

Segmenting the Naqab (Negev): Israel Redistricts to Postpone Local Elections for Arab-Bedouin Citizens

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Introduction: The Interior Ministry Scrambles to Block Elections in Abu Basma

Jewish Regional Councils in the Naqab cover 86% of the Naqab (Negev), 11,600 square kilometers (km²) of the Naqab's 12,835km², and include most of the Naqab's tax revenue-generating operations. The eight Arab local authorities of the Naqab, including the government-appointed Abu Basma Regional Council, which has Arab constituents but Jewish leadership, oversee only 120km², or 1% of the Naqab. Arab-Bedouin constitute one-third of the population of the Naqab (Source: *Negev Statistical Yearbook*, 2006).

First-time elections for the Abu Basma Regional Council in 2012 would make it more difficult for the Israeli government to implement the [Prawer Plan](#), the scheme to 'regulate Bedouin settlement' over the next five years and forcibly displace up to 70,000 Bedouin in the Naqab. The government founded the Abu Basma Regional Council in 2003 to oversee 10 newly recognized Bedouin villages, and promptly appointed members to the Council, delaying elections multiple times. In 2010, the Supreme Court mandated that the Council hold elections by December 2012 in a case brought by Adalah and the Association for Civil Rights in Israel against the government. A democratically-elected Abu Basma Regional Council that represents its 25,000 constituents would complicate the government's planning and enforcement of the Prawer Plan. Therefore, the Israeli Interior Ministry scrambled to deal with the Supreme Court's decision and delay elections again.

The General Director of the Interior Ministry solved the government's problem by appointing a Boundary Committee in April 2012, headed by jurisdiction expert Professor Eran Razin of Hebrew University. The Razin Boundary Committee speedily issued an unprecedented planning and jurisdiction recommendation to justify splitting the Abu Basma Regional Council into two separate authorities just months before elections, therefore preventing the Arab-Bedouin citizens of Israel in Abu Basma from electing their own leadership once again.

Razin Boundary Committee's Mandate

The Razin Boundary Committee was created "to accelerate procedures to regulate the housing of the Bedouin in the Naqab", as "stipulated in Resolution No. 3707 dated 9 November 2011," or to implement the [Prawer Plan](#) (See "Letter of Appointment of Committee to Examine the Appropriate Regulation of Municipal and Local Planning Areas of the Bedouin Region in the Bir el-Sabe (Beersheva) Area" (Razin Committee). 2012, [Appendix 1](#)).

The Committee immediately sought to "end the role of the Abu Basma Council and re-district Bedouin land" (ibid.). The Abu Basma Regional Council was established and filled with government appointees in 2003. Elections were twice postponed, prompting Adalah and the

Association for Civil Rights in Israel to petition the Supreme Court for elections. [The Supreme Court mandated that democratic elections had to take place by 4 December 2012.](#) Consensus among Arab political observers and leaders is that the decision aimed to postpone democratic elections, which analysis of the Committee's report confirms.

Appointed Abu Basma Council Members recommend the council's dissolution

Government-appointed Abu Basma Regional Council Mayor Rahamim Yona and Council Advisor Dr. Aharon Zohar represented the Abu Basma Council at the Boundary Committee. Dr. Zohar created the plan for the Abu Basma Council to govern 10 recognized villages in the Naqab only, leaving most of the land between the villages as "land without jurisdiction," whose residents have no local planning, infrastructural, or voting rights. (See Zohar Committee's "[Report Examining Municipal Structure and Borders of New \(Abu Basma\) Towns in the Southern District.](#)" Interior Ministry of Israel: 2003.)¹

In 2012, Dr. Zohar recommended to the Razin Boundary Committee that the government split the Abu Basma Regional Council, establishing two separate councils in its place. The Northern Regional Council would be based in Mulda and incorporate the villages on Road 31 - Umm Bateen, Al-Sayed, Dreijat, Kahla, Mak-hool, and Tarabin. The Southern Regional Council, based in Abu Tlul, would include the villages along Roads 25 and 40 - Abu Qreinat, Bir Hadaj, and Qasr ElSir (Abu Basma Regional Council. "Position Paper of the Abu Basma Regional Council to the [Razin] Boundary and Tax Resource Committee." 2012.).

In contrast with normal local authority practice to expand boundaries as far as possible in order to increase tax revenue, Dr. Zohar also recommended that new Regional Councils not include any new area. He observed that adding land currently without jurisdiction would only increase law enforcement, administrative, and economic considerations for the appointed councils. Why, he asked, incorporate unsupervised land into a local authority and "increase expectations of the Bedouin community, particularly those claiming ownership?"

In addition, Dr. Zohar proposed that the two hypothetical regional councils should not control building and planning—generally the most important area of command for a Regional Council—and that the Interior Ministry instead establish a joint Regulatory Regional Building and Planning Committee in Bir el-Sabe, led by a Jewish appointee.

