

# **Arab Citizens in the Shadow of War**

## **IMPACT ON JEWISH-ARAB RELATIONS**

**IATF** | November 10, 2023

### **OVERVIEW**

**Arab citizens of Israel have been deeply impacted** by the Hamas attacks of October 7, their aftermath, and the ongoing war. They suffered deaths and casualties in the attacks, remain missing, and are among the hostages in Gaza.<sup>1</sup> Many came to the rescue of innocent civilians—some losing their lives in the process. Many more mourn together with Jewish friends and neighbors the lives cut short through unimaginable tragedy.

**Jewish-Arab relations in Israel are always affected by escalations** in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The October 7 attacks and the war in Gaza are the most severe escalation in decades. These have ignited profound fears among Jews and Arabs in Israel: for their personal safety, of potential outbreak of Jewish-Arab violence within Israel, and for what the future might hold. Arab citizens are also hurting for Palestinian civilians in Gaza, a feeling that is difficult to hold or express in the charged and fearful atmosphere of wartime Israel.

**Over these difficult weeks, thousands of Israelis are mobilizing** to support each other. This includes Arab and Jewish citizens working together to meet emergency needs, express solidarity, prevent escalations, and preserve a shared future in the face of these unimaginable difficulties.

This resource summarizes concerns and efforts that have become priorities for Arab society and Jewish-Arab relations. Less visible in the headlines, we hope it may be a source of important information, insight, and inspiration as American Jewish communities grapple with losses, tensions, and concerns for Israel and its future.

### **TOPICS OF CONCERN**

October 7<sup>th</sup> and its aftermath have heightened two major vectors of fear and concern:

- **Increased fear and mistrust between Jewish and Arab citizens**, affecting daily life in workplaces, on campuses, and all shared spaces, including social media; and
- **Fear of widespread escalations and provocations** that could ignite intergroup violence within the country.

What happens in both these arenas now will have profound consequences for Jewish-Arab relations for years to come.

## ARAB CITIZENS VIEWED WITH FEAR AND MISTRUST

*"Whoever says he supports Hamas should pay the price, but it's dozens. It's a minority in the minority. We are two million citizens, how can we all be considered like that?" - [Soroka hospital physician](#).*

Following the attacks, many Arab citizens of Israel expressed [shock, horror, and grief](#), along with [denunciations](#) and [condemnations](#) of such brutality.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, this grief was quickly accompanied by [overwhelming fear](#) over how the attacks would affect their place and safety as a minority in Israeli society.

- **Personal Security and Safety:** In an [October 15-19 survey by IDI](#), 69% of Arab citizens report fear for their physical safety. Israeli-Jews, deeply traumatized, are viewing Arabs with greater suspicion and fear.<sup>3</sup> Many more are applying for gun licenses or joining civilian security squads, leaving Arab communities in fear that they will be targeted. In times of conflict Arab citizens fear speaking Arabic in public. Today many are also afraid to leave home.
- **Chilling Effect.** The war in Gaza adds to overall tensions. Most Arab citizens are unable to side with a scenario in which Palestinian civilian deaths are an inevitable price. Most of the Jewish public is unequivocal about the need to exact a definitive victory against Hamas and views Arab ambivalence with suspicion or worse. Arab citizens are monitored—formally and informally—for such expressions and are met with threats, arrests, and dismissals. The result is an [overall chilling effect](#) on Jewish-Arab relations.
 

*"As far as [Jewish] Israelis are concerned, we are citizens of Israel and we have to choose a very clear side, but some of us have family in Gaza, friends and peace activists who are now under incessant fire and inhumane conditions." - [Rula Daoud, Director of Standing Together](#)*
- **Social Media.** As of November 2<sup>nd</sup>, police monitoring of social media has led to [over 170 Arab arrests](#). Wartime vigilance means a wide range of online comments can lead to rapid arrest, including [expressions of sympathy](#) for Palestinian casualties in Gaza. Meanwhile, [fake-news, misinformation, and misunderstandings](#) provoke anxieties and suspicions among Arabs and Jews.
- **Work and Campus.** Workplaces and institutions serving Jews and Arabs are in crisis. Across industries ([healthcare](#), education, [construction](#), [public transport](#), retail, and more), many Jewish Israelis express fear working alongside Arab colleagues and Arab staff feel scrutinized and prejudged. Some employers provide training and facilitation to calm tensions, but Arab workers report [cases of terminations](#) and fear of going to work. [Academic institutions](#) have also suspended Arab students for their views, leaving students afraid of speaking and going to campus.

*"Especially in this most difficult period in the history of our people and that of our country, and all its citizens, it is important to protect the rights of all citizens in the country, to calm and support the public, and not to ignite or escalate." - [MK Moshe Arbel \(Shas\), Minister of Interior](#), [instructing the Mayor of Givatayim not to prohibit Arab workers from construction sites](#)*

*“Every day that passes, that I wake up in the morning, and the streets didn’t burn. I’m relieved.” – **Amir Badran**, Council Member and Founder of Guardians of Jewish-Arab Partnership in Tel Aviv- Jaffa*

## VOLATILE ATMOSPHERE

The scale of trauma and ongoing war not only raise tensions between Jewish and Arab citizens but evoke fears of a more existential escalation between the two groups within Israel, echoing the [events of May 2021](#).

