

# Being Palestinian in Israel: Identity, Protest, and Political Exclusion

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I'm caught in the perfect paradox—I have to be a loyal citizen of a country that declares itself not to be my country but rather the country of the Jewish people.  
—Azmi Bishara

**T**he end of the Cold War has paradoxically unleashed a worldwide orgy of ethnic violence, despite—or perhaps because of—increased political and economic freedom. One need look only as far as Africa, to the bloodbath of the Rwandan civil war, or to Eastern Europe, where the violent breakup of the former Yugoslavia coined a new term, *ethnic cleansing*, to witness the intensity and even savagery of ethnic competition. The renewal of violence between Palestinians and Israelis in the Middle East aptly illustrates the persistence of some ethnic conflicts.

Nationalists in many ethnically oriented states often advocate the marginalization of minorities, which lends credence to the battlecries of ethnic entrepreneurs who hope to mobilize minorities through political or military action. Despite the potential for ethnic conflict, nationalists often press for policies that favor the dominant ethnic group and marginalize minorities, claiming that such policies reflect the natural order or that majority groups have the right to make policies that favor them. In fact, some argue that the dominance of a single ethnic group is in fact preferable in divided societies, since it may lead to more stable ethnic relations. Some academic research backs up these claims with evidence that ethnic dominance can enhance stability.<sup>1</sup>

Oppressed minorities and their liberal allies, however, argue that marginalizing ethnic minorities will only exacerbate tensions. Instead, minorities should be incorporated into the body politic in order to encourage peaceful ethnic relations. Ted Gurr has offered global-level empirical evidence that inclusion is associated with reduced ethnic violence.<sup>2</sup>

This article presents evidence supporting Gurr's claims of a link between ethnic inclusion and stability. I argue that identification with the state among minorities facilitates more stable ethnic relations; however, identification with the state is difficult when the state's institutions are used to marginalize minority groups. Inclusion, therefore, remains an important factor supporting ethnic stability.

1. Ian Lustick, *Arabs in the Jewish State: Israel's Control of a National Minority*, Modern Middle East Series (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1980); Lustick, "Stability in Deeply Divided Societies: Consociationalism versus Control," *World Politics* 31 (1979): 325–44; Sammy Smooha, "Minority Status in an Ethnic

Democracy: The Status of the Arab Minority in Israel," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 13 (1990): 389–413.

2. Ted Robert Gurr, "Ethnic Warfare on the Wane," *Foreign Affairs* 79 (2000): 52–64; Gurr, *Peoples versus States: Minorities at Risk in the New Century* (Washington, DC: U.S. Institute of Peace, 2000).

The case of Israel is used to support this argument. Israel is an ethnically oriented state that uses state institutions to favor the Jewish majority over the indigenous Israeli Palestinian population.<sup>3</sup> The Israeli Palestinian minority therefore suffers from discrimination, deprivation, and dilemmas in identity that have been the subject of some interest in recent years.<sup>4</sup> It is among this minority that displays varying levels of identification with the state that we may find evidence to support or refute the claims of this article.

Briefly, the results of my study suggest that the political, economic, and social exclusion of Israeli Palestinians hinders the development of an authentic “Israeli” identity among this minority. Policies implied by the state’s Jewish character distance Israeli Palestinians from affective attachment to the state. Furthermore, the main alternative to this underdeveloped Israeli identity—the Palestinian identity—provides a much-needed affective attachment to people (although not state) and acts as a form of symbolic resistance. This Palestinian identity is associated with political action—including vote boycotting and political protest—at the individual level.

The implications of these findings are clear: state repression may not decrease minority resistance. Repression may, in fact, increase political resistance, potentially leading to ethnic instability. “Control” strategies, then, are not the most effective in achieving tranquility.

The analysis of the article is informed by the theoretical influences of constructivism. Under constructivist assumptions, one’s identity is not eternally fixed, but can be shaped by external events and the attempts of ethnic entrepreneurs to mobilize constituencies. This is

not to say that identity is completely malleable; identity is anchored by a number of factors such as cultural markers and collective memories. Within certain constraints, however, the interpretation of boundaries and meanings of cultural anchors can be influenced by external factors.

In addition to historical research and recent field research, I make use of survey data to support my arguments. The main data set I rely on is a survey conducted in Israel in winter/spring 2001 consisting of 1,202 face-to-face interviews in Arabic among Palestinian citizens. I commissioned the Givat Haviva Center for Peace Research to conduct the survey. This organization is experienced in conducting surveys among the Arab population in Israel, a specialized population that requires a greater degree of knowledge and experience than polling the general population of Israel.

The Arabic face-to-face survey was conducted during January–May 2001. It was based on a name sample, randomly drawn from Arab localities on the population register of the Ministry of Interior. Included in the sample were residents of forty-four villages and towns inside the Green Line, which constitutes a representative stratified sample of all localities in which Palestinian citizens live. The interviews were conducted in Arabic by native Arabic-speaking interviewers trained by Givat Haviva.

Through the analysis of this survey data set, historical research, and personal interviews, I show that those who identify as “Israeli,” that is, those Palestinian Israelis who identify with the Israeli state, are less likely to engage in system-challenging activity (protest, vote boycott) than those who do not, particularly those who identify as “Palestinian.” This link between

3. Israeli Palestinians are citizens of Israel, descendants of the Palestinians who remained in Israel after the 1948 war that created Israel. The terminology used to describe this population reflects, at least in part, one’s political orientation, and thus the topic is politically sensitive. The most widespread term in use in Israel and the United States is *Israeli Arab*. In order to be clear and consistent, I have chosen to use the term *Israeli Palestinian* where context permits, since it seems most appropriately descriptive and least politically charged.

