not increase their numbers from the last Knesset elections.³⁸

Following the elections, Ariel Sharon was invited to form the government and after long discussions and negotiations with other parties, a coalition comprising of Likud, Shinui, Ichud Leumi (National Union) and the National Religious Party (NRP) was formed. 'The coalition agreed on a platform that focused on improving Israeli security through fighting Palestinian terror, along with the attention to improving Israel's economic standing.'³⁹

Shortly after the elections, Shinui tried to bring Labour into the coalition government that would be headed by Likud and Shinui. Although Labour refused to join the government, Shinui convinced Prime Minister Sharon not to ally with the ultra orthodox wing.⁴⁰ Later, Sharon included the National Religious Party in the coalition, which diluted the anti-religious stand of Shinui but it still managed to keep its centrist approach.

Finally, the election results highlighted a trend in which the Israeli public moved towards the centre and diluted their support for left, ultra left or right and right religious ideology. Even Likud's comeback illustrated this trend as it could only get the massive support after it projected itself as a centrist party in the 2003 elections. The loss of Labour, Meretz and Shas clearly illustrates the public opinion of Israel in the 2003 elections. As far as Arab voters were concerned, after a very low turnout in the 2001 elections, they came back to vote and registered 62 per cent of turnout. However, their party preferences clearly indicated the effect of the al-Aqsa Intifada and discontent with mainstream parties. They did not show more confidence in Arab parties though.

³⁸Three left parties, Meretz, The Democratic Choice, and Shahar ran on a single list. Later they changed their name to Yahad and The Democratic Choice.

³⁹ Israeli Election Series: "The 16th Knesset- A Retrospective", Israeli Affairs, *Britain Israeli communication and research centre (BICOM)*, 11 September 2008, <http://www.bicom.org.uk/context/research-and-analysis/israeli-affairs/israeli-elections-series--the-16th-knesset---a-retrospective>, accessed on 30 October 2011.

⁴⁰Sandler,, Molloy, and Rynhold, *Israel at the Polls 2003*, p. 68.

Table 3.1: Results of the 16th Knesset elections
(Numbers in brackets show the 1999 Knesset election figures)

| Party | Number of seats | Percentage of Vote | Number of valid votes |
|---|------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------|
| Likud | 38 (19) | 29.39 | 925,279 |
| Avodah-Meimad (Labour) ⁴¹ | 19 (26) | 14.46 | 455,183 |
| Shinui (Change) | 15 (6) | 12.28 | 386,535 |
| Shas | 11 (17) | 8.22 | 258,879 |
| National Union (NU-HaIchud HaLeumi) ⁴² | 7 (8) | 5.53 | 173,973 |
| Meretz– Democratic Choice-Shahar ⁴³ | 6 (10) | 5.21 | 164,122 |
| National Religious Party (NRP-Mafdal) | 6 (5) | 4.20 | 132,370 |
| United Torah Judaism (UTJ) ⁴⁴ | 5 (5) | 4.29 | 135,087 |
| One Nation (Am Ehad) | 3 (2) | 2.76 | 93,819 |
| Democratic Front for Peace and Equality (Hadash) –Ta'al ⁴⁵ | 3 (3) | 2.98 | 93,819 |
| National Democratic Assembly (Ba'lad) | 3 (2) | 2.26 | 71,299 |
| Yisrael biAliya (Israel by Immigration) ⁴⁶ | 2 (6) | 2.15 | 67,719 |
| United Arab List (Ra'am) | 2 (5) | 2.08 | 65,551 |
| Others under 1.5% | 0 (6) | 4.18 | |
| Total | 120 | 99.99% | |

Source: Sixteenth Knesset, Government of Israel, http://www.knesset.gov.il/history/eng/eng_hist16_s.htm, accessed on 30 October 2011.

⁴¹Labour-Meimad changed its name to Labor-Meimad-Am Ahad when Am Ahad joined on May 23, 2005.

⁴²Yisrael Beitenu split from the Ichud Leumi on February 1, 2006.

⁴³Meretz- Democratic Choice- Shahar change their name to Yahad- Democratic Choice in July, 2005.

⁴⁴United Torah Judaism split into Agudat and Degel Hatorah in Jan, 2005.

⁴⁵After the Arab Movement for Renewal (Ta'al) in Feb, 2006 the name was changed to Hadash.

⁴⁶Yisrael Bialiya joined the Likud government shortly after the elections in march 2003.

Social and Economic Conditions of Arabs on the Eve of the Elections

The social and economic conditions of any community play an important role in the voting preferences and party choices. In the case of the Arab community of Israel, the socio-economic conditions are not at par with the Jew citizens of Israel. The previous chapter has highlighted that during the initial days of Israel, the conditions of Arabs were very poor. Due to the discriminatory policies of the government the gap between them increased. As one can observe, during the early days of Israel, the Arabs were considered as a security risk, a hostile population.⁴⁷ However, the gap between them has been decreasing at a faster pace in the past years.

The development of the socio-economic conditions of the Arabs and the greater access to economic and political resources have impacted elections. One can analyse that there is a constant improvement in the education, health and housing fields, particularly after the end of military restrictions. Although the Israeli Arab parties find them inadequate and insufficient, there has been an upward movement of the graph when compared with the previous years. In the health sector, since the early 1980s, the life expectancy of the Arab population has increased by nearly four years. In 2003, the life expectancy of Arab males was 74.6 years, and that of Arab females 78.0 (3.3 and 3.8 years lower than the life expectancy of Jewish males and females, respectively).⁴⁸

In 2003, the infant mortality rate of the Israeli Arab population was 8.2 deaths per 1,000 live births whereas it was 24.2 in 1980. In the same year the Jews mortality rate was 4.5, thus indicating a wide gap between Jew and Arab population of Israel. Strikingly, in the Negev, the Bedouin community has an infant mortality rate of 18.7 deaths per 1,000 recorded births.⁴⁹ This highlights that when compared with previous years, although the gap is reducing for the Arab population, it is still very wide in contrast with the Jew population. Moreover, in many sectors/villages the gap is very wide rather alarming. However, the infant mortality rate of the Arab population of Israel is much lower than in the neighbouring Arab

⁴⁷Ori Stendel, *The Arabs in Israel*, Sussex Academic Press (1996), p. 24.

⁴⁸Government of Israel, "The Arab population of Israel", Centre Bureau of Statistics, Centre for Statistical Information, *Statistilite no. 50* (2003), p. 2.

⁴⁹Mossawa Centre, *The Palestinian Arab Citizens of Israel: Status, Opportunities and Challenges for an Israeli-Palestinian Peace*, Haifa (June 2006), p. 36.

countries and in the Palestinian Authority: 102 deaths per 1,000 live births in Iraq, 38 in Egypt, 27 in Lebanon, 26 in the Palestinian Authority, 22 in Jordan and 18 in Syria.⁵⁰

In terms of education also, in the past three decades, there has been a striking rise in the level of education of the Arab population. In 1970, half of this population had up to five years of schooling whereas in 2003, they had almost ten years of schooling.⁵¹ The Arab school system in Israel has undergone many changes: an increase in the number of students and educational frameworks, as well as improvements in the quality of teaching and level of education.⁵² Not only at primary and secondary but also at the pre-school levels, the conditions of Arabs are changing. An increasing number of Arab students join schools at an early age and there is a growing awareness among the Arab population of the importance of early education, which eventually gives them a better opportunity to get employment.⁵³

At the eve of the 2003 Knesset elections, the social and economic conditions of Arabs were improving if compared to the past years. However, contrary to the Jews of Israel, the discrepancy was still very high. In many localities of Arabs like the Negev region, their condition is very poor. Yet, the slowly improving condition of Arabs plays an important role in influencing their voting behaviour. Labour is the most favoured party by Arabs. But a significant number of Arab votes also go to Likud and Shinui.

The Influence of the Al-Aqsa Intifada

By the end of September 2000, Israel witnessed a new wave of protest and violence in the occupied territories.⁵⁴ Immediate cause of the second Intifada or more popularly known as al-Aqsa intifada, named after mosque where the violence started, was the visit of ‘Ariel Sharon, then the leader of Israel's opposition, to the site in East Jerusalem known to Muslims as

⁵⁰Statistilite no. 50, p. 2.

⁵¹Sikkuy Report, *Monitoring Civic Equality between Arab and Jewish Citizen of Israel, 2001-2002*, by Shalom Dichter and As'ad Ghanem (ed.), Jerusalem (July 2002), p. 20.

⁵²*Ibid.*, p. 20.

⁵³Mossawa, *The Palestinian Arab Citizens of Israel: Status, Opportunities and Challenges for an Israeli-Palestinian Peace*, p. 38.

⁵⁴ UN Report, *Search for peaceful settlement and the role of United Nations*, New York (1992),p. 5. <http://www.un.org/law/books/HandbookOnPSD.pdf>, accessed on 8 June 2012.

Haram al-Sharif, and to Jews as Temple Mount, which houses the al-Aqsa mosque.⁵⁵ The visit of Sharon was seen by the Palestinians as an incitement by expressing the Israeli sovereignty over the mosque in particular and Jerusalem in general. However, the actual reason was the frustration coming from the side of Palestinians after the Camp David summit collapsed and all hopes to find a solution for the Palestinian state were broken.

The violence which erupted as a clash between the Israeli policemen and Palestinians resulted in at least 50 persons were reported killed and some 1,500 injured, most of them Palestinians.⁵⁶ However, the most salient feature of the al-Aqsa intifada was the participation of Israeli Arabs in the support of the Palestinians. Nevertheless, Israeli Arabs themselves were suffering from their own internal troubles. The support of Israeli Arabs during the protests of al-Aqsa was the result of their own frustration they were experiencing from the Israeli government.

During the 1990s and more particularly under Rabin and Peres' governments, the hopes arose within the Arab population of Israel regarding the development and better social, economic, and political movement. The latter obtained a degree of governmental attention and even some preferential budgetary allocation.⁵⁷ On the contrary, Netanyahu and Ehud Barak, did not follow the path taken by their predecessors towards the Arab community of Israel. They adopted policies neglecting the Israeli Arabs, which in the end led to an increase of unemployment and poverty. The government failed to develop a sound economic infrastructure in the Israeli Arab community. It barely granted them the status of a preferential development region, and did little to establish industrial zones in the Arab localities.⁵⁸ Because of the inability of the Israeli government to solve Arabs-related issues, the Israeli Arabs expressed their dissatisfaction by not participating to the 2001 elections but also by the more deterrent method of supporting the al-Aqsa Intifada.

⁵⁵The al-Aqsa Intifada, *BBC News* (29 September 2004), http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/3677206.stm, accessed on 12 June 2012.

⁵⁶UN report, *Search for peaceful settlement and the role of United Nations*, p. 5.

⁵⁷Elie Rekhess, "The Arabs of Israel after Oslo: Localisation of the National Struggle", *Israel Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (fall, 2002), Indiana University Press, p. 8.

⁵⁸*Ibid*, p. 9.

The response of Israeli Arabs in support of the Palestinians during the Second Intifada was a reaction to show their frustration at the government's inability to come up with a solution to the problems faced by the Arabs of Israel and the Palestinian Authority. 'The events of September 2000 were an expression of the frustration and anguish felt by most of the public towards both Israel for the continued occupation and the Palestinian Authority, whose unimpressive political achievements vis-à-vis Israel highlighted even further its impaired functionality.'⁵⁹ The Israeli Arabs engaged themselves in the protest supporting the Palestinians. Places like Nazareth, Sakhnin, Arrabeh and Jatt were the first to be affected. The strikes and disturbances continued intermittently for more than a week. As the result of violence, thirteen Israeli Arabs were killed and many more were injured, as police and snipers used live ammunition, rubber-coated steel bullets and tear gas to quell the demonstrations. Over 1,000 Israeli Arab demonstrators, including several minors, were arrested.⁶⁰

The 2003 elections were the first Knesset elections after the al-Aqsa Intifada. At that time, the Arabs' grievances were still unaddressed and therefore their discontent was remaining. It could be already perceived in the results of the 2001 prime minister election, when the Arabs registered the lowest turnout⁶¹ in the history of Israeli democracy. Moreover, during the two years of Sharon's government, the economic and social conditions of Israeli citizens in general and Israeli Arabs in particular were deteriorating. Under such a background, when elections were held, a lot of scepticism emerged regarding the shadow of the al-Aqsa Intifada and the poor economic condition of Israel. As for the Arab political parties in Israel, they wanted to exploit the influence of the al-Aqsa Intifada, which constituted a source of concern for the Zionist parties. Finally, different trends emerged before and during the elections. The Arab voting percentage which was predicted to be very low, as it happened during the 2001 election, reached 62 per cent, a level finally above expectations. A low turnout was observed not only in the Arab sector of Israel but also among the Jews. It is believed that the low

⁵⁹Ephraim Lavie, "Israel's Coping with the al-Aqsa Intifada: A Critical Review", *Strategic Assessment*, Vol. 13, No.3 (October 2010), p. 103.

⁶⁰Identity crisis: "Israel and its Arab citizens", *International Crisis Group (ICG)*, Amman/Brussels, (4 March 2004), p. 9.

⁶¹The turnout of the eligible Arab voters was a mere 18 percent whereas the average turnout of the Israeli Arabs in the last four elections was of 70 percent.

turnout among the Israeli citizens was more because of their exhaustion from the five elections in the span of ten years.⁶²

Contrary to what was believed, the Israeli Arabs refrained themselves from any act of violence after the outbreak of the al-Aqsa Intifada.⁶³ Rather, the Israeli Arabs after the protest, which was also known as October riots, no traces of violence and protests were found among the Israeli Arabs. However, the violent clashes continued between the Israel and the Palestinians. On the contrary, the Israeli Arabs chose a policy of ‘hands off’ and maintained limited contacts with the Jew community once the wave of violence was settled.

The influence of the al-Aqsa Intifada was strongly visible in the election campaigns and parties' placement of candidates. For the first time since its formation, DFPE (later Hadash) did not field any Jewish candidate as a replacement, when one of its prominent Jewish members retired from politics. Even the Labour party did not field its Arab candidates in the realistic slots and the Israeli Arab members were put low in the Labour list of the 2003 elections, as compared to the previous elections.⁶⁴ Though Likud put two members in its list, both of them were Druze.⁶⁵

During the elections, Balad or the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), secured three seats, whereas the United Arab League (UAL) could only get two seats in the Knesset elections. The Arab parties in all could only manage eight seats in the Sixteenth Knesset which were two seats less than their share in the last elections. Although among the Zionist parties, only Likud's Arab members could manage to get into the Knesset, both members came from the Druze community.

Thus, the al-Aqsa Intifada had immense influence on the Israeli Arab voting behaviour. The low turnout as well as fragmented votes did harm the votes of the Zionist parties. Nevertheless, even Arab parties suffered from this fragmented pattern because there was no

⁶²Frisch, “The Influence of the al-Aqsa Intifada on the Arab Vote in the 2003 General Elections”, p. 131

⁶³*Ibid*, p. 132.

⁶⁴The 2003 elections list of Labour party, [http://knesset.gov.il/elections16/eng/lists/list_eng.asp?id=18_for full Labour list](http://knesset.gov.il/elections16/eng/lists/list_eng.asp?id=18_for_full_Labour_list) http://judaism.about.com/library/1_politics/elections/bl_elections2003_laborlist.htm accessed on 6 November 2011.

⁶⁵The Sixteenth Knesset, Government of Israel, <http://www.knesset.gov.il/mk/heb/mkindexbyknesset.asp?knesset=16>, accessed on 6 November 2011.

unity as well as no effort among the Arab parties to fill the vacuum created by the Zionist parties. The Israeli Arab votes for Zionist parties fell to 31 percent. At the same time though, the number of seats in the Knesset for the Arab parties also fell from 10 to 8. The Arab voters were dissatisfied with the Arab Knesset members for not focusing on issues such as the Arab socio-economic improvements including education, health, unemployment, poverty, per capita income, but rather concentrating on the issue of the Palestinian issue. Thus, a large section of Arabs who were dissatisfied with the Zionist parties also expressed their lack of confidence in the Arab parties.⁶⁶

The Arab Votes for Zionist Parties in the 2003 Knesset Elections

Under the PR system, every single vote becomes valuable for the political parties. Thus, every political party tries to attract all the political communities in the country. The Arabs which constitute 20 percent of the entire population are one of the most important political sections in Israel. However, they are always looked down upon by the majority and often their support to the Palestinian cause and their progress is seen as betrayal and anti-national. The support to organisations considered inimical to Israel by the Arab leaders and Arab Knesset members creates a further chasm. This chasm was further increased after the al-Aqsa Intifada when the public opinion in Israel towards Israeli Arabs changed a lot. Under such circumstances, it is logical that the Israeli Arabs would vote for the Arab parties but a sizeable percentage of the Israeli Arab population still voted for Zionist parties like Labour, Meretz and even Likud.⁶⁷ There are many reasons which can justify these voting patterns. These reasons range from party election manifestos to the fielding of Israeli Arab candidates at realistic spots.

In the 2003 elections, the Arab voting percentage was around 62 per cent. The lowest participation rates for the 2003 elections were in the unrecognized villages of the Negev (Naqab).⁶⁸ In these villages, zero per cent of votes was observed. This was because of some technical problems as some voting centres were shifted to other places without any advance

⁶⁶Yair Ettinger, "The Abyss is Widening between the Jewish and Arab Parties", *Haaretz* (30 January 2003), <http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/the-abyss-is-widening-between-the-jewish-and-arab-parties-1.20639>, accessed on 14 November 2011.

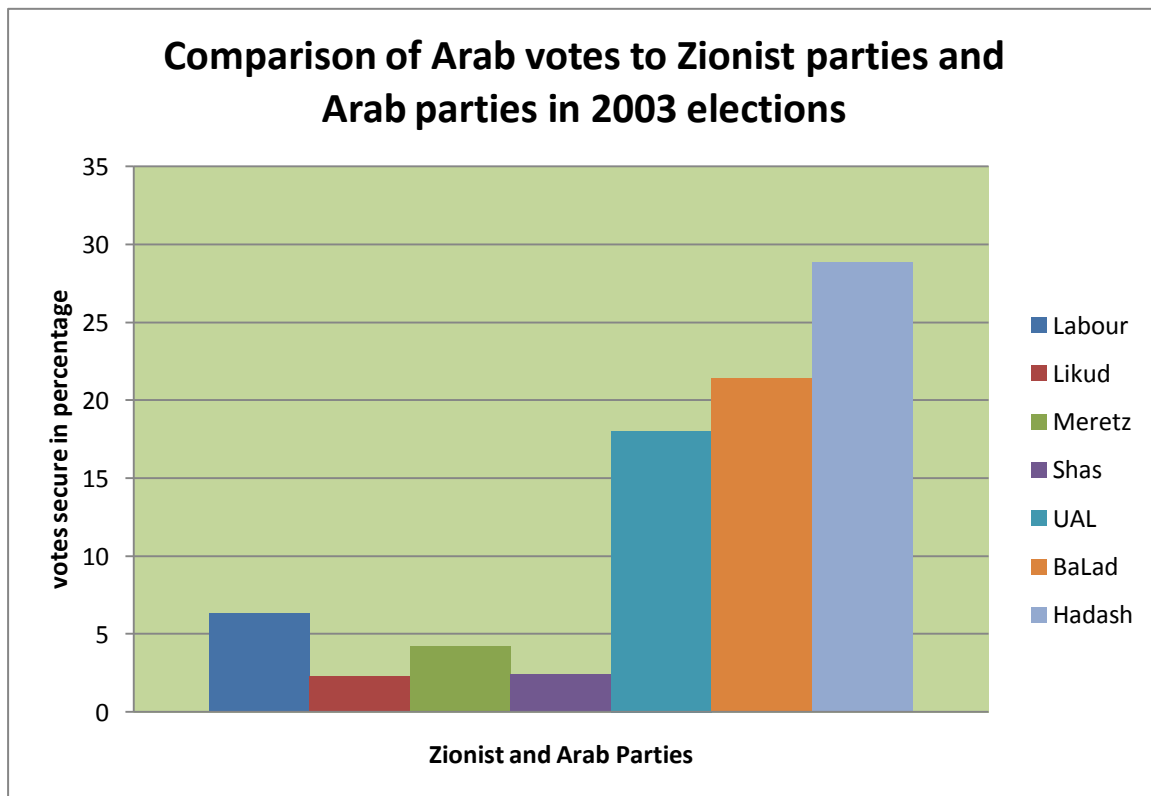
⁶⁷Peretz, Kook, and Doron, "Knesset Election 2003: Why Likud Regained Its Political Domination and Labor Continued to fade out", p. 597.

⁶⁸*The Palestinian Arab Minority and the 2009 Israeli Elections*, The Mossawa Centre, The Advocacy Centre for Arab Citizens in Israel, Haifa (2009), p. 11.

notice to the residents of Negev.⁶⁹ In the elections, 6.3 per cent of the Arab electorate voted for Labour and 2.3 per cent voted for Likud (it was all time low). If one adds Meretz's 4.2 per cent, to Shas 2.4 per cent, the total Arab votes that went to Zionist parties (Kadima was not formed in the 2003 elections) comes out to be 20 per cent (Figure 3.1).

This means that around one-fifth of the Arabs were still voting for the Zionist parties, although when compared with the last elections, the voting percentage declined. The percentage goes higher if one adds the votes which went to Zionist parties which could not cross the threshold limit. Thus, around 31 per cent of Arabs voted for Zionist parties (eight per cent from other Zionist parties), a significant fact against the backdrop of the al-Aqsa Intifada which created a big divide between Arabs and Jews in Israel.⁷⁰

Figure 3.1



*Source: Israel Decides, Elections 2003, *Jerusalem Post* (30 January 2003) http://info.jpost.com/C002/Supplements/Elections2003/results_sections.html#results, accessed on 17 November 2011.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁷⁰Asher and Shamir, *The 2003 Elections in Israel*, p. 36.

Likud

When elections' results were announced, it was clear that Likud had witnessed its greatest victory since the 1977 elections. The Likud, which shrank to 19 seats during the 1999 elections, regained considerably and doubled its representation.⁷¹ However, its performance in the Arab sector was bad as it is during the 2003 elections that it got its lowest number of Arab votes. In the Arab sector, only 2.4 per cent of Arabs voted for Likud and most of these votes came from the Druze community.

The impressive performance of Likud in the Israeli elections and disappointing outcome in the Arab sector need some close scrutiny. Likud in 2003 elections adopted a radical stand against the Israeli Arab parties. Likud MKs supported resolutions to disqualify Azmi Bishara and other Israeli Arab leaders. Moreover, Sharon and Likud took a very strong stand with regards to the central issues of security, war and peace in their elections campaign.⁷² Furthermore, Sharon agreed in his first term to construct parts of a long security barrier to separate Israeli from Palestinian populations in the West Bank.⁷³ Thus, one can say that the al-Aqsa Intifada and the issue of security immensely affected the Likud votes. On the other hand, Likud in general, presented a more centrist approach to tackle serious issues of economy and development. Sharon even showed his willingness to resolve the Palestinian issue. Sharon along with other progressive ministers, constituted the new Israeli centre.⁷⁴ Thus, a more centrist stand of Likud did attract the Israeli votes in general but Israeli Arabs were not much attracted by the new approach of Likud.

On one side, thanks to its centrist approach adopted in the elections campaign, it obtained votes from the centrist-right and right political ideology public of Israel. On the other side, because of its radical approach in the field of security, it lost votes from the Arab sector. If

⁷¹Ami Pedahzur, Sivan Hirsch, Daphna Canetti-Nisim, "Whose Victory? An Empirical Analysis of the Popular Votes for the Right-Wing Camp in the 2003 Elections", in Shmuel Sandler, M. Benjamin Mollov, Jonathan Rynhold, *Israel at the polls 2003*, Routledge Publications, New York (2005), p. 20.

⁷²Jonathan Rynhold and Gerald Steinberg, "The peace process and the Israeli elections", in Shmuel Sandler, M. Benjamin Mollov, Jonathan Rynhold, *Israel at the polls 2003*, Routledge publications, New York, 2005, p. 194.

⁷³*Ibid.*, p. 196.

⁷⁴Shmuel Sandler and M. Ben Mollov, "Israel at the Polls 2003: A New Turning Point in the Political History of the Jewish state", in Shmuel Sandler, M. Benjamin Mollov, Jonathan Rynhold, *Israel at the polls 2003*, Routledge publications, New York (2005), pp. 9-10.

Likud created history with its best ever performance since the early 1980s, its performance vis-à-vis Arab votes was the worst one.

Labour

While Likud registered its best performance for nearly two decades, Labour party scored very poorly. This contrast could again be observed for the 2003 Knesset elections results as Labour only managed to secure 19 seats, with overall less than 15 per cent of the votes. In the Arab sector, Labour's performance was as well far from being satisfactory. It could get only 6.3 per cent votes from the Arab sector as compared to 7.7 per cent in the previous elections.⁷⁵ Labour got its maximum of votes from the Kibbutzim area, which is traditionally a Labour stronghold. The Table 3.2 shows the voting behaviour of the Israeli population and the performance of all the parties in the different sectors. The performance of Labour in different sectors can be put under investigation.

Unlike Likud, Labour failed to present a centrist approach. Moreover and to some extent, the responsibility of the early elections was put on the account of the withdrawal of Labour from the unity government. It was believed that it was the left wing of the Labour party that pressurized its representatives in the national unity government to withdraw their parliamentary support.⁷⁶ The citizens in Israel were frustrated with the frequent elections. Thus, when Labour projected a leftist orientation during its campaign, it was clear that it would not be make political gains.

