# Violence, Crime, and Policing in Arab Society

## Personal and Community Security Index

# 2019

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June 2020

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# Introduction

The 2019 Personal Security Index is the third report issued on the subject of violence, personal security, and policing in Arab communities in Israel.

The **Abraham Initiatives** publishes this annual report in order to provide readers with an up-to-date picture concerning attitudes among Arab citizens on issues relating to policing and violence. The reports also monitor the work of the police in the Arab population and the implementation of Government Decision 1402 for enhancing personal security in the Arab sector.

The index was launched in recognition of the alarming reality in Arab society, which has reached new peaks in recent years. Every year we see a further rise in the level of crime and violence in Arab society: A total of 71 Arab citizens were killed in 2018, accounting for 61 percent of all murder and manslaughter victims in Israel in that year – three times the weight of the Arab population in the state. In 2019, the number of murder and manslaughter victims in Arab society was 89 – the highest in any year since the establishment of the State of Israel. This figure constituted 65% of the total number of murder and manslaughter victims in Israel in that year.

The phenomenon of violence in Arab society did not emerge in a vacuum. There are many reasons for the problem, principally: an inadequate police presence in the Arab communities; the socioeconomic condition of the Arab population – half of all Arab families are defined as poor, and almost two-thirds of Arab children live below the poverty line; high unemployment, particularly among young people; changes in the role of the family in Arab society, including a transition to a more individualistic society, so that the family no longer constitutes a source of security and law enforcement as it did in the past – while the official authorities are still not filling this function adequately in the lives of Arab citizens; inequality in services for Arab citizens, as reflected for example in the sparse presence of government institutions in Arab communities, and so on.

Government Decision 922, adopted in December 2015, allocated unprecedented resources for promoting the economic development of Arab communities. The decision seemed to mark a turning point in the status of Palestinian society in Israel and in the willingness of the state to enable this society to make progress. However, it soon became clear that economic development is impossible in communities facing an endless wave of crime. This understanding led to Government Decision 1402, which sought to improve the level of personal security in Arab society and in Jerusalem. The decision defined several objectives: The establishment

of a new administrative authority for police services in Arab society; the recruitment of thousands of police officers, including members of Arab society; the establishment of new police stations in Arab communities; and the upgrading of existing stations.

Despite these important government decisions, Arab society still suffers from an inadequate police presence in the Arab towns and villages, and in the Arab neighborhoods of the mixed cities, on the one hand – and on the other hand from aggressive and hostile policing in encounters with the police. The relations between the police and Arab society are rooted in mistrust on the part of Arab citizens toward the Israel Police due to its failure to uproot violence and crime in Arab communities. At the beginning of 2019, a broad-based civil protest erupted among Arab citizens following the murder of three young Arab men in Majd al-Krum in the Galilee, apparently against the background of a commercial dispute. The tragic murder occurred in broad daylight and shocked the small town, which had previously been considered relatively calm and peaceful. The fact that the murder occurred a year after a new police station was opened in Majd al-Krum created a sense of frustration and anger among residents due to the failure of the police to impose law and order during its first year of a local presence. It is important to note that from the outset the opening of the police station met with a suspicious response and opposition among circles in the local council and community. Accordingly, the traumatic event sparked anger among residents and led to the outbreak of the protest. Large-scale demonstrations were held in Arab communities opposing the police, and participants included leaders of Arab society from the local and national levels. During the protests, Arab citizens demanded that the police work efficiently to combat organized crime gangs that use firearms, money, and drugs and are responsible for many of the incidents that disturb normal life in Arab society. Tens of thousands of Arab citizens participated in the protests, reflecting the demand that the state in general, and the police in particular, act to ensure their security. This protest and the accompanying awakening of public sentiments are clearly evident in the attitudes of Arab society as reflected in our survey.

The 2019 personal and community security index is based on a survey that focused on four spheres: (1) feelings and attitudes among Arab citizens regarding the scale of violence and crime, and prominent phenomena in this field, in their communities; (2) the level of exposure of Arab citizens to violence and crime, whether directly or among their friends and relatives; (3) the willingness of Arab citizens to help in the struggle against violence; and (4) attitudes among Arab citizens toward the police and their impressions concerning police behavior toward them.

The survey was held on the basis of a representative sample of the entire

Arab population. For comparison purposes, a parallel national survey was conducted among a representative sample of Jewish society. Since a survey using identical questions was also undertaken in 2018, this report includes a comparison between the figures for 2018 and 2019, as well as a comparison between the findings for Arab and Jewish society. This comparison facilitates the identification of trends and changes, and we will continue to monitor these data on an annual basis. The current report also includes a breakdown of responses by geographical area for some of the findings, permitting an examination of differences in attitudes among Arab citizens in different parts of Israel. The geographical distribution was based on the customary definitions used in Arab society – the Galilee, the "Triangle" area, the Negev, and the mixed cities.

