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Survey: Relations between Jewish and Arab Israelis continue to suffer amid war

(RNS) – ‘The level of fear is very, very high. Our job is to tell them that this is not the time to duck down and wait for the tsunami to end. This is the time to show up,’ said Mohammad Darawshe, director of strategy for Givat Haviva, which organized the survey.


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People prepare their meal before breaking their fast during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan at the Old City of Jaffa, Israel, March 5, 2025. (AP Photo/Leo Correa)

By Michele Chabin
March 6, 2025



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JERUSALEM (RNS) – Trust and interpersonal relationships between Jewish and Arab citizens of Israel have further deteriorated in the past year as the war in Gaza continues, according to a recent survey.

Conducted the first week of January 2025, an annual survey from the Israeli social change nongovernmental organization Givat Haviva-The Center for a Shared Society examined feelings and attitudes among Jewish and Arab citizens of Israel on issues of mutual trust, personal security and changes in behavior over the past year. Jewish-Arab relations within Israel have been particularly strained ever since Hamas’ Oct. 7, 2023, attack on Israel and the ensuing war in Gaza. A fragile ceasefire between Israel and Hamas has facilitated the release of some Israeli hostages and Palestinian prisoners and provided some relief for civilians on both sides of the conflict.

Compared with the results of the January 2024 survey, “Israeli society is more hesitant about shared living,” according to a press release describing the 2025 survey’s findings. Respondents also reported increased avoidance of social and economic collaborations and more radical opinions on related matters, the authors wrote.

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“The good news is provided by life itself: Israeli society has displayed restraint and relative resilience,” the authors wrote. “The streets are not aflame, and the shared cities have not become violent arenas.”

Arabs comprise about 20% of Israel’s population of 9.5 million. The report, released in Hebrew, details findings of the survey, which included 442 Jewish Israelis and 280 Arab Israelis and had a margin of sampling error of 5 percentage points. Conducted by Midgam Research, it was first presented at the Givat Haviva Annual Shared Society Conference on Jan. 30.

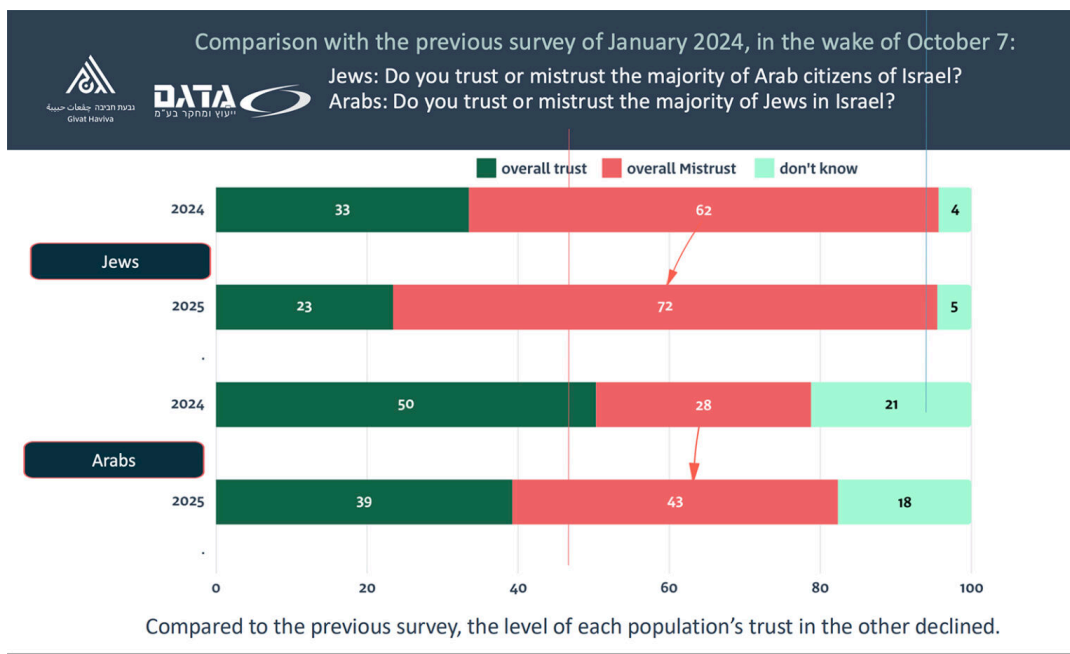
Mohammad Darawshe, Givat Haviva’s director of strategy, told RNS that although “things were not perfect” between Arabs and Jews in Israel prior to the Hamas attack and ensuing war, relations have been even more strained, which recent surveys demonstrate. The organization aims to “create a model society in Israel” and has several programs to help build a Jewish and Arab shared society.