In Israel, the Left-Arab bloc comprises approximately 30 percent of the population, whereas the right-religious comprises around 35 per cent,⁷⁷ and the remaining one-third bloc votes according to its shifting loyalties and influences. Parties like Likud, Shinui presented a centrist approach to attract the voters of the third bloc while Labour failed to get their support.

⁷⁵Giora Goldberg, "The electoral collapse of the Israeli doves", in Shmuel Sandler, M. Benjamin Mollov, Jonathan Rynhold, *Israel at the polls 2003*, Routledge publications, New York (2005), p. 50.

⁷⁶Sandler and Mollov, "Israel at the Polls 2003: A New Turning Point in the Political History of the Jewish state", p. 6.

⁷⁷Goldberg, "The electoral collapse of the Israeli doves", p. 36.

Table 3.2: The Demographic Breakdown of the 2003 election results***(Figures in percentage)**

| Party | Jerusalem | Tel-Aviv | Haifa | Old cities | New cities | Religious cities | Arab sector | West Bank settlements | Kibbutz |
|-----------------|------------------|-----------------|--------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------------|--------------------|------------------------------|----------------|
| Likud | 27.8 | 28.4 | 28.2 | 35.2 | 36.0 | 8.4 | 2.3 | 28.6 | 6.9 |
| Labor | 9 | 22.6 | 22.3 | 17.2 | 8.8 | 2 | 6.3 | 4 | 45.5 |
| Shinui | 6.9 | 15.5 | 16.4 | 16.6 | 11.3 | 2.1 | | 6.6 | 7.8 |
| Shas | 12.6 | 7.2 | 2.9 | 6.9 | 12.4 | 22.8 | 2.4 | 8.5 | 0.5 |
| National Union | 5.6 | 2.6 | 6.1 | 5.2 | 8.7 | 2.2 | 0.4 | 15.6 | 1.3 |
| Meretz | 4.8 | 11.1 | 5.4 | 4.6 | 2.5 | | 4.2 | 1.4 | 27 |
| NRP | 6.5 | 2.5 | 2.8 | 4.3 | 3.4 | 5.6 | | 14.4 | 3.7 |
| UTJ | 18.6 | 1.3 | 2 | 1.5 | 3.1 | 51.2 | | 10.8 | |
| One Nation | | 1.4 | 1.8 | 2.6 | 3.8 | | 5 | 0.7 | 0.9 |
| Hadash | | | 2.4 | | | | 28.8 | | |
| Balad | | | 2.2 | | | | 21.4 | | |
| Ra'am | | | | | | | 18.6 | | |
| Yisrael biAliya | 1.9 | | 3.6 | 2.1 | 4.1 | | 0.4 | 1.7 | 0.4 |

*Source: Cameron S. Brown, Israel's 2003 Elections: A Victory of Moderate Right and Secular Centre, *Middle East Review of International Affairs (MERIA)*, Vol.7, No. 3 (March 2003), <http://meria.idc.ac.il/journal/2003/issue1/jv7n1a7.html>, accessed on 20 October 2011.

Although the overall percentage of votes fell down in the Arab sector, different trends can be noticed with a close look given to this Arab sector. In Druze communities, the voting percentage rose from 21.5 per cent to 23.6 per cent, and among Bedouin voters, it went from four per cent to 7.9 per cent. The voting share in the Arab villages saw a decline whereas Arab towns showed an increase from 5.6 per cent to 6.1 per cent.⁷⁸

Labour's overall decline of votes also comes from the fact that the first Arab member on the Labour list was placed very low. However, when compared to the 1999 elections, the first position of the Israeli Arab candidate was at the same spot as in the 2003 elections.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

Considering the influence of the al-Aqsa Intifada and the dissatisfaction of the Arabs, Labour would have been able to attract more Arab votes if they had have given more realistic spot to the Israeli Arab candidates. The first Arab member to enter the Labour list, Galeb Majadla, occupied the twentieth position and the second member, Salah Tarif, was given the 21st spot.⁷⁹ Not surprisingly, when Labour only won 19 seats, no Israeli Arab member could make it to the Knesset on the Labour party List. However, eventually Galeb Majadla entered the Knesset in 2004 as a replacement when Avraham Burg retired from the active politics. Further, even Salah Tarif entered into the Knesset when the leader of the party Amram Mitzna resigned his Knesset membership.⁸⁰

The seeds of Arab disappointment with Labour were sown after the 1999 elections and the al Aqsa Intifada, thus much before the 2003 Knesset elections. In the 1999 elections, the Arab leader Azmi Bishara, ran for the prime minister election. However, he pulled out to give an open field to Ehud Barak in the prime ministerial election. Barak's victory comes partly from the massive Arab support. However, in a move perceived as a political betrayal by the Arab community, Barak bypassed the Arab parties in including in his government coalition right wing Orthodox Jewish parties such as Shas, known for its unfavourable views towards the Arab community.⁸¹ Barak struck to this line of conduct since he did not include any Arab party in the coalition, which eventually frustrated Arab MKs as they felt marginalised.

A survey done in 2002 by the Institute of Peace and Research revealed that an increasing number of Israeli Arabs were losing confidence in the Israeli democratic system and their ability to influence it.⁸² Thus, the Labour party which in the past had massive support in the Arab sector failed to convince Israeli Arabs particularly in the light of the al-Aqsa Intifada and the failure of the Oslo peace process.

⁷⁹Galeb Majadla and Salah Tarif (Druze) were placed on the 20th and 21st spot respectively on the Arab list for 2003 Knesset elections.

⁸⁰Yair Ettinger, "Three-Way Race is on for Labour's Reserved Slot for Arab Candidate", *Ha'aretz* (6 December, 2011).

⁸¹Mossawa Centre, "The Palestinian Arab Minority and the 2009 Israeli Elections", p. 10.

⁸²*Ibid.*, p. 7.

Shas, Meretz, and Shinui

As far as other major parties were concerned, there were three more big parties which got substantial votes from the Israeli public. The most impressive performance was given by Shinui which emerged as the third largest party in the 2003 elections. They were the second biggest winner of the 2003 elections after Likud. Shinui presented a strict centrist position in the elections campaign. On the religious issues, it was more radical than Labour and on the socio-economic axis more liberal than Likud.⁸³ Shinui was offering something to everyone, therefore slowly became the best choice for the Israeli public. Shinui's substantial votes came from Haifa and Tel Aviv: 16.4 per cent and 15.5 respectively.

As for Meretz and Shas, they both failed to impress the public and lost massive votes including those from their traditional strongholds. Shas, which had registered a massive victory in its last elections, showed signs of decline even before the elections. Shas' maximum votes came from the religious centres where it got 22.8 per cent of votes, the second largest percentage after NRP's (National Religious Party) 51.2 per cent. From the Arab sector, Shas secured 2.4 per cent of votes, a noticeable performance for a Jewish religious party.

Another prominent party which suffered losses was Meretz. Well known for its left-wing ideology, the party did mistakes similar to the Labour. It failed to place Israeli Arab candidates on the realistic spots.⁸⁴ Meretz position in the Israeli political platform was taken up by parties like Green Leaf and Yisrael Acheret (Other Israel). Moreover, its Arab votes were taken away by Hadash.⁸⁵ Although Meretz performance in the Arab sector was not very impressive, it secured 4.2 per cent votes. It lost 19.2 per cent of its strength in the Arab sector of Israel, coming down from 5.2 per cent to 4.2 per cent.⁸⁶ Unfortunately for Meretz, its biggest competitor was Shinui. Meretz was considered to be a party of youth and fresh ideas⁸⁷

⁸³Sandler and Mollov, "Israel at the Polls 2003: A New Turning Point in the Political History of the Jewish state", p. 10.

⁸⁴Goldberg, "The electoral collapse of the Israeli doves", p. 47.

⁸⁵*Ibid.*, p. 47.

⁸⁶*Ibid.*, p. 50.

⁸⁷*Ibid.*, p. 47.

when it was formed, but it came back in later years to the same traditional ways. Not surprisingly, Shinui attracted the youth and got massive support from this section.

The Non-Voting of Arabs

The consistent decline in the Arab voting turnout is a silent expression of their lack of confidence in the political system of Israel. A sizeable and increasing number of Arabs are now abstaining from participating in the Knesset elections. In 2003 elections, only 62 per cent of the Arab population casted their votes. Though this number was certainly very high when compared to the 2001 Prime Minister election, the Arab participation in the recent elections has seen a steep decline. The Arab voting turnout reached its peak in the 1955 elections with 90 per cent of voting turnout (figure 3.2). However, since the mid- 1960's, the voting rate of the Arab citizens has been lower than the general voting percentage of the Israeli public. In more recent years, the gap has widened⁸⁸ and since 1988, the gap between the two is more visible. This is again a very interesting observation as 1988 also marks the arrival of Arab parties on the Israeli political platform. Scholars have identified a few reasons to comprehend the decline character of Israeli Arab voting turnout.

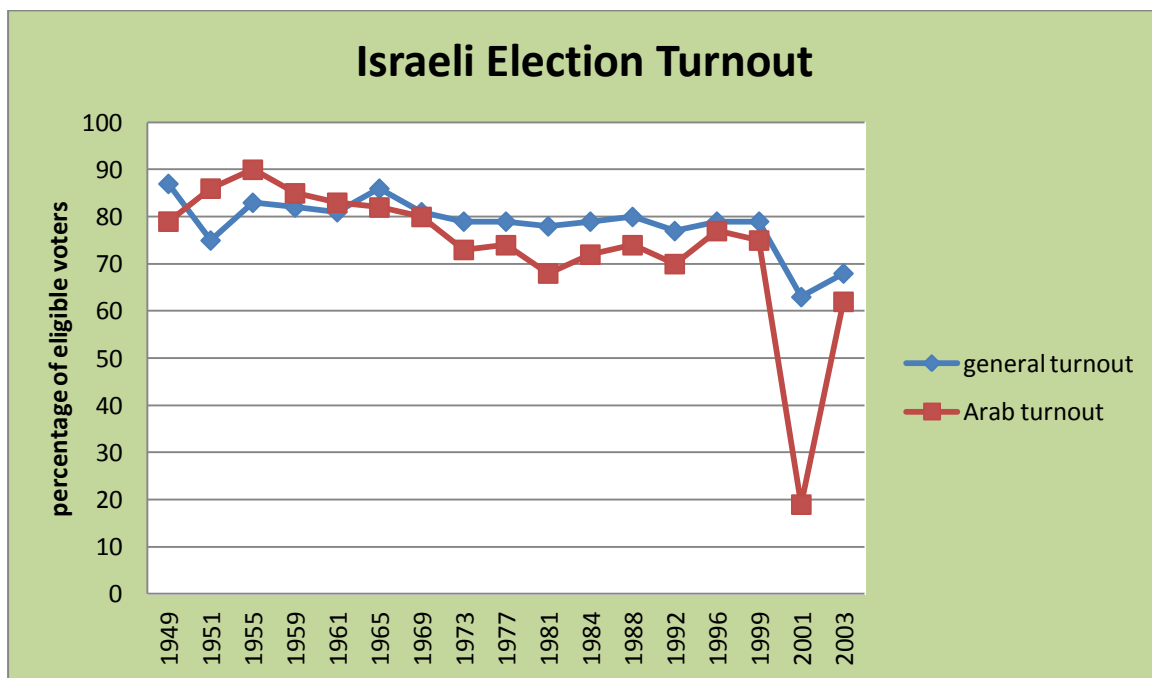
One of the major reasons of the Arab low turnout can be associated with the movement favouring boycott of the elections which started with the 2001 prime ministerial election and were very successful in its objective. In 2003, this movement named as “Public Committee for Elections Boycott”, organised activities aimed to publicize the boycott effort, in line with what has been done in 2001. The public committee was a coalition of movements that have historically supported the boycott, such as the Sons of the Village, and other academic, public, and media personalities in Israel. Their activities were similar to election campaigns, publication of platforms, debates and rallies, polling, and mobilization of supporters.⁸⁹ Boycotting and other nonviolent political strategies constitute attempts to improve the situation of the Arabs in Israel and to expand the meaning of citizenship from its present limited conception to a full and equal citizenship. These strategies are being used precisely in

⁸⁸As'ad Ghanem, *The Palestinian-Arab Minority in Israel, 1948-2000: A Political Study*, Albany, NY: University of New York Press (2001), p. 41.

⁸⁹Yair Ettinger, “To Boycott or not to Boycott”, *Ha'aretz*, (26 January 2003); also Asa'd Ghanem and Muhammad Mustafa, “The Palestine in Israel and the 2006 Knesset Elections: Political and Ideological Implication of Election Boycott”, *Holy Land Studies*, 6 (May, 2007), p. 62.

order to avoid jeopardizing their accomplishments with radical methods.⁹⁰ Organisations like the ‘Northern Faction of the Islamic Movement in Israel’ also call for the boycott of Israeli elections, and mainly for religious reasons, they claim that participation in Israeli elections is opposed to the spirit of Islam and Islamic law.⁹¹

Figure 3.2*



*Sources: Schafferman Karin Tamar, Participation, Abstention, and Boycott: Trends in Arab Voter Turnout in Israeli Elections, *Israeli Democracy Institute* (2009), <http://www.idi.org.il/sites/english/ResearchAndPrograms/elections09/Pages/ArabVoterTurnout.aspx> , accessed 8 November 2011; Also: Voters Turnout Data for Israel, *International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA)*, http://www.idea.int/vt/country_view.cfm?CountryCode=IL, accessed on 8 November 2011.

These boycotts become more relevant as the Arab citizens of Israel feel that a marginal part of their complex national identity is also Palestinian. By their abstention, the Arab citizens of Israel seek to express their collective objection to the discrimination, inequality, alienation and contempt that the Israeli political system and public has shown towards them throughout the years. The widespread abstention at that time was not rooted in indifference or a lack of interest, but was rather a type of reverse participation whose goal was to emphasize the

⁹⁰Amal Jamal, “Citizenship as Resistance: Arab Politics in Israel Revisited”, In *Israel and the Palestinian Minority: Mada's Third Annual Political Monitoring Report*, ed. N. Sultany, Mada al-Carmel - The Arab Center for Applied Social Research , Haifa (2004), p. 26.

⁹¹Schafferman Karin Tamar, “Participation, Abstention, and Boycott: Trends in Arab Voter Turnout in Israeli Elections”, *Israeli Democracy Institute*, 2009. <http://www.idi.org.il/sites/english/ResearchAndPrograms/elections09/Pages/ArabVoterTurnout.aspx>, accessed 8 November 2011.

importance and the role of this population for the future of Israeli democracy.⁹² Thus, boycotting had become a very important instrument or weapon in Israel to fulfill Arabs' demands. Nevertheless, various surveys done by institutes like Israel Democracy Institute, Mada al-Carmel after the 2003 elections, reveal that the majority of non-voters are going through a temporary phase of isolation and that they may return in the next elections.⁹³

There are other factors which influence the Arab population for non-voting. One of the factors is the disappointment of the Arab parties of Israel. Particularly in the last decade, the Arab public of Israel has begun to lose faith in its Knesset representatives as a result of their inability to bring about any real change, and because they have abandoned the struggle for the day-to-day interests of the Arab citizens of Israel in favour of the nationalist Palestinian cause.⁹⁴

On the other hand, there is also a trend in which the voting percentage of Israeli population in general has decreased. This comes from the frustration of the Israeli population in relation to the political instability and the high frequency of the elections. From 1992 till 2001, the Israeli population faced 5 different elections. Thus, not only the Arabs but the Jews are also very exhausted by the frequent elections. Hence, one can say that apart from the influence of the al-Aqsa Intifada, the Arab population was also facing many other issues, some of them similar to the Jewish section of the population, which affected their voting pattern in the process and resulted in high absenteeism.

The Issue of Palestine in the 2003 Elections

The Palestinian issue always play a central role during the Israeli elections and have a tremendous impact on the elections, often determining their outcome. The feelings towards Palestine in the 2003 elections erupted because the al-Aqsa Intifada was still in the mind of Arab citizens of Israel. The Arab political parties of Israel took this opportunity to attract a

⁹²Amal Jamal, "Abstention as Participation: The Paradoxes of Arab Politics in Israel", in Alan Arian, Michal Shamir, *The Elections in Israel, 2001*, The Israeli Democracy Institute, Jerusalem, Israel (2002), p. 60.

⁹³Mada, al-Carmel, *Survey of Palestinians in Israel Regarding the Boycott of Knesset Elections in 2003*, Mada al-Carmel - The Arab Center for Applied Social Research 2004, Arabic edition published in 2004 (English version published in 2009), p. 11, <http://www.mada-research.org/?LanguageId=1&System=Item&MenuId=11&PMenuId=2&MenuTemplateId=1&CategoryId=10&ItemId=263&ItemTemplateId=1>, accessed on 8 November 2011.

⁹⁴Tamar, "Participation, Abstention, and Boycott: Trends in Arab Voter Turnout in Israeli Elections", <http://www.idi.org.il/sites/english/ResearchAndPrograms/elections09/Pages/ArabVoterTurnout.aspx>.

maximum of Israeli Arab votes. Meanwhile, they often highlighted the issue of Palestine and presented a link between the issue of Palestine, the al-Aqsa Intifada, and the plight of Israeli Arabs. Their viewpoint was often supported by the leaders of the Palestinian Authority.

In the 2003 elections, three major views emerged. The first view was taken up by the pro-Arafat group, which favoured a liberal stand and argued ‘that statements over reducing the violence or ending attack, at least against civilians on Israeli territory, would help defeat Sharon.’⁹⁵ This view was supported by many progressive leaders in Israel and they believed that such efforts could bridge the gap between the Arabs of Israel and the Jews.

The second group which mostly consisted of radical members presented a militant view. They believed that any efforts to bring peace in the region is useless as Israel does not want any peace and thus, even supporting Doves and Labour party would be of no use in the elections. ‘They behaved implicitly as if they wanted to provoke Israel to further escalations, thus mobilizing Israeli Arabs and Palestinians to support for maximalist demands and armed struggle.’⁹⁶ This kind of viewpoint often generated tensions among the Jews and Arabs in Israel and vindicated the claims of right wing parties.

The third block was the most moderate one and they believed that issues between Israel and Palestine can only be solved when more and more Israelis come in the support of Palestinian issue. For this, they thought that supporting Doves to come to power would increase the chances of peace and may bring an amicable solution for Palestine. It is said that many Palestinian Authority officials quietly encouraged Israeli Arab voters to go to the polls in large numbers.⁹⁷ It is also believed that even Arafat voiced the idea that the Palestinians should help the Israeli left to win the elections.⁹⁸ He supported, though not openly, the candidature of Mitzna in the 2003 elections. Arafat even called the Palestinians just before the elections not to attack any civilian so as to help Israeli left to win the elections.

⁹⁵Barry Rubin, “External Influences on Israel’s 2003 Election”, in Shmuel Sandler, M. Benjamin Mollov, Jonathan Rynhold, *Israel at the polls 2003*, Routledge publications, New York (2005), p. 206.

⁹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 206.

⁹⁷Abu Mazen, an important Fatah leader, said before the 2003 elections, “you have a different role than ours, an important role in bringing down [Israel’s] government and making [new ones]”, published in *Al- Hayat*, 26 November 2002. Translated in English by MEMRI 449 (15 December 2002).

⁹⁸Rubin, “External Influences on Israel’s 2003 Election”, p. 207.

Thus, the Palestinian issue and the leaders of the PA played an important role in influencing Israeli Arabs to vote for the left parties. Not surprisingly, out of 31 per cent of votes which went to the Zionist parties, around 13 to 14 per cent votes went to the leftwing Zionist parties. However, the call of the PA on the Arab population of Israel to participate in the elections was not very successful and 37 per cent of voters' abstention was recorded. This also explains that for Israeli Arabs their internal development was more important than the external issues like the one of Palestine. They were disappointed from the Zionist parties as well as the Arab parties and their constant failure to raise the issues for their rights.

The Failure of Arab Parties

The loss of Zionist votes did not lead to the gain of Arab parties. The Arab voters of Israel were equally dissatisfied with the Arab parties and they expressed their disappointment by abstaining from the elections, even after the regular calls by the PA for high turnout.⁹⁹ Secondly, those who turned up did not only vote for Arab parties. Thus, the 2003 Knesset elections became the first elections since 1988 with the share of Arab parties in the Knesset going down.

In the 2003 Knesset elections, the Arab parties, including the Hadash, could only manage to get eight seats in the Knesset. Although Hadash and Balad won three seats each in the elections, Hadash got 93,819 of Arab votes, which is well ahead of Balad's 71,299 Arab votes. The biggest setback came for the United Arab List (UAL). They could only get two seats in the Knesset with just 65,551 votes. The massive loss for UAL also came because of the internal conflicts UAL was facing with its sub-groups.¹⁰⁰ Thus, the Arab parties also experienced a decline and that phenomenon was very much reflected in the election mandate. The failure of the Arab parties lies in the fact that they did not manage to bring any substantial change to the social and economic conditions of Arabs. The main agenda of all the Arab parties was to highlight the issue of Palestine. In the Knesset also, they never tried to

⁹⁹Although a big section of PA supported the elections and asked the Arabs to come out in numbers, a small section called for boycott. Even in Israel, many small parties called for boycott. However, it would not be correct to conclude that because of the call for boycott by these parties, the Arabs did not vote. There are many reasons to suggest this action. One of the reasons apart from the dissatisfaction and disillusion was the election fatigue. The citizens of Israel in general were frustrated with the regular elections. This also explains why even the Jews' turnout sharply fell.

¹⁰⁰Frisch, "The Influence of the al-Aqsa Intifada on the Arab Vote in the 2003 General Elections", p. 140.

cooperate with the government and bring reforms related to the Arab citizens of Israel. The only exception was Hadash which aimed to bring Arab- Jewish unity.

Conclusion

The 2003 elections when seen in the background of the Israeli Arab politics were not as dramatic as it was expected. The call for complete boycott was not heeded by the Arab population and so was the call to participate in the elections by the Palestinian Authority. However, the low turnout was the obvious outcome of the frequent elections and the dissatisfaction of Israeli Arabs from the Zionist parties as well as the Arab parties.

The elections were held earlier than schedule and the Israeli public was not happy with the frequency of the elections as it was causing huge losses to the exchequer, and therefore had repercussions on the inflation. The real issues such as the rising unemployment and the significant poverty were overshadowed by the al-Aqsa Intifada even two years after its outbreak. Not surprisingly, the Arab votes fell down from the previous Knesset elections.¹⁰¹ However, even the voting in the Jewish section also fell because of the general unwillingness to participate in such frequent elections.

The results were quite predictable when the right wing Likud government came into power but the decline of Labour party was very much a topic of discussion after the elections were over. However, the most surprising result was given by the centrist Shinui which became the third largest party in the Knesset. The left wing Meretz also failed to impress by their performance.

The influence of the al-Aqsa Intifada was quite evident in the 2003 elections. The Arab votes for Zionist parties went down to 31 per cent. However, this was still large enough to be an influential block in the Knesset. The Jewish citizens also moved from extreme right to the centrist parties. The massive victory of Shinui is one illustration. The centrist approach of Likud also shows the Israeli orientation in the 2003 Knesset elections.

The Arab votes for the Zionist parties went mostly to Labour and Meretz. The Arab parties also failed to impress and could get only eight seats in the Knesset elections. This projected a

¹⁰¹The comparison made is from the 1999 Knesset elections. In the 2001 Prime Minister Election the Arab voting turnout was just 18 per cent.

general trend of dissatisfaction among the Arab citizens. Even the issue of Palestine could not attract Arab voters.

Finally, the trend in the 2003 elections showed clearly an influence of the al-Aqsa Intifada in the Israeli domestic politics. The falling voting turnout was not only evident in Arab sector but also among the Jews. Many Arabs did not vote because of their disillusionment with Zionist parties as well as the Arab parties. Many Arabs preferred not to vote also because of the regular elections in the Israeli democracy. Nevertheless, 30 per cent of Israeli Arab votes for Zionist parties reflected that a sizeable Arab population still preferred to go in opposition to the Arab parties' strong campaigning against the mainstream parties.

Chapter 4

Seventeenth Knesset Elections, 2006

The 16th Knesset was dissolved by the president on 23 November 2005 with Ariel Sharon acting as the prime minister for the transitional government.¹ There were many remarkable events which happened during the period of the Sixteenth Knesset. Firstly, the National Religious Party left the coalition on the issue of Gaza Disengagement Plan and then, Shinui pulled out of the coalition within the few next months. After this, the Labour party came to the rescue of the Likud-led coalition when it was in trouble by joining it but after a brief period of stability, the Labour party also pulled out. Moreover, the Likud was going through some internal crisis which led to the formation of the Kadima party by Ariel Sharon in 2005.

The 17th Knesset elections gave Kadima the status of largest party but not the majority and it was not even a victory which could have enabled Kadima to dictate terms with their coalition partners. The 2006 elections proved to be a disaster for the Likud which could win only 12 seats in the Knesset. Similarly, the other parties also could not increase their vote share. The Labour got exactly the same number of seats as in the 2003 elections and so were Shas and Meretz, which gained and lost one seat respectively.

