



The National Significance of Israeli Demographics at the Outset of a New Decade

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This article presents and analyzes up-to-date demographic data for Israel. Some figures involve the COVID19- pandemic, which has so far caused “excess mortality” and a reduction in immigration of Jews to Israel. Even if this is a temporary phenomenon, the pandemic has highlighted the sectoral composition of Israel’s population, while in tandem, the political crisis has highlighted factionalism in the non-haredi (ultra-Orthodox) Jewish population in Israel, which represents 62 percent of the population. From a multi-year perspective, the rapid growth of the haredi and Arab sectors has continued (especially in the Bedouin subsector). These populations do not identify fully with the state, their participation in the workforce is low, and many do not serve in the army. What does this mean for the future of Israel as a Jewish, democratic, developed, growing country, and what can be done about it? With Palestinian demography in the Land of Israel intertwined with Jewish demography, what is the significance of the combined data and demographic forecasts for the coming decades?

Keywords: demography, national security, forecast, Jewish state, haredi, Palestinians

Introduction

Demographic data derive their significance or constitute policy variables within a specific context, resolution, and time period, according to specific needs and agendas, and from the perspective of specific people. The decision to present certain figures and not others from the range of the available demographic data and how to present them constitutes a statement in itself, for example, putting data into a category of “Jews and other non-haredis [ultra-Orthodox]” (e.g., Central Bureau of Statistics, 2018a). Demographic definitions of population groups are also used for political and policy purposes. For example, in the framework of the Arab struggle against Israel and its claim to the “right of return,” the Palestinian refugees have been awarded a uniquely broad demographic definition, recognized by the UN, that gives them, their offspring, and their descendants the status of refugees. No other refugees in the world, including the refugees in the ongoing war in Syria, are awarded such status.

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As a rule, Israel compares itself to the developed countries, including in demography, and its demographic data and human capital, like those of other countries, are among its defining features. The source of a country’s population is natural increase and immigration. Human capital is derived from the population, and the labor force for the civilian sector and

soldiers for the military come from this human capital. Indeed, demography is one of the foundations of national security, and the link between these realms is multi-faceted. Going back to the days of David Ben-Gurion, Israel’s security concept was shaped on the basis of solutions that assumed Israel’s quantitative demographic inferiority to the Arabs and its human qualitative advantage. Population dispersal for example, i.e., settlement, was regarded as part of the security concept, as the composition of sectors in the population affects the degree of national cohesion. In various countries, such as Lebanon and Iraq, community divisions are a destabilizing factor. In Israel, there are sectors that do not identify with the Zionist state, and do not participate in military service. Does that suggest that for the long term, Israel also harbors a seed of instability?

One of the important sources of demographic data is the population census. The census serves as an anchor for estimates to be produced in the succeeding years with the help of surveys. The most recent census in Israel was conducted in 2008; the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) is preparing to conduct Israel’s next census, the “2022 Population and Housing Census,” for the purpose of obtaining a complete and credible picture of the country’s population, including demographic, social, and economic data in each community in Israel (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2019)—though the COVID-19 pandemic has caused a delay of several months in this census.

The purpose of this article is to present Israel’s principal demographic data at the outset of the new decade and to analyze their national significance, especially their implications for Israel’s identify as a Jewish and democratic state and its character as a liberal and developed country. The article contains two parts. The first is a description of the main points of the demographic picture, based on selected quantitative data, including the demographic consequences of the pandemic, the CBS forecast until 2065, and figures for Palestinian

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demography. The second part assesses the implications of these data through two avenues: the internal demographic challenge and its effect on Israel's character as a democratic, liberal, and developed country, and the political demographic challenge to Israel as a Jewish and democratic state. These questions have also engaged demographic researchers in the past (for example, Bystrov & Soffer, 2010).

Part I: Highlights of the Demographic Situation, and Demographic Forecasts

Size and Composition of Israel's Population in 2020

2020, the closing year of the preceding decade, will be remembered as the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, an event that also affected demographic data. The population of Israel totaled 9.293 million people at the end of 2020 (see Table 1 for a comparison with previous years). These figures include the residents of East Jerusalem, but do not include the population of foreign workers, who in 2019 numbered 167,000 (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2020h).

During 2020, Israel's population grew by only 1.67 percent compared with 1.93 percent in 2019 and an average annual increase of 1.9 percent in the 10 preceding years (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2020a). The main reason was the COVID-19 pandemic, which caused a decrease in the number of immigrants to Israel and an increase in mortality, primarily among the older population. Note that the rate of increase in Israel's population is the highest of any developed country, given a fertility rate of 3.1, compared with 1.7 children per woman in the developed countries (Kasir, 2020).

As of the end of 2020, Israel's population included 6.87 million Jews—constituting 73.9 percent of the population (compared with 75.6 percent in the 2008 census); 1.96 million Arabs (Muslims, Druze, and Christians Arabs)—21.1

percent of the population (compared with 20.2 percent in the 2008 census); and 465,000 “others”—5.0 percent of the population, compared with 4.2 percent in the 2008 census (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2020g). The “others” group consists of people with no religious classification in the population registry (for the most part people of Jewish descent whose mother is not Jewish, mostly from the former Soviet Union) and non-Arab Christians. Immigration to Israel has increased the representation of this group in the population.