- **Perceptions:** A survey of Israeli citizens run by [aChord on Oct. 18<sup>4</sup>](#) found that 54% of Jews and 41% of Arabs strongly believe the other group poses a threat to their security. Meanwhile, 98% of Arab and 90% of Jewish respondents oppose violence between the groups—but both believe at least 50% of the other group supports it.
- **Provocations:** Though both Jews and Arabs oppose intergroup violence, the anger, and fear in the Israeli public is fertile ground for provocation. [Misinformation](#), vengeful and [alarmist rhetoric](#) in public and online discourse, [conspiracy theories](#), and incitement by [extremists](#) are all prominent factors in this sensitive and volatile period. Small confrontations can escalate quickly—such as the [mob threatening Arab students](#) in Netanya. [East Jerusalem](#) – the site of [recent stabbing attacks](#) – remains a powder keg for further escalations. In May 2021, confrontations in East Jerusalem sparked the widespread riots and clashes that broke out in Israel. That recent memory has Jewish and Arab communities wary and fearful of outbreaks and renewed vigilantism.
- **Police and Security:** Arab citizens fear that—especially in wartime—Israel’s security forces and policies will be directed against them. Formation of over [600 civilian defense units](#) armed with [25,000-40,000 government-issued firearms](#), along with [relaxation of gun laws](#), increase the [fear of lethal force](#). Earlier this year, the government approved plans to create a national guard—then widely viewed then as intended [against the Arab minority](#) and empowering vigilante groups—while also [dismantling](#) efforts to strengthen effective policing and crime-prevention in Arab communities. The prevailing feeling in Arab society is that while increased security forces and [wartime policies](#) can be directed against them, they will not have recourse or protection.

*“We are witness to countless acts and gestures expressing the mutual care and good neighborly relations of residents from all backgrounds and communities ... As civic leaders ... we see ourselves as responsible for continuing to act together to preserve these good neighborly relations and the personal security of all Negev residents. There is no place for racism or violence in the Negev. Only in this way can we ensure a better future for our children and communities.” – Letter signed by **Jewish and Bedouin mayors** in Negev*

## PRESERVING JEWISH-ARAB PARTNERSHIP IN ISRAEL

Over these difficult weeks, thousands of Israelis are mobilizing to support each other, address emergency needs, and strengthen communities. This includes efforts to promote Jewish-Arab solidarity and prevent deterioration or escalations.

- **Leadership.** Numerous leaders are calling on the public to preserve Jewish-Arab partnership and to combat hate, harassment, and deterioration of relations. Examples include [President Isaac Herzog](#), the [Chief Rabbis of Israel](#), [MK Mansour Abbas](#), and others, along with other [government leaders](#), [mayors](#), [Sheiks](#), and civil sector leaders across the country.
- **Preventing Escalations.** Civil Society, philanthropic, and grassroots organizations and leaders have jumped into action to prevent deterioration and further harm. Action areas span (i) **strengthening leaders and organizations** working in mixed cities especially, (ii) **advocacy and media campaigns** to promote calm and [solidarity in public discourse](#); and (iii) **support for mixed workplaces and institutions**. [Read more](#) and view the [growing database](#) of initiatives.
- **Promoting Solidarity.** Important efforts to preserve Jewish-Arab partnership have been emerging in the aftermath of the crisis. These expressions of solidarity, shared and mutual responsibility, enable Jewish and Arab volunteers to work side by side, and ensure Arab communities are visible as part of overall emergency mobilization.
  - **Emergency response centers:** [In the center](#) and the [Negev](#), centers set up by Jewish, Arab and joint organizations and leaders ensure Arab communities are part of the national emergency response. An [Arab-Jewish Joint Emergency Center](#) in Rahat mobilizes Jewish and Arab volunteers from around the country.
  - **Grassroots movements:** [Rov Ha'Ir](#) in Haifa, [Guardians of Jewish-Arab Partnership in Tel Avivi-Jaffa](#), [Neighbors at Peace](#), [Standing Together](#), are some of the movements protecting shared life in Israel's mixed cities. Volunteers gather donations for Jewish and Arab communities, engage leaders, calm and de-escalating tensions, organize joint activities, and send a message of solidarity and partnership.
  - **Web of Resilience:** Dozens of [civil society organizations](#) are working to heal Jewish-Arab relations within Jewish and Arab communities, and in shared physical and online spaces. Efforts include supporting employers and employees, youth, and young adults, working with police and security forces towards sensitivity, engaging local leaders, combatting misinformation, and strengthening the shared social fabric for the future.

*"[T]he enemy seeks to fan hatred within us - between Jewish and Arab citizens [...] We must eradicate all hostility, hatred, and racism towards different groups within us; remember the dozens of Arab citizens who paid with their lives [...]. Most importantly, remember the responsibility and partnership that Arab society in Israel is expressing."* - **[President Isaac Herzog](#)**

To learn more [about these efforts](#) and the [organizations](#) leading them, meet with shared society leaders, or brief your community, **[contact IATF](#)**.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> According to [Bokra.net](#), this [map](#), and other [sources](#), a total of 26 Arab citizens have been killed. At least 11 were killed by Hamas terrorists, including five rescue workers. Six are thought to have been abducted to Gaza. Since, seven have also fallen in combat as IDF soldiers.

<sup>2</sup> Recent research shows that Arab feelings of empathy towards Jewish Israelis are highest since May 2021. Source: [aChord: Social Psychology for Social Change, Hebrew University, October 18, 2023](#).

<sup>3</sup> aChord research shows a significant spike in feelings of anger, fear, hatred, and mistrust among Jewish-Israelis towards the Arab citizens. Arab citizens show increased fear but also increased empathy for Jewish Israelis. Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.