Appointing Officials in Local Authorities in the Arab Society in the State of Israel

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Abstract: This paper examines the main factors influencing the election and appointment of officials in Arab local authorities in Israel. The election and appointment of officials in Arab local authorities in Israel face significant challenges rooted in social, economic, bureaucratic and political factors. This paper reviews key challenges such as political and clan-based influences, budgetary constraints, a shortage of skilled professionals, governance instability, violence and threats and against officials, and bureaucracy. Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive governmental policies, enhanced transparency, and improved professional training to ensure the effective administration of Arab local authorities.

Keywords: Arab society, local authorities, elections, Israel

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INTRODUCTION

Arab citizens constitute approximately a fifth of Israel's total population (as of 2024), making up about 2 million people. Most of the Arab population resides in homogenous Arab communities, while Arab citizens also live in Jewish cities with mixed population. Most Arab communities and municipalities are located in the Galilee region, in northern Israel (Israel Democracy Institute, 2023).

The municipal status of localities in Israel is typically determined by their population size. Most Arab communities are small to medium in terms of demography and area (Injaz, 2024, p. 11). Local Arab authorities in Israel can be categorized into three main groups: cities (municipalities), local councils, and regional councils (Hamaisi, n.d.). The majority of the Arab population, approximately 80% of Arab communities, lives in independent Arab local authorities, most of them are managed by small local councils (Hamaisi, n.d.) , 15% are cities, and 5% of the communities are included within regional councils (Israel Democracy Institute, 2023).

The local municipalities in the Arab society in Israel play a central role in managing the daily lives of residents, while facing unique challenges arising from social, cultural, and political circumstances. The local Arab municipalities frequently face challenges such as limited resources, dependence on the central government, and shortage of skilled workers and personnel (The Van Leer Jerusalem Institute, 2022).

The appointment of officials in these municipalities reflects the complexities and inner dynamics within Arab society, and directly influences the effectiveness and performance of these local authorities.

PURPOSE

This paper seeks to explore the factors influencing the election and appointment of officials in local authorities within Arab society in Israel, as well as the challenges associated with these processes.

METHOD

This paper **uses** a qualitative research approach based on a review of academic sources, official publications available online, news articles published in the Israeli media, in both English and Hebrew.

CHALLENGES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITIES IN ARAB SOCIETY IN ISRAEL

Local municipalities play an essential role in the daily life of the Arab society in Israel, serving as key institutions for social and economic development in their communities. The local Arab municipalities in Israel face responsibilities and multiple challenges. Some of the major responsibilities and challenges of the Arab local authorities include:

Providing Services
Local authorities are responsible for providing essential services and infrastructure to meet community needs.

Economic Development
They play an important role in promoting economic growth and creating job opportunities for their residents.

Representing the Community
Arab local authorities stand up for their communities' needs and try to influence policy-making at the state level.

Resource Management
Arab local authorities manage the budget and financial resources, including getting government funding and distributing budgets across departments.

Planning and Development
Local authorities engage in long-term planning, developing master plans to guide community development and growth (The Galilee Society, 2022).

THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN IN THE ARAB LOCAL AUTHORITIES IN ISRAEL

The elections for Arab local authorities in Israel are held every five years, same as in all local authorities in the country. These elections follow a system of direct voting for the head of the authority and separate voting for the local council (Hilou, 2013). . To be elected as head of the authority, a candidate must receive at least 40% of the votes. If no candidate reaches this threshold, a second round is held between the two leading candidates. Voter turnout in elections for Arab municipalities and local councils is particularly high, exceeding 80% (Halabi, 2014).

Campaigns in the Arab sector are largely influenced and shaped by traditional culture, with elections often determined by family clans rather than political parties. As a result, recent campaigns focused mostly on the family and clan connections of the candidates (Injaz , 2024, p.23). Public

discourse and debate, therefore, did not focus on the key issues impacting the community's daily lives or which of the candidates can bring a change (Hilou, 2013).

