

Special Report –
Irregular Polling Stations Inquiry
Israel 2019 General Elections

July, 2019

Irregular Polling Station Inquiry

As part of an Analysis of the 2019 elections conducted by the Macro Center for Political Economics, several polling stations were found to present statistically irregular results. While such results do not necessarily indicate irregular voting procedures, the Macro Center for Political Economics was able to flag 214 polling stations (out of a total of 10,432 polling stations) in which highly irregular and inexplicable results were found, based on strict qualification criteria.

All polling stations were assessed through a series of inquiries regarding voter turnout and results in polling stations throughout the country. Based on the severity of the irregularity found, each polling station received an "Irregularity Indicator" on a scale of 1-4 (1 being highly irregular). Forthcoming is a summary of the inquiries conducted and their results:

Irregular Voter Turnout

The general voter turnout in the past election was 68.46%. Since voter turnout varies substantially between sectors and areas, not every deviation from this figure can be regarded as irregular. With that being said, a voter turnout of over 85% can be considered extremely high and only 260 polling stations exceeded this figure. Out of those, in 130 polling stations support for one of the four blocks was higher than 90%. The combination of very high voter turnout and such vast support for one block is considered highly irregular and thus all 130 polling stations were marked as part of the inquiry with an Irregularity Indicator of 3. 16 of these polling stations, in which all but up to 5 votes were cast for the same block, were given an indicator of 1.

Out of the 16, only two cities had more than one polling station with such anomalies: Ashdod (3 polling stations) and Modiin Eilit (2). Due to the assessment that irregularities in one polling station might indicate irregularities in other nearby polling stations, all of the 130 abovementioned polling stations that were located in one of these two cities were given an Irregularity Indicator of 2. Finally, polling stations from voting sites in which more than one polling station was found as irregular were added to the list and given an Irregularity Indicator of 4.

Another inquiry conducted as part of the voter turnout inspection marked polling stations in which turnout rose significantly in comparison to the 2015 and 2013 elections. While on average voter turnout decreased by 6% in every polling station between 2015 and 2019, in

127 polling stations voter turnout rose by more than 10%. Out of these, many polling stations were quite small (less than 50 voters). Significant change in voter turnout is more common in such polling stations due to it being related to a relatively small numerical change in the amount of voters. Thus, these ballots were not marked as irregular. Out of the larger polling stations, those in which one of the four blocks' voter share rose by more than 150% in comparison to both the 2015 and 2013 elections were marked irregular and given an Irregularity Indicator of 3.

Irregular Polling Station Results

As previously indicated by the Macro Center for Political Economics, voting trends in Israel highly match various Socio-Economic and Demographic patterns. Based on this observation and the specific patterns seen during previous analyses, a total of 95 polling stations were found in which voter support for one of the blocks was over 300% higher than the average support for the block in other polling stations in the same area or from areas with the same demographic characteristics. Of course, such variations can occur for various reasons aside of irregularities. For example, many parties over perform in specific areas due to an active Political Influencer of the party who resides in the area. Since such an explanation, as well as many others, would usually result in the same kind of statistical irregularities during previous elections, results from the abovementioned polling stations during the 2013 and 2015 elections were examined. This examination narrowed the initial list of 95 polling stations to 37 in which the 2019 irregularity was unique in comparison to 2015 and 2013. These polling stations were given an Irregularity Indicator of 3.

Lastly, while the essence of democratic elections is the ability to shift votes from one block to another, high rates of change in polling stations between two consecutive elections is rare, especially due to the similar vote share for each of the two main blocks in 2015 and 2019. Thus, a list of polling stations in which one block received over 70% of the overall vote share in 2019, while receiving less than 45% in 2015, was created. The combination of substantially high voter support in the 2019 election and a high change rate between 2015 and 2019 can be regarded as quite irregular and thus these polling stations were given an Irregularity Indicator of 3.

Conclusion

As abovementioned, a total of 214 polling stations were found to show irregular voting patterns in the 2019 elections¹. These polling stations include a total of 130,564 registered voters (out of which 101,720 votes were cast in 2019). The cities with the most irregular polling stations were Ashdod (18), Modiin Eilit (16), Elad (13), Bnei Brak (13) and Sachnin (9).

Irregularity Indicator Block	1	2	3	4	Total
RW	5,072	1,518	17,934	1,923	26,447
CLZ	445	18	5,985	112	6,560
JR	13,685	4,778	30,216	3,756	52,435
Arab Parties	759	0	13,890	17	14,666
Total Votes (Number of Polling Stations)	19,961 (42)	6,314 (12)	68,025 (148)	5,808 (12)	100,108 ² (214)

While statistical irregularities in voting results do not necessarily indicate actual irregularities in voting procedures, the strict criteria used as part of this analysis makes it highly likely that these polling stations experienced some kind of irregularity during the 2019 election.

¹ Some of these were found to be irregular based on more than one inquiry and thus given an Irregularity Indicator of 1.

² Votes cast to parties with less than 1.75% of the general vote share were not counted as part of this table. Due to this, there is a difference between the number of votes cast listed in this page and the total number of votes indicated in the table.