

Jews, vote for an Israeli Arab party in this election

Avraham Burg | Mar. 22, 2021 | 5:07 PM | 6

Tuesday's election is one of the most boring and most important we've had here in recent years. Boring, because at school they taught us that elections are every four years. No one prepared us for a situation of hyper-democracy: four elections in two years. And most important because for the first time in a long time, the political map is clearer than ever.

Some parts of the right wing are showing signs of resistance to the suffocating grip of the python from Balfour Street. From 1948 to this day, the right has had only four leaders: Menachem Begin, Yitzhak Shamir, Ariel Sharon and Benjamin Netanyahu. But that's finished. Now there isn't one potential leader of the right-wing bloc – but three at least.

In the rival camp the energy is changing. After weeks in which candidates with no prospects were winnowed out, there remain only Benny Gantz and Yaron Zelekha, who aren't getting the message. The rest are offering a fairly good selection of very precise alternatives.

Anyone who believes that it's somehow possible for our side to replace Netanyahu wants a large and strong Yair Lapid, with Yesh Atid winning 20 Knesset seats at least. His success in establishing a middle-class party is impressive. Those who are fed up with the confluence of religion and state have found a home in Avigdor Lieberman – the responsible, experienced and secular adult, who has lowered all his other flames to a minimum and has cut to the nub of the fundamental argument: religion vs. the state.

Feminists have a new destination in Merav Michaeli's Labor Party. The pink-collar party seems to have been rescued from oblivion, for now. Meretz remains proud of its LGBTQ orthodoxy and opposition to the occupation, and is once again appealing to feelings of responsibility among "strategic" voters, urging them to save the party from drowning once again. And then there are the Arabs.

But this seeming bounty is the worst of the worst: pizza slices that don't fit together to form a whole pie. Every supporter of each of the above parties is prepared to swear that their issue is the most important in the world: Gender, ethnic background, orientation and religious beliefs – everyone seeks equality for themselves and are committed to preferential treatment for their

community and its interests. Just theirs. They aren't capable of rising above, of uniting and running together in this election for the greatest idea of all: a state of all its citizens, committed to true and meaningful equality for all Israelis. The real, profound election campaign is one that is pitting the secular perception of the civilian State of Israel against the zealots of Jewish supremacy, who are prepared to sanctify discrimination, distinction and exclusion to preserve this tribal power.

So whom should one vote for, given the failure of Lapid, Michaeli, Nitzan Horowitz and Ayman Odeh to unite in a civic struggle? My answer is simple. All identities are important, all communal pain has justification – but none of those party leaders will change Israel's operating system. Even if there were 20 LGBTQ people in the Knesset, and its ranks were equally divided between men and women (as they should be) – very little, if anything, would change in the existing comfort and discomfort zones.

Only equality between Arab and Jewish societies, establishment of a parliamentary partnership on a civil and nondiscriminatory basis, will foment change of any magnitude. Which is why anyone who is truly committed to the principle of equality for everyone must vote for the Joint List.

This party is far from perfect; there are parties with more impressive parliamentarians, better-known personalities and better ideas. But no other vote will bring about the earthquake that's vital to us all. Total equality for the Arabs is a winning card, after which all the frustration, exclusion and discrimination will be resolved.

All this is unpleasant to the nationalist ear, but it must be said: The future of Israeli democracy lies in a future that grants full civic equality to the Arab minority. That's why a vote for the Joint List is the most democratic vote possible today.

And if all this doesn't convince you, I will add an emotional argument. A Jew connected to their historic heritage must ask themselves: How would they have wanted the non-Jewish majority of the diasporas in the past to vote? We wanted them to vote for parties that would guarantee the Jewish minority the right to be equal, but different. If that's how it was when we were a minority, how much more so does this obligate us when we're the majority.

The most Jewish vote in this election is a vote for the Joint List.