POSITIONS IN ARAB LOCAL AUTHORITIES IN ISRAEL

Positions in local authorities in the Arab society in Israel are similar to those in all local authorities across the country. There are however some positions that are unique to Arab municipalities. For example: a consultant for promoting women's integration, responsible for advancing women's status and participation in the public sphere. In some municipalities, there is also a position dedicated to economic and employment development, aimed at supporting local businesses and creating job opportunities.

FACTORS INFLUENCING ELECTING AND APPOINTING OFFICIALS IN ARAB LOCAL AUTHORITIES IN ISRAEL

The appointment of officials in the Arab local authorities in Israel involves challenges influenced by political, social and economic factors:

Lack of resources and positions
Limited resources
Many Arab local authorities have limited budgets, and this prevents them from offering attractive salaries and attracting skilled professionals (IATF, 2024; Hamaisi, n.d.).

Limited number of positions
The Ministry of Interior approves a limited number of positions, creating an excessive workload for a small number of employees, and this can affect the quality of their work (IATF, 2024).

Shortage of skilled professionals
For some positions in the local authorities there is a shortage of skilled professionals from the Arab sector, which makes it difficult to staff key positions. Another problem is talented employees leaving and moving to the private sector or government institutions, where employment conditions are better than in the Arab local authorities.
There are also difficulties integrating women into senior positions due to social and cultural barriers (IATF, 2024).

Family and clan influence on appointing officials
Arab society in Israel is characterized by a traditional social structure in which the clan and family play a central role. The central role of the family. In most Arab municipalities, voting in local elections is heavily influenced by family ties. Large families join forces to support a specific candidate for the municipal council, increasing their chances of being elected (Injaz, 2024, p, 18).

Clan-based social structure
Clan loyalties significantly influence the electoral process, and candidates are often chosen based on family or personal affiliation rather than professional qualifications. (Rodnitzky, 2018). Without significant clan support, a candidate's chance of being elected is not high. This comes at a price, as those elected with the help of clan votes often find themselves obligated to repay the favor (Medlij, 2020, pp. 54–49). This obligation is expressed in providing favors, such as appointments to positions in municipal institutions and in the local education system, or offering other benefits and concessions.
Local elections in Arab municipalities have a more clan-oriented dimension than a political one, although this dimension still has political significance. This also explains the high participation rates in local elections and the lack of Arab political party involvement in the competition for municipal leadership (Medlij, 2020, pp. 54–49).

Internal politics and management issues
In some Arab local authorities, conflicts and lack of cooperation among council members can lead to stagnation in decision-making processes and to the appointment of personnel based on political compromises.

Intervention of the state in Arab local authorities' affairs
The ministry of Interior sometimes imposes conditions for appointing officials, limiting the ability of heads of authorities to choose and appoint officials. Additionally there is an increased supervision of Arab authorities due to inefficient or problematic financial management, and this sometimes leads to replacing officials by state-appointed officers.

Bureaucracy
The recruitment processes for positions in the local authorities are subject to tendering procedures and cumbersome bureaucracy, which delays filling of essential positions.

Violence against officials in Arab local authorities

In recent years, the rising incidents of violence aimed at public figures and high-ranking employees led to a climate of fear, discouraging capable candidates from entering local politics in Arab local authorities in Israel (Abu Jiab, 2024) Organized crime attempts to influence personnel decisions in order to gain access and control over tenders, jobs and projects

While these issues are known to the authorities, the state does not always provide sufficient protection for public officials, causing potential candidates to avoid these roles (Hamaisi, n.d.).

The Involvement of Organized Crime in Local Elections

Criminal elements and organized crime groups have a presence and influence in local elections in Arab municipalities in Israel.

According to data from the Israel Police, the extent of involvement and influence of organized crime groups in local elections indicates a significant rise in violence against elected officials. These organizations seek to gain control over the resources of local authorities, including tenders and jobs. Controlling decision-making processes in local government can serve as a significant source of income for these criminal elements (Itiel, 2023).

