In the run-up to the Israeli parliamentary elections on October 27, FokusIsrael.ch is profiling the most important political leaders of the Jewish state. This week, the spotlight is on the leaders of the Arab three-party coalition: Yousef Jabareen of the "Hadash" party, Ahmed Tibi of "Ta'al," and Sami Abu Shehadeh of "Balad."

By Jan Kapusnak

The three Arab parties—"Hadash," "Ta'al," and "Balad"—have reunited ahead of the October 27 election. Their leaders agree on the need to remove Benjamin Netanyahu from the office of prime minister and to strengthen Arab representation. However, they remain divided on issues of ideology, political participation, and the nature of the State of Israel.

Joint list with three, instead of four, parties

When the four main parties representing Israel's Arab citizens ran together for the first time in 2015, this joint list became the third-largest faction in the Knesset. It united communists, Palestinian nationalists, Islamists, and local politicians. In 2015, the alliance won 13 seats, and in March 2020, it even secured 15 seats in the 120-member Israeli parliament.

Later, the four-party alliance fell apart over the question of what it wanted to achieve in the Knesset. Even before the 2021 elections, the Islamist party Ra'am withdrew from the alliance for this reason. It is running on its own again this time. However, "Hadash," "Ta'al," and "Balad" have once again formed a three-party alliance for the election on October 27. "Hadash" Chairman Yousef Jabareen heads the joint ticket, followed by "Ta'al" founder Ahmad Tibi and "Balad" leader Sami Abu Shehadeh.

By forming this alliance, the three parties effectively eliminate the risk that Arab votes will be "wasted" because the 3.25 percent threshold required to enter the Knesset is not met. In addition, the unified three-party list could lead to higher voter turnout among Arab voters.

Yousef Jabareen: The Civil Rights Lawyer

A legal scholar from Umm al-Fahm, Yousef Jabareen, now 54, studied at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, as well as at the American University and Georgetown

University in Washington. Before entering politics, he taught law and specialized in constitutional law, minority rights, and the legal status of Arab citizens of Israel.

Yousef Jabareen served as a member of the Knesset from 2015 to 2021. In May 2026, Hadash elected him as its chairman with 82 percent of the vote. Jabareen stands for continuity in terms of policy, but for a change in style. His public discourse is characterized more by legal arguments than by populist rhetoric. His party, “Hadash, the Democratic Front for Peace and Equality,” was founded in 1977 around Israel’s communist movement. It defines itself as a Jewish-Arab party and combines socialism, support for a Palestinian state, opposition to the occupation, and full civil equality.

Calls for greater equality take center stage

Jabareen links calls for greater civil equality with opposition to Israel’s constitutional identity as the nation-state of the Jewish people. After the 2018 Nation-State Law went into effect, he claimed that it “fosters hatred against Arabs and enables exclusion.” And he warned that the law could lead to segregation in the civil service.

Eight years later, this prediction has not come true. The law did not introduce segregation and did not abolish the individual rights protected by Israel’s other Basic Laws. In 2021, the Supreme Court upheld the law by a vote of 10 to 1 and ruled that it did not undermine Israel’s democratic character.

Yousef Jabareen also advocates for stronger measures against organized crime, increased funding for Arab communities, and renewed negotiations on Palestinian statehood. Prior to the elections, he did not openly express support for potentially joining a future coalition government, but he did not rule it out outright either.

Ahmad Tibi: The Indispensable Veteran

Ahmad Tibi was born in Tayibe in 1958 and studied medicine at the Hebrew University. From 1993 to 1999, he served as a political advisor to PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat and represented the Palestinian delegation as its spokesperson during the Wye River negotiations in 1998. He left that position before being elected to the Knesset in 1999, but his close ties to Arafat remained a source of mistrust among many Jewish Israelis. In 2003, the Central Elections Committee disqualified him on

the grounds that his support for Arafat amounted to support for terrorism. However, the Israeli Supreme Court unanimously overturned this decision.

Tibi founded “Ta’al, the Arab Movement for Renewal” in 1996. The secular party supports Palestinian statehood and civil equality. It focuses on issues such as affordable housing, health care, and public services. Ahmad Tibi’s familiarity with parliamentary procedures, his proficiency in Arabic and Hebrew, and decades of experience negotiating legislation, budgets, and committee assignments make him the most experienced politician in the three-party alliance.

