

Topic: **Jewish-Arab Relations**

Updated: **June 2014**

- The relations between Jews and Arabs in Israel inevitably reflect the ongoing confrontations between Israel and the Palestinians and between Israel and neighboring Arab countries. The outbreak of the Second Intifada in the West Bank and Gaza Strip in September 2000, the Second Lebanon War in the summer of 2006, and Israel's recent military operation in Gaza Strip (operation "Cast Lead", December 2008; Operation "Pillar of Defence", 2012), heightened the tension between the two sectors.
- The October 2000 events in the Galilee (Northern Israel) and the Triangle region (Central Israel) have had a long-lasting impact on the fabric of Jewish-Arab relations. As each side perceived its very existence threatened, mutual fears escalated.
- The Jews pointed to three major threats:
 - Demographic Threat: The high natural growth rate of the Arab population is considered by many Jews to be a threat to Israel's ability to sustain a Jewish majority over time.²
 - "Re-opening of the '1948 Files'": This includes the demand for the state to assume responsibility for the 1948 Palestinian Nakba (literally, the "catastrophe" of the loss of Palestine).³
 - Delegitimization of the State of Israel.⁴
- Arabs also list a series of concerns:
 - Population transfer or territorial exchange under a future permanent settlement agreement between Israel and the Palestinian Authority: Arab spokesmen claim that the term "transfer," which was once outside the boundaries of Jewish public discourse, is currently being explored and discussed openly. Their concern is that the legitimacy of the discourse will lead to the legitimization of the deed itself.⁵
 - Encroachments on civil rights: For example, the Law of Citizenship and Entry to Israel

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² Amon Soffer, "The Arabs of Israel and the Peace Process – Recommendations for Policy Guidelines." In: Ruth Gavison and Dafna Hecker (editors), *The Jewish-Arab Cleavage in Israel: A Reader* (Jerusalem: The Israeli Democracy Institute, 2000), pp. 146-150.

³ Elie Rekhess, "The Arabs of Israel after Oslo: Localization of the National Struggle." *Israel Studies*, vol. 7, no. 3 (2002), pp. 26-28.

⁴ *Yediot Acharonot*, March 19, 2007; Elie Rekhess and Arik Rudnitzky (editors), *The Arabs in Israel and the War in the North* (Tel-Aviv University: The Konrad Adenauer Program for Jewish-Arab Cooperation, August 21, 2006), pp. 8-9

⁵ *Jerusalem Post*, March 22, 2002.

- (2003, renewed in 2013), which was passed by the Knesset and subsequently upheld by the High Court of Justice.⁶
- The “witch hunt” against Arab politicians and public figures⁷
 - Police violence against Arabs: For example, the 13 people killed in the October 2000 events, and Jewish violence against Arab citizens, such as the four Arab citizens killed by a Jewish IDF deserter in August 2005 in Shfar’am.
 - Random acts of violence committed by Jewish citizens against Arabs, which has been particularly problematic in Jerusalem.⁸
 - Growing and intensified expressions of racism against Arabs.
- These perceptions of threat are expressed in public surveys. According to the “Jewish-Arab Relations Index,” conducted on an annual basis by Professor of Sociology Sammy Smooha, Professor of Sociology at the University of Haifa. The period between 2003 and 2012⁹ witnessed a significant deterioration in the relations between Jewish and Arab citizens of Israel.
 - Arabs are less willing to:
 - Send their children to study in Jewish schools (2003: 70.5%, 2008: 54.8%, 2012: 37%)
 - Have a Jew as their neighbor (2003: 27.2%, 2008: 47.3%, 2012: 42%)
 - Recognize Israel’s right to exist as an independent state (2003: 81.1%, 2008: 53.7%, 2012: 75%)
 - Accept Israel’s nature as “Jewish and Democratic” (2003: 65.6%, 2008: 41.4%, 2012: 48%)¹⁰
 - Concurrently, more Arabs report:
 - Suffering from concrete threats or humiliating acts by Jewish citizens (2003:19.4%, 2008: 30.9%)
 - Disbelief that the Holocaust happened (28.0% in 2006 compared to 40.5% in 2008).
 - 10.6% of Arab respondents in 2012, compared to 12.6% in 2008 and only 5.4% in 2003, supported the use of all means possible, including violence, to bring an improvement in the status of Arab citizens in Israel.¹¹
 - The percentage of Arabs unwilling to have a Jewish friend has nearly doubled, from

⁶ According to the law, citizenship is not automatically granted to spouses of Arab Israeli citizens if the applicant spouse holds a Palestinian ID card. Arabs believe that this law is designed to encourage Arab Israeli citizens to leave Israel.