4. Mishael Mawari Caspi and Jerome David Weltsch, *From Slumber to Awakening: Culture and Identity of Arab Israeli Literati* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1998); David Grossman, *Sleeping on a Wire: Conversations with Palestinians in Israel*, trans. Haim Watzman (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1993); Nadim Rouhana, *Palestinian Citizens in an Ethnic Jewish State: Identities in Conflict* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997); Izhak Schnell, *Perceptions of Israeli Arabs: Territoriality and Identity, Research in Ethnic Relations* (Aldershot, England: Avebury, 1994); Rebecca L. Torstrick, *The Limits of Co-existence: Identity Politics in Israel* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000).

identity and system-challenging suggests that identification with the state is an important component of ethnic stability.

### Citizenship, the State, and Identity

The Jewish nature of the Israeli state has garnered some attention regarding its treatment of its Palestinian minority and the implications for Israeli democracy.

The controversy over Israel's political system centers on minority rights. Although prevailing procedurally minimal definitions of democracy focus on the electoral institutions that allow for citizen control over the government and its policies,<sup>5</sup> an underlying principle of democracy is that of the equality of all citizens.<sup>6</sup> Liberal democracy institutionalizes the principle of equality not only through elections but also through minority protections, usually as enshrined in a constitution or other foundational document.<sup>7</sup>

Sammy Smootha argues that Israel is a democracy of a new type, called "ethnic democracy."<sup>8</sup> This form of democracy, he argues, has all the necessary institutions and practices to qualify as a democracy. It has free and fair elections, and enough color-blind civil liberties to allow what are normally considered democratic processes to operate. However, it institutionalizes the dominance of a single ethnic group within the democratic structure. Smootha's argument in many ways echoes that of Fareed Zakaria, who describes "illiberal democracy" as a form of democracy that holds competitive elections but otherwise circumscribes individual freedoms.<sup>9</sup> Smootha argues that ethnic democracy may be a stable political system in the long run.

Opposed to Smootha's position are several other scholars who contend that Israel's institutionalized ethnic dominance and poor treatment of its Palestinian citizens disqualifies it as a bona fide democracy. Instead, Israel is an "ethnic state" that disempowers its Arab citizens to the extent that it cannot be considered a democracy.<sup>10</sup> Oren Yiftachel similarly argues that Israel's status as a biethnic state composed of two rival "homeland" ethnic groups makes it comparable to unstable countries such as Northern Ireland and Cyprus and that political violence is likely to erupt if Israel does not move to include Arab citizens in power-sharing arrangements.<sup>11</sup>

Alan Dowty<sup>12</sup> and Ruth Gavison<sup>13</sup> have disputed this critical view of Israel, arguing that Israel is not a perfect democracy, but it is a democracy nonetheless and should be considered to be roughly on par with democratic nation-states in Western Europe. Dowty argues that As'ad Ghanem, Nadim Rouhana, and Oren Yiftachel<sup>14</sup> use too restrictive of criteria to classify states as democracies. Nation-states of Western Europe, such as France and Germany, are also guilty of mistreating minorities to some extent or another, since the mission of the nation-state is to be the instrument of the (dominant) nation's self-determination. Thus Israel, as a democratic nation-state, is no less democratic than countries widely accepted as democracies.

It is important to note that none of the above arguments claims that Israel's Palestinian citizens are treated equally or fairly. Instead, some, such as Dowty, defend Israel's self-definition as a Jewish state as relatively benign and at least potentially in harmony with

5. Robert A. Dahl, *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1971).

6. David Braybrooke, *Three Tests for Democracy: Personal Rights, Human Welfare, Collective Preference*, ed. V. C. Chappell, *Studies in Philosophy* (New York: Random House, 1968).

7. Larry Diamond, *Developing Democracy* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999).

8. Sammy Smootha, "Ethnic Democracy: Israel as an Archetype," *Israel Studies* 2 (1997): 198–241; Smootha, "Minority Status in an Ethnic Democracy."

9. Fareed Zakaria, "The Rise of Illiberal Democracy," *Foreign Affairs* 76 (1997): 22–43.

10. As'ad Ghanem, "State and Minority in Israel: The Case of Ethnic State and the Predicament of Its Minority," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 21 (1998): 428–47; Nadim Rouhana, "Israel and Its Arab Citizens: Predicaments in the Relationship between Ethnic States and Ethnonational Minorities," *Third World Quarterly* 19 (1998): 277–96; Nadim Rouhana and As'ad Ghanem, "The Crisis of Minorities in Ethnic States: The Case of Palestinian Citizens in Israel," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 30 (1998): 321–46.

11. Oren Yiftachel, "The Concept of 'Ethnic Democracy' and Its Applicability to the Case of Israel," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 15 (1992): 125–36.

12. Alan Dowty, "Consociationalism and Ethnic Democracy: Israeli Arabs in Comparative Perspective," *Israel Affairs* 5 (1999): 169–82; Dowty, "Is Israel Democratic? Substance and Semantics in the 'Ethnic Democracy' Debate," *Israel Studies* 4 (1999): 1–15; Dowty, *The Jewish State: A Century Later* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

13. Ruth Gavison, "Jewish and Democratic? A Rejoinder to the 'Ethnic Democracy' Debate," *Israel Studies* 4 (1999): 44–72.

14. As'ad Ghanem, Nadim Rouhana, and Oren Yiftachel, "Questioning 'Ethnic Democracy': A Response to Sammy Smootha," *Israel Studies* 3 (1998): 253–67.

democratic principles, whereas others argue that a Jewish state cannot treat non-Jews equally and is therefore inherently undemocratic.

The academic debate over Israel's Jewishness and democracy highlights the importance of a state's "nationalizing" policies toward ethnic minorities. Some states, called "nationalizing" by Rogers Brubaker<sup>15</sup> and "organic, programmatic" states by Nils Butenschon,<sup>16</sup> are ethnically nonneutral in character. These states, according to Brubaker, hold in common a number of characteristics: an ethnoculturally defined nation, its claim to ownership of the state, and a compensatory state project that strengthens this national majority at the expense of other cultural groups.