In the Arab sector of Israel, the struggle for the votes was mainly between Labour and Kadima. Meretz and Shas, although remaining active in the Arab sectors, did not hope much from the Israeli Arabs and Likud was almost annihilated after the 2006 elections. As it was expected, the Labour party garnered a maximum of votes in the Arab sector followed by Kadima. Meretz and Shas came distant third and fourth respectively.

Among the Arab political parties, the contest was between the communist Hadash or the Democratic Front for Peace and Equality (DPFE) and the coalition of United Arab List (UAL) and Ta'al (Arab Movement for Renewal, AMC). The Balad or National Democratic Assembly (NDA) was the third party and was not expected to perform well in the Arab sector. However, when the results came, to everyone's surprise, Balad won three seats in the

¹The Sixteenth Knesset, The State of Israel, <http://www.knesset.gov.il/review/ReviewPage2.aspx?kns=16&lng=3>, accessed on 14 June 2012.

Knesset which was equal to that of Hadash, though Balad got slightly less number of votes than Hadash.

The 2006 elections showed that Israeli citizens were more inclined towards centrist parties than the right wing parties. Before the 2006 Knesset elections, it was observed that the citizens of Israel were more than willing to create an amicable environment for the peaceful solution with the Palestinians. Sharon's Gaza Disengagement plan found a sizeable support within the Israeli population. Such issues became the highlight of the election campaign. Apart from that, social and development issues were also given prominence during the election campaign. In their elections campaign, the Likud highlighted Netanyahu's successful economic policies, but as the result illustrated it, the Israeli voters were more inclined towards Kadima in the 2006 Knesset elections.

Socio- Economic Conditions

Development of any community plays an important role in the political orientation which eventually sets the voting pattern. The case was similar with the Arab community in Israel. In the 2003 elections, a large section in the Arab community was not happy with the Israeli Arab leaders due to their inability to bring any positive change in the community and the fact that they were rather focusing on external issues such as Palestine. In 2006, this disillusionment grew bigger. This was one of the reasons for the drop in the voting percentage. However, a certain section of the Israeli Arab population understands that it was not easier to bring any legal and social change through the parties in power. That is why many Israeli Arabs prefer Zionist parties over the Arab parties. One shall see that one-third of the Israeli chose to vote for the Zionist mainstream parties as they were instrumental in bringing any strong change.

As seen in earlier decades, the Israeli Arabs lag behind the Jews in the social and economic developments. In many towns and villages, the difference is huge. However, when the Israeli Arabs are compared with their counterpart in the adjacent Arab countries, their conditions still seem much better. Nevertheless, there is a constant rise in their social and economic developments. Between 2003 and 2006, the social and economic development saw a slight increase. According to the survey done by Sikkuy in 2006, the inequality between the Jews and Arabs of Israel lies more in the health sector as compared to the education, employment

and social welfare ones.² In the health sector, the most important component is the life expectancy. The life expectancy for females among Israeli Arabs was 78.4 and Jews was 82.2 whereas in males it was 74.4 for Israeli Arabs and 78.2 for Jews. The infant mortality rate in 2006 for the Israeli Arabs was 8 per 1000 deaths whereas it was 3.6 among the Jews.³

In terms of poverty, the condition of the Israeli Arabs as compared to the Jews is not encouraging. Unlike for other social indicators, the poverty among the Israeli Arabs between 2001 and 2006 saw a rise. The number of Israeli Arab families living in poverty has increased from 47.6 per cent of all Israeli Arab families (112,300 families) in 2002 to 48.4 per cent of all Israeli Arab families (119,700 families) in 2003.⁴ One reason for the rise in poverty could be the recession Israel was facing during this period. In the same period, the poverty ratio in the Jewish sector also saw a rise. However, Israel saw an economic recovery in 2004. A growth in economy came in combination with a general improvement in the economic conditions but the poverty still saw a rise though the rate declined. Arab families and Arab children continued to be among those with the highest poverty rates.⁵ The poverty in 2005 and 2006 attained 49.2 per cent of all Israeli Arab families.⁶ In terms of unemployment among the Israeli Arabs, the rate was 11.5 per cent whereas that of Jews was 9.7 per cent.⁷

In the education field, the condition of the Israeli Arabs is better than other social indicators. However, for the most part, Arabs and Jews in Israel attend separate schools, generally with different curricula, languages of study, school hours, and quality of education.⁸ In 2006, the average density in the Arab education as a whole is 30 pupils per classroom, compared to 26 pupils in the Hebrew education. About half of the Israeli Arab population completed eight

²The Equality Index of Jewish and Arab Citizens of Israel, *The Sikkuy Report 2006*, Sikkuy, Haifa, Jerusalem (March 2007), p. 48.

³The Central Bureau of Statistics, Statistical Abstract of Israel, *Statistilite 2007; Stastilite 2002; The Sikkuy Report 2006*, pp. 49-50.

⁴The Palestinian Arab Citizens of Israel: Status, Opportunities and Challenges for an Israeli-Palestinian Peace, *The Mossawa centre*, Haifa (June 2006), p. 31.

⁵Yigal Ben Shalom (ed.), *Annual Survey 2006*, National Insurance Institute Research and Planning Administration, Jerusalem (August 2007), p. E73.

⁶ *The Sikkuy Report 2006*, p. 66.

⁷*Ibid.*, 63.

⁸The Palestinian Arab Citizens of Israel: Status, Opportunities and Challenges for an Israeli-Palestinian Peace, *The Mossawa centre*, p. 38.

years of schooling or less. Only eight per cent of the Arab population completed 16 years or more of schooling.⁹ Comparing the social benefits which Jews and Arabs of Israel get from the government, one can find that the government expenditure in 2006 on Israeli Arabs was 246 (NIS¹⁰ per capita) whereas that for Jews was 378 NIS.¹¹

Thus, there is a certain gap between the Jews and the Israeli Arabs with regards to all the indicators of social and economic conditions but the indicators also show a persistent rise from the previous years. This constant rise partly accounts for one-third of the Israeli Arab population voting for Zionist parties which have better resources and power to bring out social and economic developments of the Israeli Arab community.

The Road to the 17th Knesset Elections

The 16th Knesset saw three governments in less than three years, and two of whom were headed by Sharon. The first government was formed by Likud in coalition with Shinui and National Religious Party (NRP). The second Government was the product of the coalition of Likud, Labour and United Torah Judaism (UTJ). The last Government was a transitional one, formed for a brief period, with Ehud Olmert as the Prime minister.

The 16th Knesset produced mixed results. On one hand, there were some courses like the positive economic policy, reforms in education system and Gaza disengagement program, which represented a step ahead in resolving the Palestinian conflict. On the other hand, the standing of the Knesset went down because of the unsavoury image of some of its members. A number of criminal charges was brought against many members of the Knesset. In one incident, the Speaker of the Knesset, Reuven Rivlin, was forced to call the police when a scandal related to the double voting was exposed on 18 May 2003.¹² The double voting charges kept rocking the house throughout the tenure of the Knesset.¹³

⁹*Israel in Figures 2007*, Central Bureau of Statistics, State of Israel, Jerusalem (2007), p. 14; *The Sikkuy Report 2006*, p. 56.

¹⁰NIS: New Israeli Shekel, adopted on 1st January 1985. The code for the currency is ILS

¹¹DIRASAT, *The Arab Centre for Law and Policy*, Nazareth (2007), <http://www.dirasat-aclp.org/Fact-Sheet-Socio-Economic.pdf>, accessed on 17 June 2012; also see *Annual Expenditure Report 2005*, Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Service (2006), <http://www.molsa.gov.il/Pages/HomePage.aspx>, accessed on 17 June 2012.

¹²Highlights of the Sixteenth Knesset, *Jewish Virtual Library*, <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsourc/Politics/Knesset16.html>, accessed on 2 February 2012.

¹³Yuval Yoaz, "AG Mazuz tells Knesset Likud MK to face double vote charges", *Ha'aretz* (31 October 2005), <http://www.haaretz.com/news/ag-mazuz-tells-knesset-likud-mk-to-face-double-vote-charges-1.172898>, accessed

In June 2003, some peace initiatives were taken from both Israel and the Palestinian Authority when Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon met Prime Minister of the Palestinian Authority Mahmoud Abbas with the U.S. President George Bush in Aqaba and expressed their commitments to end the current conflict between the two.¹⁴ When these moves failed, Ariel Sharon pushed hard to unilaterally implement the Gaza Disengagement plan, to the point of even risking his government. During the end of the 16th Knesset, the acting Prime Minister Ehud Olmert presented a realignment plan under which ninety percent of the Israeli settlements of the West Bank would be evacuated and dismantled.¹⁵

The coalition government formed by Ariel Sharon in 2003 lasted just over three years. In the 2003 elections, a coalition of Likud, Shinui, and the National Religious Party was formed when Likud got the largest number of seats. However, in less than two years, the coalition government started to struggle for its survival as the National Religious Party pulled out of the government over their disagreement on the Gaza Disengagement Plan¹⁶ and a little while later, even Shinui left the government over its dispute with Likud on the budget allocation.

Once Shinui pulled out, the government lost its majority in the Knesset. In this crisis, the Labour party came at the rescue of Likud and joined the coalition. Thus, the second coalition government was formed by Likud, Labour and United Torah Judaism.¹⁷ The prime minister for the second government was again Ariel Sharon. With the Labour party on board, it was easy to implement the Gaza Disengagement Plan. Hence, the Gaza Disengagement Plan was implemented much to the apathy of religious parties which included the former partners of Likud.

on 2 February 2012. Also, Ze'ev Segal, "Lawmakers above the Law", *Ha'aretz* (7 June 2005), <http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/opinion/lawmakers-above-the-law-1.160656>, accessed on 2 February 2012.

¹⁴*The Sixteenth Knesset, Government of Israel*, <http://www.knesset.gov.il/review/ReviewPage2.aspx?kns=16&lng=3>, accessed on 2 February 2012..

¹⁵*Ibid.*

¹⁶The Gaza Disengagement Plan was a proposal adopted by the Ariel Sharon government in 2004. This proposal seeks to evict all Israelis from the Gaza Strip and from four settlements of Northern West Bank. This Plan, which was proposed by Ariel Sharon, was rejected by the National Religious Party which eventually pulled out from the coalition in November 2004. For details on the Gaza Disengagement Plan see: The Disengagement Plan, *Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs* (18 April 2004), <http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Peace+Process/Reference+Documents/Disengagement+Plan+-+General+Outline.htm>, accessed on 15 January, 2012.

¹⁷*The Sixteenth Knesset, Government of Israel*, <http://www.knesset.gov.il/review/ReviewPage2.aspx?kns=16&lng=3>, accessed on 15 January 2012.

However, by the fall of 2005, the cracks in the coalition started appearing. There were two significant occurring developments which accelerated the conclusion of the 16th Knesset. The first division appeared inside Likud when Ariel Sharon decided to form a separate political party Kadima, after series of disagreements with his party members. The second development was the pullout of the Labour party from the coalition.

The decision of the Labour party to pull out from the coalition was mainly because of the emerging circumstances after the internal crisis of the Labour party's leadership. In Labour's leadership elections scheduled for early November, Amir Peretz campaigned on a platform which included withdrawing Labour from the Sharon-led coalition. Soon after, Amir Peretz caused political upheaval by ousting the veteran Labour party leader Shimon Peres.¹⁸ And finally two days later, all Labour ministers resigned from the Cabinet and Labour withdrew its support for the Government, leaving it without a majority support in the Knesset.

Under such circumstances, the Prime Minister Ariel Sharon declared elections one year prior to the proposed dates. Sharon's appeal to the President Moshe Katsav to dissolve the 16th Knesset and his inability to give majority government was accepted and the sixteenth Knesset was disbanded on 8 December 2005.¹⁹ Thus, a transition government was formed by Ariel Sharon but during the run up of the elections Sharon suffered a massive stroke and ended up medically unfit to govern. Hence, Ehud Olmert took over as head of the new party Kadima and active prime minister till the next elections.²⁰ The elections for the 17th Knesset were held in March 2006.

The Political Parties

There were in total 31 political parties which participated in the 17th Knesset elections. However, only 12 political parties emerged victorious and could send members to the Knesset. These political parties can be categorized in three sections: Zionist parties, Arab

¹⁸ Yair Ettinger, Mazal Mualem and Daniel Ben-Simon, "After stinging defeat, Peres says mulling retirement from politics", *Ha'aretz* (10 November 2005), <http://www.haaretz.com/news/after-stinging-defeat-peres-says-mulling-retirement-from-politics-1.173703>, accessed on 2 February 2012.

¹⁹ Elections in Israel March 2006, *Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, Government of Israel, <http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/History/Modern+History/Historic+Events/Elections+in+Israel+March+2006.htm>, accessed on 2 February 2012.

²⁰ Although Ariel Sharon became the prime minister for the transitional government, in January 2005 Ehud Olmert became the acting prime minister because Ariel Sharon suffered a massive stroke which took him into coma.

parties and the Religious parties. Maximum votes were captured by the Zionist parties which included both Jewish and Arab votes. The Arab parties were depending on the majority of Arab votes while the religious parties got votes mainly from the religious and ultra orthodox Jews.

Zionist Parties

In the 17th Knesset elections, three major Zionist parties were contesting: the right wing Likud, centrist Kadima, and leftist Labour. Kadima was a new party which was launched just four months before the elections of March. However, Ariel Sharon got a massive stroke in January which put him into coma. Thus, Olmert was declared as the prime ministerial candidate of Kadima for the coming Knesset elections. As for Likud, after Sharon left the party, Benjamin Netanyahu took over the leadership and became its prime ministerial candidate. In the Labour camp, the state of affairs was the same. Simon Peres left the party owing to the internal conflict with Amir Peretz giving latter the number one spot on the election list of Labour.

Likud and Kadima were fighting elections alone whereas Labour was in coalition with Meimad, a left wing religious Zionist party with an ideology aligning with Labour party. Meimad was formed in 1988 and had advocated for the inclusion of religious studies in the main curriculum of Israeli school studies. Apart from these three major parties, there were other Zionist parties like Meretz which was a left Zionist party and Yisrael Beiteinu which was a nationalist party mainly supported by Jews who emigrated from the erstwhile Soviet Union.

Arab Parties

In the elections, 31 political parties participated in the 17th Knesset elections, out of which could be found 4 Arab parties. The largest Arab political party was the Democratic Front for Peace and Equality (DFPE) or Hadash led by Muhammad Barakeh, driving its members from both the Jew and Arab communities. Other important candidates were Hanna Suwaid, Dov Hanin (a Jew member), and Manal Shalabi.²¹ The second largest party was Azmi Bishara's Balad (in Hebrew) or the National Democratic Assembly (in English). Its important

²¹“The Palestinian Arab Citizens of Israel: Status, Opportunities and Challenges for an Israeli-Palestinian Peace”, p. 48.

candidates for the elections were Jamal Zahalka, Wasil Taha, and Sa'id Naffa.²² The United Arab List (UAL), headed by Sheikh Ibrahim Sarsour, was an alliance between the Islamic Movement, the Arab movement for Renewal party (Ta-al) and the Arab Democratic Party. Its main candidates were Ahmad Tibi, Talab al- Sana, and Shaykh Abbas Zakur.²³ Two factions, Islamic Movement led by Shiek Ra'ed Salah and Abna' Al-Balad led by Raja Eghbariah, decided to boycott the elections.

Religious Parties

Among the several religious parties which participated in the elections, three parties need a little bit of description. They were the Shas, the National Religious Party (NRP), and the United Torah Judaism. In the 2003 Knesset elections, Shas performed miserably and dropped its tally. On the other hand, Shas regained strength in the 2006 Knesset elections. In these elections, the main leader of Shas was Eli Yishai, who later served as deputy prime minister in the government. National Religious Party was in coalition with the National Union, which itself was a combination of four smaller parties: Moledet, Hatikva, Eretz Yisrael Shelanu, and Tkuma. NRP's main ideology is that Israel is a Jewish state and its objective is to protect the Jewish character of Israel as much as possible. The United Torah Judaism is an alliance of two small parties with the right religious orthodox ideology and 'represents growing orthodox community.'²⁴ They support the religious teachings and Israel as a Jewish state. They also support the increasing settlements in the occupied territories. They also oppose the separation of religion and state.

Sharon's Policies and the Formation of Kadima

Kadima or Forward was formed by Ariel Sharon after he decided to quit Likud over disputes regarding the issue of leadership and consistent disagreement with party members over his decisions on political issues.²⁵ During this period, he started facing opposition from its own

²²*Ibid*, p. 48.

²³*Seventeenth Knesset website*, State of Israel, http://www.knesset.gov.il/elections17/eng/list/ListIndex_eng.asp accessed on 5 February 2012.

²⁴United Torah Judaism, *Jewish Virtual Library*, <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsourc/Politics/UTJ.html>, accessed on 2 February 2012.

²⁵Aluff Ben, Mazal Maulem, and Yossi Verter, "PM to quit Likud, form new party," *Ha'aretz* (21 November 2005), <http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/pm-to-quit-likud-form-new-party-1.174721>, accessed on 2 February 2012.

party members. Many of his decisions were turned down by the party and this included his proposal to appoint many ministers of his choice in the government.²⁶ Thus, when leaders like Benjamin Netanyahu tried to sideline him, he decided to leave the party declaring that ‘staying in the Likud would have meant wasting time in internal political battles, rather than doing what needs to be done.’²⁷

Although Sharon faced criticism for his move to form a new party, members of the other parties joined Kadima. This included the experienced Labour party leader Shimon Peres, who himself was facing competition from Amir Peretz, and many other leaders from other parties.²⁸ As a consequence, Kadima was ‘a new central movement that would include most of Labour, the new pragmatic Likud, and much of Shinui.’²⁹

The popularity of Kadima increased also from the fact that they projected themselves as a strong centrist party which has a very pragmatic domestic and foreign policy agenda. The corruption charges faced by Likud MK’s also helped in the rise of Kadima. Likud MK’s faced a lot of corruption and criminal charges which included the double voting. The Israeli voters lost faith in the political system in general and Likud in particular. The decline of the voting percentage in both Jew and Arab sectors testify this hypothesis. Thus, there was a ‘low and declining trust in the parties and the legislature, and a propensity to indifference towards them’³⁰ and Sharon got an edge because of this loss of trust of Israeli public in the political parties and political system.³¹

²⁶In the Knesset, when the proposal to give members of his choice some ministerial post was brought up by Sharon many Likud MK’s voted against his proposal which came as a humiliation for the veteran leader.

²⁷Leslie Susser, “In Israel, Shifting the Aftermath of Sharon’s Political Earthquake”, *Jerusalem Telegraph Agency (JTA)* (22 November 2005), <http://archive.jta.org/article/2005/11/22/2929316/in-israel-sifting-the-aftermath-of-sharons-political-earthquake>, accessed on 2 February 2012.

²⁸David Krusch, “Kadima Party”, *Jewish Virtual Library*, <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Politics/sharonnewparty.html>, accessed on 2 February 2012.

²⁹Michal Shamir, Raphael Ventura, Asher Arian, and Orit Kedar, “Kadima-Forward in a Dealigned Party System”, in Asher Arian, Michal Shamir (ed.), *The Elections in Israel 2006*, New Jersey (2008), p. 16.

³⁰*Ibid.*, p. 20.

³¹According to a research and survey done by Israeli Democracy institute in 2006 only 22 percent of the people said that they still trust political parties and the political system which 32 percent in 2004. In 2006, 42 percent said that they do not trust political parties and 36 percent said they had little trust on them. Courtesy: Asher Arian, Michal Shamir (ed.), *The Elections in Israel 2006*, New Jersey, 2008.

Kadima attracted the erstwhile voters of all the three major parties, Likud, Labour, and Shinui. According to a survey conducted by Israeli National Election Studies (INES), 42 per cent of the votes which came from Kadima were of those who voted for Likud in 2003, 23 per cent from Labour, and 17 per cent from Shinui and new voters consisted of mere 4 per cent. These percentages increased when another round of polls were conducted in December 2006. In this survey, 53 per cent of Likud voters revealed that they voted for Kadima while 37 per cent Labour voters and 74 per cent Shinui voters voted for Kadima.³²

The Gaza disengagement plan also played an important role in winning huge support for Kadima. When this plan was proposed by Sharon, he found opposition from his own party. However, many in Likud supported his plan. They believed in an ‘unilateral disengagement’ and an amicable solution with the Arab population inside and outside Israel. Sharon also had favourable opinion in Arab sector. He was the first prime minister to appoint an Israeli Arab as a full cabinet minister.³³ According to the survey conducted by INES, ‘more than half of the former Likud voters cited personal support for Ariel Sharon. Former Labour voters talked most often about Sharon’s and Kadima’s policy, and former Shinui voters pointed out their personal dissatisfaction with their former party.’³⁴ Thus, Sharon’s security and foreign policy which he formulated during his prime ministership helped a lot in attracting voters from different parties to vote for Kadima.

Opinion Surveys

As mentioned earlier, there were around 12 political parties in the Knesset elections. However, studying all the political parties is out of the scope of this research. Thus, the focus of study under this and the following sections would be limited to a few Zionist and Arab parties. At the national level, the Kadima party was expected to become the largest party and all the opinion polls projected the return of Ariel Sharon.³⁵ ‘The opinion polls in December

³²All these surveys have been conducted by INES, under the supervision of Asher Arian and Michal Shamir and had been published in Arian and Shamir (ed.), *The Elections in Israel 2006*, p. 21. For detailed study of Israeli election survey’s see: <http://www.ines.tau.ac.il/>

³³Andrea Carla, “Pointless Representation: The Tyranny of the Majority in Proportional Representative System”, *American Political Science Association* (30 August -3 September 2006), p. 17.

³⁴Shamir, Ventura, Arian, and Kedar, “Kadima-Forward in a Dealigned Party System”, p. 20.

³⁵“Kadima wins with 28 seats”, *YNet News* (29 March 2006), <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3233630,00.html>, accessed on 2 February 2012.

2005, consistently predicted a Kadima securing about 40 Knesset seats. The Prime Minister's own sudden departure from the political stage, however, in early January 2006, once more reintroduced an element of unpredictability into the campaign.³⁶ Hence, Kadima slightly underperformed as per the prediction at the national level. Before the 17th Knesset elections, Likud went through a phase of crisis.

Ariel Sharon's Kadima took many of its prominent leaders and created a political void which to an extent, was filled up by Netanyahu. During the elections campaign, Likud highlighted Netanyahu's economic policies from the time he was the finance minister. However, 'the large number of Israelis who approved of Netanyahu's economic measures appears to have been unconvinced by his hard-line views on the diplomatic processes.'³⁷ Thus, a poll prediction showed Likud losing its share and it was projected that Likud may fall to the third place. Nevertheless, no one predicted that Likud would fall behind Shas and would be a distant fourth.

Labour party was also not expected to do very well as it also lost a few of its top leaders to Kadima which included the veteran Shimon Peres. However, the policies of Labour before elections were also not very encouraging and any hope of improvement in the tally of Labour looked bleak. The Histadrut Leader Amir Peretz's victory over Simon Peres and the subsequent departure of the latter from Labour was looked more as an internal crisis.

The Arab parties at the national level were mainly depending on the Arab votes and nationwide, their electoral support was not very wide. According to the poll survey conducted by the Yaffa Institute, around 67 per cent of the Israeli Arabs in the Arab sector said that they would participate in the upcoming elections and around 18 percent expressed their willingness to boycott the election.³⁸

According to the survey conducted by the same institute for the Adenauer program for Jewish-Arab Cooperation, a voting trend was predicted in the Arab sector. The poll was divided into two sections. The first section was the Israeli Arabs who might vote for the

³⁶Jonathan Spyer, "The 17th Knesset Elections 2006", *MERIA News Special Issue*, Volume 10, 3- (10 April 2006), <http://jonathanspyer.com/2011/03/15/the-17th-knesset-elections-2006/>, accessed on 5 February 2012.

³⁷*Ibid.*

³⁸Elie Rekhess, "Arab Politics in Israel and the 17th Knesset Elections", *The Moshe Dayan Centre for Middle Eastern and African Studies*, Tel Aviv University (22 March 2006), p. 4.

Zionist parties and the second section was for the Arab parties which might get votes from the Arab population of Israel. According to the poll for Zionist parties, Labour party was predicted to get a high number of Israeli Arab votes with around 27.7 per cent. The new party Kadima, though promoted Arab associated programs, was predicted to get around 9 per cent of votes and the Likud, which lost all its left leaning leaders to Kadima, was predicted only to get 1.6 per cent of votes mainly from the Druze sector. Among the other Zionist parties, the Left Meretz was projected a voter share of 1.4 per cent, little less than that of Likud, and the religious Shas was predicted to get only 0.5 per cent.³⁹ Many political scientists and academicians opined that Israeli Arabs would benefit with Kadima coming into power whereas they also warned from the dangers coming from ultra right wing leaders. ‘While Arabs stand to benefit from an increased concern for socio-economic issues within Israel, the rise of Knesset Member Avigdor Lieberman and his party, Yisrael Beiteinu, pose a direct threat to the demographic security of Arabs in Israel.’⁴⁰

The second section which focused on the Arab parties, Hadash or DFPE combined with AMC, was projected to get a voter share of around 15.3 per cent in the Arab sector. The National Democratic Alliance (NDA) was projected a share of around 13 per cent and the United Arab List (UAL) was third with the projected vote share of 7.4 per cent.

