

CURRENT EVENTS UPDATE

August 2014

Current Events and Jewish-Arab Relations in Israel

When a cross-border conflict like the current military operation in Gaza erupts, issues relating to Arab citizens and Jewish-Arab relations within Israel tend to fall out of the public eye. The focus is on the intense fighting, danger and loss of lives. Yet escalations in tension, violence and mistrust between Jewish and Arab citizens are leaving their mark on Israeli society. Divisive undercurrents that were on the rise prior to the kidnap and murder of three Jewish and one Palestinian teen boiled over following these events and have further escalated since the launch of Operation Protective Edge.

For Israel, deterioration in majority-minority relations among its own citizens has complicated and detrimental consequences. Since the Orr Commission Report following the Events of October 2000, the socio-economic status of Arab citizens has been recognized as one of Israel's major national priorities and numerous related government and civil society programs have been launched. Heightened tensions between Jews and Arabs reinforce barriers to economic and societal participation that may delay progress on these fronts.

Organizations engaged in strengthening Jewish-Arab relations in Israel are both lamenting this deterioration and attempting to seize the opportunity to speak about majority-minority relations, civil rights, and the need to build a shared future.

Following is a brief outline of the escalation, current status and responses to this rise in tensions on the ground.

Recent Escalation

Over the last several weeks, deterioration in Jewish-Arab relations has been marked by violence and radicalized public discourse. Arab demonstrations have turned violent and led to clashes between Arab citizens and the police. Joint Jewish-Arab rallies for peace came under attack by right wing demonstrators. Calls of "revenge" and "death to Arabs" are heard in rallies and on social media. And Jewish and Arab political leaders often added fuel to the fire. There have been incidents of physical attacks against Arab citizens in public areas (public transport and shopping centers) and many Arab citizens are now afraid to speak Arabic in public. At the same

time, stone-throwing attacks on Jewish passers-by in Arab towns have contributed to Jewish citizens feeling fear and keeping distance from their Arab neighbors.

Although violent events continue to take place, it is hard to estimate the exact scope. Such events are largely unreported—neither to authorities nor in the media. What does appear in mainstream Hebrew press does not usually get translated into English. Some examples of incidents that received coverage include:

- [Arab-Israeli Deliveryman Indicted for Swastika Vandalism](#) – *Israel National News* – Moshe Cohen – 8.7.14
- [In Jerusalem, nationalistic violence claims more Arab victims](#) – *Times of Israel* – Elhanan Miller – 8.1.14
- [Two Arab detained for trying to hurt a Jewish couple](#) - *Israel Hayom* – Edna Adati – 7.20.14 (Hebrew)
- [Right-wingers beat Haifa deputy mayor during anti-war protest](#) – *Haaretz* – Roy Chicky Arad – 7.20.14
- [Abusive graffiti against Arabs sprayed in Nahariya](#) – *YNET* – Adi Gal – 7.20.14 (Hebrew)
- [A violent demonstration in Haifa: Arabs struck by stones](#) – *NRG* – Yair Kraus – 7.14.14 (Hebrew)
- [Three youngsters from Nazareth Illit detained; suspected of assaulting an Arab youngster, while abusive graffiti was sprayed in Furadis](#) – *Haaretz* - Eli Ashkenazi – 7.13.14 (Hebrew)
- [Jews attacked in an Arab town](#) – *YNET* – Hassan Shaalan - 7.5.14

Operation Protective Edge further escalated tensions. When Arab citizens—who identify with Palestinians in Gaza both as a people and because of family connections—demonstrate in opposition to the war, they are often perceived by the Jewish majority as anti-Israeli. The Jewish public is also less inclined to distinguish between Arab citizens of Israel and Palestinians in Gaza.

Arab and Jewish leadership have also fanned the flames. The Arab Higher Follow-Up Committee (a voluntary representative body composed of mayors, political leaders and party representatives) called a general strike on Monday, July 21st, in protest against the operation. In response Foreign Minister Lieberman wrote a Facebook post urging people [not to buy from Arabs who participate in the strike](#). Three Arab MKs (Sarsur, Ganaim and Tibi) called Israeli soldiers ‘murderers’ in the Knesset and were removed by speaker Feingold. This followed a controversial 6-month suspension of MK Hanin Zoabi from the Knesset plenum for statements identifying with Palestinians’ cause including one urging Palestinians to “impose a siege” rather than negotiate with Israel.”

Government and Civil Society Response

According to numerous Jewish and Arab civil society leaders and intellectuals, current divisions are more severe than during Operation Cast Lead in 2008. Trust between Jews and Arabs is at a lower level and exclusionary and divisive discourse has become much more common.