The findings of the 2019 survey highlight the lack of policing in Arab society. The reports by the Arab respondents paint a depressing picture in terms of violence and crime and the impact these have on the lives of Arab citizens. This reality includes the use of firearms, drug dealing, physical violence, and intimidation.

The **Abraham Initiatives** attaches great importance to the struggle against crime and violence in Arab society. The organization's Safe Communities Initiative seeks to promote service-oriented and positive policing for Arab citizens; strengthen the mechanisms for dialogue between the police and the community; inculcate educational programs against violence in schools; and establish life-saving services in Arab communities. One section of the report is devoted to the organization's monitoring of the campaign launched by the Ministry for Personal Security to encourage citizens to hand in firearms in return for non-criminalization – an important step in light of the key role illegal firearms play in the violent daily reality faced by Arab citizens.

Over recent years, the **Abraham Initiatives** has called for the establishment of an interministerial team to uproot violence and crime in Arab society, including a response to the deep-rooted causes of these phenomena. In October 2019, at the height of the civil protests in Arab society, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced the formation of a team in the Prime Minister's Office, including the director-generals of the relevant ministries, in order to formulate a comprehensive plan to uproot violence and crime in Arab society. Over the six months from this decision through the publication of this report, the **Abraham Initiatives** has been involved in some of the discussions held under the leadership of the Prime Minister's Office. During the course of the committee's work, the organization submitted its recommendations, based on its long experience in the field of relations between the police and Arab society.

The Safe Communities Initiative – and this report – do not address the subject of policing in East Jerusalem or among residents of Israel (as distinct from citizens). This reflects the focused goal of the **Abraham Initiatives**, which is to promote integration and equality among Arab and Jewish citizens of the State of Israel.

We would like to thank the authors of this report – Ola Najami-Yousef, Ruth Lewin-Chen, and Dr. Nohad 'Ali – for the extensive efforts they invested in preparing and writing the document.

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# Abstract

The following are some of the key findings of the survey:

- The proportion of Arab citizens who felt a sense of personal insecurity in the community where they live reached 60.5% in 2019, compared to just 12.8% of Jewish citizens. The proportion of Arab citizens reporting a sense of personal insecurity rose dramatically by comparison to 2018 (35.8%), while among Jewish citizens the figure remained unchanged by comparison to 2018.

- The phenomena of most concern to Arab citizens are crime and violence (83.9% and 83.7%, respectively). These issues are of greater concern to Arab citizens than questions relating to civil status, such as racist legislation, inequality between Jews and Arabs, and the stalemate in the peace process. Returning to different aspects of violence and crime: 82.1% of Arab respondents are worried or very worried about shootings and the use of firearms, and 70.2% are worried or very worried about property offenses. A rise in the proportion of Arab citizens worried about these issues can be seen among Arab citizens.

- Violence against women is also a source of concern among Arab citizens. Women are more concerned about this phenomenon than men: 70.4% of Arab women are worried or very worried about violence against women (almost identical to the figure for 2018), compared to just 55.7% of men (compared to 53% in 2018).

- By comparison to violence against women, the phenomenon of domestic violence (which also includes violence by parents against their children) is of less concern to Arab society: 53.4% of women and 52.5% of men are worried or very worried about this phenomenon – an increase of 5-7 percentage points by comparison to 2018.

- Fear of being harmed by various forms of violence and crime is more widespread in Arab society than in Jewish society. Just 19.3% of Jewish citizens are afraid that they or their family will be harmed by violent offenses, compared to 73.1% of Arab citizens. Property offenses are also the subject of much greater concern in Arab society – 65.6%, compared to 17.8% among Jews. Concern at sex offenses is lower in both societies – 46% among Arab citizens and 21.6% among Jews. The proportion of Arab citizens concerned about all these phenomena rose in 2019 by comparison to 2018, while the figures for Jewish society fell.

- When asked in which places they feel a sense of personal insecurity, Arab citizens most frequently specified their home community as the place where they feel least secure (42.2% stated that they feel very or extremely threatened in their home community). This was followed by places of entertainment (33.8%). By contrast, and as in 2018, the home is regarded as the safest place (only 6.2% of Arab respondents reported a threat to their personal security in their home). This finding shows that for Arab citizens, their home is their castle, and is regarded as the only place that can protect them against violence and crime.

