Explainer: What Israel's Arab Parties Stand For

Avraham Spraragen, J Street Policy and Research Coordinator
Liam Hamama, J Street Policy Assistant | NOVEMBER 6, 2026

Gallanter-Winograd Policy Center
A J Street Initiative

Israel's Arab parties, which represent roughly 20 percent of its population, secured an unprecedented 19 seats in the recent election. As debate continues over whether Jewish opposition leaders will partner with the Arab parties to bring down Prime Minister Netanyahu, this explainer breaks down what each of these parties – Hadash, Ta'al, Balad, and Ra'am – actually stands for. The Arab parties are not a monolith, and they have deep policy and ideological differences with the Jewish-led opposition parties. Understanding where they stand is vital to understanding both the challenges of forming a new government and the potential areas for cooperation.

The Joint List

The Joint List is a coalition of three Arab parties, Hadash, Ta'al, and Balad. Hadash and Ta'al have run together since 2015, while their alliance with Balad has been more volatile. The three parties ran together in 2026 to ensure they all crossed the electoral threshold.

All three parties emphasize equality for Israel's Arab citizens and an end to Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. Hadash is an Arab-Jewish socialist party, Ta'al is a secular Arab party, and Balad is a Palestinian nationalist party. As part of its Palestinian nationalism, Balad has historically gone further than the other two parties in advocating for a fundamental redefinition of Israel's identity as a Jewish state, but this is not reflected in the Joint List's platform.

Leadership

Hadash: Dr. Yousef Jabareen is the leader of Hadash and chair of the Joint List. Jabareen, who holds a PhD in law from Georgetown University, was chosen to succeed Ayman Odeh as Hadash leader in May 2026.

Ta'al: Dr. Ahmad Tibi, a physician and former advisor to then-PLO leader Yasser Arafat, has served in the Knesset since 1999, including several terms as deputy speaker.

Balad: Sami Abu Shehadeh, a former Knesset member and historian from Jaffa, is Balad chairman. Last month, he withdrew his candidacy from the Israeli election after the Supreme Court indicated it would approve his disqualification over an article he published the day after October 7, describing the attack as an important historical event and suggesting that others could learn from Hamas's success in surprising Israel. Abu Shehadeh has since expressed regret for the article and remains chairman, but was replaced on the Joint List by another Balad candidate, Bakhar Awawdeh.

Key Positions

Israel as a Jewish state: The Joint List advocates for Israel to provide full civic, national, and political equality to all its citizens.

West Bank: The Joint List supports a peace agreement that includes an end to the occupation and Israeli settlement activity in the West Bank, as well as the establishment of a Palestinian state alongside Israel based on the 1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital. This closely aligns with the PLO's position.

Gaza: The Joint List describes the war in Gaza as a genocide and calls for an end to Israel's military campaign there.

October 7: The Joint List unequivocally condemns the October 7 Hamas massacre. The Balad leader has apologized for an article he published the day after the massacre that did not condemn it.

Hamas as a terrorist organization: The Joint List declines to recognize Hamas as a terrorist organization, although it condemns Hamas's killing of civilians.

Approach to the 2026 Election

The Joint List's central goal in the 2026 election was to replace the Netanyahu government, with a particular focus on unseating far-right National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir. Along with many Arab citizens, the Joint List's leaders blame Ben-Gvir for the skyrocketing violent crime in the Arab community. That, combined with the Netanyahu government's policies in Gaza and the West Bank, led Jabareen to say the Joint List was prepared to use "all available tools" to remove the government.

The Joint List's leaders have offered a parliamentary safety net to an Eisenkot-led minority government, meaning they would support its formation and continued survival without formally joining the coalition. However, they have indicated that they would seek concessions on combating crime in the Arab community and on the Palestinian file in exchange for this support.

Areas of Agreement with the Eisenkot Bloc

The Joint List shares the Eisenkot bloc's urgency to remove Netanyahu's far-right government from power. It also agrees with the Eisenkot bloc on the need to protect Israel's democratic institutions, undo elements of Netanyahu's judicial coup, and establish a non-partisan state commission of inquiry into October 7. The final area of significant agreement is their shared focus on combating rising crime in the Arab community and improving government services in Arab municipalities.

Areas of Disagreement with the Eisenkot Bloc

Universal Conscription: The Joint List rejects both compulsory military service and civil service for Arab citizens, arguing that their rights should not be conditioned on service. The Eisenkot bloc supports passing a universal conscription law.