On a national level, most government efforts have been overwhelmingly focused on the conflict with Gaza and its aftermath. However the Ministry of Justice did open a dedicated [hotline for complaints against incitement and violence and is tracking responses](#). On a local level, mayors are working hard to quell violence regionally, often in joint Jewish-Arab cooperation, including issuing [statements condemning violence and calling for good neighborly relations and calm](#). The Tel-Aviv-Jaffa municipality launched a [campaign for tolerance](#) in the city's bus-stops and online. Furthermore, while Arab demonstrations have resulted in clashes with the police and many arrests, a number of civil society leaders acknowledge that the police are showing deliberate restraint and that significant progress in this area has been made since the clashes of October 2000.

On the civil society front, a number of organizations are making efforts to reinforce Jewish-Arab relations and to draw attention to the issues behind the escalation and eruption of tensions. Many organizations quickly partnered to coordinate weekly joint-Jewish-Arab demonstrations in solidarity, mutual support and a refusal to be enemies, as well as gatherings and conferences for Jewish-Arab dialogue and planning. Dialogue was also quickly organized in places that experienced local violence, and many families chose to come together for joint Iftar break-fasts. (A selection of such efforts can be found here: [July 4-19](#), [July 20-26](#), [July 26-31](#), [Aug 1-8](#).) In addition, civil society organizations issued [statements condemning incitement and calling for solidarity](#), including an [ad signed by a significant portion of shared society and human rights organizations](#) in Haaretz on July 24th which read:

"The escalation in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict over the past month brought with it a wave of incitement and acts of racism and verbal and physical violence against Arab citizens. The boundaries of the public and media discourse are becoming increasingly narrow, and voicing a different opinion than that of the Jewish mainstream is being condemned as dangerous. The magnitude of the incitement, hatred and acts of violence should worry every citizen... and warn Israeli society it is on the brink of an abyss. The Jewish public should understand that the Arab citizens of Israel are part of the Palestinian people, and many of them have family members in the Gaza Strip. They naturally identify with their plight."

Further Reading

- [Torn between state and people, one Arab Israeli feels strain of Gaza war](#) - Haaretz - Leora Eren Frucht - 8.9.14

- [As Gaza war ebbs, Israeli Arabs feel under threat](#) - *Christian Science Monitor* - Shira Rubin – 8.6.14
- [Gaza Strip Conflict Deepens Divide Between Arabs, Jews in Israel](#) - *Bloomberg Businessweek* - Amy Teibel and Caroline Alexander – 8.5.14
- [As war tensions flare, Arab businesses struggle](#) – *Jerusalem Post* – Niv Ellis – 8.6.14
- [Sympathies divided, Israel's Arab minority is caught in the middle of Gaza war](#) – *Fox News* – AP - 7.27.14
- [Israeli Arabs caught in the middle of Gaza war](#) - *Associated Press* – Aron Heller – 7.27.14
- [Do we belong?](#) - *The Economist* – 7.26.14

Arab and Jewish Voices

The escalation in tensions between Arabs and Jews within the country sparked a public exchange of dialogue and opinions in the press. Among the Arab voices included those for whom the current escalation was the last straw. They no longer could envision a gainful future in the country as an Arab citizen. Sayed Kashua declared that “[Jewish Arab coexistence has failed](#).” Zohair Bahloul wrote that “nothing will help” in “[I’ve had it with being an Arab in this country](#).” In response, a number of Arab leaders and media personalities wrote that, despite their frustration, they are committed to shared society and to peace. Jewish voices ranging from MKs to civil society leaders also wrote in alarm of the rise in tensions and warned of a further deterioration in Jewish-Arab relations. See the following Arab and Jewish op-eds:

Arab voices

- [Why Sayed Kashua is leaving Jerusalem and never coming back](#) – *Haaretz* - Sayed Kasua – 7.4.14
- [Not going anywhere](#) – *Haaretz* - Nadia Hilou – 7.8.14 (Hebrew)
- [I’m sick of being an Arab here](#) – *Haaretz* - Zohair Bahloul (Hebrew)
- [Go in peace, dear Sayed](#) - *Haaretz* - Mira Awad – 7.22.14
- [We don’t have the privilege of succumbing to despair](#) – *Jewish News (UK)* - Thabet Abu Ras – 7.28.14
- [Israeli Arabs, stop whining](#) – *Haaretz* - Oudeh Basharat – 7.29.14

Jewish voices

- [The choice is ours](#) – *Times of Israel* - Rebecca Bardach – 7.4.14
- [Not just escalation: A frightening new era of Jewish-Arab relations in Israel](#) – *+972 Magazine* - Ron Gerlitz - 7.7.14
- [Everything will NOT be OK](#) – *Jerusalem Post* - MK Nahman Shai 7.10.14
- [They took her off the train; they burned his car: Arab citizens in the shadow of Protective Edge](#) – *Globes* - Dror Feuer – 7.19.14 (Hebrew)