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Our study examines the relationship between the socio-economic transformation of Arabs in Israel and changes in their voting patterns. We draw on 80 Arab localities with election results and socio-economic indicators from seven points in time between 1996 and 2015, which demonstrate variances in political preferences and socioeconomic status across time and localities. We find that an increase in median age and a decrease in the dependency ratio, which indicates a demographic transition, are associated with a decrease in the vote share of Zionist Parties. We also find that an increase in standard of living indicators is associated with a rise in voter turnout and vote share for Arab Parties. When viewed from the lens of existing literature on ethnic minorities and economic vote theory, one can interpret these results as a political maturation of Arabs in Israel, who, with social and economic modernization, become more politically engaged and politically independent.

Keywords: Israel; elections; Arabs;

Over the last few decades, Israeli Arabs have gone through three major developments. The first is a steady increase in human capital and standard of living (Yashiv & Kasir, 2018). The second is a demographic transition, namely a steady decline in fertility and birth rate (Winckler, 2002; Yashiv & Kasir, 2018). Thirdly, Arab voting patterns have evolved, with a transition from Zionist parties to Arab parties, or to voter abstention. Are these three developments related? In this paper, we apply the theory of economic voting to understand the relationship between these changes. Determining the nature of this relationship will help inform decision-makers about the political consequences of economic development.

"Classic" economic voting theory states that voters tend to reward incumbents in periods of economic prosperity (Lewis-Beck & Paldam, 2000), and punish them in periods of economic decline (Duch & Stevenson, 2008; Lewis-Beck, 1986; Lewis-Beck & Stegmaier, 2007; 2008). High-income individuals are also more likely to vote and engage in politics compared to low-income individuals (Verba, Nie, & Kim, 1987; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995). The relationship between socioeconomic status and voting has been previously studied in the context of Israel (Afriat & Dahan, 2010). Researchers examined the cause for the steady decrease in turnout for Israeli general elections from 1996 to 2006. They found that while turnout decreased across all localities, localities which experienced a lower rate of household income growth also experienced a greater drop in turnout (Afriat & Dahan, 2010).

When considering the political behavior of minority voters, we see that ethnic minorities, especially immigrants, tend to support left-wing parties (Bergh & Bjørklund, 2011; De la Garza & Cortina, 2007; Teney, Jacobs, Rea, & Delwit, 2010; Marcos-Marne, 2017). This tendency can be explained through two principal observations. The first is greater visibility and representation of ethnic minorities amongst the elected officials of left-wing parties (Teney, Jacobs, Rea, & Delwit, 2010). The second is that left-wing parties usually promote interventionist economic policies in order to close socioeconomic gaps; these benefit ethnic minorities, who are typically less wealthy (Marcos-Marne, 2017). Given that research on the voting patterns of minorities, especially non-immigrant ones, is sparse, this paper stands to make a significant contribution to the literature. The salience of this paper will increase over time, as the descendants of immigrants across different national contexts will constitute large, non-immigrant minorities in their respective countries.

The use of economic voting theory in this paper is complemented with the use of instrumental versus expressive voting theory. This theory creates a distinction between two types of voting motive. The first is "instrumental voting", which is motivated by anticipated benefits to the individual voter's material welfare stemming from a particular election outcome. The previously mentioned theory of economic voting, which states that politicians are rewarded for bringing or sustaining economic prosperity, is understood as "instrumental voting" within the terms of instrumental versus expressive voting theory. Another example of instrumental voting is voter desire to receive material benefits from a future government (Buchanan & Yoon, 2004). By

contrast, "expressive voting" is motivated by concerns that are not purely economic, and that are not related to the anticipation of material gain from the outcome of a given election (Brennan & Hamlin, 2000; Hamlin & Jennings, 2011; Brennan & Brooks, 2013). One of the main motives for expressive voting is that of social identification (Hamlin & Jennings, 2011). A good example for social identification associated with high levels of mobilization can be found if we look at municipal elections in Arab localities in which extended family or hamula identity (Ben-Bassat & Dahan, 2012) and religious identity (Hillman, Metsuyanim, & Potrafke, 2015) are associated with high turnout.

