

Topic: **Mixed Cities in Israel**

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Background

- In Israel, the term “mixed cities” usually refers to five cities: Akko (Acre), Haifa, Jaffa (the southern quarter of Tel Aviv), Ramla, and Lod. However, the Central Bureau of Statistics defines “mixed cities” as localities in which the decisive majority of the population is Jewish but which have a sizeable minority of Arab residents. The term also refers to Ma’alot-Tarshiha (a joint municipality of the Jewish settlement of Ma’alot and the Arab village of Tarshiha) and Upper Nazareth, both located in the Galilee in Northern Israel.
- According to government statistics at the end of 2011, the Arab population of Israel’s mixed cities totaled approximately 102,000 inhabitants, or about 8% of the entire population of Israeli Arab citizens (excluding Arab residents of East Jerusalem).

Statistical Data Regarding Mixed Cities for 2011, CBS²

City	Total Population	Jews	Arabs	Others³
Akko (Acre)	46,464	30,000 (64.6%)	14,000 (30.1%)	2,500 (5.4%)
Haifa	270,348	217,600 (80.5%)	27,800 (10.3%)	24,900 (9.2%)
Jaffa ⁴	46,198	32,200 (69.7%)	14,000 (30.3%)	2,700 (5.8%)
Ramla	67,874	49,900 (73.5%)	15,100 (22.2%)	2,900 (4.3%)
Lod	70,270	45,400 (68.3%)	19,800 (24.3%)	5,100 (7.4%)
Ma’alot-Tarshiha	21,032	14,700 (69.9%)	4,100 (19.5%)	2,200 (10.5%)
Upper Nazareth	40,582	28,300 (69.7%)	7,200 (17.7%)	5,100 (12.6%)
Total	562,768	418,100	102,000	45,400

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² “Yishuvim 2011” [Hebrew], see: http://www.cbs.gov.il/ishuvim/ishuvim_main.htm.

³ The term “Others” refers to non-Jewish immigrants from FSU countries.

⁴ Yearly data from Tel Aviv-Jaffa 2012, in connection to district 7 which primarily composes the area that is the city of Jaffa: Tables 2.7 and 2.24 [Hebrew].

- The anthropologist Daniel Monterescu suggests that the term “mixed cities” in Israel underwent structural and symbolic transformation. Under the British Mandate prior to 1948 this term reflected the distress of Jewish residents as members of a minority group under Arab authorities in cities such as Haifa and Jaffa. Today, however, this term relates to the distress of Arab residents as members of a minority group in these predominantly Jewish cities, in which their institutions are Jewish-oriented.⁵
- The transformation of the Arab population in these cities from majority to minority status socially and politically is well reflected by Arab public and academic figures. Some said that “the story of mixed cities in Israel is one of the darkest chapters in the history of the state.”⁶
- Others suggested that these cities should be termed “divided or segregated cities,” in which the Arab inhabitants are being marginalized and their living space is being reduced by State authorities.⁷
- However, more recent statistics indicate that the gap is slowly closing between the Jewish and Arab populations of many of the mixed cities, as the percentage of Arabs slowly moves towards 50%. A conference in Ramla in 2011 discussed Jewish migration away from mixed cities, while Arabs continue to move in. According to one newspaper, the conference dealt with the question: “Is ‘a Jewish majority’ necessary in Israel’s cities?”⁸
- This trend can be seen in all mixed cities except Ma’alot-Tarshiha and Jaffa. For example, the Arab population in Lod increased by nearly one quarter between 2003-2009, while the Jewish population decreased by nearly 8%. In that same time period the Arab population in Upper Nazareth increased by nearly 40% while the Jewish population decreased by about 7%.⁹
- However, in addition to Jewish attempts to buy apartments in order to “Judaize” Arab areas, a practice decried by Tel Aviv-Jaffa mayor Ron Huldai,¹⁰ active measures have also been taken to prevent the “Arabization” of Jewish areas. Rabbis all around the country have signed onto the declaration forbidding the renting of property to Arabs, including the Former Chief Sephardi Rabbi, Ovadia Yosef, as well as rabbis from Safed, Ramat Hasharon, Ashdod, Nahariya, Herzliya, Pardes Hanna, Rehovot, Rosh Ha’ayin, Karmiel, and Upper Nazareth among others.¹¹

⁵ Daniel Monterescu, “Spatial Heteronomy and the Politics of Identity in Mixed Cities – Jaffa, 1948-2004.” In: Elie Rekhess (editor), *Together but Apart: Mixed Cities in Israel* (Tel Aviv University: The Konrad Adenauer Program for Jewish-Arab Cooperation, 2007), pp. 75-79 (in Hebrew). See also: Daniel Monterescu and Dan Rabinowitz (editors), *Mixed towns, trapped communities: historical narratives, spatial dynamics, gender relations and cultural encounters in Palestinian-Israeli towns* (Ashgate Publishing, 2007).

