

# A CRISIS OF PERSONAL SECURITY

## Organized Crime in Arab Society in Israel

Israeli society finds itself in a prolonged state of emergency since October 7th, 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 **252 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.

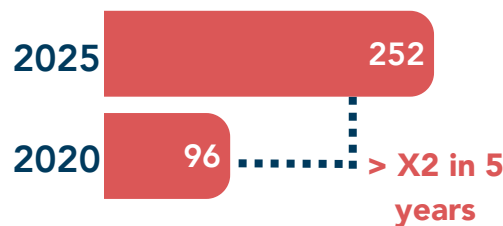
### THE CRISIS

**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 population 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)

**~30% are NEETs\***

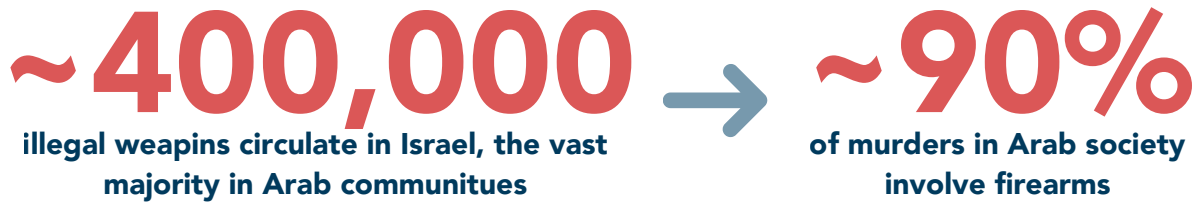
\*Not in Employment, Education, or Training

Limited access to formal credit drive 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

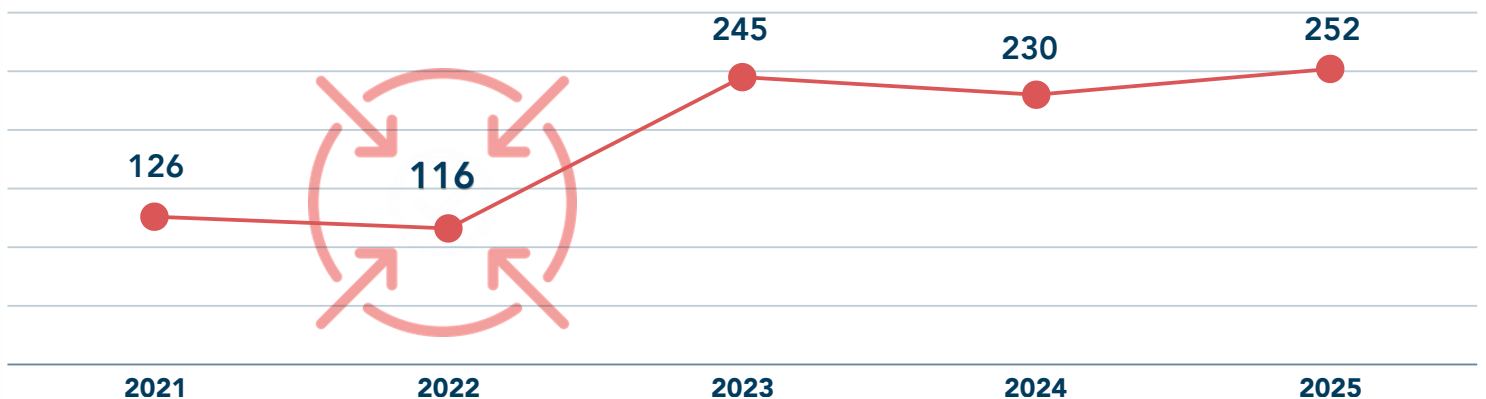
Violence in Arab society is often framed as a cultural issue in public, media and political discourse. In some cases, the framing goes further, linking the violence to terrorism. This blurs the line between crime and security threats, reinforcing stigma and obscuring the root causes.

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

Maariv Poll, Feb, 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.



## Policy Frameworks

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**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.

- Cross-government coordination
- 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

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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

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- ↓ 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

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- ↓ 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 behaves fairly to all citizens

### Impact on Shared Society

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- ↓ 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](mailto:lirons@jdc.org).

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