The role of the northern faction which was headed by Shaykh Ra’id Sallah was important as it garnered the support of 50 per cent of the Israeli Arab population. It was believed that ‘had Northern Faction participated in the elections, it would have won almost 23 percent of the (Israeli) Arab votes.’⁴¹ Moreover, in case of a united Arab front, all the Zionist parties would have decreased their vote share in the Arab sector.

³⁹The survey details can be viewed at: <http://www.dayan.org/kapjac/files/survey2006.ppt>, accessed on 2 February 2012.

⁴⁰Ori Nir and Yosef Jabareen, “Israel’s Arab citizens and 2006 National elections”, *The Jerusalem fund*, Record No. 249 (4 April 2006), <http://www.thejerusalemfund.org/ht/display/ContentDetails/i/2613>, accessed 10 March 2012.

⁴¹Rekhess, “Arab Politics in Israel and the 17th Knesset Elections”, p. 5.

Table 4.1: Voting trends in the Arab sector- projected results of 2006 elections⁴²

| Party | 2006 projected results | | 2006 projected results-revised | |
|--|------------------------|---------|--------------------------------|---------|
| | Percentage | votes | Percentage | votes |
| Zionist parties | | | | |
| Labour | 27.7% | 110,135 | 33% | 131,525 |
| Kadima | 9% | 35,784 | 10.7% | 42,604 |
| Likud | 1.6% | 6,361 | 1.9% | 7,601 |
| Meretz | 1.4% | 5,566 | 1.6% | 6,496 |
| Shas | 0.5% | 1,998 | 0.5% | 2,298 |
| Arab Parties | | | | |
| DPFE + AMC* | 15.3% | 60,832 | 21.87% | 87,061 |
| NDA | 12.9% | 51,290 | 18.44% | 73,423 |
| UAL | 7.4% | 29,422 | 10.57% | 42,074 |
| | | | | |
| Others/Remaining/ Undecided | 24.2% | 95,820 | | |

Source: Elie Rekhess, Arab Politics in Israel and the 17th Knesset Elections, *The Moshe Dayan Centre for Middle Eastern and African Studies*, Tel Aviv University (22 March 2006), p. 4.

*In the initial phase DPFE decided to contest elections together and formed an alliance. However, later the alliance broke down because of internal differences.

Campaigns, Elections and Results

Since a long time, a sizeable Israeli population believed that an amicable solution with the Palestinians is possible if it involves the Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories. When Ariel Sharon's policy on the future of the Palestinian Authority got aligned with the above view, many Israeli citizens gave full support to this policy. Thus, Kadima's main campaigning in the 2006 elections was centred on this concept. Kadima's intentions to present itself as a centrist party and to garner support from a wider section of Israel proved to be beneficial. It would have achieved its objective score, had Ariel Sharon not suffered a stroke. Kadima's Majalli Wahbee, led the campaign in the no-Jewish sector and was an

⁴²The table represent a projected score and not the final results conducted before elections and the declaration of final results. Final results were slightly different from the projected results.

important figure in the Arab sector. Kadima opened many offices in the Arab villages to attract Arab votes just after its formation.⁴³

Like Likud, the Labour party was also struggling with the internal crisis and was trying to regain the lost grounds from the previous elections. It suffered from a massive loss in the 2003 elections and thus in 2006, it emphasized on a strong campaign. ‘Throughout the campaign, Labour remained consistent in stressing socio-economic issues and avoiding making a detailed reference to its diplomatic plans and record.’⁴⁴ Labour party’s emphasis on socio-economic issues was mainly because the party wanted to project itself as a campaigner of a social democratic party, a thing Labour was known for in the past.

The party platform had a section on “the Arab citizen of Israel” underlining a complete equality between Israeli Arabs and Jews. The party’s election campaign vis-à-vis Arabs focused on various issues. It highlighted its commitment to improve the conditions of Israeli Arabs. Special grants and budget allocation were proposed for the Israeli Arab towns. The target was kept to establish centres of technology-intensive industry, especially for women, ending the discrimination against Arab municipalities, and resolving obstacles to the employment of Arab academics.⁴⁵ Labour party also targeted the Arab political parties by highlighting that those have failed to address the issues of Israeli Arabs.⁴⁶

Likud on the other hand focused more on diplomatic and security matters.⁴⁷ It targeted Hamas and made the security as the central theme of its campaign and adopted the slogan: “Likud: strong against Hamas.” Likud also targeted the Kadima and its leaders at the personal level and attempted to portray Kadima’s Convergence plan⁴⁸ as a ‘dangerous policy of

⁴³Suheir Abu Oksa Daoud, “The Arab Vote in the Upcoming Israeli National Elections”, *The Jerusalem Fund, Information Brief No. 133* (24 March 2006), <http://www.thejerusalemfund.org/ht/display/ContentDetails/i/2214/pid/v>, [accessed on 10 February 2012].

⁴⁴Spyer, “The 17th Knesset Elections 2006”.

⁴⁵Elie Rekhess, “The Arab Minority in Israel and the seventeenth Knesset Elections: The Beginning of a new Era?”, in Asher Arian, Michal Shamir (ed.), *The Elections in Israel 2006*, New Jersey (2008), p. 162.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, p. 162

⁴⁷Jonathan Spyer, The 17th Knesset Elections 2006, <http://jonathanspyer.com/2011/03/15/the-17th-knesset-elections-2006/>.

⁴⁸Convergence plan, later called as realignment plan was a plan to disengage from the most of the West Bank. This plan was introduced by Ehud Olmert during the election campaign of 2006 Knesset elections.

concessions which would allow Israel's enemies, including Iran, to move into the vacuum left by further unilateral withdrawals.⁴⁹

Table 4.2: Results to the 17th Knesset Elections

| Name of the party | Number of valid votes | % of total votes | Number of seats |
|---------------------------|-----------------------|------------------|-----------------|
| Kadima | 690,901 | 22.0 | 29 (-) |
| Labour- Meimad | 472,366 | 15.1 | 19 (19) |
| Shas | 299,054 | 9.5 | 12 (11) |
| Likud | 281,996 | 9.0 | 12 (38) |
| Yisrael Beitenu | 281,880 | 9.0 | 11 (-) |
| Ichud Leumi- Mafdal | 224,083 | 7.1 | 9 (-) |
| Gil | 185,759 | 5.9 | 7 (-) |
| Torah and Shabbat Judaism | 147,091 | 4.7 | 6 (5) |
| Meretz | 118,301 | 3.8 | 5 (6) |
| UAL- Arab Renewal | 94,786 | 3.0 | 4 (2) |
| Hadash | 86,092 | 2.7 | 3 (3) |
| NDA | 72,066 | 2.3 | 3 (3) |

*Source: *Seventeenth Knesset*, Knesset Election results, The State of Israel, http://www.knesset.gov.il/description/eng/eng_mimshal_res17.htm, accessed on 5 February 2012.

*results in bracket shows the seats won by the respective parties in 2003 Knesset elections.

The elections for the 17th Knesset were held on 28 March 2006. As many as 31 political parties participated in the elections and 12 entered the Knesset. The total number of eligible voters was 5,014,622, whereas the total valid votes were 3,137,064.⁵⁰ The total voting participation was 63.2 per cent, which was slightly less than the 2003 Knesset elections.⁵¹ The participation of Israeli Arabs was 56.3 percent, showing a decrease since the 2003

⁴⁹*Ibid.*

⁵⁰*Seventeenth Knesset*, Knesset Election Results, The State of Israel, http://www.knesset.gov.il/description/eng/eng_mimshal_res17.htm, accessed on 5 February 2012.

⁵¹Elections in Israel March 2006, *Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, Government of Israel, <http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/History/Modern+History/Historic+Events/Elections+in+Israel+March+2006.htm>, accessed on 2 February 2012.

elections.⁵² The low turnout represented the frustration of the Israeli citizen, both Jews and Arabs and one of the main reasons 'for the high rate of abstention was despair at the political leadership and system' and a general sense of disappointment with the leadership of Israel.⁵³ Among the other issues lack of concern for the public interest and increasing levels of corruption charges on the politicians kept the voters away. Many politicians were seen indulging in abuse of power and in promoting personal agendas and interests of their own narrow constituencies.⁵⁴

When the final elections results were announced, Kadima emerged as the single largest party with 28 seats in the Knesset. However, it was around 10 seats less than what was predicted in the pre-polls.⁵⁵ Kadima could secure 22 per cent of votes with 690,901 voters voting for them. The Labour party, which was in a pre-poll alliance with Meimad, kept a tally of 19. They secured 15.1 per cent of total votes with 472,366 voters. This was exactly the score of the previous elections. Shas secured the third place with 12 votes and 9.5 per cent of votes but the biggest loser in the 17th Knesset elections was Likud which came down to the fourth place, getting just 12 seats with a vote share of 9 per cent. This was Likud's worst performance since its formation. Moreover, there was only a difference of 116 votes between Likud and Yisrael Beitenu which came in fifth position.

When the election performances of parties are studied city-wise, one can infer that the vote share of the Zionist and religious parties decreased in the Arab dominated towns of Israel. Arab towns like Umm al-Fahm and to an extent the city of Haifa witnessed a decline in the vote share of Zionist parties. Labour and Meretz and to an extent Kadima secured some votes from these cities but Likud and Shas fared badly in Arab dominated towns and cities.

The Arab parties' performance improved slightly. They increased their seats and voting percentage in the Knesset from 8 to 10. The United Arab List (UAL) which was in alliance

⁵²Rekness, "The Arab Minority in Israel and the seventeenth Knesset Elections: The Beginning of a new Era?", p. 174.

⁵³Shahar Ilan, "Not the Politicians but US", *Ha'aretz* (27 March 2006), <http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/opinion/not-the-politicians-but-us-1.183836>, accessed on 10 February 2012.

⁵⁴Michel Warschawski, "The 2006 Israeli Elections: A Drive to Normalcy and Separation", *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 4 (Summer 2006), p. 45.

⁵⁵*Israel Votes 2006*, 29 March 2006, http://www.israelvotes.com/2006/election_news.php, accessed on 5 February 2012.

with the AMC secured four seats, hence its best performance till date. It got a total share of 3 per cent with 94,786 voters voting for them. Hadash could not increase its tally from the 2003 Knesset elections and got 3 seats with 2.7 per cent of votes. Similarly, the party of Azim Bishara, Balad, could not make progress and won three seats with a vote share of 2.3 per cent. However, with a close look at the vote share in cities, one can conclude that Arab parties got almost no vote in the Jew dominated cities. They received votes only in the Arab dominated areas like Umm al-Fahm and Haifa.

Before this section can be summed up, there was an important development which needs a separate discussion. This election also marked the entry of the only second Israeli Arab women in to the Knesset. Nadia Hilou, from Haifa, entered the Knesset through the list of Labour party. Hilou's victory in the 2006 elections marked a 'new phase in (Israeli) Arab women's representation in the Israeli national arena.'⁵⁶ Unfortunately, this new phase in the Israeli Arab women's history did not come from the Arab parties which claim to be the sole emancipators of the development of the Israeli Arab society. The present leadership of Arab parties, except Hadash or DPFE, are not in favour of the entry of the women in the political sphere.⁵⁷ Only Hadash encourages entry of women. A leading woman activist from DFPE said, "it is a shame that the first and second Arab women to make it to the Knesset did so through a Zionist party. We hope Arab parties will learn a lesson and finally work seriously to place an (Israeli) Arab woman in the Knesset."⁵⁸ Thus, the Arab parties would have to face new challenges in the coming elections. On one hand, they would have to find ways to narrow down the Israeli Arab vote share for Zionist parties. On the other hand, they would also have to pave the way for women candidates.

When Likud came to power with overwhelming victory during the 2003 elections, it could succeed because Likud projected its ideology drifting towards centre and that was also the reason why centre parties like Shinui got high number of seats in the Knesset. In the 2006 elections also, the same trend can be noticed. The Israeli voters preferred a centrist party with pragmatic policies. Netanyahu's constant call for security against the external groups could

⁵⁶Suheir Abu Oksa Daoud, "Palestinian Women in the Israeli Knesset", *Middle East Report*, No. 240, Life under Siege (Fall 2006), p. 26.

⁵⁷Amal Jamal, "The Arab Leadership in Israel: Ascendance and Fragmentation", *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 2 (Winter 2006), pp. 6-22.

⁵⁸ Daoud, "Palestinian Women in the Israeli Knesset", p. 28.

not attract voters and they preferred the centrist Kadima over Likud. ‘The defeat of the Right reflects a real and quite deep change in the Israeli dominant mentality and political culture.’⁵⁹

Table 4.3: vote share (in per cent) by cities

| | Labour | Likud | Kadima | Meretz | Shas | DFPE | NDA | UAL |
|----------------|--------|-------|--------|--------|------|------|------|------|
| Cities | | | | | | | | |
| Ariel | 3.9 | 24.1 | 12.4 | 0.5 | 4.2 | - | - | - |
| Ashdod | 10.3 | 10.1 | 19.5 | 1 | 17.1 | - | - | - |
| Ashkelon | 11.2 | 13 | 19.7 | 1.1 | 15.1 | - | - | - |
| Batyam | 11.8 | 11.6 | 21.1 | 1.5 | 12.3 | 0.1 | - | - |
| Bnei Brak | 1.9 | 3 | 3.1 | 0.2 | 23.8 | - | - | - |
| Beersheba | 16.7 | 9.5 | 21.5 | 1.5 | 14 | 0.1 | 0.1 | 0.1 |
| Eilat | 21.2 | 9.1 | 31.4 | 2.2 | 8.9 | 0.1 | - | - |
| Haifa | 16.9 | 8.3 | 28.9 | 3.8 | 3.6 | 2.8 | 2.9 | 0.2 |
| Herzliya | 17.5 | 8.7 | 35.1 | 6 | 5.6 | 0.1 | - | - |
| Holon | 14.5 | 11.4 | 28.9 | 2.3 | 12.8 | - | - | - |
| Jerusalem | 10.3 | 10.6 | 12 | 3.1 | 15.2 | 0.3 | 0.2 | 0.1 |
| Kiryat * | 17.8 | 12.1 | 17.6 | 0.8 | 14.3 | 0.1 | - | - |
| Modi'in** | 20.4 | 10.2 | 32.3 | 5.3 | 2.8 | - | - | - |
| Netanya | 10.9 | 12.2 | 23.8 | 1.6 | 12.9 | - | - | - |
| Ofakim | 16.3 | 10 | 9.1 | 2.2 | 22.2 | - | - | - |
| Petah*** | 12.2 | 11 | 23.4 | 2.2 | 9.3 | - | - | - |
| Rishon*** * | 15 | 10.7 | 32.4 | 2.6 | 6.6 | - | - | - |
| Ramat Gan | 16.8 | 10.9 | 30 | 4.3 | 5.5 | 0.2 | - | - |
| Tel Aviv | 19.8 | 8.7 | 27.4 | 8.7 | 7.5 | 0.9 | 0.3 | 0.7 |
| Umm Fahm | 3.7 | - | 1 | 2.3 | 0.7 | 56.1 | 21.7 | 10.6 |

*Kiryat Shmona **Modi'in- Maccabim-Re'ut ***Petah Tikva ****Rishon LeZion

Source: elections for the Seventeenth Knesset, State of Israel,

http://www.knesset.gov.il/elections17/eng/Results/region_results_eng.asp, accessed on 20 February 2012.

The 2006 elections were probably the high point where Israeli citizens rejected the right wing ideology. They did it in 2003 when they rejected Shas but in 2006, when a major mainstream party Likud was shown the door, a new ideology started emerging which was aligned with the centrist approach. Israel faced a full scale war with Hezbollah and continuous threat from Hamas the same year though. This changed the emerging trends in the politics and brought

⁵⁹Warschawski, “The 2006 Israeli Elections: A Drive to Normalcy and Separation”, p. 46.

back Likud in the 2009 elections. However, as for the 2006 elections the trend was more towards centrist and as the result Kadima became the largest party.

The Arab Votes for Zionist Parties

As discussed in the previous chapters, there are many factors which influence the behaviour of Israeli Arab voters towards the Zionist parties. Among others, one is the placement of Arab candidates at realistic slots. The placement of right candidates makes Israeli Arab voters to vote for Arab candidates belonging to the Zionist parties and that is why Zionist parties reserve slots for Israeli Arab candidates.

In the list of the Kadima party, out of the first 40 slots there was only one Arab candidate coming from the Druze community getting the 18th spot on the list.⁶⁰ The Labour party put four Arab candidates in their top three slots. The first candidate was a woman, Nadia Hilo, a Christian from Jaffna, who was given the 15th spot on the list. The second and third spot were given to a Muslim and a Druze at 19th and 20th place respectively.⁶¹ The fourth candidate Hasib Abud, a Christian, placed 29th on the list, had little chances of entering into the Knesset.

Before the elections, some polls predicted that the Arab parties would face tough competition from the Zionist parties as those parties were very much active in the Arab sector with an increasing presence of Shas in the Arab streets of Israel for instance. Simon Peres, and Haim Ramon, both of whom left Labour party for Kadima, were popular in the Arab sector and so was Amir Peretz. Thus, all the Zionist parties were predicted to increase their voting share in the Arab sector.

The results for the Zionist parties were not as per the pre-election prediction. All the Zionist parties scored less than what was predicted and the Labour party got the maximum share of the Israeli Arab votes. According to the figures taken only from the Arab sectors and excluding those from the mixed localities, the Labour party got a vote share of 12.8 per cent (opinion poll predicted 27-33 per cent). Kadima got a vote share of 6.8 per cent (as against 9-10 per cent during the pre-poll prediction). Likud was almost decimated as getting only 0.9 per cent of votes, which was even less than the religious Shas which worked in the Arab

⁶⁰ Daoud, "The Arab Vote in the Upcoming Israeli National Elections", <http://www.thejerusalemfund.org/ht/display/ContentDetails/i/2214/pid/v>, accessed on 10 February 2012.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

sector during its election campaign and secured around 2.9 per cent of votes. Meretz got around 2.8 per cent of Israeli Arab votes. If one includes Israeli Arab votes in the mixed localities, a slight increase in the votes of Labour and Kadima is observed. The Zionist parties secured around 28 per cent of Israeli Arab votes.

Table 4.4: Arab votes for Zionist and Arab parties in 2006 Knesset elections⁶²

| Party | Arab voting percentage |
|------------------------------|------------------------|
| Labour | 12.8 |
| Kadima | 6.8 |
| Shas | 2.9 |
| Meretz | 2.8 |
| Likud | 0.9 |
| Religious parties and others | 1.9 |
| UAL- AMC | 27.4 |
| DFPE | 24.3 |
| NDA | 20.2 |

*Adopted from: Elie Rekhess, “The Arab Minority in Israel and the Seventeenth Knesset Elections: The Beginning of a New Era?”, in Asher Arian, Michal Shamir (ed.), *The Elections in Israel 2006*, New Jersey (2008), p 159-186; also Hillel Frisch, “Stability Amidst Flux: The Arab Parties Come of Age in the 2006 General Elections”, *Israel Affairs*, Vol. 13, No.2 (April 2007), pp. 368-383.

Kadima’s under-performance in the Arab sector as against the pre-poll prediction needs some explanations. Kadima was expected to perform well in the elections even in the Arab sectors. However, Kadima itself was to be blamed for its loss of Arab votes. Its leaders campaigned rigorously in the Arab sector with Majalli Wahbee taking the charge. It associated many Israeli Arab local leaders in its party campaigning in the Arab sectors to attract Israeli Arab votes. These local leaders who were heading Arab municipalities were hopeful to see their name in the list of Kadima, considering that their effort to campaign for the party would be rewarded.

However, Majalli Wahbee could only find his name at the 18th spot in the first 40 candidates when the list came out. This was a big disappointment for these local leaders as well as for the Arab population, especially when they presented a few days earlier a list of 50 candidates

⁶²The figure given here excludes the vote of Arabs living in the cities of the mixed localities. There is high probability that if these votes are included the vote share of Zionist parties may increase slightly.

in Jerusalem attracting huge Israeli Arab applaud.⁶³ These local leaders responded promptly by disassociating themselves from Kadima.⁶⁴ Majalli Wahabee, had to take the claim of representing the whole Arab community which itself was a strategic mistake by Kadima. By the time Kadima realised its mistake and hastily announced an Arab member at 51st slot of the list, it was too late. The candidate, mayor of Al-Shagur, Ahmed Dabbah, expresses his disappointment and said that he was expecting a place between 10 to 20 spots of the list or at least under 30. He was so confident that he did not even try to exert any pressure. He said that there was anger in the Arab sector and that he was more disappointed to see three candidates from the minorities sector among the first 20 names on the Labour Party list.⁶⁵ The head of the Bueina-Nujdat council, Saleh Suleiman, also believed that Kadima made a big mistake by ignoring one million Israeli Arabs. He said “had there been an (Israeli) Arab candidate, the party would have received three Knesset seats from the sector”. The loss may not be that high but the fear of losing potential Jew voters led Kadima to lose at least 3 to 4 per cent of Israeli Arab votes and in the process, lost at least 1 or 2 additional seats in the Knesset.

The Likud’s disastrous performance was very well predicted as after Sharon left the party, Netanyahu shifted the campaign of the party towards the security issues. Throughout his campaign, Netanyahu targeted the potential threats from Hamas and Hezbollah. This alienated the Israeli Arab votes. Most of the Arab votes of Likud were taken away by Kadima. Moreover, Likud also lost votes because of their repeated attempts to force the Central Election Committee to ban the Arab parties from participating in the elections. In the 2006 elections, Likud moved the resolution with the help of the National Religious Party to ban MK Sarsur, who was rejected by the committee.⁶⁶

The only party which seemed to have gained from these elections in the Arab sector was Labour, especially when compared with its share in the 2003 elections. However, like

⁶³Lily Galili, “They Forgot One Million People”, *Ha’aretz* (16 February 2006), <http://www.haaretz.com/news/elections/they-forgot-one-million-people-1.180311>, accessed on 18 February 2012.

⁶⁴Rekness, “The Arab Minority in Israel and the seventeenth Knesset Elections: The Beginning of a new Era?”, p.162.

⁶⁵Galili, “They Forgot One Million People”, *Ha’aretz*.

⁶⁶“Learning From Mistakes”, 28 February 2006, <http://heebcom/archives/031533.html>, accessed on 15 February 2012.

Kadima, Labour also came down from the pre-poll predictions. Pre-election polls gave Labour a voting share of 28 per cent and in a revised estimate, the party's Arab vote share went up to 33 per cent. However, the actual vote percentage was only 12.8 per cent (excluding the votes in the mixed localities). Thus, Labour party lost the advantage it got before the elections. If Kadima lost the advantage because of its faulty decisions and strategic mistakes, Labour lost because of its poor campaigning in the Arab sector during the final hours of the elections. The promises pledged by Peretz could not sustain till the eve of elections and as the elections approached, the Israeli public became disenchanted.

Although Labour party successfully increased its voting share as compared to the 2003 elections and secured 12.8 per cent of Arab votes, if one combines the voting share of Amir Peretz's Am Ehad and Labour in the 2003 elections, the score may cross 15 per cent points which again indicate that Peretz could not reap the benefits as expected.

Among the other Jewish parties, two parties deserve a brief mention, namely, Meretz-Yahad and Shas. Meretz has a left leaning and thus it is easy to explain its vote share in the Arab sector but Shas is a religious party and its performance in the Arab sector was better than of Likud, a mainstream national party. Shas' performance in the 2003 Knesset elections was a disaster after its impressive gains in the 1999 elections. In the 2006 elections, Shas worked a lot during its elections campaign and among other issues, focused significantly on social development. 'Shas suddenly redefined itself as the "Social Party" and centred its electoral campaign on a program of social reforms.'⁶⁷ 'Party leader, MK Eli Yishai, and the individual responsible for the Arab sector, David Azulai, repeatedly pledged the party's commitment to action, especially in the area of social welfare.'⁶⁸ Nevertheless, the party could only increase its tally by one seat. Political scientists believe that Shas could not capitalize the momentum it gained during the elections campaign and could have got more votes than what it finally secured. They believed that the fall in votes at the last minute could have come from the speculation of Shas joining a coalition with the Kadima. How far this speculation would have affected the voting pattern of Arabs in the last minute is difficult to predict but comparing it with the opinion polls conducted by the Moshe Dayan Centre of the Tel Aviv University, it is clear that Shas emerged as a complete winner as it got 2.9 per cent of Arab votes, which was

⁶⁷Warschawski, "The 2006 Israeli Elections: A Drive to Normalcy and Separation", p. 49.

⁶⁸Rekness, "The Arab Minority in Israel and the seventeenth Knesset Elections: The Beginning of a new Era?", p. 163.

0.5 per cent more than the previous elections and 2.4 per cent more than the opinion polls conducted during December 2005.

The other Zionist party, Meretz reduced its Israeli Arab vote share when compared with the 2003 elections where it received around 4.2 per cent of votes but in 2006, it got only 2.8 per cent. However, when compared it with the opinion polls of December 2005, one finds that Meretz performed better than predicted (1.4 per cent in opinion polls and 1.6 in the adjusted opinion polls). Meretz also committed the same mistake as of Kadima by not placing the Israeli Arab candidate in the realistic slot. The first Israeli Arab candidate (Issawi Freij from Kafr Kassem) got seventh spot in the list. This decision may be moved by the factor that Meretz, a leftist party which was well known for its policies in favour of Israeli Arabs, was not as strong as in the 2003 elections and thus was less willing to risk its Jewish votes.