Despite having its own state, the national majority is thought to be embattled by an outside force and is therefore in a weak cultural, economic, or demographic position within the state. This legacy of discrimination is used to justify the "remedial" or "compensatory" project of the state by promoting the specific (and heretofore inadequately served) interests of the core nation. This compensatory aim justifies the nationalizing policies of the state, which are generally aimed at bolstering the economic, political, or demographic position of the core nation vis-à-vis the state's minorities.

This conception of the state stands in sharp contrast to civic states, where the "nation" is the body of legal citizens and citizenship is tied to territorial, not ethnic, considerations. Even states such as France and Germany, which have varying degrees of ethnocultural stipulations attached to citizenship,<sup>17</sup> lack the compensatory project of the state and incorporate greater minority rights into their legal systems. They exemplify the "hybrid model of minority rights" in which the state is national, but not nationalizing.<sup>18</sup>

Citizenship acts as an important institutional link between an individual's identity and

the state in which he or she lives. Citizenship has been described as "a scarce public good that is distributed by the state, a source of collective identity and an instrument of political control . . . that regulates the distribution of rights and obligations in a country."<sup>19</sup> Thus it is of great importance to individual identities and the distribution of power in a society whether national citizenship is implemented as ethnic or civic.

Citizenship can refer to two different concepts: one's status as a legal citizen, and one's identity as a member of a community, usually referring to membership in a political community such as an internationally recognized state.<sup>20</sup> When these two concepts overlap, that is, when legal citizenship and identification with the political community are distributed to all residing within the boundaries of the state, the state's inhabitants are said to enjoy civic citizenship. All are able to enjoy equal access to the resources of the state<sup>21</sup> as well as equal opportunity to consider oneself as "belonging" to the state. If any legal citizens are excluded from identifying with the political community, such exclusion is considered an aberration. Claimants can refer to the contradiction between principle and practice in their attempts to rectify the grievance.

When identification with the political community is reserved for a single ethnic group, excluding significant communities of legal citizens, an ethnonational conception of citizenship prevails. Legal citizens who are not members of the core nation are excluded from full membership in society and may not enjoy full access to the resources of the state.

Citizenship also acts as a form of identity that links the state with the individual; thus, disjuncture between legal and national citizenship may create confusion in identification. Members of a national minority find it difficult to identify with the state that reigns over their homeland when that state is not *their* state.

15. William Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

16. Nils A. Butenschon, "State, Power, and Citizenship in the Middle East," in *Citizenship and the State in the Middle East: Approaches and Applications*, ed. Nils A. Butenschon, Uri Davis, and Manuel Hassassian (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2000): 3–27.

17. William Rogers Brubaker, "Immigration, Citizenship, and the Nation-State in France and Germany: A Comparative Historical Analysis," *International Sociology* 5, no. 4 (1990): 379–407.

18. Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed*, 105.

19. Butenschon, "State, Power, and Citizenship in the Middle East," 5.

20. *Ibid.*

21. Uri Davis, "Conceptions of Citizenship in the Middle East," in Butenschon, Davis, and Hassassian, *Citizenship and the State*, 49–69.

Affect, an essential part of identification and belonging, may be noticeably reduced or absent when minorities are excluded from membership in the state's primary political community.

Under these circumstances, collective identities of national minorities may be incomplete or unbalanced,<sup>22</sup> thus provoking a psychological search for balance. This search may manifest itself in political activity aimed at correcting state-imposed conditions of imbalance. This article aims to investigate the contradictions in identity among Israeli Palestinians and to show the link between identity, state, and political activity.

### Identity and the National State: The Case of Israel

Although located outside Eastern Europe, where most commonly identified nationalizing states exist, Israel nevertheless bears the legacy of interwar nationalizing states. The early Zionists, who first conceived of a Jewish state, were predominantly from Eastern European countries such as Poland and Russia. They were highly influenced by ethnonationalist thought based on nationalizing projects, as well as a mature conception of democracy and citizenship. Their state-building efforts in Israel were understandably influenced by these theories.

Zionist pioneers began moving to the area called Palestine at the end of the nineteenth century motivated by Enlightenment ideas of the nation-state and the occurrence of anti-Semitic violence in Eastern Europe. Their arrival and the establishment of protostate institutions did not prepare them for the reality of Palestine at the time. How could Zionists create a Jewish state in Palestine when Palestinian Arabs comprised the overwhelming majority of inhabitants? Zionist thought had not done much to answer this question, displaying instead mostly avoidance or denial of the issue.<sup>23</sup>

During the war of 1948 that established the state of Israel, the majority of Palestinians were expelled or fled, thereby nominally "solving" the so-called Arab problem. Those Palestinians remaining comprised about 19 percent of the population of Israel and were eventually

made Israeli citizens. Most of the Palestinian leadership and economic elite remained in exile, so Palestinian citizens in Israel found themselves leaderless and placed under harsh military rule similar to Israel's current rule in the West Bank and Gaza. Unaccustomed to Jewish politics and institutions, as well as the new language, Palestinians were largely unequipped to seriously negotiate with the new government about their plight. For their part, Jewish Israelis largely ignored the Palestinian minority and went about the business of state building and nation building.

As Israeli Palestinians comprised a relatively small numerical minority, their Israeli citizenship was not thought to constitute a threat to Jewish state- and nation-building activities, particularly since they were controlled by a tough military regime. Thus, the Israeli government was able to clear the borders of Palestinian villages—thought to be a security threat—and confiscate large amounts of land with little reaction from the demoralized and disorganized minority. Israeli actions remained largely uncontested until the 1970s.

Because of the legacy of centuries of discrimination and exile and the need to carve out a secure national home in hostile territory, Israeli policymakers created policies meant to serve Jewish interests in the state of Israel and to solidify Jewish demographic, economic, and political predominance in the formerly Arab-majority territory. Thus, after the exigencies of war created a Jewish-majority Israeli state, Israeli elites were able to use the democratic legitimacy of the Jewish majority to create policies that favor Jewish Israelis at the expense of the Palestinian Israeli minority, thus solidifying the Jewish-ethnic (nationalizing) nature of the state.

