

Murders in Arab Society: A Quantitative Status Report

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This article presents a new and detailed database of murder cases in Israel's Arab sector since 2012 – 999 in total. The figures illustrate the significant increase in the number of murders over time, with the death toll this year expected to reach 262. The data also show that lethal violence is not limited to specific regions, but has spread to all areas with an Arab population. The rise in the number of murders in Arab society is a result of the increased criminal activity by *hamulas* (clans), crime organizations, and gangs in certain areas, especially Nazareth, Ramla, and Lod. The change in balance to the background of the murders affects the overall performance of the police, which has managed to solve less than 10 percent of all murders resulting from criminal activity by clans, criminal organizations, and gangs. The figures clearly demonstrate the need for a long-term systemic plan to eradicate crime within Arab society.

The Institute for National Security Studies (INSS) has created a database of murder cases in Israel's Arab sector from January 2012 through June 2023. This database, which lists the names of all 999 victims, is based on open sources, including the Abraham Initiatives and the Aman Center, as well as information from the Hebrew and Arab press. It provides information regarding each victim, including name, gender, age, and place of residence at the time of the murder. The database also contains information about the main motive for the murder – domestic violence, fights between clans and criminal organizations, street violence, or personal disputes. It likewise allows one to infer, through information issued by the Israel Police and the State Attorney's Office, whether the crime has been solved and whether any charges have been pressed.

At first glance, one can learn a great deal about the perpetrators of violence in Arab society, as well as police performance. Below are three typical cases:

- Najlla al-Amouri, 19 years old from Lod, was murdered in April 2019 by her brother, who disapproved of her way of life. He strangled her at her home and buried her in a pit in an open area near Tel Hadid. The murder was solved by the police in June 2019.
- Cousins Ali and Mahmoud Fahouri (17 and 25, respectively) from Nazareth were shot to death by unknown perpetrators in June 2022, while they were sitting in their car. They are two of the mounting toll of fatalities of the bloody feud between the Bahri and Hariri crime families. As far as is known, their murder has not yet been solved.
- Muhammed Amash, 24, from Jisr az-Zarqa, was murdered in February 2023 by his cousin Ramah Amesh, 23, following a long dispute between them, which ended in a quarrel over a jacket. The State Attorney's Office pressed charges against the accused one month after the murder.

These examples reflect the overall phenomenon – the main background and details about the murderers and their victims. They also indicate that the police excel at solving a particular type of murder – those resulting from domestic violence and personal disputes between the victim and the killer – yet in general, fail to address murders that involve criminal organizations.

The database enables a profound analysis of the phenomenon through an overall examination of the characteristics of the victims, as well as the variation among the cases in time and space. Such an analysis allows a study of the link between violence within Arab society and particular features of this sector, which are often mentioned as causes of crime. They include, inter alia, the dropout rate from the education system, an increase in the number of idle youth, and the lack of access to the job market and banking services.

The following four figures and one table provide a quantitative description of the main characteristics of the murders, which damage not only Arab society, but also the internal security of the State of Israel.

