

A CRISIS OF PERSONAL SECURITY

Organized Crime in Arab Society in Israel

Israeli society finds itself in a prolonged state of emergency since October 7, but for Arab communities, daily life has long been overshadowed by another crisis: widespread escalation of organized crime and related violence.

Decades of structural gaps, underinvestment, and limited opportunities, especially for young people, have created conditions where criminal networks can thrive. Inadequate deterrence has left Arab communities vulnerable and calling for solutions.

This explainer summarizes the scale and causes of the crisis, and highlights key needs and potential actions.

WHY TALK ABOUT THIS NOW?

2025 was the deadliest year on record with **263 homicide victims**, and 2026 is on track to surpass it. Crime in Arab communities increasingly affects the entire country, with consequences for economic growth, state-minority relations, and shared Jewish-Arab life.

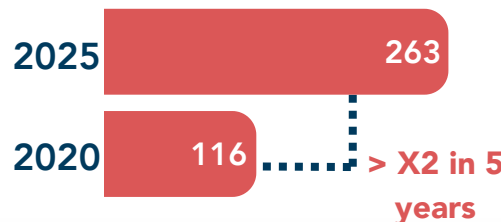
THE CRISIS

Arab society is facing a real and urgent crisis of personal security.

Organized crime increasingly affects daily life. Families fear for their children, business owners face extortion, and local leaders face intimidation and attempts on their lives.

~70%
of murder victims in Israel are Arab citizens, even though Arab society makes up about 21% of the population

Homicide Rates



Murder cases solved

<15% in Arab society
>60% in Jewish society

Homicide rates within Arab society in Israel are among the highest across the OECD countries. In some comparisons: 3rd after Mexico and Colombia

This is not a temporary spike, Arab society is calling for a solution

Surveys show that **80% of Arab citizens fear** they or their family member will be harmed by serious violence or gunfire. **Nearly two-thirds identify crime as the most pressing issue** facing their communities.

Across the country, communities are speaking out through protests, public appeals, and local leadership, calling for safety and protection for all citizens.

In January 2026, thousands protest in Sakhnin and Tel Aviv, demanding action on crime and violence

"The past few months have been frightening and paralyzing, marked by near-total lawlessness and a complete collapse of restraint. In January alone, 28 people were murdered."

Rasool Saada, Kulna CEO, one of the January 2026 anti-crime demonstrations' organizers



Crime is driven by structural gaps and lack of belonging

Arab society has experienced significant socio-economic mobility in recent years with growing numbers of university graduates, a developing middle class, and increased integration into Israel's economy. These processes also widened the gap between middle class and the significant Arab population still living in poverty. This creates fertile ground for organized crime, which recruits youth by offering more money, status, power, and sense of belonging than they can access elsewhere in Israeli society.

Structural Gaps → Youth Disengagement → Lack of Belonging

~40%
live below
poverty line

~312,000
of Arab citizens are
aged 18-24

Arab youth report weak civic belonging and low trust in institutions. Experiences of exclusion and marginalization undermine motivation and future outlook.



Crime Recruitment

Youth are both the primary victims and perpetrators of organized crime.

Most Arab localities rank in lowest socio-economic clusters (1-4 out of 10)

~40% are NEETs*

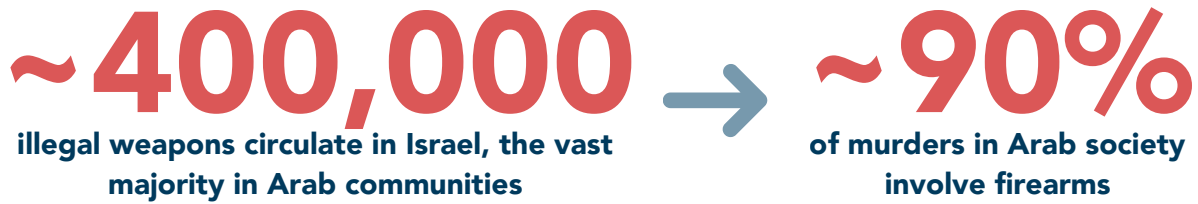
*Not in Employment, Education, or Training

Limited access to formal credit drives many to rely on black-market loans.

59%
of Arab youth are in debt,
28% cannot meet financial obligations

Over 50% of homicide victims in 2025 were under 30

In addition to long-term structural gaps, majority of Arab respondents (57%) blame **police inaction and widespread availability of weapons**.



The dynamics seen in Arab society are not unique. Organized crime tends to expand in environments characterized by weak enforcement, economic exclusion, and limited state presence. Similar patterns have been documented in other countries, where criminal organizations have filled institutional gaps and embedded themselves in local economies.

Crime is a structural and policy challenge, not a cultural one

Violence in Arab society is often framed as a cultural issue in public, media and political discourse. In some cases, the framing goes further, linking the violence to terrorism. This blurs the line between crime and security threats, reinforcing stigma and obscuring the root causes.