Voting patterns of Arabs in Israel

In the early years of Israeli statehood, Arab turnout in general elections was high: around 80%-90% in elections held in the years 1949-1969 (Israel Democracy Institute, 2009).[1] Their votes were divided between Arab satellite parties of Mapai, the dominant party in Israeli politics until 1977, and the Israeli communist party Maki. The satellite parties of Mapai were formed as part of a patronage system wherein localities in which the satellite parties enjoyed a high vote share would receive a better level of public funding and resources. Maki attracted Arab voters who had not been coopted by Mapai. Along with its later radical left successors, Rakach and Hadash, it remained outside of the Israeli political mainstream. The satellite parties faded away in the seventies. The system of patronage continued, and Arabs moved to vote directly for Zionist, especially Zionist Left parties such as the Israeli Labor Party, which was the successor of Mapai. "Anti-establishment" Arab voters continued voting for Hadash and for smaller binational left-wing parties.

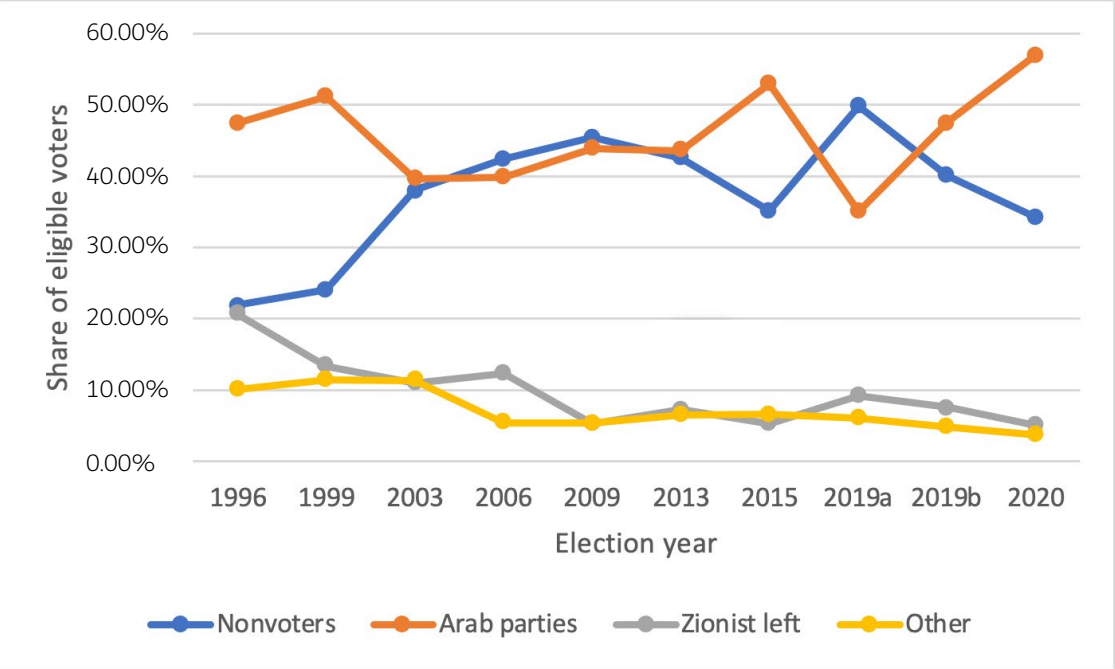
The 1990s saw significant change, in that for the first time, independent Arab parties (who were neither communist nor officially binational, like Hadash) gained seats in the Knesset. These parties, along with Hadash, were also outside of the Israeli political mainstream. They represented a variety of political ideologies, such as socialism (Hadash), Islamism (Ra'am), liberalism (Ta'al), and Arab nationalism (Balad). In practice, Israeli Jewish politicians and media treated them as a single block of "Arab parties". On the central issue of the day, namely the peace process and the future of the West Bank and Gaza, they all had positions considered 'radical' by the mainstream. As such, they were never part of a ruling coalition. However, Hadash and the Democratic Arab Party[2] (Mada) did provide votes to the Rabin government, passing votes of confidence and state budget confirmations in the period 1992-1995. In return for this support, they gained additional budgets for Arab municipalities and for infrastructure development projects. The emergence of these parties led to many Arab voters leaving the Zionist Left parties.

1. This turnout rate later decreased to about 70%-80%, but remained very close to the Jewish turnout rate by the time of the 1999 elections.

2. A small Arab party that was elected to the Knesset in 1992, and merged with Ra'am before the 1996 elections.

A decline in the turnout of Arab voters followed the Second Intifada and the clashes with Israeli police in October 2000 (Figure 1). It took until 2015, when the four Arab parties united to form the Joint List, for Arab turnout to rebound. The political power of this union can be seen in the sharp decrease in turnout and vote share for Arab parties that occurred in the April 2019 elections when the List had split, and the recovery of the turnout in September 2019 when the List reunited. The vote share for Zionist Left parties continued to decrease in that period as well, excepting for a brief plateau in April 2019.