Table 1. Population of Israel (in thousands)

Year	Jews	Jews and others	Arabs (including East Jerusalem)	Total population
1995	4,522.3	4,607.4	1,004.9	5,612.3
2000	4,955.4	5,180.6	1,188.7	6,369.3
2005	5,313.8	5,613.6	1,377.1	6,990.7
2010	5,802.9	6,121.3	1,573.8	7,695.1
2011	5,803.9	6,122.3	1,574.8	7,697.1
2012	5,804.9	6,123.3	1,575.8	7,699.1
2013	5,805.9	6,124.3	1,576.8	7,701.1
2014	6,216.9	6,576.4	1,720.2	8,296.6
2015	6,334.5	6,705.6	1,757.8	8,463.4
2016	6,446.1	6,831.3	1,797.3	8,628.6
2017	6,554.5	6,959.8	1,838.2	8,798.0
2018	6,664.3	7,089.2	1,878.4	8,967.6
2019	6,773.2	7,221.4	1,919.0	9,140.4
2020	6,870.9	7,335.7	1,957.6	9,293.3
Increase in the past decade	18.4%	19.8%	24.4%	20.8%

Source: Central Bureau of Statistics, information database

Table 1 displays the population data for Israel by year in 1995-2020. It is clear that the Jewish population grew at a slower rate than the population as a whole, and that its relative size in the total population fell as a result (Table 2).

Table 2. Proportion of Jews in Israel's population (1995-2020)

Year	Percentage
1995	80.6
2000	77.8
2005	76.0
2010	75.4
2015	74.8
2020	73.9

Source: Analysis of figures from the Central Bureau of Statistics database (2021a)

Birthrate and Mortality in 2020: In the Shadow of the Pandemic

According to figures from the Central Bureau of Statistics (2020h), 176,000 babies were born in Israel in 2020 (177,000 in 2019): 73.8 percent of the babies were born to Jewish mothers, 23.4 percent to Arab mothers, and 2.8 percent to others. The effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on the birthrate in Israel will become clear only during 2021. In early February 2021, Prof. Roni Maimon, head of Obstetrics and Gynecology at the Shamir Medical Center (Assaf Harofeh) and head of the Israeli Society of Obstetrics and Gynecology, said, "In the first stage, there is a decline in the number of births in comparison with previous years. This is probably due to anxiety, economic conditions, and so forth. We are experiencing a baby deficit, not a baby boom" (Bachur-Nir, 2021).

In 2020, 48,688 people died in Israel. This is a striking figure—2,710 more than the number who died in 2019. For the sake of comparison, the difference in the number of those who died between 2019 and 2018 was 1,450, 65 fewer people died in 2018 than in 2017, and there was an increase of 625 in the number of those who died between 2016 and 2017 (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2020b). The initial estimate by the CBS for the number of deaths in 2020 was 50,000 (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2020h), but the revised figure is still high, and reflects "excess mortality."

Furthermore, according to an announcement by the CBS (2020f) about the pandemic in March-October 2020, the number of deaths during this period (2,586) was 9 percent higher than the number in the corresponding period in 2019, and 2,207 more people died in August-October 2020 than in the corresponding period in 2019. According to the Ministry of Health, the number of deaths from COVID-19 reached 3,347 on December 31, 2020 and over 6,200 by the end of March 2021 (Ministry of Health, 2021).

For the CBS, "excess mortality" is a more comprehensive and reliable index than the figures for direct mortality. Measuring the excess mortality makes it possible to assess the extent of mortality beyond the known mortality from COVID-19, and to include data that might be caused by deaths from the virus that were not diagnosed due to error, or to include mortality from other causes that were indirectly influenced by the crisis, for example, when people were late in requesting treatment or did not request medical treatment because of fear of infection. This index is also better for comparisons between countries, due to the differences between them in testing and diagnosis policy (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2020f). This concept appears to be significant, but it is nevertheless important to investigate and isolate the indirect excess mortality caused by the preventive measures in order to avoid a situation in which the damage from the preventive measures outweighs the damage caused by the pandemic.

Immigration to Israel in 2020 during COVID-19

Immigration is the second element in population growth after natural increase, which calculates births minus deaths. In 2020, 30,300 people entered Israel as residents, and 6,000 Israelis residing abroad for over one year were removed from the register of residents. The (international) balance of immigration was therefore an addition of 24,300 people to the population in Israel, of whom 8,200 were Jews,

2,500 Arabs, and 13,600 “others.” Thus only one third of the positive balance of immigration to Israel were defined as Jews; most of the immigration consisted of “others” (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2020h).

According to the Central Bureau of Statistics (2020h), of those entering Israel in 2020, 20,000 had immigrant status, compared with 34,000 in 2019. The cause of the steep drop in immigration was presumably bureaucratic procedures and the reduction in air traffic as a result of the measures taken to deal with the pandemic. Immigrants came primarily from Russia (38.1 percent), Ukraine (15.8 percent), France (11.0 percent), and the United States (10.7 percent).

The Jews in Israel

A religious profile is one of the leading factors in determining a person’s membership group. This is especially prominent in Israel, which defines itself as a Jewish and democratic country. The definition of a Jew according to Jewish religious law is what determines the size of the Jewish population in Israel, including by the CBS. A person whose father is Jewish and whose mother is not Jewish may self-define as Jewish, but the CBS will include him/her in the “others” population group. On the other hand, a person self-defining as haredi in a survey will be included statistically in the haredi population group (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2018d), although there is no official definition of the term “haredi.” The division into groups by the CBS in its multi-year forecast, between the non-haredi Jews and “others” group and the haredi group reflects a specific perspective toward Israeli society.

