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Why this Zionist Israeli is running with an Islamist party

Yoav Segalovitz hopes to help bridge the divide between Jewish and Arab Israelis.

By [Ruth Eglash](#) October 20, 2026



Mansour Abbas (right), head of the Ra'am Party, and Yoav Segalovitz, attend a discussion in the Knesset in 2021. (Olivier Fitoussi/FLASH90)

KIBBUTZ EIN HAHORESH, Israel – He’s been called a “terror supporter” and a “traitor,” and even accused of devious steps to enable Islamists to “infiltrate” Israel’s next government. But Yoav Segalovitz, the Jewish parliamentarian who recently broke strict taboos by teaming up with an Arab Islamist party, is unperturbed.

“There are always crazy people, and it doesn’t matter what they say on television; I think when you’ve chosen your path, you just have to ignore it all,” he said in a recent interview with the Jewish Telegraphic Agency.

It has been just over a month since Segalovitz, 67, a veteran member of Israel’s parliament, the Knesset, made his unprecedented decision to leave the centrist Yesh Atid party for Ra’am, an Arab-Israeli party with roots in the Muslim Brotherhood, in the hopes of bridging the gap between Jews and Arabs in Israel.

“Are all the old patterns going to change in the coming month? Absolutely not,” Segalovitz, a former deputy minister for public security and a former police investigator, said. “But I’m thinking long term, not just about these particular elections. From my perspective, this is a long-term story. It’s not about the here and now.”

At a recent campaign event in the well-worn communal dining room of Kibbutz Ein Hahoreh, an agricultural community in the Emek Hefer region of central Israel, Segalovitz explained to a group of around 80 Jewish voters why he made the radical decision as a self-declared Zionist to team up with an Islamist party.

“I wanted to have an impact,” he said, describing how he knew it would somehow be related to the Arab community in Israel that makes up around 21% of the total population.

“I knew I wanted to break down the paradigms that exist; I wanted to cross the bridge; the only question was how I could do this,” Segalovitz said, speaking to the small crowd of kibbutz members and residents of the surrounding communities.

Microphone in hand, the neatly dressed former police officer described how, when tensions were high and societal divisions deeper than ever during the final days of the previous Knesset, he asked himself how he could make a meaningful difference in Israeli society.

Segalovitz said that at first he considered creating a brand new joint Israeli-Arab party. But he quickly realized that he could make greater change by joining forces with Ra’am, an Arab party whose leader, Mansour Abbas, is already known for his own paradigm-breaking political moves.

Abbas, a deeply religious conservative Muslim who, in his own words, identifies as a Palestinian citizen of Israel, was the first Arab party leader to join an Israeli government, breaking deep-rooted taboos in his own community. In 2021, his bold move to join former prime ministers Naftali Bennett and Yair Lapid in a ruling coalition helped to briefly oust Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu from power.

While the move signaled an unprecedented shift in Israeli politics, it was also fraught with tension and ultimately proved to be deeply unpopular with much of the Israeli public and some in the Arab community. Ultimately, Ra'am's inclusion in the Bennett-Lapid government was one of the factors that led to its rapid downfall.

If including an Arab party in the government was controversial before Hamas' attacks on Oct. 7, 2023, today it is close to unthinkable. In the run-up to the Oct. 27 election, most predominantly Jewish parties have avoided saying publicly that they would consider including Ra'am, or any other Arab party, in a future coalition. And, beyond Ra'am, the other Arab party – the Joint List – remains emphatically against any such alliance.

But [recent polls suggest](#) that bringing Arab parties into a governing alliance could be the only way to secure the parliamentary majority needed to form a new government. With [Segalovitz now running on Ra'am's list](#), such a prospect may be slightly more realistic.

However, the challenges of reaching such an arrangement were evident at the recent Kibbutz Ein Hahoreh meeting.

An aging audience of casually dressed kibbutzniks sauntered into the sparse hall curious to hear Segalovitz's story. They gave him a warm and polite reception, and grilled him with questions after listening to him speak. But most said they were not swayed to vote for him.

"He's very brave for doing what he did," said Elie Aloni, 80, a resident of nearby Beit Herut. But she continued to say that she would not vote for Ra'am because she's already committed to the left-wing Democrats Party.

Aloni said her party's leader, Yair Golan, had already stated that he wanted to see Ra'am join the government, and she hoped that would happen. She was also hopeful that having an Israeli Jew on Ra'am's list would make it easier for the party to be included in the next coalition.