Figure 1: Number of murder victims in Arab society over time

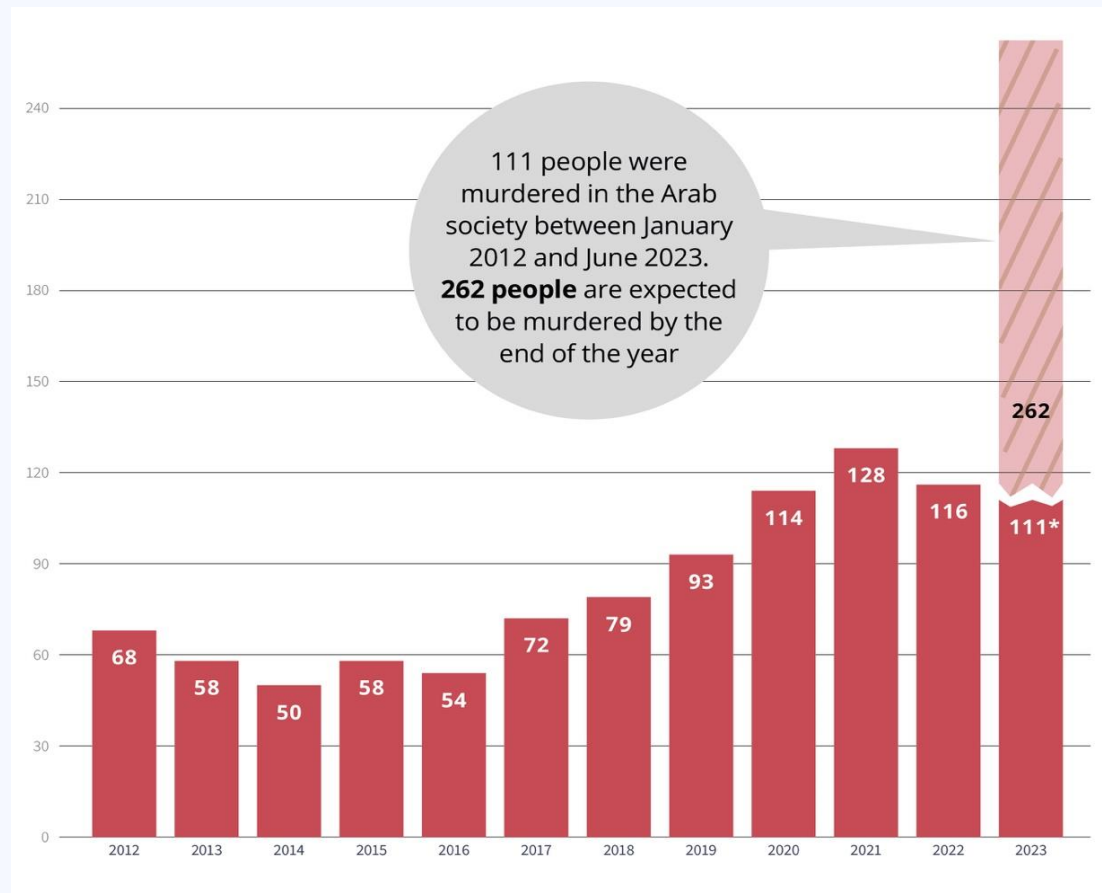


Figure 1 shows the total number of murder victims in Arab society over time. It illustrates the significant increase in violence experienced by Arab society over the last 10 years, particularly since 2017. An average of 58 percent of murders in these years occurred in the second half of the year. At the current rate, the expected number of murders in 2023 may be as high as 262.

Between January 2012 and June 2023, 856 men and 143 women were murdered. The average age of male and female victims was 33 and 34, respectively. The number of female victims has remained constant over time, with twelve victims annually, whereas the number of male victims has risen considerably. This supports the claim that most of the increase in the

number of murders can be attributed to the increasing activity of criminal organizations and power struggles between clans, which affect the number of murdered men, and not to domestic violence, which mostly affects women.

Figure 2: Heatmap of the number of murder victims between 2017 and June 2023, by natural region