The CBS database does not provide detailed multi-year data about religious cross-sections of the population. The data are supplied when surveys make them available. According to a CBS survey from late 2016 (published in June 2018—the most recent survey available), 45 percent of Jews defined themselves as living a secular lifestyle, 25 percent a traditional lifestyle, 16 percent a very religious lifestyle,

and 14 percent a haredi lifestyle (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2018d). This means that in 2016, the group of non-haredi Jews constituted 86 percent of the Jewish population and 64.2 percent of the general population in Israel. As of the date of the survey, the secular group was the largest in the Jewish sector, but did not constitute an absolute majority of that sector.

Overall, the proportion of Jews in the general population is declining, due to the greater rate of natural increase among the Arab population (Table 2).

Haredi Population

The haredi population represents the most significant variable in this analysis, as well as in the CBS forecast. This sector is composed of subsectors and is growing very rapidly, but its size is difficult to determine. The indicators for the size of the haredi population are based primarily on surveys (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2018d). Additional indicators of this sector’s size can be obtained from growth in the number of students at haredi institutions and population growth in haredi communities.

The size of the haredi community was projected to reach 1.175 million in 2020, according to the CBS forecast (2018a) (the medium variant), under an assumption of 4.4 percent annual population growth, based on fertility and mortality figures. This number constitutes 12.6 percent of Israel’s total population and 17.1 percent of the Jewish population in 2020. At the same time, according to a 2016 survey, 14 percent of the Jewish respondents reported that they were haredi. If this latter figure represented the proportion of haredi in the Jewish population at the end of 2016, then there were 902,000 in the haredi sector in 2016 and only 1.07 million in 2020, amounting to 11.5 percent of Israel’s total population and 15.6 percent of the Jewish population.

A population with 4.4 percent annual growth (24 percent in the past five years) is exceptional in the world, and is the result of extraordinarily

Even if the birthrate in the haredi sector falls substantially in the coming years, the young composition of ages in this population guarantees a high rate of population growth for the next two decades, due to the large number of women of childbearing age. One of the direct economic consequences is that each wage earner supports a large number of dependents.

high fertility—6.6 children per haredi woman, compared with 2.1 among secular women (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2020d). The haredi sector therefore features large families and young ages. Even if the sector's birthrate falls substantially in the coming years, the young composition of ages in this population guarantees a high rate of population growth for the next two decades, due to the large number of women of childbearing age. One of the direct economic consequences is that each wage earner supports a large number of dependents. In many homes in the haredi sector, a woman is the breadwinner, because the sector features a relatively low rate of participation in the labor force among men. The rate of participation among men of working age (ages 25-64) in this sector was estimated at 49 percent in 2018, compared with 82.3 percent among all men in Israel. Factoring in employment of women, the employment rate in the haredi sector is 61.2 percent, compared with 78.2 percent in the general population (Knesset Research and Information Center, 2018).

These demographic figures, combined with the sector's wish to live together in largely

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homogenous areas, result in great density in the haredi sector. The city of Bnei Brak, for example, had 26,000 residents per square kilometer (2017), making it one of the world's most crowded cities, with the same density as Manhattan (Danieli, 2017). This density also affected the extent of infection during the pandemic.

The Arab Population in Israel

The size of the Arab population at the end of 2020 was 1.96 million, including East Jerusalem (Table 1). This population is not homogenous, and should not be regarded as such. For example, there is no resemblance between the Druze ethnic group and the strength of its affiliation with the State of Israel and the residents of East Jerusalem, who are not Israeli citizens, and who are also listed by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics. The social characteristics of Arab society hamper its integration in the Israeli economy. Participation of married Arab women in the labor force is especially low for social and religious reasons, and Arab men and women are employed primarily in low-paying jobs that do not require higher education.

As of the fourth quarter of 2019 (before the COVID-19 pandemic), the rate of participation in the labor force among Arab women was 37.0 percent, compared with 77.1 percent in the general female population. Participation in the labor force among Arab men was 76.3 percent, compared with 85.3 percent among the general male population. There was a sharp downtrend in the participation rate among Arab men even before the pandemic—the rate in the second quarter of 2017 was 80.6 percent (Knesset Research and Information Center, 2020). One positive point is the employment of Arabs in the Israeli medical sector, including as doctors, nurses, and pharmacists. This is a good example of the sector's ability to integrate in the Israeli economy.

According to a CBS survey of late 2016, 11 percent of Arabs defined their lifestyle as secular, 57 percent as traditional, and 31 percent

as either religious or very religious (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2018d).

The Muslim residents of Israel are the largest group in the Arab population, which constitutes part of the Palestinian people. As of the end of 2020, this group numbered 1.673 million people—85.6 percent of all Arab citizens of Israeli and 18 percent of Israel's total population. This figure includes the Muslim Arabs living in East Jerusalem, who are not Israeli citizens. It can therefore be concluded that there are 1.3 million Muslim citizens of Israel (author's calculation based on the Central Bureau of Statistics, 2020c).

Table 3. Regions with Muslim populations in Israel

District	Percent
Northern region	35.2
Haifa region	13.7
Jerusalem region	21.9
Southern region	17.1
Central region	10.9
Tel Aviv region	1.2
Total	100

Source: Central Bureau of Statistics, 2020c

The growth rate of the Muslim population in 2019 was 2.3 percent, the same as in 2018. The annual growth rate of the Muslim population fell from 3.8 percent to 2.3 percent in the past two decades, but is still higher than the Jewish and Christian population growth rate. The growth rate of the Jewish population in 2019 was 1.6 percent, that of the Christian population 1.6 percent, and that of the Druze population 1.3 percent (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2020c).