Figure 1: Voting trends in Arab localities, 1996-2020



Source: Israel's central elections commission

This is the share of voters in each political block out of eligible voters in all Arab localities, including smaller localities who are not included in the statistical analysis. Two general elections were held in 2019, on April and September, marked 2019a and 2019b, respectively. See the Data and Methods section for further information on the composition and division of political blocks.

Data and Methods

We use two data sources in our paper. The first is election results for Israeli general elections held from 1996 to 2020,[3] in which a new Knesset was elected.[4] This data includes the number of

3. We exclude the 2001 special elections because they were only for Prime Minister, not for the Knesset. Moreover, in the 1996 and 1999 elections, which included two ballots, we exclude the Prime Minister ballot.

4. For more information about the Israeli political system, see section 3.4 of Adnan and Miaari (2018).

eligible voters, total voters, and the number of ballots cast for each party or list in each locality. We include only the 123 localities defined as "Arab"[5] by the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics (ICBS). With almost every election, the composition of the Arab parties has changed. We have therefore divided eligible voters into four political blocs: "nonvoters", "Arab parties", "Zionist left" and "other."

We calculate nonvoters as the number of eligible voters minus the number of voters. The distinction of nonvoters is important, as to abstain from voting is itself a political act, particularly in this context. This is due to the fact that influential Arab political movements have promoted the boycotting of general elections, and there is marked difference between the historically high voting share in municipal elections (Ben-Bassat & Dahan, 2012) and the historically low share in general elections. Both indicate that not voting itself represents a legitimate stance which a politically engaged public might choose to adopt. "Arab parties" are non-Zionist parties that cater specifically to Arab voters, who make up most of their voters. From 1996 to 2015, they included four major parties, who ran in several different alignments: The socialist Hadash,[6] Islamist Ra'am, nationalist Balad, and liberal Ta'al. "Zionist left" includes all left and center-left Zionist parties, whose majority of voters are Jewish. These include, among others, the Israeli Labor Party, Meretz, Kadima, Blue and White, and Yesh Atid. Starting in the Nineties, and especially after the Second Intifada, many of these parties (especially the newer ones) began defining themselves as "center parties". However, their voters, at least the Jewish ones, mostly came from the Israeli Labor Party and Meretz (Mushkin, 2018), implying a continuation of the same political identity. "Other" includes all Zionist rightwing parties and Jewish religious and Haredi parties. This category also includes very small parties, who received less than 1% of the votes in the general election, white ballots, and disqualified ballots.[7] As an alternative specification, we also join "Other" and "Zionist left" to a single category called "Zionist".

The second data source we use is taken from ICBS publications from the years 1995-2015. The ICBS periodically releases data on the socioeconomic characteristics of localities that have an independent municipality.[8] These publications include a Municipal Socioeconomic Index (MSI) calculated by the ICBS for each locality, and locality level data for each of the indicators used to calculate it. The frequency of publication is irregular, and the methods and indicators for calculating the MSI have changed over time. We therefore use only five indicators which consistently appear in all publications: (1) The median age of locality residents. (2) The dependency ratio, calculated as the size of dependent population (children and youths of ages 0-19 plus elderly of ages 65 and

5. About 73% of Arabs in Israel live in these localities. 26% live in 6 localities the ICBS defines as "mixed", and only 1% live in Jewish localities (Yashiv & Kasir, 2018).

6. Who is officially a bi-national Arab-Jewish party, but with relatively few Jewish voters and MKs (Members of the Knesset)

7. The share of small parties, white and disqualified ballots is negligible, and they are included in this category for simplicity.

8. Excluding very small localities, with populations of less than 2000, who are incorporated in regional councils.

above) divided by the size of working age population (ages 20-64). (3) The average household income per capita. (4) The share of subminimum wage earners, which is the share of employees and independent workers (out of all employees and independent workers) whose monthly income is under the statutory minimum wage for a full-time worker. (5) The share of individuals (out of the total population) receiving a maintenance stipend from the National Insurance Institute.[9] We include only the 80 Arab localities who were surveyed.