West Bank occupation, settlement construction, and Palestinian statehood: The Joint List calls for ending the occupation and Israeli settlement activity, and establishing an independent

Palestinian state. This directly contradicts the positions of B'Yachad (Bennett) and Yisrael Beiteinu (Lieberman), both of which strongly oppose the establishment of a Palestinian state and support the annexation of Area C – roughly 60 percent of the West Bank. These positions also conflict with Yashar's (Eisenkot) support for construction in settlements authorized by the Israeli government.

The war in Gaza: Whereas the Joint List describes Israel's war in Gaza as a genocide, the Jewish-led opposition parties remain broadly supportive of the IDF's military tactics in the Strip. The Joint List's leaders call for a full Israeli withdrawal from Gaza. By contrast, Eisenkot has pledged that within 18 months of taking office, Hamas would either disarm through a political agreement (similar to the one already agreed to by Hamas with the Board of Peace) or Israel would disarm it by force. Lieberman and Bennett have gone further, calling for renewed military action aimed at decisively defeating Hamas.

Ra'am

Leadership: Mansour Abbas, a former dentist and practicing imam, leads the party and became the first Arab party leader to join an Israeli governing coalition in 2021. While serving in the Bennett-Lapid government, Abbas secured an unprecedented multibillion-dollar budget for the Arab community.

Key Positions

Ideology: Ra'am is a socially conservative party that previously functioned as the political wing of the Southern Branch of the Islamic Movement, which advocates for Islam in Israel. In July, Ra'am separated from the Islamic Movement and its guiding Shura Council, opening the door to non-Muslims. Ahead of the recent election, Abbas recruited his party's first-ever Jewish candidate, Yoav Segalovitz, who resigned from the Yesh Atid party and now holds the number two spot on the Ra'am list. Segalovitz developed relationships within Arab society during his career in Israeli law enforcement and later as deputy public security minister in the Bennett-Lapid government.

Israel as a Jewish state: Unlike the other Arab parties, Ra'am has publicly acknowledged Israel's Jewish character, even as it continues to affirm Palestinian national identity.

West Bank: Ra'am endorses the two-state solution based on the 1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as Palestine's capital.

Gaza: Ra'am has called for an end to Israel's military campaign in Gaza, but has not declared that it constitutes genocide.

October 7: Ra'am unequivocally condemns the October 7 Hamas massacre as contrary to the "values of Islam."

Hamas as a terrorist organization: Ra'am supports disarming Hamas and holding it to account for its crimes, but has declined to recognize Hamas as a terrorist organization.

Approach to the 2026 Election

Ra'am's central objective in the 2026 election was to return to government and secure greater investment in the Arab community, particularly to combat organized crime and improve housing, infrastructure, and economic opportunities. Unlike Hadash, Ta'al, and Balad, Ra'am declined to join the reconstituted Joint List and instead pursued an independent electoral strategy that emphasized its willingness to cooperate with Jewish-led opposition parties. Building on its participation in the 2021-22 Bennett-Lapid coalition, Abbas argued that Arab citizens could achieve more by participating directly in government than by remaining in the opposition.

Areas of Agreement with the Eisenkot Bloc

Ra'am shares the Eisenkot bloc's interest in replacing the Netanyahu government and improving public security, particularly by strengthening law enforcement against rising crime in the Arab community. The parties also broadly agree on the importance of protecting democratic institutions, improving Arab-Jewish relations, and increasing investment in underserved Arab municipalities.

Areas of Disagreement with the Eisenkot Bloc

Universal Conscription: Like the Joint List, Ra'am opposes compulsory military service for Arab citizens. However, Mansour Abbas has said he is open to developing a civil service program that "meets both the needs of the Arab youth and broader Israeli expectations." While he has at times been ambiguous about whether such a program should be mandatory or voluntary, he has since clarified that he supports voluntary service.

Ra'am disagrees with Eisenkot, Bennett, and Lieberman on West Bank policy. However, Abbas maintains that these disagreements over the conflict should not preclude cooperation on issues affecting Arab citizens.

Ra'am has consistently opposed Israel's military campaign in Gaza and has advocated for a diplomatic resolution based on Palestinian statehood. Unlike the other Arab party leaders, Abbas has generally avoided making the Gaza war a centerpiece of Ra'am's strategy, instead emphasizing pragmatic cooperation on shared interests with potential Jewish coalition partners.

Conclusion

Israel's four Arab parties largely agree on policy concerning Arab citizens and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, even as they emphasize different issues. This week, the Joint List and Ra'am formally recommended Eisenkot to form the next government. It remains to be seen whether the Arab and Jewish opposition leaders can set aside their differences and form a coalition that finally ends Netanyahu's reign and restores Israel's democratic institutions. Arab-Jewish partnership in government would also likely advance the parties' shared goal of protecting Arab citizens and could open the door to future progress on the Palestinian issue.