⁷ Elie Rekhess, “The Islamic Movement following the Municipal Elections – Rising Political Power?” in: Elie Rekhess and Sarah Ozacky-Lazar (editors), *The Municipal Elections in the Arab and Druze Sector (2003): Clans, Sectarianism and Political Parties* (Tel-Aviv University: The Konrad Adenauer Program for Jewish-Arab Cooperation, 2005), p. 37.

⁸ *Yediot Jerusalem*, August 31, 2012.

⁹ Israel Democracy Institute, “Release of 2012 Index of Jewish-Arab Relations in Israel,” See: <http://en.idi.org.il/about-idi/press-releases/release-of-2012-index-of-arab-jewish-relations-in-israel>

¹⁰ Sammy Smooha, “Still Playing by the Rules: Index of Arab-Jewish Relations in Israel 2012, Findings and Conclusions,” University of Haifa and Israeli Democracy Institute, 2013.

¹¹ *Globes*, May 18, 2009 (Hebrew). See press release with the main findings on the 2008 Jewish-Arab relations index, at: <http://www.danhaifa.dk/?download=PR58-Jewish-Arab%20relations%20index.doc>.

16% in 2003 to 29% in 2009.¹²

- The fear that Arab civil rights will be curtailed has become more palpable with the growing strength of right-wing parties in the 17th and 18th Knesset elections (2006 and 2009, respectively), but the most recent election results (2013) came with some sense of relief (see: Elections).
- In a survey conducted in 2007 on behalf of the Konrad Adenauer Program for Jewish-Arab Cooperation at Tel Aviv University, Arabs expressed the fear that their situation would worsen if Avigdor Liberman, then the Chairman of the right-wing Yisrael Beitenu party and Foreign Minister, joined the government. Specifically, 87% feared a rise in land expropriations; 85% were concerned that their civil rights would be restricted; 83% feared an increase in violence against Arabs; and 48% were afraid that the Triangle region would be transferred to Palestinian sovereignty against its residents' wishes.¹³
- Some of the strongest manifestations of tension between the Jewish and Arab populations are racist acts by Jews against Arabs.
- Racism is occasionally expressed in calls of "Death to Arabs" in soccer stadiums (particularly that of Beitar Jerusalem) and at the sites of terrorist attacks. Mossawa, the Advocacy Center for Arab Citizens in Israel, reported: In March 2011, during Week 26 of the football season, around 200 Beitar Jerusalem fans chanted "Death to Arabs," as well as, "Tuama is a Terrorist, , I also hate Sakhnin and all Arabs."¹⁴
- Racist slogans such as "No Arabs – No Terror Attacks" have appeared in graffiti and on bumper stickers. Verbal racism was occasionally paired with violent racist actions. Occasionally, reports appear in the press about harassment of Arabs, and even beatings of Arabs, usually by gangs of Jewish youth. Arabs are sometimes expelled from public parks, clubs, and beaches.¹⁵
- In October 2011, a mosque in Tuba Zangaria was destroyed by arson and graffiti which read, "revenge" and "price tag." The "price tag" ideology seeks revenge on Arabs and government officials in response to government actions that limit settlement activity.¹⁶
- While 50% of Arabs don't want to live near Jews,¹⁷ 50% of Jewish high school students did not want to study with Arabs¹⁸ and 55% did not want to live near them.¹⁹
- A report on the state of racism in the state of Israel published in March 2012 by Mossawa, the Advocacy Center for Arab Citizens in Israel, indicated that politicians do not take the necessary steps to protect the Arab minority from verbal and physical attacks, and "ultimately

¹² *Ha'aretz*, May 25, 2009.

¹³ Elie Rekhess and Arik Rudnitzky (editors), *The Arab Population in Israel: Public Opinion Poll* (Tel-Aviv University: The Konrad Adenauer Program for Jewish-Arab Cooperation, March 29, 2007), p. 14.

¹⁴ See: <http://www.mossawacenter.org/he/item.asp?aid=227> (in Hebrew)

¹⁵ Shimon Shamir, *The Arabs in Israel – Two Years after the Or Commission Report* (Tel-Aviv University: The Konrad Adenauer Program for Jewish-Arab Cooperation, 2006), pp. 12-13.

¹⁶ "The Main Findings of the 2012 Racism in Israel Report," (Haifa: Mossawa Center, April 2010), pp. 4-6. See: http://www.mossawacenter.org/my_documents/publication2/2012%20Main%20Findings%20of%202012%20Racism%20Report.pdf

¹⁷ *Maariv*, December 3, 2010;

¹⁸ *Israel Post*, September 6, 2010.