Criminal organizations are interested also in the resources of local authorities, including tenders and jobs. For them, controlling decision-making processes in local government can serve as a significant source of income. The implications are that some heads of local authorities may work not according to the interests of the residents, but rather for the benefit of criminal organizations that promoted them and brought them to the position of head of the authority or council member (Itiel, 2023).

All these factors combined, creates a complex system in which appointing officials is influenced not only by professional qualifications but also by social and political considerations specific to Arab society in Israel (Abu Jiab, 2024).

DISCUSSION

Local Arab authorities, representing about a third of Israel's municipalities, play an important role in Arab social life and have significant influence on the development and advancement of the Arab society in Israel. Most of these authorities suffer from functional, managerial, and financial difficulties due to their independent status.

(Shushan-Refaeli, n.d.)

The challenges faced by Arab local authorities influence the appointment of officials and, as a result, impact their functioning and the well-being of residents (Hilou, 2013). Arab local authorities frequently face financial constraints and a shortage of qualified personnel. Consequently, roles are sometimes assigned based on political or social considerations rather than professional qualifications (The Galilee Society, 2022). Arab municipalities rely heavily on government grants due to low self-generated revenue from property taxes. This dependence creates political pressures that may influence the appointment of officials (Hamaisi, n.d.). Many local authorities are missing essential departments, such as economic development and public relations. Additionally, there is a shortage of permanent staff in key areas like education and infrastructure. Despite the existence of minimum requirements for appointments, there is a lack of effective mechanisms to monitor selection and staffing processes (Hamaisi, n.d.).

The family and clan-based social structure in Arab communities is also one of the challenges facing Arab local authorities in Israel (Injaz , 2024, p.6). Clans and families play a significant role in the election of local authority officials, and as a result, elected officials often feel obligated to their clan and family. This means that appointment of staff to key positions is not always based on professional qualifications but rather on family or clan ties, and this impacts the operation and effectiveness of the local authority and as a result, the well-being of residents (Rodnitzky, 2018).

Another factor influencing the appointment of officials in local authorities in the Arab society in Israel is the levels of violence and crime in Arab society in Israel today.

In recent years, violence in Arab society has become one of the most dangerous phenomena (Itiel, 2023). The rising violence in Arab society in Israel affects the quality of life and standard of living. It leads to migration of population to cities with mixed population and Jewish cities, a loss of personal security among residents, a decline in trust in governmental institutions, and more.

The surge in violence has also reached public officials and government institutions (Injaz , 2024, p.16). There were incidents of shootings targeted at heads of local authorities, their deputies, officials, municipal employees and candidates in municipal elections, as well as murder cases. There were incidents of property vandalism and setting vehicles on fire. In 2023, the Ministry of National Security declared 29 heads of Arab local authorities and 70

Arab local government sector employees as being "under serious threat" compared to 17 and 44, respectively, in 2017 (Israel Democracy Institute, 2023).

These are some of the main challenges facing local authorities in Arab society in Israel.

To address these challenges and others, changes are needed not only at the local government

level but also, and perhaps primarily, at the central government level.

CONCLUSION

The appointment of officials in local authorities in the Arab society in Israel is influenced by several factors, including local politics, budgetary issues, a shortage of manpower, bureaucratic barriers, state intervention, and factors unique to Arab society in Israel, such as cultural influences, social and family structure, and violence.

The challenges posed by these factors in the elections and appointments of officials in Arab local authorities create problems that affect the functioning of local government and the lives and quality of life of residents.

Solving these issues requires change and implementation of a comprehensive government policy, including:

Incentives to attract skilled professionals, providing budgets to improve the salaries and the working conditions. Increasing transparency in appointment processes to reduce nepotistic appointments. Increased enforcement against threats and violence to protect officials as well as resident. Promoting specialized professional training, especially in areas such as urban planning, engineering, and financial management.

Improving and strengthening the relations between the government and Arab authorities, to allow greater managerial flexibility for the authorities and reduce tight supervision.

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