“

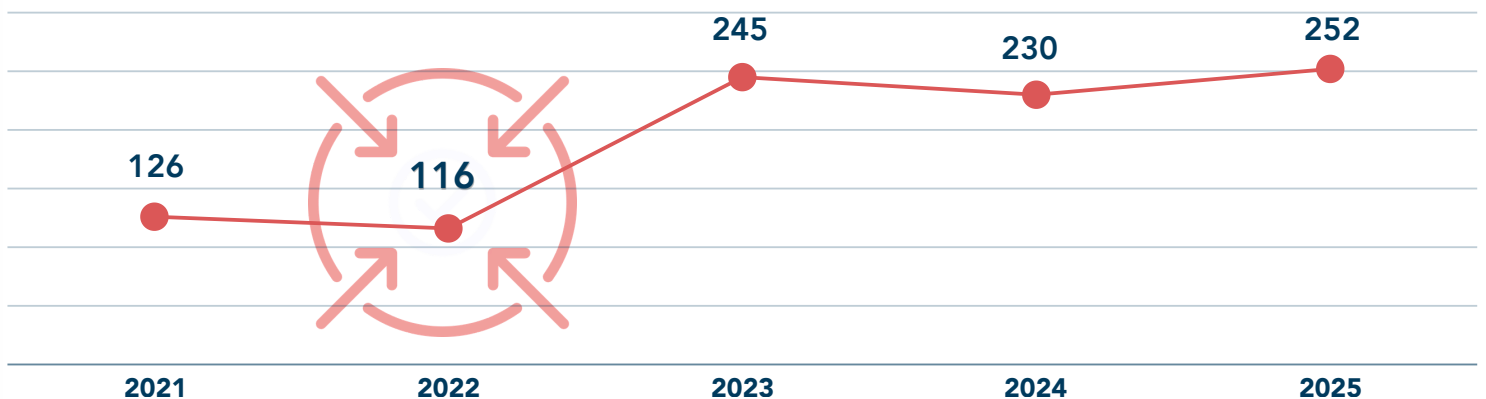
56% of Jewish respondents said the main reason for the high number of murders in Arab society was a 'cultural problem.'

Maariv Poll, February 2026

”

Policy matters. Coordinated government action → violence decline

In 2022 implementation of a government strategic plan to reduce crime and violence in Arab society led to homicide rates stabilizing for the first time since 2016.



Government Resolution 549 (GR-549) is a five-year government plan (2022–2026) launched in October 2021 with an investment of NIS 2.5 billion to combat crime and violence in Arab communities in Israel.

-
- **Developed with Arab local leadership**
- **Combined enforcement, prevention, and socio-economic investment**

↳ **“Stop the Bleeding”**, launched in 2022 as part of GR-549, piloted a targeted, place-based model in seven cities (Umm al-Fahm, Taibeh, Jisr az-Zarqa, Tamra, Tur’an, Lod, and Rahat). It combined:

- Focused enforcement in crime “hotspots”
- Community-based prevention
- Rehabilitation pathways for individuals seeking to exit criminal networks

Early results showed declines in murders in targeted areas and increased confiscation of illegal weapons.

In 2023, the program alongside “Safe Path” emergency plan were frozen by the Ministry of National Security and implementation largely stalled. This was followed by the closure of the Emergency Information Center for Arab local authorities in Kafr Qassem. Following this, violence surged again.

Crime increasingly affects the entire country

The crisis has consequences for all of Israel. Violence in Arab communities undermines social cohesion, limits economic growth, and erodes the foundations of shared civic life.

Impact on Economy

- ↓ High levels of violence reduce productivity and deter investment
- ↓ Limits progress in narrowing socio-economic inequality
- ↓ Businesses face insecurity
- ↓ Young people see fewer opportunities

Impact on State–Minority Relations

- ↓ Among Arabs, no state institution attained a trust rating of 50% or above. 40% of Arab respondents have no trust at all in the police. Only 37% of the public think that the police act fairly to all citizens

Impact on Shared Society

- ↓ Crime creates a sense of insecurity and fear for all communities
- ↓ Unequal enforcement conveys that Arab lives are valued less, eroding equal citizenship and shared civic life

What can be done?

Addressing crime in Arab society in Israel requires sustained, multi-level engagement.

There are several meaningful ways to contribute:

- **Support civil society organizations** working on the ground to reduce crime and violence, and provide young people with pathways to education, employment, and mobility.
- **Bring Arab citizens' voices into media and programs** to share lived experiences, deepen understanding of root causes, and elevate community-driven solutions.
- **Facilitate knowledge exchange** by connecting international experts with local leaders to share best practices and adapt effective models from other contexts to the realities on the ground.

For more information on how to engage in any of these efforts, please contact Liron Shoham, Task Force Executive Director, lirons@jdc.org.

References

- Ben Simon, B., & Konstantinov, V. (Eds.). *Young Adults in Israel: Statistical Abstract 2025*. Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute. 2025.
- Israel Democracy Institute. *2024 Statistical Report on Arab Society in Israel*. (Hebrew)
- Miari, S. (n.d.). *Violence in Arab society: Factors, repercussions, and the way to escape*. Arab Economic Forum
- NAS Consulting. *Mental Health Among Young People in Arab Society*. April 2025.
- Office of the Prime Minister/Government of Israel. Inter-Ministerial Committee. *Final report of the Inter-Ministerial Committee for Examining the Black Market and Crime in Arab Society*. May 2022.
- Rassed. *Dashboard of Crime and Violence Data in Arab Society*. (Hebrew/Arabic)
- State Comptroller and Ombudsman of Israel. *The government's handling of young NEET people among the Arab society: Annual audit report 2023*. (Hebrew)
- Taub Center for Social Policy Studies in Israel. *Homicide Rates in Israel: Recent Trends and a Crossnational Comparison*. February 2024.
- The Abraham Initiatives. *Victims of crime and violence in Arab society: 2025 summary report. December 2025*.
- The Abraham Initiatives and Citizens' Empowerment Center. *Midterm report on Government Resolution 549: Plan to curb crime and violence in Arab society 2022–2026*. April 2024. (Hebrew)
- The Task Force on Arab Citizens of Israel. *Crime and violence in Arab society: Recent spike and emerging initiatives*. September 2023.
- The Task Force on Arab Citizens of Israel. *Government updates 2024 budget proposal: Cuts NIS 1.2B from Arab development plans*. January 2024.
- The Task Force on Arab Citizens of Israel. *January strike and rallies in Sakhnin and Tel Aviv*. February 2026.