Voting Pattern in the Arab Sector

In the 2006 elections, one can examine that the Zionist parties got maximum votes from the Druze community, the community which also participates in conscription favouring Zionist parties over Arab parties. In the Druze community, Labour got the maximum votes followed by Kadima. Likud also obtained maximum Arab share from the Druze community. Among the Arab political parties, National Democratic Alliance (NDA) got the maximum Druze votes followed by Hadash's 6.1 per cent.

In the Bedouin areas, votes which include both villages and tribes favoured UAL-AMC alliance mainly because of the strong influence of the southern faction of the Islamic movement. However, the second party to get higher number of votes in the Bedouin villages and tribes was Labour which secured 10.9 per cent of votes followed by 10.5 per cent of NDA. Among the other Zionist parties, Kadima got 8.3 per cent of votes. Meretz and Likud fared poorly getting 1 per cent and 0.7 votes respectively.

Similarly in the southern and central triangle, UAL-AMC got 41.9 per cent of votes because of the high influence of the Islamic Movement's Southern Faction which was very active throughout the elections. Labour's vote share was 8.4 per cent followed by Kadima's 3.1 per cent and Meretz's 2.8 per cent. Likud votes were even less than one per cent.

Table 4.5: Arab voting pattern in the Arab sectors in 2006 elections

| | Southern and central triangle | Bedouin* | Druze | National |
|----------------|-------------------------------|----------|-------|----------|
| Parties | | | | |
| Labour | 8.4 | 10.9 | 30.8 | 12.8 |
| Kadima | 3.1 | 8.2 | 21.9 | 6.8 |
| Likud | 0.9 | 0.7 | 2.2 | 0.9 |
| Meretz | 6.0 | 1.0 | 2.2 | 2.8 |
| DFPE | 18.0 | 7.2 | 6.1 | 24.3 |
| NDA | 20.7 | 10.5 | 9.3 | 20.2 |
| UAL-AMC | 41.9 | 55.7 | 2.3 | 27.4 |

Source: Knesset websites: <http://www.knesset.gov.il/elections17/heb/cec/CecIndex.asp>; also: <http://www.knesset.gov.il/elections17/hb/results/Result17.xls>; also: Elie Rekhess, "The Arab Minority in Israel and the seventeenth Knesset Elections: The Beginning of a new Era?", in Asher Arian, Michal Shamir (ed.), *The Elections in Israel 2006*, New Jersey, 2008, pp. 159-186.

*Bedouin votes include the Bedouin villages and scattered Bedouin tribes.

If one concludes the above research, a decline of the Zionist parties in the Arab sector can be envisaged. There is no doubt that the Zionist and religious parties combined votes reflect a fall from the 2003 elections. Also, these parties failed to take advantage of the impetus they got during the elections campaign.

Had they have performed as per the pre-election predictions they would have received around 50 per cent of the Israeli Arab votes. Their strategic mistakes were well exploited by the Arab parties and gave them the opportunity to resolve all the issues related to the internal struggles before elections.

However, the picture was still not as bad as it looks. Labour increased its share from the previous elections and Kadima took away most of the votes of Likud. Although Meretz reduced its Israeli Arab share, it performed well above the predicted expectations of the opinion polls. Shas almost remained constant getting 0.5 per cent above the previous elections but getting far more votes than what was predicted in the opinion polls. To sum up, the Zionist parties still secured around 30 per cent of the Arab votes which means they still hold around one-third of the Arab votes.

Arab Political Parties

In the 2006 elections, the Arab parties performed better than in the pre-poll predictions. In the 2003 elections, they decreased their tally to 8 seats. However, in 2006 the Arab parties got 10 seats in the Knesset due to an increase in their Arab vote share. It was believed that had Arab parties have succeeded in presenting a united front, they would have got even more votes from the Israeli Arab community. Considering the low turnout, disillusion of Israeli Arabs from their leaders, and a heavy voting fatigue, the performance of the Arab parties was an improvement.⁶⁹ Despite the internal difference and failure to form a united Arab front these parties got a total of around 70 per cent Israeli Arab votes (including the Druze sector).

Table 4.6: Comparisons of Israeli Arab Votes between Zionist and Arab Parties in 2003 and 2006 Elections (figures in percentage)

| Parties | 2003 elections | 2006 elections |
|-----------------------------------|---|-----------------------|
| Zionist parties | 31 | 28 |
| Arab parties | 69 | 71 |
| Labour, Likud and Kadima combined | 8.6 (excluding Kadima) 12.8(including 4.2 of Meretz) | 20.5 |

*Source: The Palestinian Arab Minority and the 2009 Israeli Elections, The Mossawa Centre, The Advocacy Centre for Arab Citizens in Israel (2009), pp 1-51; Elie Rekhess, "The Arab Minority in Israel and the seventeenth Knesset Elections: The Beginning of a new Era?", in Asher Arian, Michal Shamir (ed.), The Elections in Israel 2006, New Jersey (2008), pp. 158-186; Hillel Frisch, "Stability Amidst Flux: The Arab Parties Come of Age in the 2006 General Elections", *Israel Affairs*, Vol. 13, No.2 (April 2007), pp. 368-383.*

In the opinion polls, the popularity of Arab parties was declining because of the inability of their leaders to present something remarkable during the elections campaign and also because of their internal struggle. The decline in popularity was projected by many leading newspapers as well as organizations conducting opinion surveys. They predicted that the popularity of Arab parties was decreasing and that they may not be able to win more than seven seats.⁷⁰ However, despite a low turnout the Arab parties won 10 seats in the Knesset, with the alliance of UAL-AMC winning 4 seats, erasing the memory of their 2003 elections'

⁶⁹Hillel Frisch, "Stability Amidst Flux: The Arab Parties Come of Age in the 2006 General Elections", *Israel Affairs*, Vol. 13, No.2 (April 2007), p. 368.

⁷⁰Roe Nahmias, "Popularity of Arab parties in decline", *YNet News* (8 January 2006), <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3196855,00.html>, accessed on 20 February 2012.

defeat. Their victory over 10 seats also coincided with the loss of Zionist parties' Arab vote share. The Zionist parties lost around 3 per cent of the Israeli Arab vote.

The biggest winner among the Arab parties was the alliance of UAL and AMC. Before the elections, Ahmad Tibi's AMC decided to form a coalition with Hadash (DPFE). However, this coalition could not survive because of their disagreement over the candidates and placement. In the combined list of DPFE and AMC, Ahmad Tibi was put on the fourth slot after two Arabs and one Jew member of DPFE. Winning four seats in the election was really difficult for DPFE even with the help of AMC especially after the pre-election polls indicated the loss of votes for Arab parties. After Ahmad Tibi's request to put him at second or third slot was turned down, he left the coalition. He later formed the coalition with UAL, where he was given the second slot after Sheikh Ibrahim Sarsur.⁷¹

The victory of UAL-AMC was also depending on the role of the Islamic movement. Sarsur himself was a member of the southern faction of the Islamic movement. The Islamic movement was very popular among the Israeli Arabs and had the northern faction participated in the elections, according to the opinion polls, they would have won 23 percent of the Israeli Arab votes alone.⁷² Furthermore, they also put candidates on the strategic positions. Best candidates were given higher ranking. 'Taleeb al-Sanaa, as a member of one of the largest tribes in the Negev, draws a high percentage of the Bedouin vote, while Sarsur had support in the middle of the country.'⁷³

The second party which gave unexpected results was NDA or Balad, one of the most radical among the three Arab parties. Before the elections, Balad was not considered a serious contender. Some opinion polls suggested that the Balad might not even cross the two percent threshold limit and enter the Knesset. Balad in past had fought the elections along with AMC. In the 2003 elections, Balad went alone and obtained three seats. In 2006, it again fought elections alone and won three seats with around 70,000 Arab votes.

⁷¹Yoav Stern, "Hadash, United Arab List submit Knesset slates", *Ha'aretz* (11 February 2006), <http://www.haaretz.com/news/elections/hadash-united-arab-list-submit-knesset-slates-1.179804>, accessed on 20 February 2012.

⁷²Rekhess, "Arab Politics in Israel and the 17th Knesset Elections", p. 5.

⁷³Frisch, "Stability Amidst Flux: The Arab Parties Come of Age in the 2006 General Elections", p. 373.

The third Arab party was Hadash or DPFE which aims at the Arab-Jewish unity. As mentioned earlier, on the top three slots, it had two Israeli Arabs and a Jewish member. Hadash is a very old political party which dominated the Arab sector since 1977. However, their vote share in the Arab sector has come down from 51 per cent to less than 30 per cent after the arrival of Arab votes. Hadash also presents a more secular front and it make sure that first three slots go to Muslim, Christian, and Jewish candidates. That is why it gets more support from Nazareth and Haifa where Christian population is high as compared to rest of the country. Even in case of women candidates, Hadash has been a vocal supporter. As many as five women candidates were in competition for a realistic slot. Aida Touma-Suleiman, a veteran and women candidate, 'withdrew from the contest for second place in favour of MK Issam Makhoul and Dr. Hanna Swaid, apparently in an attempt to secure the election of the latter.'⁷⁴

The Issue of Palestine and the External Security

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has always taken a centre stage during the Israeli elections. The conflictual relations of Israel with its Arab neighbours have always been an important dimension in the Israeli politics. In the past many years, the issue of Palestine was dominant in the political circles. During their elections campaign, right wing parties always make the Palestinian issue a security issue and try to win the votes based on that whereas the left wing and Arab parties try to highlight the grievances of Palestinians during the elections.

Right wing parties like Likud often focus on the issue of security and conflict with Palestine before the elections. In fact, every party has a different strategy to follow before the elections vis-à-vis the issue of Palestine. The issues of security and Palestine were highlighted by different parties in different ways. Likud has always focused on the security issue whether in power or in opposition. 'Labour party when in opposition (1992, 1999, and 2003), hammered at domestic issues, where in power (1996 and 2001), had emphasized on peace and security issues.'⁷⁵ Terror attacks before the elections also help right wing parties to secure more votes during the elections. Research shows that public opinion is more favourable to right wing parties during the period with high levels of terrorism and support may decrease during the

⁷⁴Rekness, "The Arab Minority in Israel and the seventeenth Knesset Elections: The Beginning of a new Era?", p. 167.

⁷⁵Michal Shamir and Jacob Shamir, "The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict in Israeli Elections", *International Political Science Review*, Vol. 28, No. 4 (September 2007), pp. 475-476.

periods of relative calm.⁷⁶ It is generally believed that right wing parties places more weight on security issues and hence tackle these issues more vehemently.⁷⁷

Although in 2006 elections security issues were not at the centre stage, they were still not free from the issue of Palestine. The formation of Kadima, the main leading party in the 2006 elections, itself was based on the disagreement of Likud members and Prime Minister Ariel Sharon over Gaza Disengagement Program. During its elections campaign, Likud focused on the security issues and changed its slogan three times targeting political parties compromising with the security issues. The victory of Hamas in the Palestinian elections a few weeks before the Knesset elections (January 2006), played the role of catalyst to ignite again the issue of Palestine, Hamas and external security. 'Following the victory of the Hamas movement in the Palestinian Legislative Council elections on 25 January 2006, at the beginning of the Israeli election campaign, Likud made the Hamas issue a central part of its campaign.'⁷⁸

However, with regards to the Palestinian issue, the Israeli Arabs are concerned about it but they would prefer to keep their personal benefits above the Palestinian cause. They are more interested in their social development, economic benefits and political advancement. However, many political scholars in Israel believe that there is an increasing sentiment in favor of Palestine among Israeli Arabs. They believe that a call for alternate autonomous representative bodies and a call for boycott are the signs of growing sentiments for the issue of Palestine.⁷⁹ These arguments can find some justification if one includes the public sentiment of Israeli Arabs during the war with Hezbollah just few months after the elections and the support for Palestinians during Operation Cast Lead in 2009. In fact, during the war with Hezbollah, the sentiments came out vividly and many Israeli Arabs openly supported Hezbollah, although many of them criticized and extended their support to Israel.⁸⁰

⁷⁶Claude Berrebi and Esteban F. Klor, "On Terrorism and Electoral Outcomes: Theory and Evidence from the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict", *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 50, No. 6 (December 2006), p. 915.

⁷⁷Claude Berrebi and Esteban F. Klor, "Are Voters Sensitive to Terrorism? Direct Evidence from the Israeli Electorate", *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 102, No. 3 (Aug., 2008), p. 289.

⁷⁸Spyer, "The 17th Knesset elections", <http://meria.idc.ac.il/news/2006/06April10news.html>, accessed on 26 February 2012.

⁷⁹Elie Rekhess, "The Evolvement of an Arab-Palestinian National Minority in Israel", *Israel Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 3 (Fall, 2007), p. 16.

⁸⁰Elie Rekhess and Arik Rudnitzky (eds), *The Arabs in Israel and the War in the North*, The Moshe Dayan Centre for Middle eastern and African studies, Tel Aviv University (14 August 2006), pp. 9-13.

In the 2006 elections, around one-third of Israeli Arabs voted for the Zionist parties despite the repeated calls from the Arab organisations such as the Islamic Movement. Moreover, only those parties where Arabs could find the realistic slots were favoured by the Israeli Arab population, for example, Ibrahim Sarsour was given the first slot as he was popular in the southern area and eventually UAL got maximum votes from that area. Similarly, Labour placed Nadia Hilou, an Israeli Arab woman, to get support of Israeli Arab female voters. How far they succeeded in getting the Israeli Arab women votes for Nadia Hilou is difficult to analyse but Nadia Hilou became only the second Israeli Arab woman to enter the Knesset. This also created a favourable opinion about the Labour to testify its claims towards its commitment to the Israeli Arab development. Thus, as in every elections, the right wing parties of the 2006 elections tried to get political advantage from the issues of security whereas the Arab political parties tried to take advantage of the cause of Palestine. Many organisations called for a boycott of the elections. Nevertheless, the Israeli Arabs remain unfazed by such calls and the voting pattern remained the same as in the 2003 elections. The issue of security, raised particularly by Likud, was ignored by Israeli citizens and the main agenda for voting, both for Israeli Arabs and Jews remained the social and economic advancements.

Call for Boycott and Low Arab Turnout

In the 2003 elections, when the voting percentage went as low as 62 per cent, it was predicted that the low turnout was the result of a call for boycott of elections and it was believed that in the coming elections, the voting per cent would rise. However, it reached in the 2006 elections an all time low with only 56.3 per cent Israeli Arab exercising their voting power. The call for boycott by the Arab organisations both inside and outside Israel may have played some role in the decline of the voting, but there are many other factors which have played bigger roles than the call for boycott. Many scholars claim that it is difficult to assess how much percentage of voters decides not to vote because of the call for boycott.⁸¹ This section will try to look at the correlation between the low turnout and the call for boycott by the Arab parties.

⁸¹Ilan Peleg and Dov Waxman, *Israeli's Palestinians: The Conflict Within*, New York, Cambridge University Press (2011), p. 98.

The declining participation of the Israeli Arabs in the elections is a reflection of the disillusion of the Israel Arabs ‘with their leadership for their inability to engender any real improvement in the socio-economic conditions of the Arab population.’⁸² One has learned in the previous chapter that the frustration of Israeli Arabs with their own leaders play a bigger role than any call for boycott. This trend will be observed in the next elections as well. The Arab Knesset members have failed to do much for the improvement of the social and economic conditions of Israeli Arabs. ‘They have been very vocal in protesting against government policies and actions but have not succeeded in bringing about any improvements for their constituencies.’⁸³

Nevertheless, since the 2001 prime minister election, the momentum to call for a boycott of the elections by many political organisations started gaining thrust. One of the arguments made by the boycott proponents is that if Israeli Arabs do not vote in the Knesset elections, then eventually they can establish their own Arab parliament as an alternative to the Knesset.⁸⁴ The same concept was supported by an organisation created just before the elections named as “Popular Committee for the Boycott of the Election” which called for the boycott of the elections. This organisation argues that ‘participation in Knesset politics was a futile effort and a waste of time’ and there should be a separate parliament for Israeli Arabs.⁸⁵

Moreover, the decision of the Islamic faction to boycott the elections also influenced many Israeli Arab voters to refrain themselves from voting. Such pressurizing tactics from popular organisations kept undoubtedly many voters at home. The correlation between the call for boycott of elections and the low turnout is visible. However, this correlation cannot be the only reason for the dip in the turn out. There are Israeli Arab voters who opposed the elections on the basis of ideology and they are partly responsible for the constant decline in the voting turnout but it cannot account “the” reason or even the biggest reason. The biggest reason for the decline is the sense of futility.⁸⁶ In the recent elections, the voting percentage

⁸²Jamal, “The Arab Leadership in Israel: Ascendance and Fragmentation”, pp. 6-22.

⁸³Ilan Peleg, Dov Waxman, *Israeli’s Palestinians: The Conflict Within*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2011, p. 86.

⁸⁴*Ibid.* p. 99.

⁸⁵Rekness, “The Evolvement of an Arab-Palestinian National Minority in Israel”, p. 16.

⁸⁶As’ad Ghanem and Muhammad Mustafa, “The Palestinians in Israel and the 2006 Knesset Elections: Political and Ideological Implications of Election Boycott”, *Holy Land Studies*, Volume 6, No 1 (May 2007), p. 68.

of Jews also declined. Neither they were influenced by any organisation nor they had any ideological support to refrain themselves from voting.

The disillusion from the leaders both Arabs and Zionists played a bigger role for the decline. Ephraim Yaar, co-director of the Peace Index, supports this view and believes that the gap between the right and left wings is disappearing slowly and the governments are now following the same policies irrespective of their political orientation.⁸⁷ Such developments and fragmented leaderships have disappointed the Arab voters of Israel.⁸⁸

Conclusion

Thus, the 2006 elections were not as remarkable as the 2003 elections. The Israeli citizens both Arabs and Jews were disappointed by their leaders. A large number of scams and corruption scandals created situations which increased the low turnout. Owing to the internal differences in Likud, a new political party came up on the Israeli political map, Kadima. The post-election analysis suggested some trends emerging in the Israeli society. The last segment has discussed briefly that the right wing parties call for security threat was out rightly rejected by the Israeli voters. The rhetoric of pre-emptive measures particularly by Likud was discarded. The shift in the public mood clearly highlighted the failure of the right wing party Likud and its 'old war-mongering slogans of blood and tears.'⁸⁹

If such concept was rejected by the Israeli citizens, there were few issues which were accepted. Social reforms and development was very well received by the Israeli public in the 2006 elections. Almost all the progressive political parties adopted the agenda of social welfare and development. Labour under Amir Peretz, who was the leader of Histadrut, adopted the social welfare policy. Kadima and Shas also favoured social development policies. Except for two political parties, the policy of social development was adopted by all the parties. These two parties were Likud and Meretz. Both of them received fewer voters in the elections.

Kadima and Labour performed well in the Arab sector of Israel securing around 20 percent of the votes together. Kadima could have performed even better but some strategic mistakes

⁸⁷Shahar Ilan, "Voters Turnout- How Long it Can go", *Ha'aretz* (29 March 2012), <http://www.haaretz.com/news/analysis-voter-turnout-how-low-can-it-go-1.184111>, accessed on 6 March 2012.

⁸⁸Jamal, "The Arab Leadership in Israel: Ascendance and Fragmentation", pp. 6-22.

⁸⁹Warschawski, "The 2006 Israeli Elections: A Drive to Normalcy and Separation", p. 47.

from its side cost the party as many as 15,000 Israeli Arab votes, taking away at least two seats.

Kadima's centrist approach and its effort to implement the Gaza Disengagement program influenced many Israeli Arab voters and they saw a sense of seriousness in Kadima's approach. Labour party also campaigned rigorously in the Arab sector and focused on the social and development plans for Arabs. The Israeli Arabs are always more attracted towards their social and economic development than the issue of Palestine. Not surprisingly, their social, economic, and political conditions are far much better than their Arab counterparts in the whole West Asian region. Thus, the question of Palestine and other issues related to the Arabs outside Israel were secondary for them.

With the arrival of Arab political parties, the share of the Zionist parties in Israeli Arab votes have decreased significantly, but it is also noteworthy that almost after two decades of the formation of the first Arab political party in Israel, around 30 per cent of Israeli Arabs (2006 elections) are still voting for Zionist parties.

Chapter 5

Eighteenth Knesset Elections, 2009

During the decade of 2000s, early elections became a salient feature of the Israeli political system. In little more than a decade (1999-2009), the Israeli citizens experienced as many as four Knesset elections and one prime ministerial election. This feature partly contributed to a decline in popular participation in the Knesset elections and as discussed earlier, voting percentage among Israeli Arabs and Jews fell drastically since 1999. The 18th Knesset elections held on 10 February 2009 did not differ from this trend. The election took place under the backdrop of tensions between Israel's Jewish and Arabs citizens and the period between the two Knesset elections (17th and 18th) was also marked by several eventful developments.

Just after the 2006 elections as Kadima formed the government with the help of the Labour party, the hopes were high over the treatment the Arab citizens of Israel and with respect to peace settlement with the Palestinians. Both parties' encouraging vision regarding the Gaza disengagement plan, their campaign to launch second disengagement from the West Bank and their willingness to seek an amicable solution with the Palestinian Authority raised popular expectations from the Kadima-led government.

However, much to widespread disappointment, duration of the 17th Knesset witnessed a widening gulf between the Arabs and Jews. Just few months after the formation of the 17th Knesset, Israel got engaged in a war against Hezbollah, also known as the Second Lebanon war. The bigger setback to Arab hopes came after in the form of Operation Cast Lead (December 2008-January 2009), a kind of full-fledged war against the Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip. Such developments resulted in the halting of all peace negotiations with the Palestinian Authority. Moreover, Israel internal political problems like its instable government and the corruption charges against the Prime Minister Ehud Olmert created further troubles. At the same time, a few events like Annapolis peace conference (November 2007) and Israel's unilateral ceasefire in Gaza which came just before the elections were some positive points which occurred during the 17th Knesset.

Road to the 18th Knesset Elections

Following the 2006 election, Ehud Olmert formed a coalition government on 6 April 2006 comprising of Kadima, Labour, Shas, and Gil.¹ His tenure began with the Second Lebanon war and Israel's unsuccessful attempt to bring back two of its soldiers who were kidnapped by Hezbollah from inside Israel. The war which lasted for 34 days (after UN broke ceasefire) was regarded mainly as a failure and was criticised by many inside Israel.²

Meanwhile, serious corruption charges were levelled in March 2006 against Olmert over the purchase by him a Jerusalem property in 2004 while he was Minister of Industry, Trade and Labour and he was accused of paying \$325,000 below the market value. A criminal investigation regarding the matter was formally launched on 24 September 2007.³ Under intense public pressures, on 21 September 2008 Olmert was forced to resign, after just two and a half years in government.⁴ The dominant force in the resignation of Ehud Olmert was Ehud Barak.⁵ He exerted pressure on Olmert to resign with 'his threat that if Olmert did not step down, the Labour Party would abandon the ruling coalition and call elections'.⁶ Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni who succeeded Olmert as leader of Kadima was however, unable to form the next government, thereby leaving Olmert to stay on as caretaker prime minister. She refused to accede to the demands of Shas and hence the possibility of the formation of any coalition diminished. Once she failed to form a new government, she expressed her inability, and the new elections were called by the president.

¹This was a unique coalition where religious Shas and left Labour came together to form the government. Kadima's. In 2006 Kadima got 29, Labour 19, Shas 11, and Gil 7 seats, thereby taking the coalition number to 66. Gil was a new party formed to protect the rights of pensioner of Israel. Surprisingly they got 7 seats in 2006 elections. Gil could not receive enough votes to secure any seat in the Knesset in 2009 elections.

²Michal Shamir and Asher Arian, *The Election in Israel 2009*, Transaction Publishers, New Jersey (2011), p.1; Jonathan Spyer, Lebanon 2006: Unfinished War, *The Middle East Review of International Affairs (MERIA)*, Volume 12, No.1 (March 2008), <http://meria.idc.ac.il/journal/2008/issue1/jv12no1a1.asp>, accessed on 12 June 2012; Efraim Inbar, "How Israel Bungled the Second Lebanon War", *Middle East Quarterly*, Vol. 14, Number 3 (Summer 2007), p. 57.

³Jeffrey Heller, "Israeli police to investigate Olmert house purchase", *Reuters* (24 September 2007), <http://www.reuters.com/article/2007/09/24/us-israel-olmert-idUSL2487421920070924>, accessed on 25 March 2012.

⁴Ralf Hexel, "Livni wins election victory but Netanyahu to be new prime minister?; Israel's 2009 Knesset elections", *Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES)*, Israel (13 February 2009), p. 2.

⁵ Following his 2001 defeat, Barak temporarily left politics only to return in 2005. Even though he did not run for the 2006 Knesset elections, he was making efforts to regain control of the leadership of the Labour party.

⁶ Mario Sznajder, "The Elections in Israel", *Mediterranean Politics* (Med. 2010), p. 182.

Socio –Economic Factors

Socio- economic issues and developments have always influenced the voting pattern of the Israeli Arabs. Although their socio economic progress lags behind that of the Jewish Israelis, it is better than the Arabs living in the West Asian region outside Israel. A section of Israeli Arab votes for Zionist parties on the assumption that the Zionist parties, particularly Labour and Kadima (since 2006), have more power to bring substantial positive changes for the Israeli Arabs than other Arab parties, as they are members of ruling coalition. These parties also present their intentions in favour of Israeli Arabs during the election campaign. Thus, socio-economic development becomes an important factor in the voting behaviour of Israeli Arabs. They measure the work done by Zionist parties in terms of their development during the previous Knesset. That was one of the reasons why Kadima during its election campaign stressed the development of the “Arab economy” by emphasising on the “Arab business” and developing them.