The drop in the average growth rate in Muslim society resulted from a decrease in the general fertility rate of the Muslim population since 2001. The fertility rate reached 3.16 children per woman in 2019, close to the fertility of Jewish women (3.09). At the same time, the Muslim population is still younger, and Muslim women marry at an average age of 22.6 years, compared

with an average marriage age of 25.7 years among Jewish women. These figures cause higher population growth in Arab society. At the same time, life expectancy in the Arab sector is still lower than in the Jewish sector. The average household in the Muslim population is estimated at 4.62 people, compared with 3.05 people in Jewish society and 3.03 people in Christian society (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2020c).

The Bedouin population is considered part of both the general Arab population and the Muslim Arab population. The Bedouins live in the northern and central regions, but mainly in the Negev (the southern region). The CBS supplies no reliable data for this population as a whole. A rough estimate is 370,000 people, amounting to 4 percent of the population in Israel. The picture in the southern region is clearer. It is customary to regard the Muslim population living in the southern region as Bedouin (Ben-Gurion University, 2021). An estimate of this population's size as of January 2021 is 279,000, 14.3 percent of Israel's overall Arab population. The growth rate of this population in the past decade has averaged 3.4 percent (based on Ben-Gurion University figures, 2021). The fertility rate of this population is 5.28 children per woman, while the fertility rates of Muslim women in the northern and Haifa regions are lower—2.51 and 2.54 children per woman, respectively (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2020c).

The non-Muslim Arab population constitutes 14 percent of Israel's Arabs. It includes 145,000 Druze (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2020a) and 139,000 Christian Arabs, accounting for 77 percent of the Christian population in Israel (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2020g).

The Circassians, Sunni Muslims who are not of Arab nationality, are a special case. They number only 5,000 (Ministry of Defense, 2021).

Demography of Jerusalem

Israel's capital is the most populated city in the country. As of late 2019, Jerusalem's population was 936,000, of whom 579,400 were Jews and

others (61.9 percent) and 357,000 were Arabs. Of these, 346,000 were Muslims, amounting to 36.9 percent of the city's population and 21.1 percent of the Arab population in Israel (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2020c), compared with 28 percent of the city's population in 1990 (Korach & Choshen, 2020). The vast majority of the Arabs living in East Jerusalem have resident status, but not Israeli citizenship.

The city's population grew by 16,500 residents in 2019: 21,400 from natural increase and 3,500 from immigration from abroad, while the city lost 8,400 residents as a result of negative internal immigration. In other words, the number of people leaving Jerusalem for other communities in Israel was greater than the number of those moving to Jerusalem (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2020b).

In 2055, the haredi population will constitute 26.7 percent of the population in Israel, the Arabs 20.4 percent, and non-haredi Jews 52.9 percent. After “others” are subtracted, non-haredi Jews will constitute under 50 percent of the population. If this forecast materializes, the character of Israel will change in the coming decades.

At the end of 2020, Jerusalem's population was 952,300, of whom 585,500 (61.5 percent) were Jews and others and 366,800 (38.5 percent) were Arabs (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2021d). The population forecast based on the population estimates at the end of 1995 (when the city's population was 591,000) in the framework of the strategic plan for Jerusalem predicted 947,000 residents in Jerusalem: 589,000 (62 percent) Jews and others, and 358,000 (38 percent) Arabs (Della Pergola & Rebhun, 2003). Such a precise forecast in such a complicated city as Jerusalem shows steady and persistent long-term trends.

Likewise according to CBS data on the demographic state of Israel's capital, the city shows an increased trend of haredization; a negative balance of internal immigration, including by the haredi population; and a high

proportion of Arab residents who are not Israeli citizens.

The Long-Term Central Bureau of Statistics Forecast (2065)

In May 2018, CBS published a demographic forecast for 2065 containing three variants, or alternatives. With the information that has emerged since then, this forecast still appears relevant today. This article addresses the medium variant, which is also considered the most likely. The forecast is particularly interesting in the context of the expected growth in the haredi population. According to the assumptions in the medium variant, the annual growth rate of the total population will fall from 1.9 percent to 1.6 percent from 2015 to 2065. The growth rate in the Jews and “others” group (excluding haredis) will fall from 1.4 percent to 0.6 percent, the growth rate in the haredi group will fall from 4.4 percent to 3.4 percent, and the growth rate in the Arab group will fall from 2.2 percent to 1.0 percent (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2018c).

In this forecast, the proportion of the haredi sector in the population is projected to grow rapidly and steeply. In 2055, the haredi population will constitute 26.7 percent of the population in Israel, the Arabs 20.4 percent, and non-haredi Jews 52.9 percent (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2018b). After “others” are subtracted, non-haredi Jews will constitute under 50 percent of the population. If this forecast materializes, the character of Israel will change in the coming decades (see also Della Pergola, 2016).

Table 4 shows that the proportion of Arabs in Israel's population will peak in 2035, and then decline. This is also a result of rapid natural increase among the haredi population.