Sharp rhetoric, pragmatic politics

His rhetoric can be far harsher than his parliamentary pragmatism. At a Palestinian event in 2012, Tibi referred to martyrs as “symbols of the homeland” and said there was “nothing more praiseworthy than those who die for their country.” The Knesset Ethics Committee reprimanded him for this. But Tibi replied that a “shahid” (martyr) is not a terrorist, but rather someone who has sacrificed himself for his country and died for it.

After October 7, Tibi condemned the massacre of Israeli civilians. But he accused the government of persecuting Arab citizens for showing sympathy for Gaza. In June 2024, he said that Israel had become an “ethnocracy for Jews only” and described the national atmosphere as “almost fascist.” This accusation is difficult to reconcile with Arab citizens’ full right to vote, their representation in parliament, and their access to independent courts. It does, however, illustrate the kind of polemical rhetoric Tibi uses to win over his supporters.

His influence was also evident in the negotiations for the current three-party coalition. Although Yousef Jabareen officially heads the list, Ahmad Tibi remains its indispensable negotiator.

Sami Abu Shehadeh: The Palestinian Nationalist

Sami Abu Shehadeh, at 50 the youngest of the three party leaders, represents the most uncompromising ideological wing of the three-party alliance. Born in Lod and raised in Jaffa, he studied Middle Eastern history at Tel Aviv University and researched Jaffa during the British Mandate. He served on the Tel Aviv-Jaffa City Council, was elected to the Knesset in 2019, and has led the “Balad” party since

2021.

“Balad, the National Democratic Assembly,” is a secular Palestinian nationalist party. It calls for a “state of all its citizens” instead of a Jewish state, collective rights for Arab citizens, Palestinian statehood, withdrawal from the territories occupied in 1967, and a right of return for Palestinian refugees. Its supporters view these as demands for equal citizenship. Its opponents see them as calling for the abolition of the Jewish state.

Call for the abolition of Israel as a Jewish state

In an interview in 2021, Abu Shehadeh described Israel as “a colonial state founded on the ruins of our people.” Yet in the same interview, he also said, “We recognize the right of Jews in Palestine to self-determination.” A few weeks ago, however, he called for Israel to stop being a Jewish state and to introduce an immigration law based on equal rights, while Jews would retain their collective national rights. In reality, this would replace the Jewish state of Israel with a binational or purely civic state.

In September, the “Otzma Yehudit” (Jewish Power) party and its leader, Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir, asked the Central Elections Committee to bar Sami Abu Shehadeh from running for the Knesset again. They cited an Arabic-language article from 2023, which they interpreted as his endorsement of the Hamas massacre on October 7. In his response, Abu Shehadeh denied having praised the massacre or supported armed struggle. He argued that in the article, he had advocated for a diplomatic process led by the Palestinian Authority and the Arab states. However, he acknowledged that publishing the article had been a mistake.

Alliance Without the Participation of “Ra’am”

“Ra’am,” the absent fourth party representing Israel’s Arab citizens, shapes the alliance almost as much as its three members. “Ra’am” leader Mansour Abbas was willing to join the alliance only if it had allowed him to negotiate a possible role in the government independently of the other three parties after the elections. However, the other three members of the alliance rejected this. As a result, “Ra’am” is now running on its own.

While “Ra’am” is open to rejoining the government, “Hadash” and “Ta’al” would at

least still be willing to support a governing coalition from outside. For “Balad,” on the other hand, even this form of cooperation is virtually impossible, as the party rejects the Jewish state as such.

14 seats predicted for the Arab parties

In two new election polls, the joint three-party list of Arab parties was projected to win eight seats in the Israeli parliament, while “Ra’am” was projected to win six. One of these polls shows Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s bloc with a total of 54 seats, slightly ahead of the opposition, which is projected to win 52 seats. The other poll gave the opposition 55 seats and Netanyahu’s bloc 51.

According to the results, both polls conclude that neither bloc can reach the 61 seats needed to form a government in the 120-member parliament. Nevertheless, with the exception of Yair Golan’s “Democrats,” all opposition parties continue to rule out including Arab parties in a potential coalition.

It remains to be seen what the three-party alliance aims to achieve.

Voter turnout will have a decisive impact on the outcome on October 27. The alliance of “Hadash,” “Ta’al,” and “Balad” has eliminated the risk for Arab voters that their votes would be wasted because the 3.25 percent electoral threshold would not be met—as might have happened had the three parties run separately. But the alliance has not yet answered the central question of what it ultimately aims to achieve without cooperating with the other parties represented in the Knesset.

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Jan Kapusnak is a political analyst and author. He lives in Tel Aviv.