“Compared to 2023, the mistrust and mutual fear among Jews and Arabs has more than doubled,” Darawshe said. “The willingness of the populations to engage in social activities, work activities, educational activities has shrunk about 35%. In employment and university study, it has decreased about 25%.”

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(Graphic courtesy of Givat Haviva)

Asked whether they trust the majority of Arab citizens, 72% of Jews surveyed in 2025 said they do not, while 43% of Arabs said they did not trust the majority of Jewish citizens. In

2024, 62% of Jews and 28% of Arabs reported the same feelings, according to the survey.

Nearly half (49%) of Jews said they had experienced expressions of hostility from Arabs during the past year, while 42% of Arabs said they had experienced hostility from Jews. One year ago, 38% of Jews and 34% of Arabs said they had encountered hostility in the previous year.

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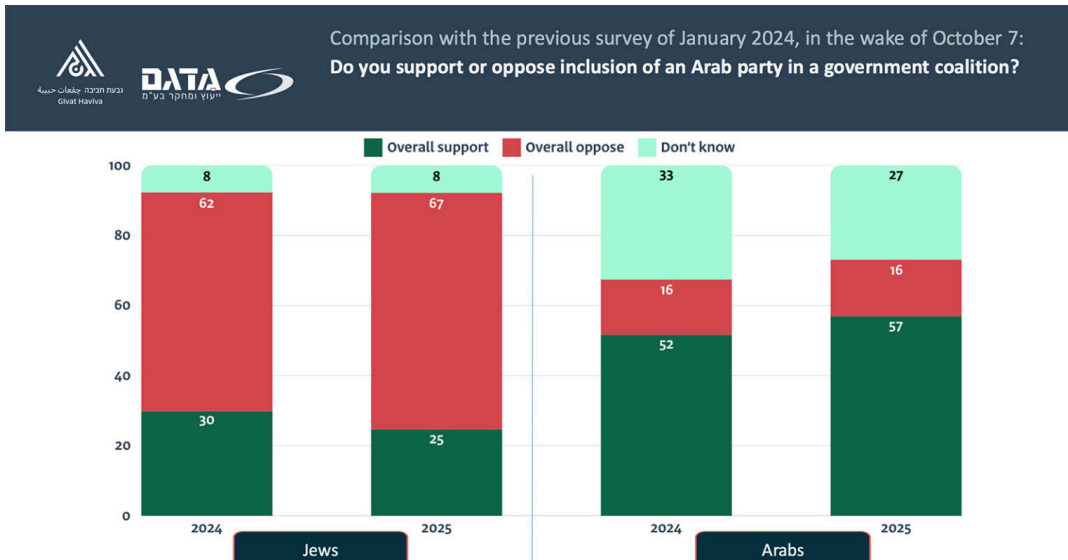
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When it comes to coexistence, 45% of Jews said they were not willing to maintain friendships with Arabs, compared with 13% of Arabs who said they could not maintain friendships with Jews.

And while every Israeli university accepts Arab students, only 44% of Jews said they were willing for themselves or their family members to study in a university with Arabs, while 67% of Arabs reported feeling that way toward Jews.

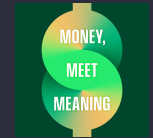
Regarding politics, 67% of Jews surveyed opposed the entry of an Arab party into Israel's governing coalition. That figure was 62% a year ago.