According to the Israeli Declaration of Independence, Israel is the state of the Jewish people, but Palestinian citizens are to be considered equal. Thus, in theory at least, they should enjoy equal rights with Jewish citizens. In practice, however, Palestinian Israelis are not treated equally.

22. Rouhana, *Palestinian Citizens in an Ethnic Jewish State*.  
23. Dowty, *The Jewish State*.

Most Israeli laws are ethnically neutral in their wording and appear to be nondiscriminatory at first glance. However, the effects of Israeli policy are far from equal. The ostensibly neutral laws often employ nonneutral criteria, such as military service or geographic location, for the distribution of benefits. These criteria generally mask ethnic differences, as most Palestinian citizens do not serve in the military and they tend to live in geographically concentrated areas.

As a result of Israeli policy, Palestinians suffer from low standards of living and considerable economic deprivation. Palestinian localities receive only a fraction of what Jewish municipalities receive from the government. For example, the 1999 budget for Arab local authorities comprised only 8 percent of the regular budget for local authorities in Israel, which represents an expenditure of only two-thirds of the per capita expense for residents of Jewish local authorities.<sup>24</sup> Additionally, Palestinian localities are generally excluded from designation as “national priority areas,” which receive additional development funds from the government, even though Palestinian areas are among the poorest in the country.<sup>25</sup>

Housing and land discrimination further compounds the economic plight of Palestinian citizens. Palestinian lands have been expropriated at a dizzying rate since 1948. Today, 93 percent of all land in Israel comes under direct state control, whereas the Jewish community owned just 6 to 7 percent of the land prior to 1948.<sup>26</sup> Much of the land that remains in Palestinian hands is restricted in use, which limits the growth of Palestinian localities in response to natural population increase.<sup>27</sup>

In large part because of housing and land discrimination, Palestinian citizens of Israel experience considerable economic depri-

vation. Land expropriation and displacement have reduced their collective wealth, leaving a legacy of economic disadvantage from the outset. Furthermore, inferior education in Palestinian localities inadequately trains them for high-paying jobs,<sup>28</sup> while inferior economic and physical infrastructures, combined with a lack of land and state investment provide an unfavorable climate for economic development in Palestinian centers of population.<sup>29</sup>

Israeli Palestinians are generally not allowed employment in the “security complex,” which plays a large role in the Israeli economy and provides a large proportion of high-skilled technical jobs such as engineering. Jobs in the military industries, private contractors to the military, and many other peripherally related jobs require security clearance, which Palestinian citizens find difficult or impossible to obtain.<sup>30</sup>

Inequities such as those described above continue to exist in great part because of a lack of Israeli Palestinian representation in decision-making bodies. Palestinian Israelis have the right to vote in Israeli elections, but they are prevented from translating their potential voting power into effective policymaking. One reason is because of Section 7(A) of the Basic Law: The Knesset and the Law of Political Parties, which prohibits a party from contesting elections if it rejects Israel “as a state of the Jewish people.”<sup>31</sup>

According to Supreme Court interpretation, the definition of Israel as the state of the Jewish people means that Jews form the majority in the state, and Jews are therefore entitled to preferential treatment. A political party that rejects these principles may be disqualified, according to this interpretation. Thus, a political party that calls for equality between Arabs and Jews—as most Arab parties do—could

24. As'ad Ghanem, Thabet Abu-Ras, and Ze'ev Rosenhek, “Local Authorities, Welfare and Community—Position Paper 2,” in *After the Rift: New Directions for Government Policy towards the Arab Population in Israel. An Emergency Report by an Inter-University Research Team*, ed. Dan Rabinowitz, As'ad Ghanem, and Oren Yiftachel (Beer-sheva, Israel: Self-published, 2000).

25. Ghanem et al., “Local Authorities, Welfare, and Community.”

26. Adalah, the Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel Adalah, “Legal Violations of Arab Minority Rights in Israel” (Shfaram, Israel: Adalah, the Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel, 1998), 49.

27. “Identity Crisis: Israel and Its Arab Citizens” (Amman/Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2004), 14.

28. Majid al-Haj, Isma'il Abu-Sa'ad, and Yossi Yonah, “Education and Community—Position Paper 4,” in Rabinowitz et al., *After the Rift*.

29. Ahmad Sa'di, Michael Shalev, and Yitzhak Schnell, “Development and Employment—Position Paper 5,” in *ibid*.

30. Jonathan Cook, “No Arabic at McDonalds Israel,” *Al-Ahram Weekly*, 4 March 2004.

31. Adalah, “Legal Violations of Arab Minority Rights in Israel.”

theoretically be disqualified from elections. As a result of this legal interpretation, the Arab parties remain in a precarious state of legal limbo.<sup>32</sup>

Since the 1992 amendment of the law to its present form, however, no Arab political party has been disqualified on this basis. The most recent elections, in January 2003, witnessed attempts to disqualify several Palestinian Israeli candidates and parties, as well as some right-wing Jewish candidates. Although the Central Election Committee voted to disqualify the nationalist Balad/Tajamu' party and two Palestinian Israeli candidates, Ahmed Tibi and Azmi Bishara, the High Court reinstated their candidacies before the elections.<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, this development illustrates the precarious situation of Arab parties in Israel and their vulnerability to the demands of the Jewish majority. They are unable to represent their constituencies effectively because of the legal limits placed on their platforms and activities.

In addition to the legal limits that they must endure, Arab parties are also negatively impacted by informal limits on their coalition participation. Israel's parliamentary system concentrates most state power in a coalition cabinet and prime minister. Exclusion from the coalition effectively means exclusion from significant decision-making power. No Arab party has ever been part of an Israeli government coalition because of a powerful consensus among Jewish policymakers and public that Arab parties, as non-Zionist or anti-Zionist parties, are too radical for participation in decision making in a Jewish state. The most powerful position the Arab parties have ever reached was as part of a "blocking majority" that kept the rightist Likud party from forming a government between 1992 and 1996. Despite their status as a blocking force, the Arab parties could not point to any concrete achievements benefiting Arabs in Israel.<sup>34</sup>

Although Israeli Palestinian members of Zionist parties have been included in coalitions, their influence within the party is quite limited, and they have been unable or unwilling to ex-

press non-Zionist viewpoints. Israel sees itself as concerned with Jewish issues with which non-Jews should have no part in influencing. Thus, many Jewish members of the Knesset have vehemently opposed participating in any coalition that includes Arab parties, and as a result, Arab parties have not even been invited to coalition-building negotiations.

