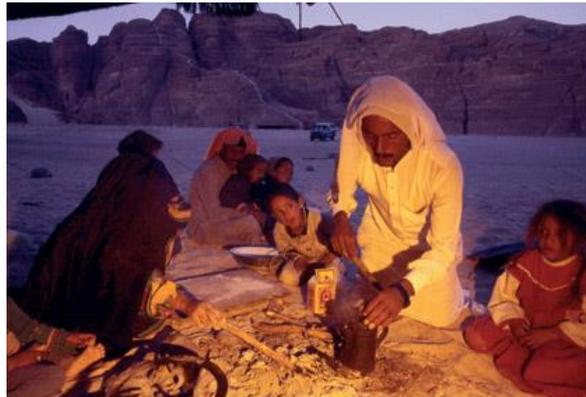


MINORITY CITIZENS OF ISRAEL

Some 1.8 million people, comprising some 24 percent of Israel's population, are non-Jews. Although defined collectively as Arab citizens of Israel, they include a number of different, primarily Arabic-speaking, groups, each with distinct characteristics.

Muslim Arabs, over 1.2 million people, most of whom are Sunni, reside mainly in small towns and villages, over half of them in the north of the country.

Bedouin Arabs, also Muslim (estimated at approximately 250,000), belong to some 30 tribes, a majority scattered over a wide area in the South. Formerly nomadic shepherds, the Bedouin are currently in transition from a tribal social framework to a permanently settled society and are gradually entering Israel's labor force.



Bedouins in the Arava Wilderness (Photo: Ministry of Tourism)

Christian Arabs, some 123,000, live mainly in urban areas, including Nazareth, Shfar'am, and Haifa. Although many denominations are nominally represented, the majority are affiliated with the Greek Catholic, Greek Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches.

The Druze, some 122,000 Arabic-speakers living in 22 villages in northern Israel, constitute a separate cultural, social, and religious community. While the Druze religion is not accessible to outsiders, one known aspect of its philosophy is the concept of *taqiyya*, which calls for complete loyalty by its adherents to the government of the country in which they reside.

Druze Religion and Israeli Society

Druze is a breakaway sect of Shi'ite Islam that incorporated Greek Philosophy and the concept of Hindu reincarnation to become a religion of its own, but they remain monotheistic. After a short period of proselytizing in 1050 the

religion became officially closed. You cannot convert into the religion and if you leave the religion or marry outside of it you are ex-communicated. They are an extremely tight-knit community. They do not allow people to convert now because according to their belief every being now is a reincarnation of a person who was alive at the time that the religion was open; thus they made their choice then not to enter and therefore now they cannot change their mind. Druze live mainly in Syria, Lebanon and Israel with some populations in the United States and France.

The Druze prophets come from all three religions. In their belief system prophets are those who believe in the monotheistic ideal and a sense of justice they include Jethro (the father-in-law of Moses), Moses, John the Baptist, Jesus and Mohammed, but also people from outside the monotheistic religions such as Greek philosophers Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. The Druze religious books are inaccessible not only to outsiders, but also to practitioners of the religion called the *juhal*, "the ignorant ones". The only ones who have access to it are the religious leaders called the *uqqal*, "knowers". The main precepts of the religion for all are:

- Speaking the truth (instead of prayer)
- Supporting your brethren (instead of charity)
- Abandoning the old creeds (instead of fasting)
- Purification from heresy (instead of pilgrimage)
- Accepting the unity of God
- Submitting to the will of God (instead of holy war)

"Although the Druze recognize all three monotheistic religions, they believe that rituals and ceremonies have caused Jews, Christians, and Muslims to turn aside from "pure faith". They argue that individuals who believe that God will forgive them if they fast and pray, will commit transgressions in the expectation of being forgiven - and then repeat their sins. The Druze thus eliminated all elements of ritual and ceremony; there is no fixed daily liturgy, no defined holy days, and no pilgrimage obligations. The Druze perform their spiritual reckoning with God at all times, and consequently need no special days of fasting or atonement." (Aridi)

There are approximately 85,000 Druze in Israel comprising 1.8% of the population. The Druze in the State of Israel speak Arabic as a mother tongue, but generally speak very good Hebrew as they are a well-integrated minority. Their men serve in the army (as opposed to other Arab-speaking populations that do not, the Bedouin can volunteer as well) and have often reached high ranking positions. The Druze who live in villages in the Golan Heights, who number approximately 18,000, (taken from Syria in the 1967 Six-Day War) are loyal to Syria and refuse to take Israeli citizenship because they want to return to Syria when a peace agreement is reached.