Palestinian Demography in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip

Jewish demography in the geographic Land of Israel is intertwined with Palestinian demography. Since the 1995 interim agreements,

Table 4: Multi-year forecast (medium variant)

Year	Jews and others, excluding haredis	Haredis	Total Jews, haredis, and others	Arabs (including East Jerusalem)	Total population
	Percent of Israel's population	Percent	Percent	Percent	Thousands
2015	68.0	11.2	79.2	20.8	8,463.4
2020	66.3	12.6	78.9	21.1	9,293.3
2025	64.5	14.3	78.7	21.3	10,188.3
2035	60.6	17.9	78.5	21.5	12,133.4
2045	57.0	22.0	79.0	21.0	14,405.9
2055	52.9	26.9	79.8	20.2	17,022.1
2065	48.4	32.3	80.7	19.3	19,954.0

Source: Central Bureau of Statistics, 2015-2065 Population Forecast (2018a)

the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics has not dealt with this population; it has received figures from the Palestinian Authority. Demographer Prof. Sergio Della Pergola believes that the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) works professionally, even though in certain areas it acts according to political instructions. Its figures are also examined by international agencies (Knesset, 2018). At the same time, others, among them Amb. (ret.) Yoram Ettinger, hold that the Palestinians exaggerate the demographic figures for political reasons (Landsmann, 2018). The Israeli Civil Administration does not accept Ettinger's estimates, but presents no in-depth research of its own.

According to the PCBS census published in March 2018, some 98 percent of the Palestinians are Muslims and some 1 percent are Christians. There are 929,000 Palestinian families in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The number of Palestinian refugees living in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem is 1.98 million (41.4 percent of the population). The average size of a Palestinian family is 5.1. The Gaza Strip is one of the most densely populated places in the world, with an average of 5,200 people per square kilometer (compared with

6,777 per square kilometer in Hong Kong and 7,804 people per square kilometer in Singapore in 2019), while the population density in the West Bank is 509 people per square kilometer. Four percent of the Palestinians are illiterate (Azulay & Levy, 2018). Also according to the Palestinian census, 393,000 Palestinians live in Area C (Levy, 2018), an area of 3,539 square kilometers—61.8 percent of the total area of the West Bank (Shragai, 2019).

According to the website of the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), as of the end of 2020, there were 5.1 million Palestinians in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem, of whom 3.05 million were in the West Bank (including East Jerusalem) and 2.05 million in the Gaza Strip. It was also reported that the annual growth rate of the Palestinian population was 2.5 percent as of 2020: 2.2 percent in the West Bank and 2.9 percent in the Gaza Strip (PCBS, 2021).

Israeli Civil Administration Forecast

In May 2018, then-Israeli Civil Administration deputy head Col. Uri Mendes presented to a Knesset committee a forecast for Palestinian population growth by 2050, prepared at the committee's request by the Civil Administration.

He said that there were 2.5-2.7 million Palestinians in the West Bank in May 2018, and that the annual growth rate, which was on a downward trend, was 3 percent. Assuming an average annual population growth rate of 2 percent, the Civil Administration predicted that there would be 6 million Palestinians in the West Bank in 2050 (author's note: the calculation amounts to 5.1 million at most), or 7.2 million according to an average annual growth rate of 2.6 percent (author's note: the PCBS is already reporting a 2.2 percent annual population growth rate in the West Bank).

According to the Civil Administration, the population registry in the Gaza Strip listed 2.1 million people (in May 2018), but there is no well-founded estimate for the number of residents there. The Civil Administration's forecast for 2050 is 4-4.3 million Palestinians in the Gaza Strip (Knesset, 2018). The figures presented by Mendes indicate a Palestinian population forecast of at least 10 million in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in 2050 (excluding Jerusalem). Note that according to the CBS forecast (medium variant), there will be 10.6 million Jews and others in Israel in 2050 (7.5 million non-haredi Jews and others and 3.1 million haredi Jews) and 3.2 million Arabs (including East Jerusalem). These forecasts by the Civil Administration and the CBS project there will be more Palestinians than Jews in the geographic Land of Israel ("between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River"). If we exclude the Gaza Strip from the equation—noting that Israel withdrew unilaterally from the Gaza Strip—the general demographic balance in 2050 gives a larger number of Jews than Palestinians (see also Della Pergola, 2021).

Part II: Demographic Significance for Israel

Israel's population is divided into various population groups and sub-groups, some of which have independent political representation. These groups differ from each other in size,

growth rate, composition, culture, attitude toward religion, and national affiliation. Israel's demographic identity to a large extent represents the division offered by former President Reuven Rivlin in his speech about the "four tribes" (secular, religious, haredi, and Arab) at the Herzliya Conference on June 7, 2015.

The Internal Demographic Challenge

Demographic changes in population sectors in democratic countries are liable to undermine their stability and character, and hence can be termed the "internal demographic challenge." For example, West European countries have high life expectancy and low birthrates, resulting in a large number of senior citizens. In Germany, the proportion of people over 65 is projected to rise from 21.8 percent in 2020 to 26.1 percent in 2030 (OECD, 2020). The declining percentage of native residents caused by immigration of young people from non-democratic countries with a different culture is liable to change the character of these countries in the future. On the other hand, countries with a high rate of natural increase (mostly in Africa) are hard pressed to supply the needs of their rapidly growing populations. Israel's multi-year rate of natural increase is ostensibly excellent for a growing country (1.9 percent in multi-year terms), but actually represents very different growth rates among different population groups. This difference has national implications, as can be concluded from CBS forecasts.

The groups in Israel leading in population growth rates are the haredi and Arab sectors (especially the Bedouin sector). Their affiliation with the Zionist state is limited; their participation in the work force is lower than that of other sectors; many do not serve in the army; but they wield significant political influence (mainly the haredi sector). The proportion of the Jewish non-haredi population is declining, especially the proportion of the secular group, as a result of lower fertility rates.