However, a very interesting trend can be observed in these elections. Although there was a slight improvement in their social and economic condition, the voting participation of Israeli Arabs continued to decline. This also indicated, as will be discussed later in this chapter, that the war in Gaza overtook all the other issues concerning the elections and became the most important factor influencing the voting pattern of Israeli Arabs. Nevertheless, the socio-economic progresses have their own role to play.

Between the 2006 and 2009 Knesset elections there was slight improvement in the development of Israeli Arabs. The population of Arabs just before the 2009 elections reached twenty per cent of the total Israeli population amounting to around 1.488 million. This was slightly higher than in the 2006 elections where the population percentage was around 19.2 per cent, thus rising at the rate of around 2.3 per cent per annum.⁷

In 2008, the life expectancy of Israeli Arabs was 75.9 for men and 79.7 for women. Even though infant mortality rate (per 1,000 live births) of the Arab population in Israel decreased from 41 in 1970 to 6.5 in 2008,⁸ yet when compared to the Jews it lags behind by four years. Moreover, in spite of the decline in infant mortality in both populations, the decline among

⁷ Nurite Yaffe, “The Arab Population in 2008”, *Statitilite no 102*, Central Bureau of Statistics, State of Israel (March 2010), p. 1.

⁸ In comparison in 2007 it was 15 in Syria; 18 in Jordan; 26 in Lebanon and 30 in Egypt. *Ibid.*, p.4.

the Jews was greater.⁹ In spite of the increase in life expectancy at birth among both Arabs and Jewish males, the trend towards change was higher in the Jewish community than in the Arab population.¹⁰ Life expectancy for both Jews and Arabs is on the rise, but the rate of increase differs in the two populations, and the gaps are still widening. In 1996 the gap in life expectancy at birth for Jewish men and Arab men was 1.7 years (76.6 and 74.9, respectively) and in 2008 it widened to 3.7 years (78.7 and 75.0, respectively). The gap in life expectancy at birth between Jewish women and Arab women was 2.6 years in 1996 (80.3 and 77.7, respectively) and increased to 3.8 years in 2008 (82.5 and 78.7, respectively).¹¹

Table 5.1: Comparison of Life expectancy, Infant Mortality rate, Unemployment rate and Schooling of Jews and Arabs in different years (all data are in percentage)

| | Infant mortality rate | | Life expectancy | | Unemployment rate | | Schooling (till matriculation) | |
|------------------------|-----------------------|------|-----------------|------|-------------------|------|-----------------------------------|------|
| | Arabs | Jews | Arabs | Jews | Arabs | Jews | Arabs | Jews |
| 2000-2004 (average) | 8.4 | 3.8 | 76.3 | 79.9 | 13.1 | 10.2 | 46 | 51 |
| 2005 | 7.7 | 4.4 | 76.7 | 80.2 | 11.5 | 9.7 | 48.7 | 55.6 |
| 2007 | 6.2 | 4.2 | 77 | 80.9 | 10.5 | 6.9 | 51 | 57 |

Compiled from: Ali Haider, The Equality Index of Jewish and Arab Citizens in Israel, *Sikkuy report 2008*, Jerusalem- Haifa (2009); Nurite Yaffe, The Arab Population in 2008, *Statitilite no.102*, Central Bureau of Statistics, State of Israel (March 2010); Jack Habib, Judith King, Assaf Ben Shoham, Abraham Wolde-Tsadick, Karen Lasky, “Labour Market and Socio Economic Outcomes of the Arab-Israeli Population”, *OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers*, No. 102, OECD Publishing (2010); The Equality Index of Jewish and Arab Citizens in Israel, *Sikkuy report 2006*, Jerusalem- Haifa (2007); The Arab Population in Israel, *Statitilite no:27*, Central Bureau of Statistics, State of Israel (November 2002); The Arab Population in Israel in 2003, *Statitilite no 50*, Central Bureau of Statistics, State of Israel (2003).

Education constitutes a very significant and important part of the life of every society. In Israel, it is important to have government intervention in imparting education as it helps to reduce discrimination in this area. The public school system can bridge gaps in the students’

⁹ Ali Haider, “The Equality Index of Jewish and Arab Citizens in Israel”, *Sikkuy report 2008*, Jerusalem- Haifa (2009), p. 22.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.22.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

scholastic achievements and can provide an equal opportunity to those coming from deprived socio-economic backgrounds. In 2008, the median number of years of schooling of the Israeli Arab population increased from less than nine in the late 1980s to 12 in 2008. Moreover, In the 2007-08 academic year Israeli Arab students comprised twelve per cent of all first degree students, six per cent of second degree students and four per cent of third degree students. In teacher training colleges, Israeli Arab students comprised 34 per cent of first degree and 23 per cent of second degree students. The state of Israel recognises that more strenuous efforts are required to level the educational playing field for Arab-Israelis.

The Arab-Israeli population between the age of 15 and 64 in 2007 numbered 783.5 thousand and comprised 18.2 percent of the total Israeli population of this age group. In terms of employment rate, the majority of Israeli Arabs continued to work in the unskilled sector. Israeli Arabs employment rate is also lower than among the Jews. The employment rate in 2008-09 for Israeli Arabs men is 59.3 per cent compared to 66.3 per cent for Jewish men.¹² The high unemployment rate leads to poverty and Arab poverty rate in Israel was around fifty percent in 2009.¹³ Thus, weak social indexes among the Israeli Arab community are contributing to low employment rates and poverty.¹⁴

Hence, when the Israeli Arab social indicators are compared with the Jewish Israelis, one finds a persistent gap even though these indicators are better than Arabs outside Israel and are steadily improving.

Election Campaign for the Eighteenth Knesset Elections

In 2009, thirty three political parties contested the 18th Knesset elections but only 12 could cross the threshold limit of two per cent.¹⁵ The political parties can be divided into four broad categories. Firstly, mainstream Zionist parties comprising of Likud, Kadima, Labour, and Meretz. The second category is of religious parties like Shas, United Torah Judaism, and NRP

¹² Jack Habib, Judith King, Assaf Ben Shoham, Abraham Wolde-Tsadick, Karen Lasky, "Labour Market and SocioEconomic Outcomes of the Arab-Israeli Population", *OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers*, No. 102, OECD Publishing (2010), p. 20.

¹³ "Economic Survey of Israel, 2009", *OECD Policy Brief* (2009), p. 7.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

¹⁵ Eighteenth Knesset election, Knesset election results, State of Israel, http://www.knesset.gov.il/description/eng/eng_mimshal_res18.htm, accessed on 27 March 2012.

and the third category belongs to the Arab parties and Arab-Jewish parties like Hadash (DPFE), United Arab list- Ta'al, and Balad. The fourth category comprises of smaller parties with small number of seats in the Knesset. Parties like National Union, Jewish home, and other smaller political parties which could not cross the threshold limit fall into this category. However, this section would discuss only first three categories.

Zionist Parties

Among the Zionist parties, Kadima, Labour, and Likud were the major political parties. Meretz, now known as New Movement-Meretz, was also in the competition for the Israeli Arab votes. Kadima, formed by Ariel Sharon in 2005, lost its credibility among the Israeli Arab population under Ehud Olmert. During the Gaza war, Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni rejected the demand for a 48 hour humanitarian ceasefire and argued that such a move would 'legitimize' Hamas.¹⁶ This angered the Israeli Arabs. Moreover, her proposal to the Israeli Arabs to accept Israel as a Jewish state just before elections caused huge losses for the party in the Arab sector of Israel.¹⁷

Kadima had to face Israeli Arabs irk just within months of 2006 Knesset elections because of the war against Hamas.¹⁸ In 2008, the government again invited wrath of its Arab populations over operation Cast Lead.¹⁹ Nevertheless, in the 2009 elections the Kadima election manifesto drew attention towards the Arab population of Israel and presented what it intended to accomplish for them in its next tenure and its platform stressed the socio-economic gap between the Israeli Arabs and Jews. Kadima pledged to undertake a study comparing education levels among Jews and Arabs and to formulate policies according to these studies. It even illustrated its intentions to develop policy regarding Arab trade and commerce and to

¹⁶ Barak Ravid, "Livni: Cease-fire in Gaza would grant Hamas legitimacy", *Ha'aretz* (1 January 2009), <http://www.haaretz.com/news/livni-cease-fire-in-gaza-would-grant-hamas-legitimacy-1.267233>, accessed on 27 March 2012.

¹⁷ A. Selgi, "FM takes heat over Israeli Arab remark", *JPost* (December 2008), <http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1228728156919&pagename=JPost/JPArticle/ShowFull>, accessed on 27 March 2012.

¹⁸ Discussions on the Second Lebanon War can be found in Shlomo Brom and Meir Elran, *The Second Lebanon War: Strategic Perspective*, Institute of National Security Studies, Tel Aviv University, Tel Aviv (2007), pp. 1-240.

¹⁹ For discussion on the Gaza War 2008-09 see, "Operation Cast Lead: 22 Days of Death and Destruction", *Amnesty International*, Amnesty International publications, London (January 2009), pp. 1-127; Anthony H. Cordesman, *The Gaza War: Strategic Analysis*, Centre for Strategic and International studies, Washington (2 February 2009), pp. 1-96.

‘promote tourism and reduction of roadblocks for Arabs entering the Job market; and promoting development of Arab towns’.²⁰

The second major party, Likud witnessed a steep decline among the Israeli Arabs in the last few Knesset elections. Hence, in the 2009 Knesset elections it tried to move away from its far right wing approach and sought to attract more centre-right votes, a section which preferred Kadima over Likud in the 2006 Knesset elections. The rationale behind the change of stand was evident after its debacle in the 2006 elections and its massive loss of votes in the Israeli Arab territory. Its visible action in line with this change in stand was the down gradation of their prominent right wing member, Moshe Feiglin, from the 20th slot to an unrealistic 36th slot in the party’s final list.²¹ As a result of such an action, Likud had to suffer among its traditional far right members.²² However, as far as Palestinians were concerned Likud expressed its willingness to negotiate with the Palestinian leadership except Hamas. The platform also included an “economic peace” with the Palestinians which may include trade and commerce with the latter.²³ Although, Likud stated that it would not curb the natural growth of Jews in the West Bank, it also expressed its opposition to the building up of new settlements.²⁴

Among the Israeli Arab sector, Likud has shown a consistent decline in the voting share. The decline was more visible in the 2003 Knesset elections and the party almost vanished from the Arab sector in the 2006 elections. Likud’s conservative political approach and economic policies of Netanyahu in past affected the Arab population of Israel. However, in the 2009

²⁰ “The Palestinian Arab Minority and the 2009 Israeli Elections, March 2009 Update”, *The Mossawa Centre*, The Advocacy Centre for Arab Citizens in Israel, Haifa (March 2009), p. 39

²¹ Mazal Mualem, “Likud committee bumps Feiglin down to 36th on party ticket”, *Ha’aretz* (11 December 2008), <http://www.haaretz.com/news/likud-committee-bumps-feiglin-down-to-36th-on-party-ticket-1.285516>, accessed on 12 May 2012.

²² Nadav Shragai, “Far-right activists found new party”, *Ha’aretz* (16 December 2008), <http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/far-right-activists-found-new-party-1.259582>; and Yossi Verter, “Support for Likud Falling Among Right-Wing Voters”, *Ha’aretz* (25 December 2008), <http://www.haaretz.com/news/support-for-likud-falling-among-right-wing-voters-survey-finds-1.260228>, accessed on 12 May 2012.

²³ “The Palestinian Arab Minority and the 2009 Israeli Elections”, *The Mossawa Centre*, p. 41.

²⁴ Barak Ravid, “Netanyahu: Likud-led coalition wouldn’t build new settlements”, *Ha’aretz* (26 January 2009), <http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/netanyahu-likud-led-coalition-wouldn-t-build-new-settlements-1.268851>, accessed on 30 March 2012.

elections, Likud seemed more than willing to attract Arab votes and its proposal for peace negotiations with Palestinians was a step in the direction to attract the Israeli Arab votes in the upcoming elections.

The third major party was Ehud Barak's led Labour Party. In the recent years, Labour party also suffered a steep decline both in the overall votes and among the Arab sector of Israel. Most of the losses were caused by the disillusion of the Israeli Arabs with the Labour party. A few Israeli Arabs moved towards the Arab parties while some decided to abstain from the Knesset elections which also became one of the reasons, among others, for the sharp decline of the Arabs voter turnout in the recent Knesset elections. Until recently the Labour party received maximum number of Israeli Arab votes for the Zionist parties. In the 2006 Knesset elections, in spite of signs of decline, they received highest number of Arab votes for the Zionist parties. In 2006 with its war against Hezbollah Israel launched full scale offensive. The defence minister who pushed for the war with Hezbollah was Amir Peretz and as his successor Barak pushed for the Gaza War of 2008. . Such steps certainly contributed to Labour party's erosion among more Israeli Arabs.

Nevertheless, on the issue of Palestinians, Labour's ideology resembled that of Kadima and advocated the need for a return to the Roadmap for Peace and a negotiated agreement to establish a Palestinian state, based on the 'Land for Peace' formula.²⁵ However, like other parties, it also refused to negotiate with Hamas. Partly because of this and partly due to its socialist attitude, the Labour still has some influence among the Israeli Arabs. The 2006 Labour party platform included a section on *The Arab citizens of Israel*, containing a general statement on the need to introduce fundamental changes in government policy, emphasizing complete equality between Arabs and Jews. Although the party's role regarding the war with Hezbollah and the operation Cast Lead have questioned the intentions of the Labour party, a sizeable Arab population still preferred Labour party. This was depicted in the Israeli Arab voting share, in which Labour party continued to receive the maximum share.

Apart from these three Zionist parties, in recent years, the left wing Meretz has also enjoyed some goodwill in the Arab sector. The share of votes for the party however, has been declining steeply and, as would be discussed, in 2009 elections its performance was a disaster. Meretz stand on the Arab population of Israel is more sympathetic compared to the

²⁵ "The Palestinian Arab Minority and the 2009 Israeli Elections", *The Mossawa Centre*, p. 44.

other Zionist parties. In 2006 elections, Meretz's manifesto was inclined towards the Israeli Arabs as they emphasises on the issues related to the Arab population of Israel. 'Meretz states that the Arab minority in Israel must be granted collective rights that will enable it to practice and express its special culture. The party also advocates for affirmative action to correct many years of discrimination against Arab citizens of Israel.'²⁶

Religious and Other Parties

In this section, three prominent parties can be identified, Shas, United Torah Judaism, and National Religious Party. Shas is not Zionist and represents the political interests of Haredi, Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews; while Zionist NRP has moved to the right, UJT is an anti-zionist block of two haredi parties. Shas was the part of the Kadima-led coalition and held four cabinet seats during the 17th Knesset. It is quite surprising to observe that Shas has performed well in the Arab sector despite of its religious and right wing character. Though non-Zionist, Shas has a clear opinion about the concept of Israel as a Jewish state and a state being governed by Jewish laws. Nevertheless, the party has campaigned in the Arab sector and extended its support for the social reforms for the Arab community of Israel. Shas MK David Aluzai was the main campaigner of the party in the Arab sector in the 2009 Knesset elections.

The United Torah Judaism is an ultra orthodox Ashkenazi party and as its character is mostly revolves around the Jewish state and the sanctity of Shabbat it has very less interest even among the secular Jews let alone among the Israeli Arabs.

Arab Parties

The Arab parties were mainly dependent on the Israeli Arabs who make up twenty percent of the Israeli population. Following the Operation Cast Lead and war with Hezbollah earlier, the Arab parties were expecting a good show in the elections. During the election campaign they exploited the gulf generated between the Jews and the Israeli Arabs at the time of the wars with Hezbollah and Hamas.

In this category, DPFE (Hadash) was the only party with the objectives of Arab-Jew unity. It maintained its Arab-Jewish character and as per its tradition, the first three realistic slots were

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 45

given to a Muslim, a Christian, and a Jew respectively.²⁷ Hadash also gave importance to the women candidate and gave three of the top ten spots to women, including two Israeli Arab women. During the election campaign, Hadash, as it had done for many decades, demanded Palestinian state along with Israel with Jerusalem as the capital of both countries. Moreover, it also called for the evacuation of all the settlements and the Israeli withdrawal from all the occupied territories captured during the June 1967 war.²⁸

Balad which performed well in the 2006 elections was also expected to repeat its performance in the 2009 elections and surveys indicated that it would get around three seats. Balad reserved third slot for women which went to Hanin Zuabi. It was believed that in case Balad would win three seats as predicted by the opinion polls, Hanin Zuabi, as we shall see, would become the first woman to get into Knesset through the Arab party.²⁹ One of the most prominent features of the Balad list was the inclusion of Abas Zakur, an erstwhile member of the radical Raam-Taal, in the list at the fourth spot. The inclusion of a former member of the Islamist Movement in Balad, which promotes the establishment of a secular state, indicates the new ideology of the Arab parties. Among the major points of their election campaigns, it promised Israeli Arabs to take steps to improve their economy.³⁰ Balad also strives to achieve social equity and guarantee individual social and economic rights including gender equality and it also supported separation of state and religion.

The third Arab party was the coalition of Islamic Movement, Taal (Arab Movement for Change), and Mada (Arab Democratic Party). This front was more radical than the other two and includes members like Ahmad Tibi. The 2006 Knesset elections demonstrated the increasing support for Islamic Movement in the southern region of Israel. As a result of this ‘two of the top five candidates belonged represented Negev Bedouin community’³¹, a community which has sizeable population in that region. However, women still could not find enough support in the coalition to be placed in a realistic spot. Out of ten top candidates only

²⁷ Ephraim Lavie and Arik Rudnitzky, “Arab Politics in Israel and the 18th Knesset elections”, *Election 2009 updates*, Konard Adenauer program for Jewish-Arab Cooperation (9 February 2009), p. 15.

²⁸ *Hadash official website*, <http://hadash.org.il/matzahadash/>, accessed on 4 April 2012.

²⁹ Lavie and Rudnitzky, “Arab Politics in Israel and the 18th Knesset elections”, p 16.

³⁰ For detailed analysis Israeli Arab economy see: David Brodet, “The Employment of Arabs in Israel”, *Caesarea Economic Policy Planning Forum*, Israeli Democracy Institute (June 2010).

³¹ Lavie and Rudnitzky, “Arab Politics in Israel and the 18th Knesset elections”, p 16.

one woman could find a spot, that too at the ninth place.³² The coalition which was known as Raam- Taal, campaigned for an independent Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital. Targeting Israeli Arabs it demanded their immediate recognition as a national minority. Moreover, the coalition also demanded to amend the Right of Return Law.³³

The Second Lebanon War and Gaza War

The Second Lebanon war started on 12 July 2006, shortly after the formation of a new government and become the source of a huge embarrassment for Israel. It was a 34-day long conflict between Hezbollah in Lebanon and Israeli Defence Force.³⁴ The war started after the rocket firing of Hezbollah into the Israeli territory. However the raid by Hezbollah into Israel resulting in the abduction of two Israeli soldiers was the immediate reason of war. Israel immediately responded by declaring an open ground war launched the Operation Change of Direction³⁵ and the IDF attacked Hezbollah headquarters in Ya'atar and bases in Davvin area, Ayata-Shav.³⁶

Although, the IDF destroyed the majority of Hezbollah bases, it could not succeed in its objective as Hezbollah leaders along with the two captured Israeli soldiers remained at large. Thus, when UNSC unanimously adopted the Resolution 1701³⁷, the Israeli forces could not claim victory. The war invited heavy criticism from both sides. The Arab population of Israel criticised the war as it resulted in the killings of more than 1,000 Lebanese citizens with a number of innocent civilians.³⁸ The Jewish population of Israel termed the operation as a

³² *Ibid.*, p.16

³³ For details about right to return law see: Law of Return 5710-1950, Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, State of Israel, http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/MFAArchive/1950_1959/Law+of+Return+5710-1950.htm, accessed on 5 April 2012.

³⁴ For discussion on the war see ---- Brom and Elran, *The Second Lebanon War: Strategic Perspective*, 2007.

³⁵ Inbar, "How Israel Bungled the Second Lebanon War", p. 57.

³⁶ "Operation Change of Direction", *Global Security Organisation*, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/lebanon-change-of-direction-chron1.htm>, accessed on 29 March 2012.

³⁷ For the complete text of the Resolution see United Nations Security Council Resolution 1701, SC/8808, Department of Public Information, News and Media Division, New York (11 August 2006), <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2006/sc8808.doc.htm>, accessed on 12 June 2012.

³⁸ Sabine Dolan, "The humanitarian challenge in Lebanon", *UNICEF* (9 August 2006), http://www.unicef.org/emerg/index_35274.html, accessed on 30 March 2012.

strategic mistake.³⁹ A dialogue poll taken during 9 and 10 August 2006 found that only 20 percent of the overall Israeli sample felt that “Israel had won the war” and 30 percent felt that “Israel had not won the war”; and 43 percent said that “there is no winner and no loser”.⁴⁰ The government constituted a commission, Winograd commission, to enquire the Lebanon war. However, this was the first time after the Al- Aqsa intifada that the Arabs citizens of Israel, though not all, openly opposed a policy of the Israeli government.

Almost two and a half years after the second Lebanon war, the Israeli state got engaged into another war this time in its south with Hamas. The timing of this war was no doubt worst for the political parties, particularly those Zionist parties which enjoyed a sizeable support among the Israeli Arabs. Unlike the war with Hezbollah, the war in Gaza has two different opinions as far as the cause was concerned. Israel government claims that the war was in response to more than 10,000 rocket strike by Hamas inside the Israeli territory.⁴¹ However, the Arabs of Israel declined to accept Hamas responsibility for the war.⁴² Operation Cast lead was a unilateral move by Israel which took place at midnight on 27 December 2008. Its stated aim was to end rocket attacks into Israel by armed groups affiliated with Hamas and other Palestinian factions. When ceasefire was announced after 22 days, almost ‘1,400 Palestinians were killed in the war which included 300 children and hundreds of unarmed civilians’.⁴³

Thus, the impact of two successive wars within the span of less than three years created a huge division between the Arabs and Jewish citizens of Israel. The next few sections investigate further the impact of Operation Cast Lead on the Arab population of Israel and trace the reasons of the decline in Arab voting in Knesset and their voting behaviour.

³⁹ Inbar, “How Israel Bungled the Second Lebanon War”, p. 62.

⁴⁰ Yehuda Ben Meir, “Israeli Public Opinion and the Second Lebanon War”, in Shlomo Brom and Meir Elran (ed.), *The Second Lebanon War: Strategic Perspectives*, The Institute of National Security Studies, Tel Aviv (2007), p.93.

⁴¹ “Operation Cast Lead: Israel Defends its Citizens”, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, State of Israel, <http://www.mfa.gov.il/GazaFacts/About/Operation-Cast-Lead-against-Hamas.htm>, accessed on 30 March 2012.

⁴² Yehuda Ben Meir, “Operation Cast Lead: Political Dimensions and Public Opinion, Strategic Assessment”, *The Institute for National Strategic Studies*, Volume 11, No. 4 (February 2009), Tel Aviv, <http://www.inss.org.il/publications.php?cat=21&incat=&read=2634>, accessed on 12 June 2012.

⁴³ “Operation Cast Lead: 22 Days of Death and Destruction”, p. 1.

Widening Gulf between Arabs and Jews

Coincidentally, in the Israeli domestic politics the election campaign was at the full flow and hence the after effect of the war was evident particularly on the Israeli Arab population. Israel refused to stop its aerial and ground offensive even on the behest of the international community. In the words of one Israeli Arab commentary: ‘Despite the mounting civilian casualties in the Strip and a Security Council Resolution adopted on 8 January which called for “an immediate, durable and fully respected cease-fire, leading to the full withdrawal of Israeli troops from Gaza,” Israel continued its activities.’⁴⁴

The impact of the Gaza war was huge on the Arab citizens of Israel which eventually resulted in the increasing gulf between Jews and Arabs. This manifested in protest marches in solidarity with the Palestinian under the shadow of war.⁴⁵ In response to these protest the government arrested a number of Arab citizens to curb the support.⁴⁶ Tensions heightened as at many places when Israeli Arabs organised protest particularly in the universities over the operation Cast Lead.⁴⁷ Incidents of clash between Jews and Arabs were also observed.

The public opinion in Israel was divided and created a visible line between Jews and Arabs. Some scholars argued that the Gaza war disturbed the social ethnic structure and destroyed the efforts of bridging the gap between the Jews and Arabs after the al- Aqsa Intifada in 2000 and the relationship between Arabs and Jews strained as they had been reshaped after the second Intifada.⁴⁸ In a public opinion survey which was done among the Arab population of Israel, around 55 percent respondents said that Israel was responsible for the war whereas 15 percent Israeli Arabs held Hamas responsible for the war. Surprisingly, around forty per cent respondent favoured Hamas rocket fires on Israel and around twenty seven percent opposed

⁴⁴ “The Palestinian Arab Minority and the 2009 Israeli Elections”, March 2009 Update, *The Mossawa Centre*, p. 21.

⁴⁵ Hisham Naffa, “The Palestinians in Israel: A view from Haifa”, *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 38, No. 3 (Spring 2009), p. 56.