No statistically significant differences from the previous survey, a somewhat rising trend of support among Arabs, and falling support among Jews

(Graphic courtesy of Givat Haviva)

While Arab parties have long served in the Knesset, Israel's parliament, they have traditionally served in the opposition, not the ruling coalition – with one exception. In



2021, the Arab Ra'am party joined the government of then-Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett in the hopes it would be more effective while serving in the government rather than the opposition.

Moreover, 69% of Jewish respondents and 55% of Arab respondents said the events of the past year have harmed their personal sense of security. This represents an improvement over January 2024 – three months after the Hamas massacre – when 77% of Jews and 62% of Arabs said they felt unsafe.

Givat Haviva conducts these annual studies “to understand the depth of the problem so we can find a realistic approach,” Darawshe said. He emphasized that the negative downturn of Jewish-Arab relations in Israel “is not a result of failure. It is the result of a continuous political ecosystem that keeps erupting every few years.”

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Surveys showed similar numbers after past crises, including during the deadly second intifada that began in 2000 and amid widespread rioting and destruction of Jewish-owned property by Arab Israelis in May 2021, according to Givat Haviva.



Mohammad Darawshe. (Photo courtesy of Givat Haviva)

“The issue is what we take from these survey results,” Darawshe said. “It’s important to understand where (society) stands so we can adapt our programs to the new reality we operate in. We need to expedite, to scale the work at the right level, so it can try to answer our needs.”

In some sectors, such as the workplace and academia, damage to interpersonal relations has not been all that severe, Darawashe noted. But social and educational interactions have taken the biggest hit because most people consider socializing and joint Jewish-Arab educational activities optional.

“To some extent, that’s understandable,” he said. “The level of fear is very, very high. Our job is to tell them that this is not the time to duck down and wait for the tsunami to end. This is the time to show up. We need to maintain relationships, even if the talk is difficult – even if you have to say things that won’t be liked by the other.”




In the past, Darawshe said, many Israeli Muslims would invite Jewish friends and co-workers to their homes for the daily iftar break-fast meals during Ramadan, and Jews would invite their Muslim colleagues and friends to their Passover Seder.

Jeff Sharlet: The S

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“People who used to do this don’t do this now,” he said.

Additionally, the many Jews who used to shop in Nazareth and other Arab towns and cities are now afraid to visit, and fewer Arabs are shopping in Jewish-majority areas, he said.

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Darawshe called on Israeli NGOs to expand their work in a way that encourages more opportunities for Jewish and Arab Israelis to interact.

Givat Haviva itself has expanded its coexistence programming to meet the current challenge. As part of one program, 24 Israeli mayors – half of them Jewish and half of them Arab, and most of them heads of neighboring municipalities – meet on a monthly basis to improve relations and create crisis management teams, Darawshe explained.

Another Givat Haviva project provides leadership training to 32 young Jewish and Arab professionals, marking the first time the organization has trained young professionals and not just teens. It will soon launch a women’s peace leadership program for Jewish and Arab women in their 30s and 40s.

Last year, due to the heightened tensions, the organization held separate events for Jewish and Arab schoolchildren in 12 pairs of schools, Darawshe said. But this year, the students in the program will meet each other in guided encounters. Anticipating many more schools will want to participate in coexistence projects, Givat Haviva recently tripled the number of staff and facilitators it is training.



Givat Haviva CEO Michal Sella is hopeful that relations between Jews and Arabs in Israel will ultimately improve. “Citizens realize we cannot handle more violence in this country, and most understand that we will always live together.” (Photo courtesy of Givat Haviva)

Givat Haviva CEO Michal Sella said she is hopeful relations between Jews and Arabs in Israel will ultimately improve.

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“Some government ministers invested energy in trying to incite violence and to cause more trauma and tension, but they didn’t succeed,” she said. “Everyone thought there would be more violence, but it didn’t happen.

“Citizens realize we cannot handle more violence in this country, and most understand that we will always live together,” she said. “There is no other option.”



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