The high rate of natural increase in the haredi sector is the main element in the CBS

forecasts (until 2065). The growth in this sector preserves the Jewish element in Israel's demography, including at the far end of the forecast. In other words, Israel will continue to be a significantly Jewish country, the Arabs will remain about one fifth of the population, and the haredi sector will be a third of population in 2065. The question therefore is not whether Israel will remain Jewish, but whether it will remain a democratic and developed country in familiar Western terms. The haredi sector does not have a democratic character, and its social norms are difficult for secular people (currently the largest group) to accept. These norms include inequality in the burden of military service, a preference among quite a few men for government allowances over work, and exclusion of women from many forums.

The general outlook and sectoral, or even separatist, social behavior typical of the haredi population is to a great extent due to the supreme preference given to the haredi spiritual world (religious commitment and Torah study) over employment and the acquisition of an income-oriented education (education that will lead to an above-average salary). It is also due to fear that the meeting of cultures, including in the labor market, will jeopardize the haredi culture. The result is that families in haredi society are large, and the burden of making a living and maintaining the family falls on women. For these cultural reasons, there is only a loose connection between haredi society and the Israeli economy.

Despite the decline in their percentage of the population, the non-haredi Jewish group still constitutes some 62 percent of the population at present. In political terms, it would be able to control the state completely, were it not divided within itself and represented by many feuding political parties, even when these parties are part of a coalition. This is the main reason for the unstable structure of the political system in Israel, reflected, inter alia, in the many election campaigns without a clear winner in recent years. The growing proportion of the haredi

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sector in the population, as forecast by the CBS, will reduce the proportion of the non-haredi Jewish group, until it no longer constitutes an absolute majority 30 years from now.

The change in the demographic composition of the Israeli population is liable to have a negative impact on key indexes measuring Israel's economic robustness, and will make it difficult to maintain Israel's character as a developed Jewish and democratic country. The decrease in the proportion of the non-haredi Jewish sector of the population will accelerate if more people from this group leave Israel, especially the secular, young, and well-educated population, which may have trouble finding its place in Israel, and particularly if the gaps between Israel and developed countries in the world widen, and this group is less able to influence the future and character of the country. Such a development is liable to worsen Israel's position, and is undesirable for any of the population groups in the country.

This risk can be reduced. A change in the trend is possible if a change occurs in the character of the particular population groups, or at least if new social understandings are reached between the various population groups in the country that will ensure that Israel remains a positive environment for all sections of the population. Therefore, steps must be taken to achieve equal opportunity for all sectors, starting with the system of elementary education, and ensure that all sectors regard core studies and labor as important national values for coexistence.

This requires an understanding in which the haredi and Arab sectors take responsibility in certain areas of importance for the country's

future, such as education and employment. Improvement in the socioeconomic situation must be a goal shared by all of the population groups, despite the disputes in politics and policy. This can be achieved, inter alia, through investment in “income-oriented education” and in real growth in the labor force participation rates and labor productivity (per capita GDP) of haredi men, Arab men and women, and all socially marginal population groups. This effort requires the state to offer relevant study programs, professional training, and jobs.

Of these populations, it is reasonable to give preference in job opportunities to people who want to find work and have difficulty doing so, rather than people who do not wish to work for social and religious reasons. The former includes, for example, Jews and Arabs on the social and geographic margins who want to progress economically and need jobs, as well as released soldiers, whose civilian careers have been interrupted by their army service.

Despite the understandable wish to narrow socioeconomic gaps, there is no national necessity for all sectors to be economically equal and to advance at the same pace, or to have uniform labor productivity that matches the average in the developed countries. For example, a large part of the widening gaps in the past decade is attributable to a breakthrough in the hi-tech sectors, not backwards movement in the absolute economic situation of the middle and lower classes. This breakthrough has been beneficial, not harmful, to the lower-income groups, because it has helped fill the state treasury and made it possible to provide assistance with unilateral transfers, even during the COVID-19 pandemic. The prosperity of hi-tech has been accompanied by expanded employment possibilities in the economy outside the hi-tech sector, with the unemployment rate in Israel before the COVID-19 crisis reaching a historic low of 3.8 percent of the labor force.

In the worldviews of population groups like haredi society, the world of religious

commitment and Torah study and the goal of large families are regarded as more important than material wealth. At the same time, people in such societies who voluntarily choose a way of life involving material poverty cannot expect equality in per capita income or permanent government funding, or constitute an economic burden on people in other sectors that work. Everyone in every sector should participate in the labor market, at least to some extent. High productivity is also preferable from the perspective of those who want time for Torah study.

The above-mentioned demographic trends have also increased inequality in the burden of IDF service, and no solution is on the horizon. Today, half of 18 year-olds in Israel do not join the IDF, and the majority of this group is composed of haredi men and Arabs (who are under no obligation to serve in the army). This puts the burden of military service on the group of non-haredi Jews and “others.” The compulsory service has been shortened (new recruits currently serve 30 months), thanks to a larger draft pool. In the current security situation, however, compulsory service can only be shortened to a limited extent for the foreseeable future, because an overly short compulsory service cannot accommodate a high level of training, professionalism, and operational experience. In view of the current demographic trends, and given the budget constraints and the IDF’s need to recruit more young people in the long term, inequality in the defense burden is expected to increase.

National service provides something of a solution but is economically inefficient in the long term, because it also postpones the training of young people and their entry into the labor market. It therefore appears that the long-term solution is to establish a professional army in Israel (elimination of compulsory military service), as exists in many other developed countries. This solution is difficult to implement in the coming years due to budgetary constraints, and because the IDF is based on a

large reserve force of demobilized soldiers. A professional army solution is also difficult for other reasons, and its future implementation is liable to have far-reaching social and political consequences that go beyond the scope of this article. Meanwhile, soldiers in compulsory and reserve military service should receive as much recompense as possible from the state when they serve as partial compensation for the inequality in the burden of service.