⁶ Zuhayr Bahlul, “Tenants in their own homes: On the status of Arabs in Acre.” In: Elie Rekhess (editor), *Together but Apart: Mixed Cities in Israel* (Tel Aviv University: The Konrad Adenauer Program for Jewish-Arab Cooperation, 2007), p. 57.

⁷ Rassem Khamaisi, *The Arab Population in Mixed Cities in Israel: Problems, Barriers and Challenges toward Alternative Urban Policies* (Jerusalem: Shatil, 2008), p. 14.

⁸ Gal Sheva, April 29, 2011.

⁹ Hamevaser, April 27, 2011.

¹⁰ *Makor Rishon*, January 28, 2011. On 1 August 2010, Yisrael Hayom published an article attacking accusations of the “Judaization” of Jaffa, instead claiming that it was not nationalistically motivated, but simply gentrification.

¹¹ *Ha’aretz*, July 12, 2010.
Yediot Ahronot, July 12, 2010.

Mixed Cities as the Focus of Jewish-Arab conflict

- The mixed cities in Israel suffer from social, economic, and planning shortcomings. The socioeconomic status of the Arab residents living in these cities is lower than the national average for Israeli Arabs. The "Rakevet [Railway] Neighborhood" in Lod was nicknamed "Israel's garbage can." In other mixed cities, such as Akko and Ramla, crime, delinquency and incidents of violence are high.¹²
- In several of the mixed cities, municipal services are in a state of collapse, and police have begun to take over the job of providing welfare assistance. Education services suffer, and dropout and illiteracy rates are high. Housing is crowded, illegal construction is prevalent, and there is not enough housing for young couples.¹³
- As the municipal elections scheduled for November 2008 drew near, the conflict between the two communities moved from the social sphere to the political arena. Racist statements contributed to the tension. The Jews feared an "Arab takeover", while the Arabs feared that the Jews would attempt to Judaize it.¹⁴
- A recent report prepared by Mossawa, the Haifa based Advocacy Center for Arab Citizens of Israel, indicated a significant increase in racist acts carried out by Jews against Arab citizens in 2011, mainly in mixed cities such as Akko, Haifa and Upper Nazareth. The numbers seem to have been reduced somewhat in 2012, though still approximately the same or higher than they were in 2010.¹⁵
- Anti-Arab incitement also takes place among the leadership of the mixed cities. Mossawa's 2012 annual racism report cited Upper Nazareth's Mayor as saying, in 2011, that the city is only for Jews (despite the fact that 16% of its population is Arab) and that "If I was there during the October 2000 [Palestinian] uprising, I would have had more people killed."¹⁶

The October 2008 Riots in Akko

- The Akko riots, which took place in early October 2008, began when an Arab drove through a Jewish neighborhood on Yom Kippur, the holiest and most widely observed fast day on the Jewish calendar. Jews reacted by beating and stoning the driver.
- The incident triggered a series of inflammatory rumors about the driver's death among the city's Arabs. Hundreds of Arabs responded to these rumors by trashing Jewish homes and cars and protesting in the streets, to which Jewish crowds responded in kind.
- These developments ignited unprecedented and widespread disturbances in the city, and acts of violence continued to flare up intermittently. Approximately 40 stores and 100 cars were

¹² Elie Rekhess, "Introduction." In: Elie Rekhess (editor), *Together but Apart: Mixed Cities in Israel* (Tel Aviv University: The Konrad Adenauer Program for Jewish-Arab Cooperation, 2007), p. 170.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Yediot Hagalit*, December 19, 2008; *Kull al-Arab*, 7 November 2008; Ha'aretz, 16 October 2008

¹⁵ *Yisrael Hayom*, March 22, 2009; The Mossawa Center, *The Main Findings of the 2012 Racism in Israel Report*, (Haifa: 2012), p.2. See:

http://www.mossawacenter.org/my_documents/publication2/2012%20Main%20Findings%20of%202012%20Racism%20Report.pdf.

¹⁶ The Mossawa Center, *The Main Findings of the 2012 Racism in Israel Report*, (Haifa: 2012), p.4. See:

http://www.mossawacenter.org/my_documents/publication2/2012%20Main%20Findings%20of%202012%20Racism%20Report.pdf.

damaged and 50 people were arrested. The Akko riots serve as a reminder of how dangerously fragile and explosive the situation is in mixed cities. Most observers, Jews and Arabs alike, agree that the volcano underlying Jewish-Arab relations in Israel, and in mixed cities in particular, is ready to explode again at any moment.