The platforms of Arab parties lie outside of the Zionist consensus that reigns in Israel among the Jewish population and is institutionalized in the Israeli state structure. According to this consensus, Israel is the "state of the Jewish people," and thus it exists to benefit Jews and to rectify the legacy of centuries of anti-Semitism. As a result, As'ad Ghanem concluded that "Arabs have never had any real opportunity to participate in decision-making, whether on domestic or foreign policy issues."<sup>35</sup>

Since the outbreak of hostilities in the occupied territories in October 2000, Israeli Palestinian citizens have been subject to greater scrutiny by the Jewish majority. Their links to the Palestinians engaged in a violent uprising have not been viewed favorably, and policies designed to neutralize Israeli Palestinians' capability to threaten the Jewish majority and its grip on the state have been instituted.

New laws placing broader restrictions on parties and candidates for election were passed in 2002, which prevented candidates or parties from contesting elections that implicitly or explicitly deny Israel's existence as a Jewish and democratic state or supporting armed struggle against Israel. Another law criminalized incitement to racism, violence, or terror by prohibiting calls "for an act of violence for terrorism"; expressing sympathy, praise, or encouragement for violence or terror; or supporting or identifying with such acts. A third law allows the Knesset to strip a Knesset member of parliamentary immunity if he speaks out against the state, expresses support for armed struggle against Israel, or denies that Israel is a Jewish and democratic state. These laws have been interpreted as prohibiting support for the Palestinian uprising

32. Ibid.

33. Ha'aretz Staff, "Supreme Court Ruling Draws Fire from Right," *Ha'aretz*, 10 January 2003.

34. As'ad Ghanem, "The Limits of Parliamentary Politics: The Arab Minority in Israel and the 1992 and 1996 Elections," *Israel Affairs* 4 (1997).

35. Ghanem, "The Limits of Parliamentary Politics."

or for equality between Israeli Palestinians and Jews, thereby silencing the Israeli Palestinian leadership and stripping the Israeli Palestinian public of its voice on issues central to the community.<sup>36</sup>

Together with physical attacks on Israeli Palestinian Knesset members and expensive, time-consuming legal investigations of their activities, the new laws and other developments have come to be called a “campaign of delegitimization” aimed against Israeli Palestinians’ potential political power.<sup>37</sup> Framed against the background of more than a half century of discrimination and political disempowerment contrasted with the democratic freedoms and influence promised—but not delivered—by the Israeli political system, Israeli Palestinians have become even more disillusioned with Israeli politics than ever before.

Many frustrated Israeli Palestinians have come to identify the ethnic Jewish nature of the state as the cause for their suffering. Since the nationalizing policies of the Jewish state aim to strengthen the Jewish demographic, economic, and political position in Israel, it is understandable that the Israeli Palestinian minority would target the nationalizing ethnic nature of the state in its criticisms. Such trends feed into the trend toward greater Palestinian identification and less Israeli identification and may encourage system-challenging behavior such as vote boycotting and protest action meant to send strong signals of disenchantment to the political establishment.

Israel’s nationalizing policies, therefore, are enormously unpopular among Israeli Palestinians and are damaging to their interests. These policies can be seen as largely incompatible with the desires of Israeli Palestinians to identify, act, and be accepted as Israeli. Although Israel’s democratic political system holds out the promise of equality for all citizens and the potential for all citizens to be considered “Israeli,” the reality of Israeli Palestinian

disempowerment has precluded such a possibility on a wide scale. While some Israeli Palestinians remain optimistic about their ability to improve their conditions through democratic politics and practical accommodation to Zionism, this trend appears to be a diminishing minority in the Israeli Palestinian community.

### Identity in the Israeli Palestinian Community

Israeli policy has historically aimed to downplay unifying national identities, such as the Arab nationalist or Palestinian identities, in order to prevent Israeli Palestinians from mobilizing on their basis. The potential of a unified, politicized minority appears threatening to the Jewish majority, and therefore Israeli policy encourages community fragmentation and depoliticization. Israeli policies do not, however, offer an authentic alternative identity, such as a civic “Israeli” identity, that could unify Israeli Palestinians in a positive way with the Israeli polity.<sup>38</sup>

Israel’s Arabic education system appears to be designed to instill pro-Zionist values and to divorce the Palestinian minority from their historical connection with the Palestinian people.<sup>39</sup> It aims to propagate a depoliticized “Israeli Arab” identity that is nonthreatening to Jewish Israelis, although its success in doing so is mixed.

Israeli education among Palestinian Arab citizens is directed by the Ministry of Education, with little institutionalized input from the Palestinian minority at the levels of curriculum development and implementation. The main purpose of Israeli education among Israeli Jews is to inculcate Zionist values, a practice that is also followed to a surprising degree in Arab schools.

Mandatory history texts and lessons, deemed by some observers as ideologically laden and revisionist,<sup>40</sup> seem to make great efforts to show the significance of the Land of Israel for Jews and to prove that only in historical Palestine could the State of Israel arise, while at

36. Arab Association for Human Rights, “Conditions of Citizenship and Restricted Political Participation: A Report for the UN Committee on Human Rights” (Nazareth: Arab Association for Human Rights, 2003); Arab Association for Human Rights, “Silencing Dissent: A Report on the Violation of Political Rights of the Arab Parties in Israel” (Nazareth: Arab Association for Human Rights, 2002).

37. Arab Association for Human Rights, “Silencing Dissent.”

38. Grossman, *Sleeping on a Wire*.

39. Human Rights Watch, “Second Class: Discrimination against Palestinian Arab Children in Israel’s Schools” (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2001).