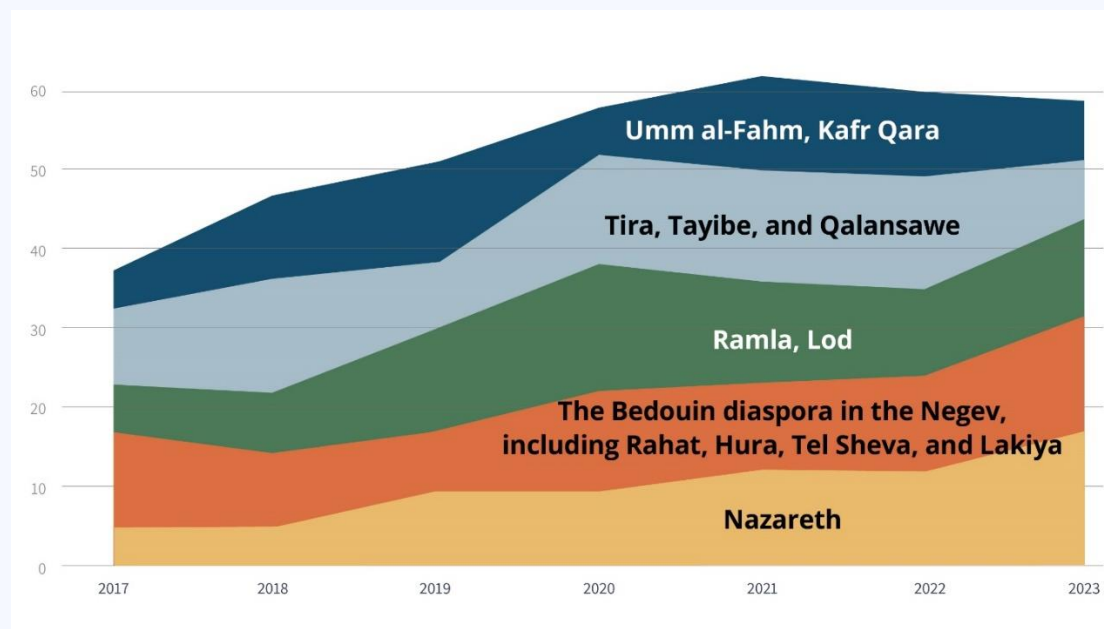


Israel is divided into fifty-two natural areas that cover the country's territory, including one natural area covering the West Bank. The division into natural areas clearly proves that violence in Arab society is widespread all over the country, from north to south. Currently there are five natural areas with an average of more than ten victims a year (Figure 2):

1. Nazareth (69)
2. Umm el-Fahm and Kafr Qara (66)
3. Tira, Tayibe, and Qalansawe (80)
4. Ramla and Lod (79)
5. The Bedouin diaspora in the Negev, which includes Rahat, Hura, Tel Sheva, and Lakiya (80 victims)

The map also shows that violence is not limited to specific areas, but has spread to every location with an Arab population, including Israel's largest three cities, Jerusalem (45), Tel Aviv-Jaffa (40), and the Haifa region (31).

Figure 3: Number of murder victims between 2017 and June 2023, over time and by region



The number of murder victims in natural areas has varied considerably over time (Figure 3). Five years ago, the total annual number of victims in Nazareth, in Ramla-Lod, and in Rahat, Hura, Tel Sheva, and Lakiya (which together accounted for around 30 percent of total number of victims that year) was lower than 25. This figure rose significantly to over 40 victims a year during the first half of 2023 (approximately 40 percent of all victims in 2023). In contrast to the significant increase in violence in these areas, a decrease has been recorded over time in the number of victims in other places, such as Tel Aviv-Jaffa, Umm al-Fahm, and Kafr Qara. These

fluctuations can be attributed to the causes of the murders, as illustrated in Table 1.

Behind the Murders

The database was created based on articles published in the press and reports by the spokesperson for the Israel Police, in order to catalog the background to the events by various categories. Research of this type entails a challenging effort. First, the background to almost 30 percent of murders is unknown or has not been mentioned in the press. But even in cases where there is information on the background to the murders, it is often not easy to differentiate between violence among clans or criminal organizations and spontaneous street violence between various gangs. It is important to take this reservation into account when referring to the data. Therefore, the analysis divides the background to the events into two distinct categories: events related to violence by clans, criminal organizations, and gangs, versus all other events.

Table 1: Background to murders from 2017 to June 2023

Background	Number of murders (percentage of total cases)
Violence between clans	145 (20%)
Criminal organizations	136 (19%)
Street brawls	52 (7%)
Collateral damage	58 (8%)
Total cases of violence by clans, criminal organizations, and gangs (including collateral damage)	391 (55%)
Domestic violence	53 (7%)
Criminals murdered in the course of a crime	42 (6%)
Personal conflict	16 (2%)

Unknown	211 (30%)
Total	713 (100%)

Table 1 shows that even if there is some variation regarding the background to murders, more than half of the cases are the result of clan, criminal organization, and gang activity, which account for 391 of the cases since January 2017. The term “personal conflict” usually refers to a quarrel between two people resulting from a spontaneous argument, such as a dispute over a parking space or a road accident. The category “criminal murdered in the course of crime” mostly refers to cases where thieves have been shot during a robbery.