¹⁹ *Ha'aretz*, August 22, 2012.

participate in this extremely harmful behavior and declarations either through tacit approval or direct participation.”²⁰

- Nonetheless, Jewish and Arab researchers point to several positive developments. Smoocha and others state that Jews and Arabs have passed the threshold of adjustment, and have come to accept the fact of each other’s existence. The Jewish majority has accepted the existence of a sizeable Arab minority, and the Arabs have accepted their minority status in the state of Israel. Some experts believe that Jewish citizens are more aware than ever of the discrimination that Arabs experience, and there is greater willingness to grant civil equality to Arabs.²¹
- According to Smoocha’s early 2006 study, 93% of the Arabs and 78% of the Jews expressed willingness for mutual fraternal relations; in 2012, 42% of Arabs surveyed said they would agree to live in Jewish neighborhoods, and 46% of Jews expressed their agreement to have Arabs live in Jewish neighborhoods.²²
- In another study conducted by Smoocha in 2004, a majority of the Jewish population supported equality for Arab citizens: 75.4% supported full civil rights and 68.1% supported equality for Arabs in budget allocations and opportunities for education and employment.²³
- According to a 2006 survey by the Israel Democracy Institute, 60% of Jews supported or strongly supported full equality of rights between Jews and Arab citizens of the state.²⁴ A 2007 study on behalf of Mossawa, showed that 60% of Jews supported the inclusion of equal collective rights for Arabs in Israel’s future constitution.²⁵
- 2011 Statistics released by Sikkuy, the Association for the Advancement of Civil Equality, stated that over half of the Jewish population (53%) was disturbed by the inequality between Arabs and Jews,²⁶ while nearly 40% of Jews were willing to pay a personal price in order to achieve a more equitable society.²⁷
- Arab and Jewish scholars concur that three cumulative conditions must be met in order to maintain stable co-existence between Jews and Arabs in Israel: first, progress in the peace process that will lead to the establishment of a Palestinian nation state alongside Israel; second, a policy that would grant full equality to Arab citizens; and third, mutual acceptance of the civil and national legitimacy of all the groups in the state.²⁸
- In 2012-2013, a number of anti-Muslim incidents took place, including attacks on Muslims (in particular in Jerusalem) and Beitar Jerusalem’s fan club, known as La Familia, demanding that

²⁰ The Coalition Against Racism in Israel: The Main Findings of the 2012 Racism in Israel Report (Haifa: Mossawa Center, March 2012). See:

http://www.mossawacenter.org/my_documents/publication2/2012%20Main%20Findings%20of%202012%20Racism%20Report.pdf

²¹ Sammy Smoocha, *Index of Arab-Jewish Relations in Israel 2004* (Haifa: The Jewish-Arab Center, University of Haifa; Jerusalem: The Citizens' Accord Forum between Jews and Arabs in Israel; Tel Aviv: Friedrich Ebert; Stiftung. 2005), pp. 12-13.

²² *Ha'aretz*, March 13, 2007; Israel Democracy Institute, “Release of 2012 Index of Jewish-Arab Relations in Israel,” See: <http://en.idi.org.il/about-idi/press-releases/release-of-2012-index-of-arab-jewish-relations-in-israel>

²³ Smoocha, *ibid*, p. 26.

²⁴ Asher Arian, Nir Atmor and Yael Hadar, *The 2006 Israeli Democracy Index* (Jerusalem: The Israeli Democracy Institute and the Guttman Center, May 2006), p. 41.

²⁵ *Kull al-Arab*, June 8, 2007.

²⁶ Nohad Ali and Shai Inbar, “Who’s in Favor of Equality?” Sikkuy, Jerusalem-Haifa, 2011, pp.3.

²⁷ *Ha'aretz*, September 29, 2011.

²⁸ Yitzhak Reiter (editor), *Dilemmas in Arab-Jewish Relations in Israel* (Tel-Aviv: Schocken Publishing House, 2005), pp. 39-41.

the newly acquired Chechen Muslim players be let go in order to keep the team “pure.”²⁹

²⁹ *Ha'aretz*, March 12, 2013. See: <http://www.haaretz.com/blogs/jerusalem-vivendi/let-s-face-it-israel-has-a-racism-problem.premium-1.508926>.

Ha'aretz, February 26, 2013. See: <http://www.haaretz.com/news/national/arab-woman-attacked-in-jerusalem-in-alleged-hate-crime.premium-1.506028>.

Ha'aretz, February 7, 2013. See: <http://www.haaretz.com/news/national/israel-indicts-four-beitar-jerusalem-soccer-fans-for-racism.premium-1.502197>.