40. Makram Izzat Coptly, “Knowledge and Power in Education: The Making of the Israeli Arab Educational System” (PhD diss., University of Texas at Austin, 1990).

the same time portraying the connection between the Arabs and Palestine as purely incidental.<sup>41</sup> In all the books of the mandatory curriculum in Arab schools, “the emphasis is put on the historical rights of the Jews to Eretz Israel (the Land of Israel). . . . The Arab child is not taught that he too has the right to this land, a land his ancestors have cultivated for decades.”<sup>42</sup>

Literature study has been similarly oriented toward Zionist portrayals of the land of Israel:

The material chosen for Arabic literature for the Arabic examination lacked any patriotic feeling and had no national tone. Moreover, it was as if the Palestinian authors did not exist; they were completely ignored . . . while the Jewish work gave expression to a live and conscious people . . . the Arab works that we were taught did not concern themselves with any nationalist ideals but were mostly works describing nature and lyrical moods . . . we felt deprived because of the total absence of national patriotic poems, especially since the Hebrew curriculum was full of them. In addition to this, it hurt us to see the total absence of Palestinian authors from the studies of poetry, and we could not see any reason for this except as a way of suppressing our national feelings.<sup>43</sup>

History texts used in both Jewish and Arab schools stress “violent aspects of Arab behavior,”<sup>44</sup> while in “less value-laden subjects” Arabs are depicted as peasants and manual laborers in opposition to the Jewish doctor or engineer.<sup>45</sup> Historical treatment of Arab history separates religious and ethnic groups, so that students study Christian history and Muslim history, but very little Arab history and no Palestinian history.<sup>46</sup>

Furthermore, in addition to the lack of Arab input into curriculum, Arab schools are treated as a low priority by the Education Ministry, resulting in a severe shortage of teach-

ers, materials, services, and space. While some changes have taken place in recent years toward reducing the overtly Zionist tone of Arab education and introducing a small number of Palestinian authors, the reforms have been criticized as too little, too late and have been hampered by a lack of resources to implement the new curriculum. In short, the education system among the Arab citizens of Israel has been described as a tool used by the Israeli establishment “for ideological control, manipulating it to divide the Arab population in a manner that clouds their Palestinian identity”<sup>47</sup> and to destroy Palestinian memory.<sup>48</sup>

In addition to the attempt to instill pro-Zionist values and prevent the development of nationalist identities through the education system, Israeli overall policy toward the Palestinian minority has historically resembled a “divide and rule” system of control that aims to stress particularistic identities at the expense of unifying national identities. Ian Lustick’s comprehensive survey outlines a number of methods by which Israel has maintained a “control” system over its Palestinian minority.<sup>49</sup> Foremost among these is the encouragement of religious, clan/tribal, and geographic segmentation as a means to discourage national identities. Many of Lustick’s conclusions have been confirmed and elaborated by later authors.<sup>50</sup>

Discouraging the specifically Palestinian national identity has occurred through an Israeli discourse of delegitimization. Perhaps the most well-known example is that of Golda Meir’s statement of the 1950s: “There was no such things as Palestinians . . . they did not exist.”<sup>51</sup> In recent decades, however, Israelis have somewhat grudgingly acknowledged the existence of Palestinians as a nation, influenced by the favorable climate created by the first Intifada and the post-Gulf War peace talks.

41. Fouzi el-Asmar, *To Be an Arab in Israel* (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1978).

42. Caspi and Weltsch, *From Slumber to Awakening*, 29.

43. el-Asmar, *To Be an Arab in Israel*, 46–48.

44. Caspi and Weltsch, *From Slumber to Awakening*, 29.

45. Human Rights Watch, “Second Class.”

46. Coptý, “Knowledge and Power in Education.”

47. al-Haj et al., “Education and Community.”

48. Hussein Ighbariyeh, interview with the author, 27 June 2001.

49. Lustick, *Arabs in the Jewish State*.

50. Kais M. Firro, “Reshaping Druze Particularism in Israel,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 30 (2001): 40–53; Avinoam Meir and Ze’ev Zivan, “Sociocultural

Encounter on the Frontier: Jewish Settlers and Bedoin Nomads in the Negev,” in *Ethnic Frontiers and Peripheries: Landscapes of Development and Inequality in Israel*, ed. Oren Yiftachel and Avinoam Meir (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1998): 241–68; Oren Yiftachel and Michaly D. Segal, “Jews and Druze in Israel: State Control and Ethnic Resistance,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 21 (1998): 476–506.

51. Rashid Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

Nevertheless, the term *Palestinian* in Israeli discourse refers only to those Arabs living in the occupied territories, not inside Israel. Today, Palestinian citizens of Israel are referred to as “non-Jews,” “the minorities,” “Arabs and Druze,” “Arab Israelis,” or “Israel’s Arabs” in official discourse, never as Palestinians.

Despite Israeli policy discouraging unifying national identities such as the Palestinian identity, these efforts have been only partially successful. In fact, recent years have witnessed the resurgence of Palestinian identity among Israeli Palestinians. Although Palestinian identity probably had never disappeared among Israel’s minority, it has become more visible and widespread since the 1980s. Surveys report a marked increase in identification as Palestinian from the 1970s to the 1980s.<sup>52</sup>

The attraction of the Palestinian identity likely stems, in part, from its antiestablishment nature. It makes a bold statement of dissent from the mainstream Israeli establishment, which considers the Palestinian identity inside Israel to be illegitimate and a direct challenge to exclusive Israeli claims to land and nationhood.

Commemoration of the *Nakba*, or disaster, that befell the Palestinian people in 1948 when Israel was established, have become large, annual events, as have “Land Day” celebrations, remembering those killed demonstrating against Israeli land confiscation. Both annual events have become similar to national holidays; similar to American Independence Day, Land Day and Nakba celebrations may include picnics and patriotic speeches, stirring people up in remembrance of their identity as Palestinians. These events are perceived with bewilderment and disdain among Jewish Israelis, who usually do not appreciate the negative treatment of Jewish-Zionist history.