Sources:

Dr. Naim Adiri. The Druze in Israel . Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
<http://www.jcpa.org/jl/hit06.htm>



Druze elders in the Galilee village of Beit Jann
(Photo: Ministry of Tourism)

The Circassians, comprising some 4,000 people concentrated in two northern villages, are Sunni Muslims, although they share neither the Arab origin nor the cultural background of the larger Islamic community. While maintaining a distinct ethnic identity, they participate in Israel's economic and national affairs without assimilating either into Jewish society or into the Muslim community.

- The majority of Israel's Arab population lives in self-contained towns and villages in Galilee, including the city of Nazareth, the central area between Hadera and Petah Tikva, the Negev, and in mixed urban centers such as Jerusalem, Akko (Acre), Haifa, Lod, Ramle, and Yafo (Jaffa).

Israel's Arab community constitutes mainly a working-class sector in a middle-class society, a politically peripheral group in a highly centralized state and an Arabic speaking minority in a Hebrew-speaking majority. Essentially non-assimilating, the community's distinct identity is facilitated through the use of Arabic, Israel's second official language; a separate Arab/Druze school system; Arabic mass media, literature, and theater; and maintenance of independent Muslim, Druze, and Christian denominational courts which adjudicate matters of personal status.

While customs of the past are still part of daily life, a gradual weakening of tribal and patriarchal authority, the effects of compulsory education and participation in Israel's democratic process are rapidly affecting traditional outlooks and lifestyles. Concurrently the status of Israeli Arab women has been significantly liberalized by legislation stipulating equal rights for women and prohibition of polygamy and child marriage.

The political involvement of the Arab sector is manifested in national and municipal elections. Arab citizens run the political and administrative affairs of their own municipalities and represent Arab interests through their elected representatives in the Knesset (Israel's parliament), who can operate in the

political arena to promote the status of minority groups and their share of national benefits.

Since Israel's establishment (1948), Arab citizens have been exempted from compulsory service in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). However, since 1957, at the request of their community leaders, IDF service has been mandatory for Druze and Circassian men, while the number of Bedouin joining the career army voluntarily increases steadily.

Arab-Jewish Dynamics

Arab citizens, who constitute more than one-sixth of Israel's population, exist on the margins of the conflicting worlds of Jews and Palestinians. However, while remaining a segment of the Arab people in culture and identity and disputing Israel's identification as a Jewish state, they see their future tied to Israel. In the process, they have adopted Hebrew as a second language and Israeli culture as an extra layer in their lives. At the same time, they strive to attain a higher degree of participation in national life, greater integration into the economy and more benefits for their own towns and villages.

Development of inter-group relations between Israel's Arabs and Jews has been hindered by deeply-rooted differences in religion, values, and political beliefs. However, though coexisting as two self-segregated communities, over the years they have come to accept each other, acknowledging the uniqueness and aspirations of each community.

Pluralism and Segregation: As a multi-ethnic, multicultural, multi-religious, and multi-lingual society, Israel has a high level of informal segregation patterns. While groups are not separated by official policy, a number of different sectors within the society are somewhat segregated and maintain their strong cultural, religious, ideological, and/or ethnic identity.

However, despite a fairly high degree of social cleavage, some economic disparities and an often overheated political life, the society is relatively balanced and stable. The low level of social conflict between the different groups, notwithstanding an inherent potential for social unrest, can be attributed to the country's judicial and political systems, which represent strict legal and civic equality.

Thus, Israel is not a melting-pot society, but rather more of a mosaic made up of different population groups coexisting in the framework of a democratic state.

(Israel's Ministry of Tourism)