But she acknowledged that, after Oct. 7, including Arab parties in a government could prove difficult.

"I'm a peace activist, but even I have become disillusioned," she said. "After Oct. 7, it has become more difficult to trust the Arabs. But they are not going to disappear, and neither are we."

Segalovitz knows that his support is unlikely to come from Jewish voters. Instead, he has been focusing on reaching the Arab community and encouraging them to exercise their democratic rights.

Since joining Ra'am in early September, he has traveled around the country to address Arabic-speaking audiences – Muslims, Christians and Druze – about why he joined the party and what he hopes to achieve. The meetings are conducted in Hebrew because, as he admits, he does not speak a word of Arabic.

Segalovitz told JTA that despite the cold reception, including some outright attacks, from Israeli Jews, the Arab community has overwhelmingly embraced him – even though there is some skepticism.

Michael Milshtein, head of the Palestinian Studies Forum at the Moshe Dayan Center at Tel Aviv University, who has researched political trends in Israel's Arab community for years, called Segalovitz's decision to join Ra'am "pioneering."

However, he noted that the Jewish MK has also faced attacks from within the Arab community from those who struggle to accept an openly Zionist Israeli joining their political ranks.

Although there are some Jewish Israeli members of Arab parties, namely the communist-leaning Hadash, they often identify as anti-Zionist. Segalovitz's arrangement with Abbas is slightly different. He has not formally joined the Islamist party but rather forged an agreement whereby he will retain the freedom to vote independently on issues including religion and state, national security and LGBTQ rights.

"His move is revolutionary; he is not a post-Zionist or an anti-Zionist like some Jewish members of Hadash," Milshtein said. "He [Segalovitz] is creating connections with a traditional religious party and it's just bizarre."

Segalovitz's presence in Ra'am, which emerged from the southern branch of the Islamic Movement in Israel, historically linked to the Muslim Brotherhood, has also prompted questions across the Arab world about how Abbas can continue to be associated with the movement that also includes more extreme groups such as Hamas, Milshtein said.

But Milshtein said the two men were "pioneering" in much the same way.

"It's kind of a mirror: Mansour breaks all kinds of taboos, and so does Segalovitz," he said, adding that many Jews respected Segalovitz, and even supported his decision, "even if they won't end up voting for him."

Ra'am's changes started in the 1990s when Israel's Islamic Movement split into two, enabling the southern branch, the political home of Ra'am, to seek political engagement with state institutions as a way to make changes within the community. Abbas's ascent to the leadership brought Ra'am's current goals into even sharper focus.

Abbas, 52, a dentist by training, succeeded in breaking the party's organizational ties with the religious leadership, allowing it to work even more harmoniously with institutions in Israel and focus on improving life for the country's Arab citizens.

At this point in Ra'am's history, Segalovitz's arrival could be a significant political asset. The party's focus is on improving life for Israel's Arab community, and Segalovitz brings experience tackling violent and organized crime, [one of the sector's most pressing concerns](#).

As head of the Israel Police's Investigations Unit from 2009 to 2013, and as deputy public security minister from 2021 to 2022, Segalovitz focused on violent crime. As deputy minister, he headed a government program aimed at addressing violent crime, successfully reducing homicides in the Arab sector by some 16%, the lowest level since 2014.

After Netanyahu's return to office in 2022, Segalovitz's program was scrapped. Since then, the murder rate has soared, with organized crime reaching beyond the Arab community. According to statistics compiled by the [Abraham Initiatives](#), the number of murders in the Arab sector more than doubled between 2022 and 2025, rising from 116 to 252.

"Today, Israel has similar crime rates to those in South American countries," said Segalovitz, referring to the organized crime that has been surging in the Arab community. He pointed the finger at Netanyahu and his government for failing to address deeper social and economic problems in Arab society.

Segalovitz is also a firm believer in some type of national community service for the Arab sector, akin to the mandatory military service most Jewish Israelis must undertake.

"Arabs make up 21% of Israel's population," Segalovitz said. "They are involved in every area of daily life in Israel, in medicine, economics, education and more. We live together with one another, and we need to decide how to manage a future partnership."

"Our future does not allow us not to work in partnership with each other," he said. "We have partnerships in all areas of life, except in politics."

While running with Ra'am is his way of trying to change that, Segalovitz is under no illusion that his efforts will translate into votes. Instead, he sees his candidacy as a small first step toward a longer-term shift in Israeli politics.