The Political Demographic Challenge

President Biden's entry into the White House may revive the political process between Israel and the Palestinians, and highlight the issue of Israel's permanent borders, in which the demographic consideration is a cornerstone. Israel totally rejects the Palestinian so-called "right of return," primarily for demographic reasons.

Israel's political demographic challenge is to preserve its identity as a Jewish and democratic state, mainly vis-à-vis the Palestinians, whose demography is intertwined with that of Israel. This means preserving a positive balance of the Jewish population over the Palestinian population within the country's borders ("the narrow balance"). Since the large wave of Jewish immigration from the former Soviet Union ended, the proportion of Jews in the narrow balance has declined as a result of faster natural increase among the Palestinian population in Israel to date (Table 2). A further reduction in the proportion of Jews in the narrow balance will occur if Israel annexes territories with their Palestinian population, for example if it annexes territories in Area C, among them the Jordan Valley—even while there is no official estimate in Israel of the number of Palestinians living in these areas, and the Palestinian figure for this should be questioned.

Although the proportion of Jews in the population has fallen, this trend is projected to end in another 20 years, as shown in the CBS forecast (Table 4). The proportion of "Jews and others" will then rise, while the proportion of

Arabs is projected to fall, as a result of enormous growth in the haredi portion of the population (from 11.8 percent in 2020 to a third of Israel's population in 2065) and a drop in the fertility rate among the Arab population. This trend guarantees the Jewish majority in the narrow balance, but raises questions about Israel's character and defining features in the future.

"The broad balance" is the ratio between the number of Jews and the number of Palestinians in the territory of the Mandatory Land of Israel. This ratio does not directly affect Israel's Jewish and democratic character, but it has a negative influence on Israel's image in the world as a country that rules over the Palestinians, and on its image as perceived by many Israeli citizens themselves, who do not wish to rule over another people.

As of the end of 2020, the number of Palestinians in Israel, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip was estimated at 6.5 million. This figure is obtained by adding the number of Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip (according to the PCBS) to the number of Israeli Palestinians listed in the figures published by the Israeli CBS (the assumption is that the group identifying as Palestinian nationals among Arabs in Israel is identical to the size of the Muslim group). The estimated number of Arabs living in East Jerusalem according to the CBS, who are also counted by the PCBS, is deducted from the figure.

There were 7.4 million "Jews and others" in 2020, meaning that there are more Jews than Palestinians in the broad balance. If the Palestinian population in Israel, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip continues growing at a faster rate than the Jewish population, however, this balance is projected to change at some point. The decline in the proportion of Jews in the broad balance is not infrequently portrayed as disastrous for the Jewish and democratic state, as if there were critical significance to the date on which the demographic balance between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River is reversed, for example, as if Israel will have

to annex the residents of the territories and become a binational state. Although finding a political solution is important, these fears are groundless.

A look at the past shows differences in Israel's attitude toward the demographic variable in the two above-mentioned balances. On May 15, 1948, David Ben-Gurion declared "the establishment of a Jewish state in Eretz Israel (Land of Israel), to be known as the State of Israel," despite efforts to dissuade him from doing so, among others by Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics founder Roberto Bachi, who argued that 600,000 Jews did not constitute a critical mass for founding a state (Landsmann, 2018). The Israeli War of Independence unexpectedly changed the demographic situation in Israel's favor, but the political demographic challenge did not disappear; it mounted.

The political demographic challenge was one of the considerations that convinced Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin to sign the Oslo Accords (1993-1995). Rabin expected that these agreements would lead Israel to peace, security, and prosperity. In his Knesset speech about approval of the interim Israeli-Palestinian agreement in October 1995, Rabin said, "We aspire to reach, first and foremost, the State of Israel as a Jewish state, at least 80 percent of whose citizens will be, and are, Jews." Rabin hoped that the Palestinians would be satisfied with an entity that was "less than a state" in territories that did not include greater Jerusalem and the Jordan Valley (Yitzhak Rabin Center, 1995). The Palestinians, however, led by the PLO, had no intention of compromising on the substance of the permanent settlement.

In speaking of demography and negotiations, the question of representation, meaning which population is represented in the negotiations and who will represent it, is very important. In order to reach a settlement on the borders with the Palestinians, Israel had to reach agreement with representatives of the territories, and indeed, conducted negotiations with them in Washington (Elyakim Rubinstein headed the

delegation). The PLO acted behind the scenes at the time, but it was clear to the world that these representatives would officially represent a specific population whose main interest was ending the "occupation" from 1967. Since no breakthrough was achieved in Washington, however, Rabin chose to sign the Oslo Accords with Arafat, and recognized the PLO as the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, including the Palestinian citizens of Israel and millions of refugees from 1948 and their descendants. On the other hand, Arafat and his successor, Abu Mazen, did not recognize Israel as the nation-state of the Jewish people and put the "right" of every Palestinian and his descendants to decide whether to exercise the "right of return" to the area inside the Green Line at the head of the Palestinians' claims. This demand obviously contradicts Israel's identity, and has been a main stumbling block in the negotiations on a permanent settlement since the 1990s.