Table 1: Pairing election years with survey years

Election year	Survey year
1996	1995
1999	1999
2003	2003
2006	2006
2009	2008
2013	2013
2015	2015

We pair each set of election results with a set of socioeconomic indicators from the most contemporaneous ICBS survey year, as per Table 1. The two 2019 elections and the 2020 election are not included in the data because no appropriate ICBS survey data is available after 2015. Also excluded are small localities which were not surveyed separately by the ICBS. The result is a panel of 80 localities[10] over seven time periods from 1996 to 2015. We then run a series of fixed effects regressions. In each regression, the dependent variable is the vote share for one of the political blocks in locality in time , while the independent variables are the observed socioeconomic characteristics for that locality at that time.

$$Vote\ share_{i,t} = \alpha + \beta X_{i,t} + \gamma_i + \delta_t + \varepsilon_{i,t}$$

Let $X_{i,t}$ be a vector of our five observed socioeconomic characteristics: median age, dependency ratio, natural logarithm of real average household income per capita, share of subminimum wage earners, and share of individuals receiving income maintenance. Let γ_i be the locality fixed effect, δ_t the time fixed effect and $\varepsilon_{i,t}$ the independent error.

9. We treat the possible omitted variable bias with a fixed effects model.

10. 58 of the settlements appear on all time period. 13 were surveyed only six times by the CBS, three localities were surveyed only five times, 5 were surveyed only four times, and one was surveyed only three times. In most cases, these were small localities who were under the minimum population threshold (see footnote 6) in earlier surveys and were included only later. In a few cases, like the case of the localities Jatt and Baqa Al-Gharbiyye, two or more localities were united under the same municipality in a specific survey year (as a result of municipal reforms that were later overturned) and were not surveyed separately.

Results

Descriptive statistics are shown in Table 2, and results for the regression are given in Table 3. We observe that an increase of one standard deviation in median age is associated with a change of 8.56 percentage points (pp) in Nonvoting share and a change of -4.09 pp in the vote share of Arab parties, -4.59 pp for Zionist left, and -4.44 pp for Zionist parties generally. An increase of one standard deviation in the dependency ratio is associated with a change of -6.94 pp in the vote share of Arab parties and a change of 2.78 pp in the vote share of other parties and 4.26 pp in the vote share of all Zionist parties. An increase of 1% in household income is associated with a change of -10 pp in the Zionist Left vote share and -7.1 pp in the vote share of all Zionist Parties. An increase of one standard deviation in subminimum wage earners share is associated with a change of 3.9 pp in the Nonvoters share and of -1.51 pp, -3.13 pp and -2.4 pp in the voting shares of Arab parties, Zionist left, and all Zionist parties, respectively. An increase of one standard deviation in the share of income maintenance recipients is associated with a change of 4.04 pp in the share of Nonvoters and -2.64 pp and -3.2 pp in the vote share of other parties and Zionist parties, respectively. Our model explains much of the variation in the Nonvoters share and in the vote share of Zionist left parties, but little of the variation in the vote share of Arab parties and other parties.

Table 2: descriptive statistics

Variable	Observations	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Nonvoters	522	0.372	0.157	0.056	0.973
Arab parties	522	0.407	0.212	0.000	0.831
Zionist left	522	0.124	0.110	0.001	0.657
Other	522	0.098	0.101	0.006	0.566
All Zionist parties (left + other)	522	0.222	0.182	0.014	0.841
Median age	522	21.198	3.891	12.000	33.000
Dependency ratio	522	1.093	0.291	0.609	2.252
Real household income per capita in NIS (2008 prices)	522	1,960.954	659.972	705.044	4,683.708
Subminimum wage earners share	522	0.509	0.064	0.322	0.723
Recipients of income maintenance share	522	0.036	0.023	0.000	0.133

Source: ICBS, Israeli Election Commission.

