

Seven and a Half Million Who?

A Belgian broadcaster says 7.5 million Palestinians can't vote in today's election. The number checks out. What's missing is the more than a million Arab citizens who are voting today.

Aryeh Leib Thorne Toren

On Monday morning, 26 October 2026, VTM Nieuws ran a report by its war correspondent Robin Ramaekers from Jerusalem, about Palestinians who can't vote in Israel's election. The text is careful. It says the 7.5 million Palestinians who live in the West Bank, in Gaza and in East Jerusalem have no vote "because they have no Israeli passport."

That's accurate as far as it goes. People who aren't citizens of a country don't vote in its national election. That's true in Belgium too.

So I'm not arguing with the reporter or the figure. My problem is the sentence that never appears.

The citizens in the story's blind spot

Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics put the population at 10,305,000 ahead of Rosh Hashanah 5787, in September 2026. Of them, 2,173,000 are Arabs, 21.7 percent.

Here's the math, so you can check it. The bureau counts 304,000 foreign residents separately. 10,305,000 minus 304,000 leaves 10,001,000. And $2,173,000 \div 10,001,000 = 21.7$ percent.

One honest caveat. The bureau's Arab figure includes the Arabs of East Jerusalem, and many of them hold permanent residency, not citizenship. They're also inside VTM's 7.5 million. So the number of Arab citizens is smaller than 2,173,000. One count puts the Arab citizens on today's voter roll at about 1.2 million (single source, not yet confirmed).

Either way, more than a million Arab citizens of Israel have the same ballot I do. Today they're standing in the same lines at the same voting stations, with the same slip and the same envelope, choosing among the same lists, Arab lists among them.

The Israeli diplomat David Saranga put the objection as a condition: if the 7.5 million includes Israel's Arab citizens, the report is wrong. On VTM's own wording it doesn't. But a Belgian viewer who hears "Palestinians can't vote in Israel" and nothing else will walk away believing it does. A headline can be true and still leave you knowing less.

The election that didn't happen

The fuller story is about the vote that VTM's 7.5 million haven't had. The last election for the Palestinian Legislative Council was held on 25 January 2006. Hamas won 74 of the 132 seats.

An election was set for May 2021. On 30 April 2021, Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas postponed it, and none has been held since. One report says a vote is now planned for 11 September 2027 (single source, not yet confirmed).

The math again. 25 January 2006 to 27 October 2026 is twenty years and nine months. A Palestinian had to be 18 by that day in 2006 to vote. So anyone in the West Bank or Gaza who is 38 or younger today has never voted for a legislature.

Walid Abu Haya, an Arab Israeli, put it more bluntly on X this morning: “We have general elections today in Israel. It’s something you have never had and you will never have, neither in Qatar nor in ISIS Syria.” That’s his view, in his words.

What fair reporting would add

One sentence would do it. Something like: “Israel’s Arab citizens vote today like any other citizen, while Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza last elected a legislature in 2006.”

That sentence takes no side on borders or on the war. It just tells the viewer who can vote and who can’t, and why.

Why it matters today

Section II of the Covenantal Republicanism monograph starts from a free people choosing who governs it and staying answerable for that choice. That’s why I care about this. A ballot is worth defending only if we’re honest about who holds one. Today about one in five Israelis is Arab, and every Arab citizen’s vote counts exactly like mine.

I encourage all eligible voters to vote.

Voting ends at 22:00.

All glory to the Ribono shel Olam · Errors are mine

Prepared in deep partnership and cooperation with Grok and xAI

Sources (checked 27 October 2026)

- VTM Nieuws / HLN, Robin Ramaekers, 26 October 2026 09:21: <https://www.hln.be/vtm-nieuws/oorlogsjournalist-robin-ramaekers-praat-in-jeruzalem-met-palestijnen-die-niet-mogen-stemmen-tijdens-verkiezingen~a276fce4/>
- David Saranga on X, 27 October 2026 07:58: <https://x.com/DavidSaranga/status/2114959809669722190> · his follow-up, 13:43: <https://x.com/DavidSaranga/status/2115046710850224631>
- Central Bureau of Statistics figures ahead of Rosh Hashanah 5787, September 2026, as reported by the Times of Israel: https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/ahead-of-rosh-hashanah-israel-population-is-10305000-1-2-more-than-a-year-ago/ · and by Ynetnews: <https://www.ynetnews.com/article/rymfsha00ge>
- 2006 Palestinian legislative election (held 25 January 2006; Hamas 74 of 132 seats): https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palestinian_legislative_election,_2006
- Postponement of the 2021 elections, 30 April 2021: WAFA <https://english.wafa.ps/Pages/Details/124253> · AP <https://apnews.com/article/hamas-middle-east-elections-religion-government-and-politics-e88636bc919f8aab455e01fbbd4b4391>
- About 1.2 million Arab eligible voters (single source, not yet confirmed): X news summary, 27 October 2026: <https://x.com/i/trending/2115036420104720802>
- A vote planned for 11 September 2027 (single source, not yet confirmed): Israel in Belgium on X, 27 October 2026 13:00: <https://x.com/IsraelinBelgium/status/2115035944843719001>

- Walid Abu Haya on X, 27 October 2026: <https://x.com/WalidAbuHaya1/status/2115014043261931787>