- The proportion of Arabs who report that they, their relatives or their friends were harmed by various manifestations of violence is higher than among Jews. For example, 15% of Arab respondents reported that they or their acquaintances were victims of cold weapons or firearms (an increase from 11% in 2018), compared to just 1% among Jews (almost unchanged over 2018).

- Among respondents reporting that they experienced violence or threats of violence, 64.5% stated that they were acquainted with the attacker or the person making the threats. In 31.3% of cases, the attackers or intimidators were neighbors, friends or acquaintances; in 26.9% of cases they were workmates; in 16% of cases relatives; and 26.9% of respondents stated that the attacker or person making the threat did not belong to any of these categories.

- Regarding attitudes toward the police, in 2019, 45.2% of Arab citizens who experienced violence stated that they did not submit a complaint to the police about the incident. While this finding reflects a profound lack of trust in the police, leading many citizens to seek alternative ways to resolve problems without recourse to the law enforcement agencies, this figure represents an increase over 2018, when only 38.3% of respondents stated that they had submitted a complaint to the police.

- The proportion of Arab citizens who report that the police response during their most recent contact was good or very good is 50% (down from 52.6% in 2018), compared to 48.2% among Jews (almost unchanged compared to 2018).

- Arab citizens believe that police functioning in aspects relating to the enforcement of law and order is good: 45.6% stated that the police functioning in enforcing traffic laws in Arab society is good or every good, and 30% expressed satisfaction with the police functioning in terms of the enforcement of law and order. However, the level of satisfaction is lower in other areas: protecting the security of Arab

citizens; the war against crime in Arab society; the police response to drug dealing and drug abuse; the war against crime families in Arab society; and the struggle against violence. In the last area, for example, only 13.2% of Arab citizens believe that the police functioning is good or very good. The respondents' evaluation of police functioning fell in 2019 by comparison to 2018.

- In the area of firearms, the factor that is considered most responsible for the high level of use of firearms are the light penalties imposed on violent offenders: 92.9% of Arabs agree that this factor has a strong influence, as do 73.5% of Jewish respondents. A high proportion of Arab respondents (86.4%) believe that the ready availability of firearms has a strong influence on violent use of firearms, compared to 53% in Jewish society. In this context, it is important to note that the limited police presence is also regarded as factor that encourages the violent use of firearms (78.8% of Arab respondents and 59.4% of Jews agreed with this view).

- 48.5% of Arab citizens are willing or very willing to participate in the struggle against violence in their locale, while 28.4% are moderately willing to do so. This finding shows that a considerable proportion (76.9%) of Arab citizens are willing to help in the struggle against the phenomenon. At the same time, around one-fourth of Arab citizens appear to have despaired of their ability to change the depressing reality around them.

- When asked about the various bodies and functions involved in the struggle against violence, the family was mentioned most often (63.2% of Arab respondents stated that they are satisfied or very satisfied with its response). Religious institutions are perceived as relatively effective in the struggle against violence among half the Arab citizens (49.5%, an increase over 45.1% in 2018). The education system also enjoys a relatively high level of satisfaction: 49.1% of citizens are satisfied or very satisfied with its functioning. However, this figure is down from 54.7% in 2018. The perception of the leadership of Arab society in this context rose sharply, with 37.1% expressing satisfaction at its response to the phenomenon in 2019, compared to 24.8% in 2018. Conversely, , the Israel Police, the Knesset, and the government are all regarded as showing limited effectiveness in reducing violence in Israel. Only 16.7% of Arab respondents expressed satisfaction with the function of the police, 16.1% with that of the Knesset, and 9.5% with that of the government.

- The general level of trust in the Israel Police among Arab citizens is very low – 17.4% (compared to 41.3% in Jewish society). Moreover,

- this figure shows a fall in the level of trust in the police among Arab respondents, from 26.1% in 2018.

- Despite this low level of trust, the police is the main body the respondents in Arab society turn to if they or their family have been the victims of violence or violent intimidation: 59.7% stated that they would turn to the police (up from 57.7% in 2018), 19.6% would act by themselves, and 10.3% would turn elsewhere to request protection.

Regarding the victims of violence: in 2019, 89 Arab citizens (79 men and 10 women) lost their lives.

The Israel Police claims that the proportion of indictment for murder in Arab society in recent years is equal to that in Jewish society, despite the grater difficulties in locating evidence and eyewitnesses in Arab society. Police commanders have also made a notable effort to engage in dialogue with the leaders of Arab society and with civil society organizations. An example of this is the forum established in February 2019 by Deputy Commissioner Gadi Siso, head of the Investigations and Intelligence Division of the Israel Police, in order to encourage cooperation in uprooting violence in Arab society.