Table 3: Regression results

Variables	Nonvoters	Arab parties	Zionist left	Other	All Zionist parties (left + other)
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Median age	**0.0220*** **	**-0.0105** **	**-0.0118*** **	0.000355	**-0.0114*** **
	(0.00541)	(0.00476)	(0.00315)	(0.00319)	(0.00392)
Dependency ratio	0.0914	**-0.238*** **	0.0506	**0.0955** **	**0.146*** **
	(0.0702)	(0.0617)	(0.0409)	(0.0415)	(0.0508)
ln(Income per capita)	0.0346	0.0367	**-0.1000*** **	0.0288	**-0.0712*** **
	(0.0335)	(0.0295)	(0.0195)	(0.0198)	(0.0243)
Subminimum wage earners share	**0.614*** **	**-0.237** **	**-0.493*** **	**0.116**	**-0.377*** **
	(0.128)	(0.112)	(0.0743)	(0.0753)	(0.0923)
Recipients of income maintenance share	**1.789*** **	-0.371	-0.249	**-1.170*** **	**-1.419*** **
	(0.405)	(0.356)	(0.236)	(0.239)	(0.293)
Constant	**-0.830** **	**0.747** **	**1.331*** **	-0.248	**1.083*** **
	(0.329)	(0.289)	(0.191)	(0.194)	(0.238)
Observations	522	522	522	522	522
Number of localities	80	80	80	80	80
Adjusted R-squared	0.227	-0.097	0.406	-0.003	0.471

Robust standard errors are reported in parentheses. The symbols *, **, *** represent statistical significance at the 10, 5, and 1 percent levels.

Discussion

The results of our econometric analysis indicate several interesting trends. The first is that the demographic transition, as indicated by an increase in the median age and a decrease in the dependency ratio, is associated with the abandonment of Zionist parties, especially the Zionist left. The second is that rising standard of living and human capital, as indicated by an increase in household income and a decrease in both subminimum earners and income maintenance recipients, is weakly associated with a rise in the Arab parties vote share. The third is that poverty, as indicated by the share of income maintenance recipients, is associated with not voting. How can we interpret our results, including both the relationships indicated by the model and the patterns which cannot be explained by it, in the context of economic voting theories?

Relation to political voting theory

The steady rise in absolute household income in Arab households should have been associated with an increase in voter participation (Verba, Nie, & Kim, 1987; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995). The reality is the opposite: there is a long-term contraction in the share of Arab voters from at least the early 2000s until 2015 (Figure 1). This pattern was reversed only after the Joint List was formed. Also, while Arabs supported left-wing parties historically, they abandoned Zionist left parties and later supported the Joint List, which is considered a radical left coalition party by the Israeli Jewish public. In reality it contains many non left-wing elements.

However, if we think of abstaining from voting as an active political stance, we can reframe this process as one indicating political maturation. In this light, the modernization process decreased the dependence on ruling Zionist parties for public goods and services. Arab voters then turned to parties that better reflected their ideologies, hence the rise in vote share for all Arab parties since the nineties. The post-2015 trend may represent a new political priority for the Arab voter: the sustained unification of Arab parties to better achieve common policy aims. These may include decreasing the socioeconomic gaps between Jews and Arabs, and repealing recent discriminatory legislation like the 2018 Nation State bill. The decrease in turnout during the April 2019 elections and subsequent rebound stand to strengthen this argument. Another portion of the trends unexplained by the model may stem from outside political events. Many major decreases in turnout and in support for Zionist parties followed periods of intense political violence. This includes violence directed towards Palestinian Arabs in Israel, as in the October 2000 conflict, but also towards Palestinians in the occupied Palestinian territories (Operation Cast Lead). These decreases reflect disappointment with Zionist parties and empathy towards Palestinians in the territories. Taken together, the voting trends and our model imply the emergence of a politically sophisticated public, with well defined political priorities, which knows how to reward and punish parties who seek its support.

Our interpretation of the findings is strengthened by expressive voting theory. Voting for Zionist parties, especially ruling ones, like Mapai and the Israeli Labor party, can be considered instrumental. Arab voters of these parties wished to obtain government benefits and public goods and services – an instrumental approach. The increase in standard of living and the reduced dependence on government allowed for expressive voting, giving rise to parties who reflected identities and ideologies (Like Islamist, socialist and nationalist) but had little effect on policy. The rise of the Joint List may represent a return to instrumental voting, or the synthesis of an instrumental approach with a more unified and demonstrative identity which supersedes those of previous Arab parties.

Concluding remarks

Our analysis provides a compelling narrative that connects socioeconomic and political trends in Arab society. Subsequent to our analysis we have identified two areas which require further study. The first concerns the part which greater gender equality plays in these political changes. The growing representation of Arab women in politics and the growing focus on eliminating domestic violence as a policy priority in the time period we have analyzed is undoubtedly connected to the political changes we have described. The second is the possible transition of Arab parties from the position of being permanently outside of the Israeli political consensus to a possible position of influence. Their growing political power may eventually make them part of a ruling coalition. In such a situation, we will be able to observe whether their voters reward or punish them according to their deeds, rather than their declarations.

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