The demographic consideration was also of key importance in the decision by Prime Minister Ariel Sharon at the height of the second intifada to withdraw unilaterally from the Gaza Strip—a decision that was implemented in 2005. The plan was based on the assumption that "in any future permanent settlement, there will be no Israeli settlement in the Gaza Strip" (Knesset, 2004), because of the minute size of the Jewish population there.

Following the implementation of the interim agreement and the withdrawal from the Gaza Strip, Israel's direct control over the Palestinian population was reduced, but these measures clearly proved to be unstable solutions, both because no solutions were given to the Palestinians' aspirations, such as the establishment of a state, and because no sustainable solutions were given for the daily life of the Palestinian population. The Oslo Accords led to the second intifada, not a permanent settlement, and Hamas gained power in the Gaza Strip. Its rise, a result of Israel's unilateral withdrawal, divided the Palestinian

system geographically, politically, militarily, and demographically. Israel should have withdrawn from the Gaza Strip in the framework of an agreement with the Palestinians under international auspices that would include an aid package for the Gaza Strip and prevent Hamas from taking control of the territory. The idea that Israel could separate itself from such a large population proved to be naive. A political solution must also provide suitable living conditions for the Palestinian population in the long term.

In both cases, the measures taken failed to bring the peace and security as promised by the two leaders. Furthermore, the world still perceives Israel as the ruler by military force and consequently as bearing responsibility for the Palestinian population in the entire area of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. It is also difficult to assert that these steps made Israel more Jewish or more democratic by lessening control over the Palestinians. In Israel, these measures resulted in the Jewish left being shunted to the political margins and the strengthening of the right.

In both cases, even though the principle of a Jewish and democratic country supports an Israeli withdrawal from territories with a dense Palestinian population, the impression is that Rabin and Sharon acted under pressure, changed Israel's positions completely, and had naive expectations. It appears that they did not sufficiently understand the special nature of the demographic considerations and how to design demographic solutions, for example by creating suitable living conditions for the other side.

Thus, the political-security solution must be process-based and convergent, both demographically and geographically. The democratic map supports non-annexation of territories in the West Bank with a dense Palestinian population, and a solution that will facilitate operational continuity of Palestinian society and the Palestinian economy. In other

words, Israel can base itself on the principle of an exchange of territories that will maximize its Jewish population and minimize the Palestinian population within the permanent borders of Israel, but subject to a situation in which Israel can defend itself and the Palestinians can live their lives in a territorially contiguous area.

There is clear demographic logic in the idea of contracting the borders of East Jerusalem, whose residents are Israeli residents but not Israeli citizens. Although such a separation ostensibly runs counter to the logic of functional continuity for the city's residents, the existing situation, in which a large proportion of the city's residents are officially Israeli residents but not Israeli citizens, while Israel does not really control all of its capital city, is worse.

The demographic map requires consideration of another non-Jewish population, "others," which constitutes 5 percent of Israel's population. This population is the result of immigration. This population is apparently less challenging to the Jewish state, because unlike the Palestinians, it has no political conflict with the Jewish majority. At the same time, the growth in this population requires special attention to its needs and the prevention of future conflicts between it and the state.

Conclusion

Israel defines itself as a Jewish and democratic country, and regards itself as a liberal and developed country. This image of Israel, however, is harbored and promoted by the non-Jewish haredi majority, which is also dominant in participation in the labor force, labor productivity, military service, and income tax payments that supply the government budget. The proportion in the population of this majority, however, is projected to fall in the coming decades as a result of continued relatively rapid growth among the haredi and Arab populations. According to the CBS forecast (medium variant), within several decades, these two "minorities"—the Arabs and the haredi

Jews—are likely to constitute a majority of the population in Israel. Social agreements are therefore needed now that will ensure that Israel will continue to preserve its current character, and that each population group will contribute its share.

Demography is an important field that affects all spheres of life, including national security in both the narrow meaning of this concept (foreign policy and defense) and the broad meaning (which also includes economics, education, and society). Nevertheless, reliable and confirmed data about various populations and sub-populations are lacking. The extent of the information gathered by the CBS is increasing and accumulating, and constitutes a good basis for academic and operative research. At the same time, it is difficult to find researchers in demography in the civilian government ministries and the Ministry of Defense, and there are also few in institutions of higher education. Demographic research should be encouraged. It is important that government ministries, policymakers, and academic researchers urge the Central Bureau of Statistics to gather data and supply forecasts that they need for their work, especially in view of the upcoming population census.

The late Col. (ret.) Dr. Shmuel Even was a senior research fellow at INSS, with a doctorate in science from the Israel Institute of Technology (Technion) and the University of Haifa. In addition to his work at INSS, Dr. Even engaged in research and consulting at Multi Concept (Consultants) Ltd., which he owned, and served as a professional director in companies. Dr. Even's research at INSS dealt with the Israeli economy, intellectual property, the oil and natural gas sector, strategy in foreign and defense affairs, defense spending, cybersecurity, intelligence, the political process with the Palestinians, and more.

Note from the Editors: The untimely passing of Dr. Shmuel Even, an esteemed and dear colleague, has left an enormous vacuum in his fields of expertise. This article was submitted for publication and was in the midst of a blind judging process by two external experts in the field. Unfortunately, the process was not completed and we were not able to relay the judges' comments to Dr. Even so that

he could submit a version revised in accordance with the comments. As a note of appreciation and homage to a friend, scholar, and treasured individual, we have chosen to publish the article in its last version, after copyediting and making several small additions recommended by one of the judges. We wanted to see the article published in this form as a worthy memorial and farewell to a talented and diligent scholar who utilized his skills to contribute to this periodical over the many years of its publication.

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