⁴⁶ Akiva Eldar, “How Israel silenced its Gaza war protesters”, *Ha’aretz*, 22 September 2009, <http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/features/how-israel-silenced-its-gaza-war-protesters-1.7477>, accessed on 12 June 2012; also Naffa, “The Palestinians in Israel: A view from Haifa”, p. 59.

⁴⁷ Naffa, “The Palestinians in Israel: A view from Haifa”, p. 59.

⁴⁸ Nadim N. Rouhana, Mtanes Shihadeh, and Areej Sabbagh-Khoury, “Turning Point Palestinian Politics in Israel: The 2009 elections”, in Asher Arian, Alan Arian, Michal Shamir(ed.), *The Election in Israel 2009*, Transaction Publication, New Jersey (2011), p. 93.

this strategy. More surprisingly, still forty percent respondents supported the military action of Hamas even after the truce came into force.⁴⁹

The public opinion of Jews in Israel held the opposite opinion. When asked whether the respondent support or oppose the Operation Cast Lead, an overwhelming population of 94 percent replied positively. Even 92 per cent of population supported the air strike which affected the civilian population of Israel. Majority of respondents were also not happy with the unilateral ceasefire and said that Israel stopped the operation too early, a position diametrically opposite to the position of Israeli Arabs.⁵⁰ Such opposite opinions undoubtedly created grounds for conflict which was highlighted during elections when political parties politicised the Arab stand vis-à-vis the Gaza war.

Conflict between the two communities was not just on Gaza war, there were other emerging issues during the same time or before, which created chasm between them. After the much criticised Second Lebanon war in 2006, Israeli government constituted a committee, known as Winograd commission, to investigate the war. This commission gave its final report in January 2008, terming the war as a partial failure for Israel and that Israel achieved only little from the war and by the time the elections were announced in October, the report findings gathered steam.

At the same time in October 2008, the northern city of Israel, Acre, also known as Akko, engulfed into one of the worst communal violence between Jews and Arabs of Israel.⁵¹ Such communal tensions between the two communities against the backdrop of elections gave an opportunity for the political parties to grab the situation and hence created further gulf in these two communities. As a response, Israel Beitenu, led by Avigdor Lieberman, and the

⁴⁹ The survey was done by various universities, research centres, and think tanks during the period of two months. For detail of the survey see: "Palestinian Opinion on War in Gaza", *Jewish Virtual Library*, <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/arabs/palpogaza.html>, accessed on 29 March 2012.

⁵⁰ "Israeli Opinion on War with Hamas", *Jewish Virtual Library*, http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Society_&_Culture/hamaswarpolls.html, accessed on 29 March 2012.

⁵¹ Akko is a town in the northern part of Israel and has around 27 per cent of Arab population. The riots started when at the eve of Yom Kippur (a day for fasting and prayers for Jews), an Arab drove inside the Jew locality and his car was attacked by Jews. The Arabs responded and at the end of Yom Kippur on 9 October 2008 major clashes across the city were observed. During the two weeks conflict more than 30 homes were damaged, three of which were burnt beyond recognition and about 100 cars and 80 shops, belonging to both Jewish and Arab were damaged. See: Isabel Kershner, "Israeli City Divided by Sectarian Violence", *The New York Times* (12 October 2008), <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/10/13/world/middleeast/13mideast.html>, accessed on 27 March 2012.

National Union have openly advocated for the transfer of the Arab population.⁵² Moreover, radical Arab leaders like Ahmad Tibi, observed the Akko (Acre) riots as ‘pogrom conducted by Jewish residents against their Arab neighbours’.⁵³ Arab leaders propagated that ‘all the talk about equality, good neighbourliness and co-existence goes up in smoke when Arab families live in a hostile Jewish environment.’⁵⁴

Such political friction was bound to further divide Arab and Jewish populations of Israel. ‘The situation in Acre was an early warning signal of a potentially explosive countrywide conflict between Arabs and Jews’⁵⁵ particularly the way Israeli government has handled the situation with respect to Hezbollah and Hamas.

Opinion Polls, Elections and Results

The 18th Knesset elections were announced after Kadima’s new leader Tzipi Livni expressed her inability to form the government by the end of October 2008. By the end of December, all parties submitted their candidates list and in January 2009 the central election committee approved the parties list. The elections took place on 10 February 2009 and around 5,278,985 Israeli voters, both Arabs and Jews, were eligible for the elections. Out of those who were eligible, around 3,373, 490 votes were found valid. With two per cent threshold limit, 67, 470 votes were needed by a political party to qualify for representation in the Knesset.⁵⁶

The public opinion about the elections, which happened around twenty months prior its date, was not very favourable. Just before the elections, the war in Gaza took place. A survey done by The Tami Steinmetz Centre for Peace Research known as War and Peace Index, in February 2009 gave Benjamin Netanyahu a slight edge over Tzipi Livni, for the prime minister’s post. However, the majority of respondents gave the coalition of Labour, Likud,

⁵² “Mossawa’s 2009 Election Analysis”, Mossawa News, Elections 2009, *The Mossawa Centre*, The Advocacy Centre for Arab Citizens in Israel, Haifa (April 2009), p. 4.

⁵³ Jonathan Cook, “The Acre Riots”, *Counter Punch* (16 October 2008), <http://www.counterpunch.org/2008/10/16/the-acre-riots/>, accessed on 27 March 2012.

⁵⁴ Uri Avnery, “Is Akko Burning?”, *Counter Punch* (20 October 2008), <http://www.counterpunch.org/2008/10/20/is-akko-burning/>, accessed on 28 March 2012.

⁵⁵ “The Palestinian Arab Minority and the 2009 Israeli Elections”, p. 21.

⁵⁶ Eighteenth Knesset, Knesset Election Results, State of Israel, http://www.knesset.gov.il/description/eng/eng_mimshal_res18.htm, accessed on 30 March 2012.

and Kadima, as their first preference.⁵⁷ Since, the security issue played the central role in the latest elections campaign, when the respondents were asked about their preference for defence minister, the majority of them preferred Ehud Barak for the post. Moreover, around forty per cent of people considered themselves as the supporter of right wing parties whereas 26 per cent claimed to be centrist.⁵⁸

Although the majority of Israeli citizen supported Ehud Barak as the defence minister, the situation was completely different in terms of their support to the Labour party. Opinion polls predicted disastrous results for Labour. Most of the political observers predicted, till the first week of January, 12 to 15 seats for the Labour party in the Knesset. However, as the polls approached by the end of January the prediction went up to 18-19 Knesset seats. Labour decline in the Arab sector of Israel was also very well predicted. That was rather one reason why Arab parties focussed on the Arab voters voting for Labour. Arab MK from UAL said that ‘they aimed to attract a range of Arab voters, including some of Labour’s traditional voters, who may be disenchanted with the party’.⁵⁹

The major competition for the top slot was between Kadima and Likud. Likud which went down to 12 seats in the 2006 elections was all set for resurgence with a changed outlook and with more centrist approach. Likud also dumped its ultra radical leaders. During the initial phase of campaigning it was predicted that Likud would win around 35 seats. However, when polling approached and its far right faction broke away, Likud’s seat share in the Knesset was predicted to be around 28 to 30.

Kadima’s popularity declined since the 2006 Knesset election owing to the two wars Israel faced but wars alone were not the reason for the decline of its popularity. Kadima’s leader Ehud Olmert was facing corruption charges for omissions and commissions during his tenure as a mayor of Jerusalem between 1999 and 2003. Moreover, later during the 17th Knesset

⁵⁷Ephraim Yaar and Tamar Hermann, *War and Peace Index*, Tami Steinmetz Centre for Peace Research (February 2009), p. 1.

⁵⁸*Ibid*, p. 3.

⁵⁹Brenda Gazzar, “Labour Likely to have few Arab representative in Knesset”, *Jerusalem Post* (3 December 2008), <http://knesset2009.wordpress.com/2008/12/03/labor-likely-to-have-few-arab-reps-if-any-in-next-knesset/>, accessed on 27 March 2012.

many more corruption-related charges were brought against him.⁶⁰ The Finance Minister Kadima's Roni Bar-On was also targeted because of his failure to take any measures during the economic crisis.⁶¹

During November-December opinion polls predicted Kadima with 25-28 seats in the elections. However, by the end of January 2009 the forecast dropped to 22-26 seats.⁶²

The final results were however not very surprising except that in the neck to neck fight between Kadima and Likud the former won the maximum number of votes. Kadima won 28 seats in the Knesset, which was one less than 2006 Knesset elections. They secured a total of 758,032 votes and 22.5 per cent of votes.

Likud, surprisingly, came one seat behind Kadima and secured 729, 054 votes or 21.6 percent. The Labour Party shrank to 13 seats with mere 9.9 per cent of votes which amounted to 334,900. However, the most surprising result was given by Yisrael Beitenu which got 15 seats with 11.7 per cent of vote share. The left wing Meretz could secure only three per cent of votes or 99,611 votes and three seats. The decline of left Zionist parties was the main feature of the elections. The Left wing parties' loss is partly associated with their approach during the war. They neither could give full support nor could oppose the war. As one analyst aptly concluded: 'The ambivalent attitudes of the left and centre-left wing parties towards the military operation in Gaza, initially offering their complete support, and later morally criticising it and demanding the operation to be stopped – projected a confused image that cost these parties many votes.'⁶³

Among the Arab parties, Hadash secured most number of votes; 112, 130 votes with 3.3 per cent share resulting in 4 seats in the Knesset. Two more Arab parties made an impressive performance. The coalition of three Arab parties, UAL-Ta'al received 111,954 votes (3.1 per cent votes) and 4 seats and Azim Bishara let NDA or Balad got 3 seats (83,739 votes or 2.5

⁶⁰ Ehud Olmert, "Times Topics", *New York Times*, http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/o/ehud_olmert/index.html, accessed on 27 March 2012.

⁶¹ Sznajder, "The Elections in Israel", p. 183.

⁶² "Likud Stays Ahead of Kadima", Poll Archive, Angus Reid Public Opinion (6 February 2009), http://www.angus-reid.com/polls/35124/likud_stays_ahead_of_kadima_in_israel/, accessed on 29 March 2012.

⁶³ Sznajder, "The Elections in Israel", p. 185.

percent of votes). In all, the Arab parties got 11 seats with 10 Arab members (one of the member on the Hadash list was a Jewish Israeli). Along with the Zionist parties, which gave three Arab members, the total Arab members in the Knesset reached to 14.

Among the other parties, Shas and United Torah Judaism got 11 and 5 seats respectively, whereas ultra orthodox National Religious Party managed to get three seats in the 18th Knesset.⁶⁴

Table 5.2: 18th Knesset election results

| Name of list | Number of valid votes | Per cent of valid votes | Number of seats |
|----------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|-----------------|
| Kadima | 758,032 | 22.5 | 28 |
| Likud | 729,054 | 21.6 | 27 |
| Yisrael Beiteinu | 394,577 | 11.7 | 15 |
| Labor | 334,900 | 9.9 | 13 |
| Shas | 286,300 | 8.5 | 11 |
| United Torah Judaism | 147,954 | 4.4 | 5 |
| UAL-Ta'al | 113,954 | 3.4 | 4 |
| Ichud Leumi | 112,570 | 3.3 | 4 |
| Hadash | 112,130 | 3.3 | 4 |
| New Movement-Meretz | 99,611 | 3.0 | 3 |
| Habayit Hayehudi | 96,765 | 2.9 | 3 |
| Balad | 83,739 | 2.5 | 3 |

*

Source: Election to the Knesset, Eighteenth Knesset, State of Israel, http://www.knesset.gov.il/description/eng/eng_mimshal_res18.htm

⁶⁴ Elections in Israel, 2009, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, State of Israel, http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/History/Modern+History/Historic+Events/Elections_in_Israel_February_2009.htm, accessed on 29 March 2012.

Arabs in the 2009 Knesset elections

When in October 2008, the Israeli elections were announced the Arab community was fully disillusioned with the Zionist parties. The Gaza war broke out shortly afterwards, the Arab discontent against the government intensified and changed the whole political equation of the country. The Israeli Arabs, particularly that section which preferred Zionist parties over Arab parties, faced two-way verbal attacks. Firstly, from the right wing parties slamming Israeli Arabs for their betrayal towards Israel MKs like Lieberman openly accused Israel's Arab citizens of 'disloyalty towards their state and using the slogan, "No citizenship without loyalty", which embodied the central message of his electoral campaign'.⁶⁵ Additionally, the right wing parties attempted to ban the Arab parties in the elections. These parties brought serious charges against the two major political parties, Azim Bishara's Balad (National Democratic Alliance) and Ahmed Tibi's United Arab List-Taal. The election committee 'accused the Arab parties of incitement, supporting terrorist groups and refusing to recognise Israel's right to exist'.⁶⁶

On the other hand the Arab parties and organisation also slammed those Israeli Arabs who voted for Zionist parties in the past. They urged the Arab citizens to vote for the Arab parties and 'claimed that a strong Arab presence must be created in the Knesset to counter the Zionist parties and the right's incitement against the Arab public'.⁶⁷ Leaders like Ahmad Tibi proclaimed that Israeli Arabs must vote in order to 'avenge the blood of the Palestinian dead in Gaza' and terming the war in Gaza as 'genocide', whereas Ibrahim Sarsur said that said Israel was seeking to "eliminate the Palestinian cause".⁶⁸

Moreover, the Arabs also faced boycott demands. The Northern Faction of the Islamic movement in Israel was a major organisation calling for boycott and refusing to recognise Knesset. Sheikh Kamal Khatib of the Northern Faction of the Islamic movement said that

⁶⁵Ralf Hexel, "Livni wins election victory but Netanyahu to be new prime minister?"; Israel's 2009 Knesset elections, *Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES)*, Israel (13 February 2009), p. 4.

⁶⁶ Rory McCarthy, "Parliament blocks Arab parties from contesting general election", *The Guardian* (13 January 2009), <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/jan/13/israel-general-election?INTCMP=ILCNETTXT3487>, accessed on 29 March 2012.

⁶⁷ David Koren, "Arab Israeli citizens in the 2009 elections: Between Israeli Citizenship and Palestinian Arab Identity", *Israel Affairs*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (January 2010), p. 128.

⁶⁸ Jonathan Cook, "Israel bars Arab parties from election", *The National* (14 January 2009), <http://www.jkcook.net/Articles2/0364.htm>, accessed on 28 March 2012.

‘they are convinced of the futility of parliamentary practice and the results of parliamentary action are extremely limited’.⁶⁹ The chairman of the sons of the village movement also favoured Israeli Arab boycott of elections claiming that ‘those responsible for the murder and massacre in Gaza are the leaders of the Zionist movement and the Israeli parliament is a Zionist parliament.’⁷⁰ Similar calls were made by the Palestinians and Arab organisation outside Israel.⁷¹

The complex environment created a situation of dilemma for the Israeli Arabs which eventually affected their voting pattern. Around fifty-four per cent Arabs voted in the 2009 elections, a drop of two per cent from the previous elections. However, the total number of Arab candidates elected to the Knesset from both Arab and Zionist parties was 14, which was same as in the 2006 Knesset elections. Total number of MK’s elected from Arab parties was 11 where as three members got into Knesset through the Zionist list; Likud, Kadima, and Israel Beiteinu. Out of the fifty four percent of Israeli Arabs who voted eighty three percent of Israeli Arabs voted for Arab parties (including Hadash) and rest seventeen percent voted for Zionist parties.⁷² This percent was lowest Israeli Arab voting share of Zionist parties which was a clear reflection of the discontent of Israeli Arab voters for the Zionist parties against the backdrop of wars with Hezbollah and Hamas. Surprisingly, the Zionist voting share never went so low even in the immediate aftermath of the Al- Aqsa Intifada.

A declining trend

The Arab voting pattern for Zionist parties was not very encouraging in the 2009 elections. The elections which focused on socio-economic development were suddenly overshadowed by the issues of security and terrorism. The widening gulf between Arabs and Jews and far right wing parties’ blatant attack on Israel’s Arab population for supporting Hamas created further suspicion among the Israeli Arabs regarding the intentions of Zionist parties. The right wing parties also approached the central election committee to disqualify Arab parties and in which they succeeded until Supreme Court revoked the disqualification.

⁶⁹ Lavie and Rudnitzky, “Arab Politics in Israel and the 18th Knesset elections”, p. 13.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁷¹ Naomi Klein, “Enough: It’s time for a boycott”, The Guardian (10 January 2009), <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2009/jan/10/naomi-klein-boycott-israel>, (accessed on 12 June 2012).

⁷² “Mossawa’s 2009 Election Analysis”, Mossawa News, p. 1

The biggest surprise came when Labour party, a dominant Zionist party in the Arab sector, failed to secure even a single seat for Israeli Arabs in the elections. Moreover, parties voting share in the Arab sector also declined sharply. This is quite obvious as Labour party candidates were the defence minister during wars with Hezbollah and Hamas and Israeli Arabs were disillusioned with the role of the Labour party during these events. The sizeable population of Israeli Arabs voting for Zionist parties would have preferred Labour but after its role during the wars the Israeli Arab support for Labour party was bound to decline.

The Arab candidates getting realistic slots on Zionist lists also dwindled and most of them found themselves in unrealistic slots. The Arab slot in the Labour Party itself saw some criticism. The first Arab slot on the Labour list was at 15. When compared to the previous elections this slot was an improvement. However, as the opinion poll predicted fewer seats for Labour it looked like even 15th or 16th slots was not sufficient for an Arab to enter the Knesset. As anticipated the Labour got 13 seats and hence for the second time in its history no Arab member got into Knesset through the Labour list.⁷³ The Labour's loss in the Arab sector could be held on Ehud Barak who was the defence minister during the Gaza war and could not defend his action among Arabs. He was unable to portray himself as a leader whom Arab could trust; 'as a matter of fact he was accused by both sides of the Israeli ideological divide'.⁷⁴ The right accused Barak for his inability to secure Israel's territories⁷⁵ and the Arabs accused him as the 'criminal' of Gaza.⁷⁶

Kadima placed one Israeli Arab member, Majalli Wahabi, on its list who was given 21st slot and he could make it to the Knesset as Kadima won 28 seats. Majalli was a Druze member but no Muslim Arab was placed on the realistic slot of Kadima list. The rationale behind it was quite obvious that after the war in Gaza the support of Arabs declined and Kadima at least did not want to lose Jew votes by placing Muslim Arab high on their election list.

⁷³ In 2003 also no Arab member, through Labour party seat, could enter the Knesset but later as a replacement candidate one Arab member, Raleb Majadele, could find a seat in the Knesset through Arab list. in 2009 elections also same thing happened but Raleb Majadele entered Knesset in 2010 when one member Yuli Tamir resigned.

⁷⁴ Shmuel Sandler and Hillel Frisch, "The 2009 Knesset Elections: A Foreign Affairs Perspective", *Israel Affairs*, Vol. 16, No. 1, January 2010 p. 9.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* p. 9.

⁷⁶ Naffa, "The Palestinians in Israel: A view from Haifa", p. 62.

Both for Kadima and Labour party faced a unique negative trend in the Arab sector. Their own Israeli Arab members who were registered in the primaries did not vote for their respective parties. The number of Israeli Arab votes secured by Kadima and Labour in the Arab sector of Israel was less than the number of voters registered in the primaries. For example, in the primary elections held in September 2008 Kadima received 385 voters in Dir Hanna, an Arab sector. However, in the general elections, Kadima had nabbed only 107 voters - just over 25 percent of the people who had voted in the Kadima party primary a few months earlier. Similarly, Taibeh had 471 Kadima members who voted in the primary, but only 42 people voted for the party in the Knesset election.⁷⁷ Similar trend was visible among the Labour party. In Negev there were 132 voters in Labour's primary held in December but only 20 people voted for the party in the general election. Iksal had 99 primary voters, compared to 29 Labour voters on the Election Day.⁷⁸

One Arab member also featured on the Likud list. Ayoob Kara, a Druze member who was placed on the 23rd slot. However, considering the history of association of Druze members with Likud it was obvious that only Druze could find a realistic slot in the Likud election list. One more Arab member could find a seat into the Knesset through the Zionist list. Hamad Amar was placed on 12th slot on the far right wing party Yisrael Beiteinu. The election of non-Jewish member should not be taken too seriously as Hamad Amar is a Druze and he stated that the party's controversial slogan "No citizenship without loyalty" is natural for the Druze community.

Other parties like Meretz gave Israeli Arab members too unrealistic seats and hence none of them could make it. The pro-Arab Meretz itself shrink to mere three seats securing just over three per cent of all votes.

The Israeli Arabs eligible for voting in 2009 elections were around 600,000, constituting around twelve per cent of the total population. The Zionist parties received eighteen per cent of total Israeli Arab votes. In this most of the votes came from Druze villages but the support for the Zionist parties in the Bedouin village of the Beer Sheeba region saw the support

⁷⁷ Yoav Stern, "Many Arab members of Kadima, Labor did not vote for their own parties", *Ha'aretz* (13 February 2009).

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

almost disappearing.⁷⁹ In the past, Bedouins were close to the Zionist parties and even took part in conscription programme. ‘The 2009 elections confirmed the shift, with only 36 percent of eligible Bedouin casting votes for the Zionist parties.’⁸⁰

Table 5.3: Israeli Arab voting pattern for Zionist parties (all data in percentage)

| Political parties | Israeli Arab Voting share in 2009 |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Kadima | 4.5 |
| Labour | 4.3 |
| Likud | 3.6 |
| Meretz | 1.6 |
| Yisrael Beitenu | 3.7 |

*Source: The Palestinian Arab Minority and the 2009 Israeli Elections, March 2009 Update, *The Mossawa Centre*, The Advocacy Centre for Arab Citizens in Israel, Haifa, March 2009; Asher Arian, Alan Arian, Michal Shamir (ed.), *The Elections in Israel 2009*, Transaction Publications, New Jersey (2011).

Among the voting pattern of Arabs for the Zionist parties, Kadima got the maximum votes. It secured around 4.5 per cent of Arab votes and since Kadima’s only Arab candidate on realistic slot was Druze it was obvious that most of the votes for Kadima would be coming from Druze sector.⁸¹ The same was the case with Likud party. It also got realistic slot to only one Arab member, also coming from the Druze community. In past also the Likud’s Arab share of votes came primarily from the Druze sector. However, in 2006 elections Likud failed to secure even from its traditional strongholds. But in 2009 Likud improved its tally and received 3.6 per cent of Arab votes.⁸²

The biggest setback came for the Labour party which could manage to secure just 4.3 per

⁷⁹ Rouhana, Shihadeh, and Sabbagh- Khoury, “Turning Point in Palestinian Politics in Israel”, p. 101.

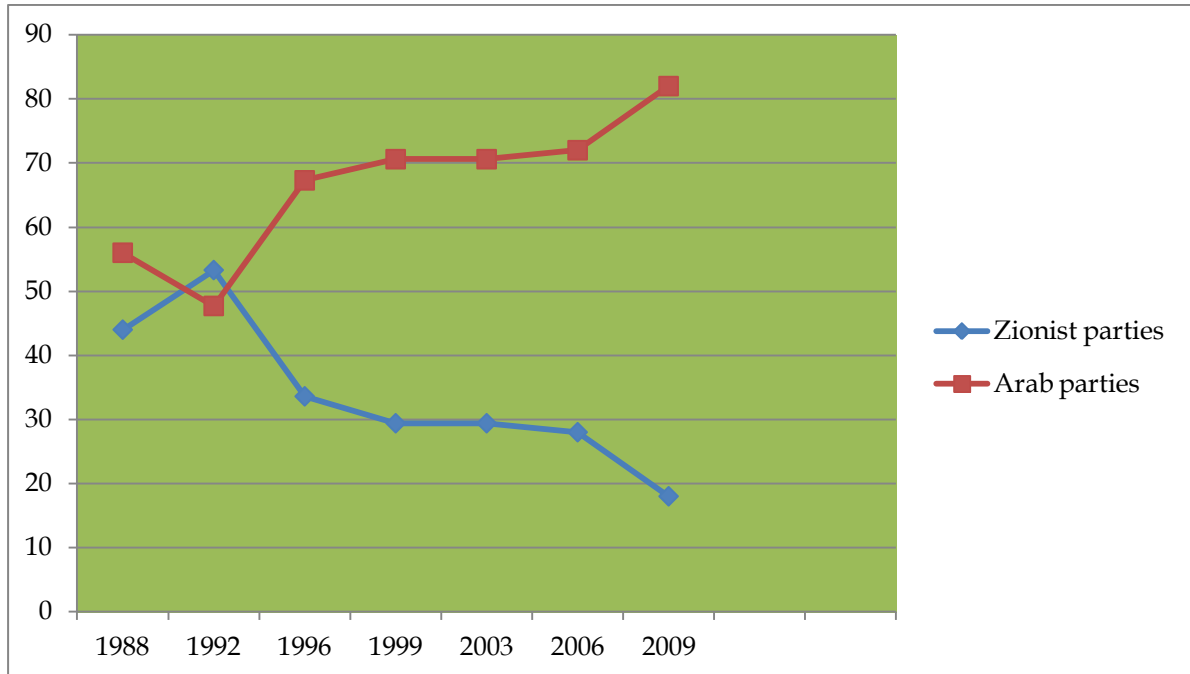
⁸⁰ Oren Yiftachel, “Voting for Apartheid: The 2009 Israeli elections”, *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 38, No. 3 (Spring 2009), p. 11.

⁸¹ “The Palestinian Arab Minority and the 2009 Israeli Elections”, *The Mossawa Centre*, p. 30.