- The events reflected powerfully on the vision of achieving coexistence. In a trenchant editorial, Zuheir Bahlul, a popular media personality and resident of Akko, wrote: "We never had co-existence [...] co-existence in the city was merely a declaration of a virtual reality."¹⁷
- Some Arab NGOs observed that the conflict in Akko was yet another manifestation of the width and depth of the wider Arab-Israeli conflict. According to a report prepared by Mossawa, the failure of the State of Israel to take into account the Or Commission's recommendations has allowed discrimination to deepen and created an atmosphere that tolerates racism in Israel. The riots in Akko, according to the Mossawa report, should be therefore taken in the context of "systematic discrimination."¹⁸

Manifestations of coexistence

- Mixed cities have been traditionally viewed as oases of coexistence and shared life. Jews and Arabs used to live side by side in mixed cities before the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948.
- Municipal bodies, non-governmental organizations, and intervention projects such as Tel Aviv University's Price-Brodie Initiative in Jaffa are evidence of dynamic efforts at urban renewal and rehabilitation.¹⁹ In Jaffa, the Municipal Development Authority is operating at full steam and has brought about a significant improvement in the physical infrastructure of the town.²⁰ In Haifa and in Akko, resources and determined efforts are focused on education.²¹
- One non-governmental organization operating in this field is the Civic Accord Forum, an advocacy group which aims at building a just and equal relationship among Israel's Jewish and Arab citizens. One of its most important initiatives is the annual Jaffa Convention on Jewish-Arab Relations, which is intended to draw public attention to key aspects of Jewish-Arab relations and Arab society and to push for much needed change in government policy.²²
- Another active organization is Shatil, a Jewish-Arab NGO which aims to lead social change in mixed cities, such as Ramla, Lod, Jaffa and Akko. One of its recent initiatives, following the October 2008 riots in Akko, was the establishment of an Akko-based working group of some

¹⁷ Zuheir Bahlul, "No Coexistence in Akko". *NRG News*, October 10, 2008. See: <http://www.nrg.co.il/online/54/ART1/797/615.html> [in Hebrew].

¹⁸ The Mossawa Center, *Akko: City on the Front. A Review of the Events and Confrontations in Akko during October 2008* (Haifa: The Mossawa Center, December 2008), p. 1. See: <http://www.mossawa.org/files/files/File/Reports/2009/akka.pdf>.

¹⁹ See: <http://www.tau.ac.il/community/price-brodie/english>.

²⁰ Dror Amir, "Interventions by Municipal Authorities: The Jaffa Development Authority." In: Elie Rekhess (editor), *Together but Apart: Mixed Cities in Israel* (Tel Aviv University: The Konrad Adenauer Program for Jewish-Arab Cooperation, 2007), pp. 127-129.

²¹ Nabil Sammur, "The Educational System for Arabs in Haifa: Between Private and Public." In: Elie Rekhess (editor), *Together but Apart: Mixed Cities in Israel* (Tel Aviv University: The Konrad Adenauer Program for Jewish-Arab Cooperation, 2007), pp. 107-110 [in Hebrew].

²² See: <http://www.caf.org.il/BaseFrg.asp?sec=433>.

20 Arab and Jewish community leaders in Akko, all of whom strive to design practical action programs in order to advance shared living in Akko and prevent future violence.²³

- In July 2009, the third annual Ma'alot-Tarshiha coexistence conference focused on mixed cities and regions in Israel. The goal of this annual convention is to stimulate discourse regarding the coexistence movement and encouraging action by top officials to improve equality between Jews and Arabs living in mixed cities.²⁴
- Some positive signs are evident at the governmental level. A Knesset lobby for mixed cities was headed by MK Nadia Hilou, member of the Labor-Meimad coalition party and resident of Jaffa.
- In July 2008 (prior to the riots in Akko), the Knesset's Internal Affairs Committee called on the government to establish an inter-ministerial unit to assist mixed Arab-Jewish cities. MK Michael Melchior (Labor-Meimad) admitted that mixed cities are currently focal points of problems. However, he hoped that "the establishment of a unit, whose activities will be dedicated to these cities, whether on the governmental or municipal level, will turn them into focal points for building lives together."²⁵
- One of the most prominent popular features of coexistence is joint events and festivals, some of which have been held annually for several years. In Haifa, celebrations of "Holiday of the Holidays" are traditionally held in the Jewish-Arab neighborhood of Wadi Nisnas during the Jewish holiday of Hanukkah, which, when it was established in 1993, coincided with Christian Christmas and the Muslim Eid al-Adha (Festival of Sacrifice).
- Similar events take place in Jaffa ("Jaffa Nights" musical festival) and Akko (The "Alternative Theater Festival").

²³ See: <http://www.shatil.org.il/english/change/shared-society/>.

²⁴ *Jerusalem Post*, July 8, 2009.

²⁵ *Jerusalem Post*, July 2, 2008.