

Crime and Violence in Arab society | Background and Policy

The menace of crime and violence in Arab society has skyrocketed in recent years and seeped into all aspects of Arab citizens' lives.

By the end of June, there have been 106 Arab fatalities due to crime and violence. Seven of them are Eastern Jerusalem residents, 91 of them were shot (with a majority from illegal weapons), 48 of them were 30 years old or less (the youngest victim was only one year old), seven of them were women. At this same time last year, there were 44 fatalities.

There are several root causes contributing to this phenomenon. Half of all Arab families are considered poor and nearly two-thirds of Arab children live under the poverty line. Unemployment is high among Arabs and there is widespread lack of employment for young people—one quarter of young males and one-third of young females do not work or study. Changes in the role of the family and the transition to a more individualistic society have led to the family no longer being the source of security and law enforcement as it used to be. In addition to these socio-economic factors, police presence in Arab-Israeli communities is insufficient, and the security authorities simply do not fulfill their roles to protect Arabs lives. The unequal provision of services to Arab citizens is shown through the deficiency of government institutes in Arab towns, the lack of government services, the lack of banking services and more.

In 2021, the 36th government (the “Change Government”) passed Government Resolutions 549 and 550 to deal with crime and violence and to reduce the socio-economic gaps in Arab society. These programs include various solutions for addressing the root causes, and at the time of this writing, these programs are in their first year of implementation and are mostly being carried out as planned. In addition, the Change Government made tackling crime and violence one of their priorities, established a ministerial council under the auspices of the Prime Minister, and initiated the Safe Track program, which tasked all relevant government ministries to develop plans to treat crime and violence.

Since the establishment of the 37th government, there has been a drastic increase in crime and violence. There are a number of reasons: neglect by the government, the absence of any professional body coordinating activities or communicating with Arab society leadership, the availability of illegal weapons, and turf wars between organized crime as a result of the actions taken against them in the previous year.

The Abraham Initiatives recommends the following actions:

1. A change in attitude towards the Arab citizens and making treatment of crime and violence a top government's priority
2. Establishment of a Ministerial Committee under the auspices of the Prime Minister.
3. Naming of a Czar by the Prime Minister who will manage government findings, coordinate the activities of Ministries and other bodies, including the Office of the Prosecutor and Tax Authority, and remain in contact with the heads of Arab local authorities and leadership. The Czar will lead the "Safe Track" program and its activities.
4. Commitment to the continuations of "Safe Track" and "Stop the Bleeding" (*Program to end murders in the Arab sector*) programs.
5. Cancellation of the commitment to establish a national guard for dealing with Arab crime and strengthening of the police. The police are the security force with the authority for enforcing the law within Israel. They should be reinforced with new hires, more resources and recruitment of Arabic-speaking investigators and specialized training for dealing with crime and violence within Arab society.
6. Establishment of an advisory committee made up of the Prime Minister and the Arab Council of Local Authorities with open, professional, honorable and continuous communication with the Heads of Authorities and professional staff in the field and the Prime Minister.

Regarding the use of Israel's Secret Service (*Shabak*) (to gain control over crime and violence):
The Abraham Initiatives does not consider the use of the *Shabak* to be a long-term viable solution as the *Shabak* is tasked with fighting the enemies of the State. However, the situation is critical, and the government is obligated to do whatever it takes to protect its citizens. Therefore, insofar as the *Shabak* has the technology at its disposal and can be subjected to the police's authority to save lives, it is appropriate to use them. However, it is vital to remember that Arab citizens are first and foremost the victims of crime and violence and that in employing *Shabak*, it is necessary to ensure the utmost protection of the civil rights of the innocent.