⁸² Rouhana, Shihadeh, Sabbagh- Khoury, “Turning Point in Palestinian Politics in Israel”, p. 105.

cent of Arab votes. This was labour’s worst performance and no Arab candidate could make it to the Knesset as Labour shrink to 13 seats and first Arab candidate was placed on the 15th slot.⁸³

Figure 5.1: Arab voting pattern since 1988



Source: Oren Yiftachel, “Voting for Apartheid: The 2009 Israeli elections”, *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. XXXVIII, No. 3 (Spring 2009); Nadim N. Rouhana, Mtanes Shihadeh, Areej Sabbagh- Khoury, “Turning Point in Palestinian Politics in Israel”, in Asher Arian, Alan Arian, Michal Shamir (ed.), *The Elections in Israel 2009*, Transaction Publications, New Jersey (2011).

Finally, the left Zionist party Meretz could not reverse its decline process both in the Jewish as well as the Arab sectors of Israel. It just got 1.6 per cent of Israeli Arab votes which was its lowest till date. Meretz also did not put any Arab candidate on the realistic slot.⁸⁴ For Yisrael Beitenui, 3.7 per cent of voting coming from the Israeli Arab sector is an additional advantage to a far right wing party which has generally adopted an anti-Arab platform.

⁸³ “The Palestinian Arab Minority and the 2009 Israeli Elections”, *The Mossawa Centre*, p. 30.

⁸⁴ Ofir Abu, Fany Yuval, and Guy Ben-Porat, “All that is Left: The Demise of the Zionist Left Parties”, in Asher Arian, Alan Arian, Michal Shamir (ed.), *The Elections in Israel 2009*, Transaction Publications, New Jersey (2011), p. 43.

Arab votes for Arab parties

The performance of Arab parties in 2009 was undoubtedly the best since the founding of first Arab party, ADP. The Arab parties got 51,850 more votes as compared to the 2006 election projecting an increase in around twenty one per cent.⁸⁵ Among the three Arab parties the maximum Israeli Arab votes was secured by Hadash followed by the coalition known as UAL- Ta'al. They both secured four seats in the Knesset.⁸⁶ Hadash share of Israeli Arab votes was 30.5 per cent amounting to 112,230 Israeli Arab votes in the 2009 Knesset elections.⁸⁷ It received around 30,000 more votes than in 2006 elections which eventually resulted in the increase in Knesset seats in 2009. Hadash strength has always been the Jewish- Arab unity, thus attracting most rational voters from both the communities which include around 10,000 Jewish votes.⁸⁸

Table 5.4: Arab share of votes in 2009 and 2006 elections for Arab parties

| Political parties | Percentage votes in 2009 elections | Percentage votes in 2006 elections |
|--------------------------|---|---|
| DFPE (Hadash) | 29.6 | 24.3 |
| UAL | 30.3 | 27.4 |
| NDA (Balad) | 22.2 | 20.2 |

*Source: Nadim N. Rouhana, Mtanes Shihadeh, Areej Sabbagh- Khoury, "Turning Point in Palestinian Politics in Israel", in Asher Arian, Alan Arian, Michal Shamir (ed.), *The Elections in Israel 2009*, Transaction Publications, New Jersey (2011).

The UAL, coalition of three parties, received around 109,806 Israeli Arab votes, securing 29.9 per cent of Israeli Arab votes and also securing four seats in the Knesset.⁸⁹ UAL

⁸⁵"The Palestinian Arab Minority and the 2009 Israeli Elections", *The Mossawa Centre*, p. 29.

⁸⁶ The Election in Israel, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, State of Israel, http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/History/Modern+History/Historic+Events/Elections_in_Israel_February_2009.htm, accessed on 14 May 2012.

⁸⁷ Knesset Election Results, State of Israel, http://www.knesset.gov.il/description/eng/eng_mimshal_res18.htm, accessed on 14 May 2012.

⁸⁸ The Election in Israel, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, State of Israel, http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/History/Modern+History/Historic+Events/Elections_in_Israel_February_2009.htm, accessed on 14 May 2012.

⁸⁹ "The Palestinian Arab Minority and the 2009 Israeli Elections, March 2009 Update", *The Mossawa Centre*, p. 30.

coalition received around 20,000 more votes than the previous elections. However, its number of seats in the Knesset remained the same. Finally, Balad, the third largest party, and led by veteran Azim Bishara, received around 82,758 votes increasing it by around 10,000 Arab votes. Bishara's Balad, got around 22.5 per cent of Israeli Arab votes.

It is interesting to analyse the voting trend among the Israeli Arab voters' vis-à-vis Arab political parties. Regrettably, the Israeli Arab voting participation decreased since the 2006 elections. Moreover, the Arab population of Israel since 2006 has not shown a drastic increase. This means that 50,000 votes which went to Arab party camp was the direct result of the drift of Israeli Arab votes from Zionist parties to Arab parties when compared to 2006 elections.⁹⁰ Interestingly, Israeli Arab voting share increased even when the voting participation decreased.

The Israeli Arab non-voting and call for boycott

The drop in Israeli Arab voting percentage is quite visible since the Al- Aqsa Intifada. In 2006 elections also the Israeli Arab voting percentage declined. However, the decline in voting percentage was consistent with the drop in national voting percent. But, in 2009 on one side the overall voting percent of Jews rose slightly, the Israeli Arab voting per cent continue to fall and reached all time low at 54 per cent, which means that almost half of the eligible voting Israeli Arab population chose not to vote. In the preceding chapters few reasons are highlighted that can be attributed for the absence of Israeli Arabs. The non-voting can be divided in to external and internal factors.

Among the external factors, primary is the call for boycott by Arab organisation both in and outside Israel. Every elections these organisations call the Arab population of Israel to not to participate in the elections. However, in 2009 Knesset elections, because of Israel's war on Hamas the demand to pull out of elections was raised high by these organisations.⁹¹ This factor has been discussed in the previous section that how Northern Faction of Islamic Movement and Son's of Village have appealed to boycott the Knesset itself.⁹²

⁹⁰Hittel Frisch, Hillel Frisch, *Israel's Security and Its Arab Citizens*, Cambridge University Press, New York (2011), p. 70.

⁹¹Rouhana, Shihadeh, and Sabbagh- Khoury, "Turning Point in Palestinian Politics in Israel", p. 101.

⁹²Schafferman Karin Tama, "Participation, Abstention and Boycott: Trends in Arab Voter Turnout in Israeli Elections", election 2009, *Israeli Democracy Institute* (21 April 2009),

The dissatisfaction of Israeli Arabs from their leader and their failure bring any noticeable change in their condition have already been discuss in the preceding chapters. Disappointment within the Israeli Arab public in the Arab leadership and Arab MKs, due to internal rifts and the Arab parties' inability to unite with each other have become one of the important factors of the Israeli Arab voting per cent decline.⁹³

Among the other external factors, Operation Cast Lead and Second Lebanon war raised their dissatisfaction with the Zionist parties.⁹⁴ 'The Arabs' protests (of Operation Cast Lead) against the military operation and their identification with the Palestinian cause were perceived' by many as anti-national which created further tensions between Israeli Arabs and Jews.⁹⁵ As discussed earlier, there is a growing gulf between Arabs and Jews of Israel. In the words of one analyst, 'now that alienation between Jews and Arabs has been increasing the Arabs are beginning to call their participation in the country's political system into question and to search for new ways to assert their own interests and demands'.⁹⁶

However, in the 2009 elections political scientists have highlighted one more new factor contributing to the absence of Israeli Arab voters. The rejection of "Future Vision"⁹⁷ documents by the Jewish population of Israel was also one of the reasons that increased the friction between the two communities. Many Israeli Arab leaders applauded the "Future Documents" and many Arab organisations claimed that the document is more reformist than radical in nature. Nevertheless, many Arabs also criticised the document stating that it will

<http://www.idi.org.il/sites/english/ResearchAndPrograms/elections09/Pages/ArabVoterTurnout.aspx#p3>, accessed on 30 March 2012.

⁹³Koren, "Arab Israeli citizens in the 2009 elections: between Israeli citizenship and Palestinian Arab identity", p. 131.

⁹⁴Ilan Peleg, Dov Waxman, *Israel's Palestinians: The Conflict Within*, Cambridge University Press, New York (2011), p. 70.

⁹⁵Tama, "Participation, Abstention and Boycott: Trends in Arab Voter Turnout in Israeli Elections", <http://www.idi.org.il/sites/english/ResearchAndPrograms/elections09/Pages/ArabVoterTurnout.aspx#p3>, accessed on 30 March 2012.

⁹⁶Lars Hänsel, "Israel Election's to the 18th Knesset", *Konrad Adenauer Stiftung*, Berlin (6 April 2009), http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas_16132-544-2-30.pdf?090406133147, accessed on 15 May 2012.

⁹⁷Future Vision documents were four position papers concerning the civic and national status of the Arabs in Israel were published between December 2006 and May 2007. The first document was The Future Vision of the Palestinian Arabs in Israel, the second document was *An Equal Constitution for All: On a Constitution and the Collective Rights of Arab Citizens in Israel*, the third document was *The Democratic Constitution*, and the fourth one was *The Haifa Declaration*.

increase Jewish right wing extremism.⁹⁸ On the other hand the Jew population expressed their strong reaction against “the Future Vision” document. Many termed it as a “declaration of war” and termed Arabs as the “enemy of the state.”⁹⁹

The increasing believes of Israeli Arab in the future vision document also contributed to the decline in the Israeli Arab votes. ‘These documents, which were the first attempt of their kind to formulate a coherent ideological conceptualization of the status of the Arab minority, proposed to establish a bi-national state certainly does little to encourage Arabs to cast their ballot in this year's elections’.¹⁰⁰

Peace initiatives and 2009 Knesset elections

Amidst the turbulent phases of wars, corruption scandals, and coalition compulsions, the Olmert government initiated the peace process with the Palestinian Authority with the objective of the future of Palestine. This peace initiative was brokered by the U.S. and was known as Annapolis conference, as it took place at the U.S. naval base in Annapolis in U.S. and attended by Israel’s Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, PA’s head Mahmoud Abbas, and the U.S. President George W. Bush. Apart from this the meeting was attended by many nations with included most of the Arab nations.¹⁰¹ Annapolis conference brought first such opportunity for negotiation of the future of Palestine and to end the conflict between Israel and PA in seven years. Even the Israeli government got support from the majority of Israelis in Israel. ‘Indeed, as stipulated in US President George W. Bush’s letter of invitation, the Annapolis conference will be a launching point for negotiations leading to an end of the 40-year Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory.’¹⁰² The conference accepted the principal of two-state solution and asserted that two nations Israel and Palestine can co-exist in the region. The most important outcome of the conference was that Israel agreed to negotiate on

⁹⁸Elie Rekhess, “The Arab Minority in Israel: An Analysis of the Future Vision Documents”, *American Jewish Community* (April 2008), p. 20.

⁹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 20.

¹⁰⁰Elie Rekhess, “Israeli Arabs are voting less”, *The Jerusalem Post* (4 Feb 2009), <http://www.israel-palestina.info/modules.php?name=News&file=print&sid=942>, accessed on 2 April 2012.

¹⁰¹“Announcement of Annapolis conference”, *Jewish Virtual Library* (27 November 2007), http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsourc/Peace/announcement_annapolis.html, accessed on 4 April 2012.

¹⁰² “The Annapolis Conference”, *PLO Negotiation Affairs Department*, Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) (November 2007), <http://www.nad-plo.org/userfiles/file/FAQ/annapol.pdf>, accessed on 10 June 2012.

Jerusalem.¹⁰³ Prime Minister Ehud Olmert announced that Israel was committed towards ‘peace and non violence, and to confront terrorism whether committed by Palestinians or Israel and that Israel is determined to bring an end to bloodshed, suffering and decades of conflict between our peoples.’¹⁰⁴

These steps could have been remarkable and reaped high benefits had the negotiation have continued. But, the internal power struggle among the Palestinians and domestic political crisis inside Israel resulted in the suspension of peace talks.

Inside Israel, following the Annapolis conference, Olmert’s willingness to negotiate Jerusalem was vehemently opposed by the far right wing parties. Even many Kadima MKs opposed the proposal. ‘Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, spiritual leader of the ultraorthodox Shas Party, declared that he will order Shas to leave the coalition if Jerusalem is raised in negotiations’.¹⁰⁵ In Palestinian Authority, there was the power struggle going on between Hamas and Fatah and with the result the peace process was stalled.

Such incident had two very important consequences. First, after the western countries and Israel refused to recognise Hamas’ authority over Gaza Latter responded with rocket attacks in the area bordering Israel. Since, Hamas denies Israel’s right to exist no possibility of negotiation was possible at first place and with rocket attacks all hopes of any comeback on the Annapolis conference was lost. Israel responded rocket attacks of Hamas with the war on Gaza and the results have been discussed in the preceding sections.

The second consequence was with the drop of peace negotiations Kadima missed a golden opportunity to attract the Israeli Arab supporters and the way it was oppose even inside Kadima, the Israeli Arab doubted the seriousness of Kadima to clinch a solution on the Palestine issue. In the process they were disillusioned are refrained themselves from extending any support to them. Moreover, with the initiation of war on Hamas, they lost all hopes in Kadima and Labour.

¹⁰³Carol Migdalovitz, “Israeli-Palestinian Peace Process: The Annapolis Conference”, *CRS Report of Congress*, Order Code RS22768 (7 December 2007), p.4.

¹⁰⁴“The Annapolis Conference”, *Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, State of Israel (27 November 2007), <http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/History/Modern+History/Historic+Events/The+Annapolis+Conference+27-Nov-2007.htm>, accessed on 7 April 2012.

¹⁰⁵Carol Migdalovitz, “Israeli-Palestinian Peace Process: The Annapolis Conference”, *CRS Report of Congress*, Order Code RS22768 (7 December 2007), p. 4.

Thus, the issue of Palestine was not directly linked with the voting pattern of Israeli Arabs but there was no doubt that indirectly the issue triggered the absence of Israeli Arabs in the 2009 Knesset elections.

Conclusion

The 2009 Knesset elections which were marked by the Operation Cast Lead overshadowed all the issues during the Israeli Knesset elections. The war was completely mistimed and was partly result of the anxiety created among Ehud Olmert and Ehud Barak. The security question was raised since many months and Hamas continued to attack Israel through rocket launchers. Thus, Barak and Olmert knew that if they went to poll without taking any action against Hamas they had a very narrow chance of winning. Nevertheless, even after the attacks they had to face criticism from both the communities for different reasons.

Many Israeli Arabs who were dissatisfied chose not to vote and the voting participation went all time low. However, other section moved their vote to the Arab parties. In this biggest beneficiary was Hadash who secured 4 seats and also received 16,000 Jewish votes which itself is a remarkable.

The Zionist parties could gather 18 per cent of Israeli Arab votes in which more than six per cent went to Likud and Yisrael Beiteinu, mostly from the Druze community. Kadima received maximum Israeli Arab votes and Labour went down to all time low voting share even in the Arab sector of Israel. However, for both parties biggest loss of votes happened because of their decision in the coalition to attack Gaza just before the elections. Had they have waited for elections to get over; they would have certainly secured more Israeli Arab votes. Not placing Arab candidate in the realistic slot also worked against them. In short, the 18th Knesset elections showed that the Israeli Arab voters despite many other factors like socio-economic improvements and favourable party platform for them moved either towards the Arab political party or decided not to cast their vote. Now only next Knesset elections would decide that this paradigm shift was temporary or permanent in nature.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

Since the first elections in January 1949, the voting pattern of the Israel's Arab citizens attracted considerable attention and scrutiny. During the 1948 and 1966 the voting pattern was dominated by the military restriction imposed upon the Israeli Arabs that resulted in a very limited contact between Jews and Arabs in Israel. Nevertheless, this phase saw high Arab participation in the Knesset elections. The second part (1966-1988) saw the end of military restrictions and the June war and increasing tensions between Israel and Arab countries. Internally, the Israeli Arabs' participation in the election process decrease owing to the general frustration against the government's inability to address their grievances. The Israeli Arab voting share of Mapai/Labour decreased and so did the support for Mapai-affiliated Arab list.

The third phase (1988-1999) saw the formation of the first independent Arab political party, namely Arab Democratic Party (ADP) and this paved the way for other political movements and parties. Moreover, this phase also saw peace talks between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization. With the formation of Palestinian Authority there were hopes for an amicable solution for the Arab-Israeli conflict. But these talks failed and the outbreak of the al-Aqsa intifada signalled an end to the Oslo process.

Since 1948 when they suddenly became a minority within Israel, there were significant progress in the socio-economic conditions of the Israeli Arabs. Almost every indicator of socio-economic conditions saw an upward movement. At the same time, when compared to the Jewish citizens of Israel, the gap were considerable. This is often reflected in their participation in the election. For example, the apathy of the Israeli Arabs were reflected when in February 2001 election for the prime minister only 18 per cent Israeli Arabs exercised their voting rights.

Continuing with these general this inquiry the research sought to examine the underlying reasons for the continued support for the Israeli Arabs for the Zionist parties. The three Knesset elections which were the focus of this research held in 2003, 2006, and 2009, were marked by some remarkable events which influenced voting behaviour of the Israeli Arabs. The 2003 Knesset elections witnessed the influence of Al Aqsa Intifada whereas the 2006

election were held in the aftermath of the internal oppositions within the ruling coalition to the Gaza disengagement plan and the formation of Kadima. The 2009 Knesset elections took place against the backdrop of Israel's conflicts with Hezbollah (2006) and Hamas (2008-09). In those elections all major Zionist parties received the lowest Israeli Arab voting share till date.

The 2003 Knesset elections were heavily influenced by the al-Aqsa of intifada. Calls by some Arab organisations for an election boycott were rejected by the majority of Israeli Arabs and their voting rose again. The Zionist parties received around 30 per cent of the Israeli Arab votes. This per cent was lower than compared to 1999 Knesset elections but huge enough to be an influential block. The elections saw the victory of Likud. Although the Labour party declined, the election marked a remarkable victory for the centrist parties. Shinui gave an impressive performance in the elections. Even in Likud, party showcased its centrist image and kept centrist leaders high on the list. Nevertheless, the Israeli Arab votes went mostly to Labour and Meretz. Interestingly, the Arab parties also failed to impress and their share in the number of seats in the Knesset came down from 10 to eight. This trend clearly indicated that the Israeli Arab community was not satisfied with their Arab leaders who failed to address the socio-economic needs of Israeli Arabs and rather their principal focus was the Palestinians and the al-Aqsa intifada. The decline in the voting participation and share of the Arab parties are examples for the Israeli Arabs dissatisfaction with the Arab leaders.

In the 2006 elections, a new party Kadima was formed by Ariel Sharon who left Likud due to disputes over his Gaza Disengagement plan. Before the elections Kadima showed some promise and worked hard in the Arab towns and villages. However, the strategic mistake made by Kadima of not playing any Israeli Arab (Muslim) on the realistic spots worked against the party in the Arab sector. Likud was almost eliminated from the Arab sector as it failed to get even one percent of Israeli Arab votes. Likud also performed badly in the national level and came down to 12 seats receiving lesser number votes than Shas. Although Labour party could not increase its seats, it increased its voting share in the Arab sector. Kadima and Labour both secured around 20 per cent of the Israeli Arab votes but the combined vote share of all the Zionist political parties could reach only 28 per cent which was two per cent lower than in the 2003 elections.

The 2006 elections were surrounded by the corruption charges and scams. The Israeli public was disappointed by the leaders and second time in a row the voting participation in both

Jewish and Arab sectors went down. Nevertheless, the issues of social development in both Jews and Arabs sector was also highlighted by the political parties. The disappointment of Israeli Arabs with the Arab leaders continued but they succeeded in increasing their Knesset seats compared to the 2003 elections. The radical Arab organisation called for election boycott. The decline in the Arab voting was corresponding to the general decline and highlighted the disillusionment and frustration with their leaders. No doubt the Zionist parties lost their votes but still they cornered around one-third of the Israeli Arab support.

The 2009 Knesset elections can be said as the most important elections among the three. The elections were held earlier their scheduled because of political instability and in election campaign all the parties focussed on the social and economic developments. However, just before the elections the war with Hamas changed all the political equations. The Operation Cast Lead overshadowed all other issues. Many Israeli Arab voters who earlier preferred to vote for Zionist parties either did not vote or choose Arab parties. The Zionist parties could get only 18 per cent of Israeli Arab votes which was around 10 per cent less than the 2006 Knesset elections. Surprisingly, right wing parties Likud and Yisrael Beiteinu got six per cent of Israel Arab votes. However, a close study indicated that most of these votes came from Druze community.

In 2009 elections, despite the socio-economic improvements of Arabs external issues got prominence. Surprisingly, even the intifada in 2003 elections could not influence the Israel Arab voters than the Gaza war. The major reason why Israeli Arabs got so much influenced was that the Gaza war happened just few days before the Knesset elections. First, it was fresh in the mind of Arabs. Second, the Arab political parties exploited this situation in their favour. The Arab political parties performed well and 11 Israeli Arab members entered into Knesset through Arab parties. One Jewish entered Knesset through Hadash list making the Arab political participation in the Knesset to 12.

In 2009, the voting participation of Israeli Arabs went further down. However, unlike last two elections the participation in the Jewish sector did not follow the same trend and rose slightly. This highlights the influence of Operation Cast Lead and call for boycott by the Arab organisations in the 2009 elections.

The four research questions have been answered in the research work. Regarding the first question '*what are the factors that influence Arab voting pattern in the Knesset elections?*',

the research revealed that the Israeli Arabs are influenced by their socio-economic improvements and the realization that it is easier to bring changes through mainstream parties rather than through Arab parties. Zionist parties placing Arab candidates in realistic position has been helpful. Moreover, the election campaigns just before the elections also influence the Arab voters. Nevertheless, there is evidence for a last minute change in the voting preference despite the opinion polls suggesting otherwise. External factors like the issue of Palestine play some role but they do not take precedence over the internal factors highlighted above. Some other factors like Al Aqsa Intifada in 2003 elections, Gaza disengagement plan in 2006, and the Gaza war in 2009, has also played important role in influencing the Israeli Arab voter. In 2009, the Gaza war completely changed the political equation just before the elections.

Regarding the second question, it is clear that there are three major methods which have been used by the Zionist parties to attract the Israeli Arab voters. The first one is placing the Arab candidates on the right spots on the election list. If the Arab candidate is placed high on list and he/she has chances to make it to the Knesset then it is very likely that Arabs will be attracted towards political parties of those candidates. Conversely, in the 2006 elections Kadima suffered because it did not give realistic slots to Arab candidates spot. The second method is political campaign and election manifesto. In 2006, Kadima worked extensively in the Arab villages and enrolled many local Arab leaders to attract the Arab votes. The third method is to bring some changes through the government decisions. Ariel Sharon's Gaza disengagement plan falls in this category. He managed to attract many Arab voters once he formed his own party Kadima.

Regarding the third question on the trends, two patterns can be observed. First, the Israeli Arabs are satisfied with their social and economic progress but they are concerned by the continuing gap between the Jews and Arabs of Israel. They are also aware that the progress made by them in the last decade is slow. Leaders belonging to Arab parties are mostly concerned with the Palestinian issue and the Zionist party leaders are caught in the security angle. Unfortunately, such factors dissatisfy them from both Arab and Jewish leaders. The decline in voting percentage of Israeli Arabs illustrates this pattern.

The final question *How far the Palestinian question affects the Arab voting patterns in the Knesset elections?*, has been answered through the first question. There is no doubt about the fact that Palestinian question has always influenced the Israeli Arab voters, however the

Israeli Arab voters are more concerned about their socio-economic progresses than about the Palestinian question. Despite of Arab parties' aggressive campaigning in support of Palestinian issue it never took precedence over their internal factors. Knesset election in 2009 was an exception but in this case also the issue of Palestine was never in the minds of Arab voters, rather they were angered by the way Israel responded in the war.

Both the hypotheses outlined in this research have been validated. The Israeli Arabs have always been concerned by their improvement in education, health, and economy. Till the phase of military establishment the socio-economic condition of Israeli Arabs was not very good. But it started changing after the military restrictions were abolished. Since then the Israeli Arabs have seen continuous rise in their social and economic conditions. Between 2001 and 2009, which is the period of study the social and economic conditions of Israeli Arabs have in every field. However, the gap between the Jews and Arabs is still persistent. Nevertheless, influenced by these improvements certain section of the Israeli Arabs prefers Zionist mainstream parties, particularly Labour and Kadima after 2006, in the Knesset elections.

Regarding the second hypothesis, it is clear that a section of the Israeli Arab community has shown their no confidence in the Arab parties. The growing frustration among the Israeli Arabs is evident with the falling voting percentage. If one excludes the 2009 elections, which was marked by last minute external factors, in both 2003 and 2006 Knesset elections the Zionist parties got 30 and 28 per cent Arab votes respectively. This means that almost one-third of the voters still preferred Zionist parties. In 2009, eighty per cent Israeli Arab voters voted for Arab parties. However, a close study point out that only 54 per cent of Israeli Arabs exercised their voting rights. This means that less than 50 per cent of Israeli Arabs preferred Arab parties. Thus, in 2009 elections a big section of Israeli Arab voters expressed their no-confidence in the Arab parties.

Whether the shift of Israeli Arab voters from Zionist parties to Arab parties or their decision to not to participate is temporary or permanent can only be known in the next Knesset elections.

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