Israeli Palestinians also have shown a more visible interest in their national heritage as Palestinians. Visits to the ruins of Arab villages, efforts to rebuild destroyed mosques and churches, and recovering oral histories of the Nakba are all part of the phenomenon of “open-

ing of the 1948 files” among Israeli Palestinians. This phenomenon represents a “reconstruction of the national history of Israeli Arabs and a revival of their national pride,” according to Tel Aviv researcher Eli Reches.<sup>53</sup>

The momentum behind the growth in Palestinian identity may also be related to the lack of an Israeli alternative. Everybody needs to feel a sense of belonging and to be a part of something larger than oneself. This need is often fulfilled through identification with country and homeland. In most cases, identification with country and homeland go hand in hand; in the case of Israeli Palestinians, however, this is a much more difficult task. While Israeli Palestinians may closely identify with their homeland and have a strong attachment to it, their country—Israel—does not claim them as its own and, in fact, may be openly hostile to them.

Because of Israel’s political, economic, and social exclusion of its minority, many Israeli Palestinians may feel unable to identify as Israeli.<sup>54</sup> In fact, a majority of the Jewish Israeli public (55 percent) reports that the term *Israeli* is inappropriate for Palestinian citizens, and the same majority (55 percent) of Israeli Palestinians also feel the same.<sup>55</sup>

Nevertheless, identity among the Israeli Palestinian public is a variable, not a constant. Because of conflicting pressures from within the community and without, a wide variety of identities can be found among Israeli Palestinians. Some identify as Israeli, as whole or in part, perhaps reflecting their desire for social mobility and the integration into Israeli society that is necessary for mobility. Others identify as Arab or Palestinian, most of whom reject the Israeli identification label if offered.

Out of the seven common identity choices given in the survey question (Israeli, Israeli Arab, Arab, Israeli Palestinian, Palestinian in Israel, Palestinian Arab, and Palestinian), more than 37 percent of the Israeli Palestinian public identify in whole or in part as Israeli (including Israeli, Israeli Arab, and Israeli Palestinian),

52. Sammy Smooha, *Arabs and Jews in Israel*, vol. 2, *Change and Continuity in Mutual Intolerance* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1992).

53. Ori Nir, “Nakba Day, 2001—Style,” *Ha’aretz*, 15 May 2001.

54. Rouhana, *Palestinian Citizens in an Ethnic Jewish State*.

55. Smooha, *Arabs and Jews in Israel*.

but more than 65 percent identify as Palestinian (including Israeli Palestinian, Palestinian in Israel, Palestinian Arab, and Palestinian, double counting the Israeli Palestinian category). Although Palestinian identities are widespread, some reject the label altogether, whereas others attempt to reconcile Israeli and Palestinian identities. The popular “Palestinian in Israel” identity (36 percent of the sample) probably reflects the desire to identify as a particular kind of Palestinian, one who resides in Israel but who does not hold an emotional attachment to it.<sup>56</sup> These various identities are politically distinct, with the Palestinian identifiers more notably activist than others, as shown below.

### Israeli Palestinian Activism

Concurrent with the rise in Palestinian identification among Israeli Palestinians was a simultaneous increase in political assertiveness. The Palestinian minority was relatively quiescent for the first twenty-five years of the existence of the state of Israel because of the strictness of the Israeli military regime governing Israeli Palestinians, and the political party patronage machine that kept them dependent upon the Labor party. Few demands for equality were made in these early years, as Israeli Palestinians were preoccupied with adjusting to life under Israeli rule.<sup>57</sup>

Since the 1970s, however, Israeli Palestinians have grown more independent and active in asserting their rights. With the abolishment of the military administration in 1966 and the rise of an Israeli-educated generation more acquainted with the Israeli system, Palestinians were able to begin the process of mobilization for equal rights, both through the formation of Israeli Palestinian organizations and through mass mobilization.

In March 1976, the first large-scale national protest occurred upon word that the government planned to expropriate a large amount of Arab land for the purpose of “Judaizing the Galilee.” The national committee established by the Communist party, the dominant

party among Palestinians at the time, called a general strike for 30 March. Disturbances broke out on 29 March and the following day, resulting in the death of six Palestinian youths. Since then 30 March has been observed as Land Day, an annual day of protest and education on the importance of land in Palestinian politics and culture.<sup>58</sup>

In addition to regularly held days of protest, such as Land Day and Nakba commemorations, Palestinians have staged protests and general strikes since the 1970s on other occasions, such as the demolition of illegal Arab housing, the expropriation of Arab land, and international Palestinian events such as the Intifada or the invasion of Lebanon. Studies have shown that protest among Israeli Palestinians has been increasing over the past two or three decades. Both in terms of the number of protest events and their intensity, protest activity among Galilee Israeli Palestinians has been increasing from the 1970s to the early 1990s.<sup>59</sup>

Jewish Israelis generally view Palestinian protest negatively, considering it to be much more threatening than Jewish protest and worthy of greater countermobilization. These protests can involve a degree of direct confrontation and violence, which may be provoked in part by the countermobilization of Israeli forces. Most Palestinian protest, however, occurs peacefully and legally, passing without major incident.