Figure 4: Background to murders by natural region

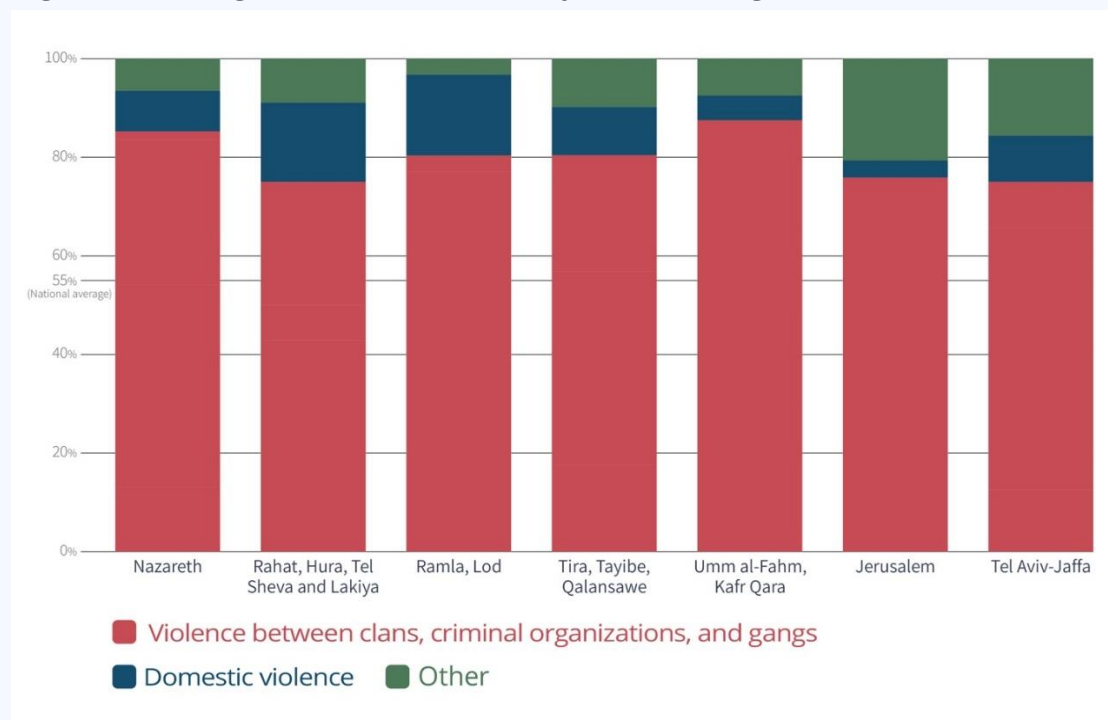


Figure 4 presents the breakdown of the backgrounds to murders in different natural areas (for cases in which the background is known). The figure shows that the percentage of murders as a result of clan, criminal organization, and gang activity is much higher in areas that are known to be violent, compared to the country average. It varies between 72 percent in Tel Aviv-Jaffa to 83 percent in Nazareth, compared to the country average of 55 percent. The percentage of murders in this category has also

increased over time and is the exclusive cause for the increase in the number of murders in Arab society. The percentage of murders within the family is particularly high among the Bedouin diaspora and in the Ramla-Lod region (16 percent each), compared to the country average, which is 7 percent.

The change in the type of murder cases is also significant for police performance. According to our data, the police have managed to solve almost all murders resulting from personal conflicts and domestic violence. On the other hand, they encounter greater difficulty solving murders committed by clans, criminal organizations, or gangs: fewer than 10 percent of these murders have been solved. This means that the decline in the number of murders solved over time and in different regions is not only the result of the weakening of the police in the different districts, but also of a change in the background of the murders over time and among the various regions of the country.

Conclusion

This article has described a new database of murder cases in Arab society from 2012 to date. INSS has made the database freely available to any researcher with an interest in the subject, in the hope that their research may help shed light on the causes of crime and violence in Arab society, in order to eradicate them.

Our primary objective is to contribute to the formulation of a long-term systemic plan to eradicate crime in Arab society. Such a plan must not be based solely on enforcement, but also address issues such as infrastructure, welfare, rehabilitation of offenders, employment, and access to banking services in the Arab sector. One of the main lessons we learned since the beginning of this year is that a policy based on promises of establishing a National Guard and threats of indiscriminate use of force are ineffective in eradicating crime and violence. Even if the National Guard were proven effective in eradicating crime, as promised by the Minister of National Security, it would not be relevant in the short term. Until it is up and running, hundreds of civilians are expected to pay with their lives (while

tens of thousands more will suffer) as a result of the current dysfunction of enforcement agencies.

Editors of the series: Anat Kurtz, Eldad Shavit and Judith Rosen