The monitoring of the implementation of Government Decision 1402 produced the following findings: (A) In 2019 one police station was opened in an Arab locale – Tamra; (B) The number of Arab police officers in the Israel Police has increased: from 2016 through the end of 2019, 642 Arabs joined the force, 92 of whom were recruited in 2019. In the same period, 89 women officers were recruited, including 10 in 2019; (C) The Authority to Improve Police Services in Arab Society has continued to operate a broad-based support service for Arab police officers, including special training to help them meet the challenges they face. In 2019 the number of locales holding such training programs was increase; (D) The Authority has run training programs for staff responsible for training Arab officers, as well as focused training at the local level for officers in police stations in Arab communities relating to the cultural sensitivity needed in contacts with Arab society.

**The following are our key recommendations for improving personal security in Arab communities:**

Our recommendations for improving personal security in Arab society focus on two areas: recommendations concerning the work of the police for Arab society, and recommendations for addressing the root causes of crime and violence. We recognize that uprooting violence and crime requires attention to underlying factors, but the police and law enforcement agencies also bear responsibility for attending to these aspects.

## Recommendations concerning the work of the police and law enforcement agencies for Arab society

1. **A permanent and positive police presence in Arab communities**. Establishing new police stations in Arab communities does not in itself guarantee the personal security of citizens. The stations must operate as welcoming and attentive service centers and respond rapidly to complaints. It must be ensured that the stations receive full staffing positions for all hours of the day, and that their staff undergo special training for work with Arab society.

2. **Measuring the work of police stations in Arab communities**. In light of the lack of trust in the police among Arab citizens, an external body should measure the work of the police in Arab communities.

3. **Uprooting criminal organizations in Arab society**. The police must combat the criminal organizations active in Arab society and prosecute the leaders and members of these gangs, which directly threaten citizens' personal security.

4. **Institutionalized dialogue between the police and the community** – establishing permanent mechanisms for dialogue between the command level at police stations and local authorities and residents. These mechanisms will ensure police transparency and accountability toward the residents, coordination between relevant bodies, and the setting of priorities.

5. **Expanding the use of technological means for law enforcement in Arab society**. These means include sensors that detect gunshots on the basis of sonar intensity, CCTVs at public sites connected to a control center staffed 24 hours a day, and other means for the location, prevention, processing, and investigation of incidents of crime and violence in the public domain.

6. **Intensifying the struggle against illegal weapons** – weapons amnesties should be formalized, while ensuring anonymity and protection from prosecution. At the same time, enforcement operations and the seizure of weapons in this field should be intensified, and penalties for weapons offenses should be increased.

7. **Ending the practice of protecting "collaborators" involved in criminal activity who provide information to the security services**.

## Recommendations concerning the root causes of violence and crime

1. **Enhancing the presence of state institutions in the Arab communities** – the presence of the state and its institutions in the Arab communities will give residents a sense of belonging, and a sense that the state cares about them. This will also carry the message that they are a partner in the framework of law and order.

2. **Solving planning and building problems in Arab society**. It is vital to increase the currently limited availability of land and to approve urban plans for the Arab communities in order to moderate violent disputes resulting from the building and housing crisis in Arab society.

3. **Establishing "emergency service compounds" in Arab communities**. These compounds will include a police station, fire-fighting and rescue station, first aid centers, and a local "emergency room." This format offers operational and economic advantages and will enhance the legitimacy of the police as a life-saving service.

4. **Increasing the level of knowledge among Arab citizens about state services in the field of personal security**. State institutions – including the police, the fire-fighting and rescue services, the 105 hotline for the protection of minors online, and other emergency services – should advertise their services in Arabic in relevant media outlets consumed by Arab society. It is also important to ensure that these services have Arab staff members and provide training about their services in Arab communities.

5. **Education against violence** – there is a need to develop and operate educational programs against violence in formal and informal education frameworks in the Arab communities and mixed cities. These programs should be adapted to the characteristics of Arab society.

6. **Attention to families prone to poverty and violence** – programs and assistance for deprived families should be expanded. There is also a need to develop programs for marginalized youth, including the allocation of staff positions for caregivers and social workers in accordance with the poverty and violence indexes for the communities.

7. **Addressing the phenomenon of violence against women** – as part of the eradication of violence against women, the legal definition of domestic violence should be expanded to include various forms of violence within the family, and not only violence between partners.

The joint social work and police program in Arab communities should be expanded in order to provide a proper solution for women who are the victims of violence by their partners. The recommendations of the Interministerial Committee to Prevent Violence in the Family should be implemented promptly and budgets allocated to this end.