Growing Palestinian assertiveness and independence also are apparent in more conventional forms of participation such as voting. The Arab vote for non-Zionist parties increased considerably from the 1950s and 1960s. For example, the Arab percentage vote for Jewish-Zionist and “Arab-sister” parties (sponsored by the major Zionist parties) in the 1950s ranged in the mid- to high eighties, but it dropped to 63 percent in 1973 and even further to 50 percent in 1977, when Arab protest and mobilization increased dramatically. In more recent years, the percentage of Arabs voting for Zionist parties has dropped even further, in 1999 dropping to

56. Rouhana, *Palestinian Citizens in an Ethnic Jewish State*.

57. Lustick, *Arabs in the Jewish State*.

58. Ori Nir, “Background: Roots of Land Day in Plan to ‘Judaize’ Galilee,” *Ha’aretz*, 30 March 2001.

59. Oren Yiftachel, “The Political Geography of Ethnic Protest: Nationalism, Deprivation, and Regionalism among Arabs in Israel,” *Transactions: Institute of British Geographers* 22 (1996): 91–110.

about 30 percent<sup>60</sup> and about 28 percent in the 2003 elections.<sup>61</sup>

Nonvoting has also been an increasing phenomenon among the Arab minority. Voting participation usually ranged in the mid-80 percent range for most elections until the 1970s, when participation dropped to the low 70 percent range.<sup>62</sup> As the elaborate political control machinery run by the military administration and the dominant Labor party waned in the 1970s, Palestinians had more freedom to express their displeasure not only by voting for non-Zionist parties but also by refusing to vote at all.

Similarly, after election reform in the 1990s allowed separate voting for Knesset parties and prime minister, many Palestinians cast votes (usually for Arab parties) for Knesset but boycotted the prime minister vote. When the prime minister vote was held without a simultaneous Knesset vote, as was the case in February 2001, the doors were thrown open for a widespread Arab boycott of the polls. Thus only about 20 percent of Palestinian voters cast ballots in 2001.<sup>63</sup> In 2003, parliamentary elections were held that increased the incentives to participate, but the controversy over Israeli Palestinian disqualifications resulted in a relatively low turnout, with only about 64 percent of Israeli Palestinian citizens casting votes for a party list.<sup>64</sup> Many interpreted this low turnout as a victory for the boycott movement, which claimed to represent the largest proportion of Israeli Palestinians in the political arena.<sup>65</sup>

Analysis of the survey data shows that political activism such as protest and vote boycotting is concentrated among the Palestinian identifiers. By examining differential attitudes toward protest, protest activity, and vote boycotting, we see that these system-challenging forms of political behavior are found at much higher rates among the Palestinian identifiers and less so among Israeli identifiers. In effect, those who feel closest to the Israeli state are

less likely to challenge it through protest and vote boycotting, whereas those who lack significant identification with Israel and wholeheartedly embrace the Palestinian identity are much more likely to engage in system-challenging behavior.

An increased propensity for protest can be seen as an individual's identity becomes less Israeli and more Palestinian. Whereas only 7 percent of Israeli identifiers expect to use legal protest in the future, nearly 45 percent of Palestinian identifiers expect to do so, while the others fall somewhere in between, increasing in a monotonic fashion. Similarly, only 2.8 percent of Israeli identifiers expect to engage in illegal protest, whereas about 17 percent of Palestinian identifiers anticipate illegally protesting. Actual protest activity is similar, with almost 28 percent of Israeli identifiers reporting past protest activity, whereas almost 52 percent of Palestinian identifiers did so. Furthermore, vote boycotting in the 2001 elections is similarly concentrated among Palestinian identifiers. Whereas only 25 percent of Israeli identifiers boycotted the 2001 election, nearly 96 percent of Palestinian identifiers refused to vote.

Multivariate analysis confirms the above results: Palestinian identifiers are more active in system-challenging forms of political behavior, and Israeli identifiers less active in this way. Furthermore, Israeli identifiers are unlikely to protest even when they hold significant grievances against the Israeli state.<sup>66</sup> These results suggest that identification is an important variable in ethnic stability within the state of Israel.

The results also imply that the lack of a civic identity in Israel is harmful to Israeli attempts to integrate its minority and achieve ethnic stability. Those who feel closest to the Israeli state, the Israeli identifiers, boycott, protest, and expect to protest at low rates. Those who feel alienated from the state engage in these behaviors at high rates. The implications seem clear: Israel's nationalizing policies may provide

60. As'ad Ghanem, *The Palestinian-Arab Minority in Israel, 1948–2000: A Political Study*, ed. Russell Stone, Suny Series in Israeli Studies (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001).

61. Arab Association for Human Rights, "Weekly Review of the Arab Press in Israel, no. 107" (Nazareth: Arab Association for Human Rights, 2003).

62. Ghanem, *The Palestinian-Arab Minority in Israel, 1948–2000*.

63. Gideon Alon, "Final Results: Sharon—62.3%, Barak—37.7%," *Ha'aretz*, 9 February 2001.

64. Arab Association for Human Rights, "Weekly Review of the Arab Press in Israel."

65. Yair Ettinger, "To Boycott or Not to Boycott," *Ha'aretz*, 26 January 2003.

66. Sherry Lowrance, "Who Protests in Israel? Identity and Political Action" (paper presented at the American Political Science Association Annual Meeting, Philadelphia, 28–31 August 2003).

psychological gratification to the Jewish majority, but it drives a wedge between the state and its non-Jewish citizens. It does so at the risk to its own internal stability.

### **Concluding Comments**

The implications of this research indicate that nationalizing policies are not likely to increase ethnic stability. In Israel, it appears to have done the opposite: the mistreatment implied by nationalizing policies has hindered the formation of an authentic Israeli identity among Israeli Palestinians and has served as a cause to mobilize a new generation of Israeli Palestinians against Israeli state policies. These individuals have been shown to be prone to unconventional “system-challenging” forms of behavior such as protest and vote boycotting, two forms of political participation viewed unfavorably by the Jewish majority.

The participation of a few Israeli Palestinians in terrorist activities since the outbreak of the al-Aqsa Intifada in late September 2000 has been an ominous development for the Israeli state. Although only a miniscule number of Israeli Palestinians have been implicated, their cases receive widespread media attention. Their alleged activities have been in support of the Palestinian cause in the Occupied Territories, not inside the Green Line. Nevertheless, it is the lack of a genuine Israeli identity that makes Israeli Palestinian involvement in terror possible.

As the ultimate “system-challenging” form of political behavior, terrorist activity shows the seriousness of the identity problem in Israel. Israeli nationalizing policies strengthen the demographic and political position of the Jewish majority at the expense of the Israeli Palestinian minority, in the process sacrificing Israel’s best prospects for future ethnic stability. §