Abu Basma Council Chairman Dr. Yona concurred with Dr. Zohar's proposal and also suggested that tax revenue from military and commercial establishments in the areas without jurisdiction,

¹ The regions under the Abu Basma Council's Regional Mandate are interspersed with so-called "areas without jurisdiction." The largest areas without jurisdiction, around 800km², are in the so-called "Siyag" region, where Israel's Military Administration moved thousands of Arab-Bedouins in the 1950s, and where there are now a large number of unrecognized villages. Without a local authority, their land claims, which have been recognized by the state, can be disregarded. There is also no authority to begin recognizing and providing infrastructure for their villages. Around of the Naqab are defined as areas "without jurisdiction," or areas where there is no local authority, the largest swath in the country. The Southern District of the Interior Ministry controls and taxes these patches of land. It is difficult for residents of areas without jurisdiction to receive building permits, and only non-profit organizations advocate for residents to receive national infrastructure and facilities funding. Residents are unable to elect local leadership.

such as Navatim Airport, be transferred to a nearby Jewish authority, and then partially granted to the Abu Basma Council (*Abu Basma Council Position Paper*).

The Razin Committee Defies Logic

The Razin Boundary Committee issued its single recommendation in an interim report just two months after it formed. The recommendation was to dismantle the Abu Basma Regional Council, saying “there is no place for the continuation of the work of the Abu Basma Regional Council in its current form” (Razin Boundary Committee. “[Interim Report on Municipal and Local Planning Areas of the Bedouin Region in the Bir el-Sabe \(Beersheva\) District](#), p. 15). The Razin Boundary Committee gave several justifications for dismantling Abu Basma and delaying elections, among them:

- The Committee claimed that the jurisdictional areas were too far apart for one Council - although space between the villages has not widened since 2003. The Committee either purposefully or neglectfully forgot regional councils such as Ramat Negev and Bnei Shimon, which are geographically larger.
- To delay elections, the Committee cited the low number of registered residents landowners within the Council's jurisdiction whose land claims are settled with the state, numbering around 7,200 people. However, there are in fact more than 15 regional councils in the country with fewer registered residents, including Tamar, Lachish, Ramat Negev and Shaar Hanegov in the Naqab. Abu Basma is the largest regional council between Bir el-Sabe and Eilat.
- The Committee also gave racial justifications, saying that an “elected Bedouin Regional Council will be composed of people who mainly attend to their own tribal and village interests,” and that because of inexperience, “a local elected Bedouin authority will face challenges procuring support from the state” (p. 5). The Razin Committee failed to explain why, if these are issues Bedouin Councils face, how Bedouin authorities often function better and outlast neighboring Jewish authorities.

The Razin Boundary Committee is claiming that the Regional Council had failed and must be reorganized –, with the very same leaders and council members as before. This is a new Interior Ministry policy. In the case of a local authority's financial or logistic collapse, the Interior Ministry regularly dismisses the elected chairperson, and sometimes the members as well, and appoints a new chair in their stead. It, has recently done this in Arad, Ofakim, Yeruham, and Arara. However, the government has never before used a Council's failure to justify re-drawing boundaries while keeping the same people in leadership roles.

The Interior Ministry, which has advocated for local authorities to pool resources and cooperate for decades, has now decided that in fact two councils are preferable to one. The Committee's recommendations seek only to circumvent the Supreme Court's order to hold elections for the Abu Basma Regional Council on 4 December 2012.

The Arab-Bedouin leadership of the Naqab, from both the recognized and unrecognized villages, must meet to plan how to correct the injustice being done to the Arab-Bedouin in the Siyag. This

plan must include demands to annex the remaining areas without jurisdiction to existing Arab local authorities, including tax-generating facilities, to hold prompt, transparent elections, and to organize local committees to represent each village from the government. The Israeli government offers the Praver Plan, to disenfranchise, dispossess, and displace up to 70,000 Arab-Bedouin from their land in the Naqab. The Arab-Bedouin leadership must coordinate to form an answer.

Further Reading

Abu Basma Regional Council. "Position Paper of the Abu Basma Regional Council to the [Razin] Boundary and Tax Resource Committee." 2012.

"Commission of Inquiry Report Limiting Abu Basma Council Region." Interior Ministry of Israel: March 2012. <http://www.moin.gov.il/SubjectDocuments/2012-5777.pdf>

HCJ 7311/02 Association for Support and Protection of Bedouin Rights in Israel v. Beersheba Municipality (Jun 22, 2011) (Isr.)
<http://elyon1.court.gov.il/files/02/110/073/h46/02073110.h46.htm>

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<http://elyon1.court.gov.il/files/10/830/031/n05/10031830.n05.htm>.

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