STRATEGIC ASSESSMENT

A Multidisciplinary Journal on National Security

Volume 27 | No. 2 | June 2024

Demography and National Security

The Azrieli Center for Israel Studies
The Ben-Gurion Research Institute
for the Study of Israel & Zionism
Ben-Gurion University of the Negev

INSS
המכון למחקרי ביטחון לאומי
THE INSTITUTE FOR NATIONAL SECURITY STUDIES
TEL AVIV UNIVERSITY אוניברסיטת תל אביב

STRATEGIC ASSESSMENT
A Multidisciplinary Journal on National Security

Strategic Assessment: A Multidisciplinary Journal on National Security is a journal published by the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS). It aims to challenge and to enrich the scholarly debate and public discourse on a range of subjects related to national security in the broadest sense of the term. Along with its focus on Israel and the Middle East, the journal includes articles on national security in the international arena. Academic and research-based articles are joined by policy papers, professional forums, academic surveys, and book reviews, and are written by INSS researchers and guest contributors. The views presented are those of the authors alone.

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The Azrieli Center for Israel Studies
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This publication was prepared with the support and cooperation of the Azrieli Center for Israel Studies (MALI), Ben-Gurion University of the Negev at the Ben-Gurion Institute for the Study of Israel and Zionism

Graphic Design: Michal Semo-Kovetz, Tel Aviv University Graphic Design Studio
Cover photo: Unsplash.com
Cover Design: Shai Librowski
Logo Design: b-way digital
Printing: Orniv Ltd., Holon

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Strategic Assessment is published in English and Hebrew.

ISSN printed version: 0793-8950
ISSN online version: 2789-9519

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Prologue – Editors' preface

The volume before you summarizes a joint research project by the Institute for National Security Studies and the Azrieli Center for Israel Studies at the Ben-Gurion Research Institute for the Study of Israel and Zionism at Ben-Gurion University, which aims to lay a conceptual foundation for the connection between demography and national security and for demography's impacts on national security, in the broad and comprehensive sense of both concepts. Scholars from both institutes took part in the project, along with external researchers. At the end of the first part of the project, a conference on the topic was held in June 2021, and the second part closes with the collection before you.

The project's point of departure is that demography is a highly important factor in the strategic balance of power between nations or nation-states, as well as between great powers. It can be conceptualized in the term, the "demographic strength" of a country. From this launch point, the project highlights this factor in a comprehensive assessment of the State of Israel's strategic standing—of its historic relations with the Palestinians, neighboring Arab states and other Islamic countries in its surroundings, and of other strategic issues.

In addition to articles on demographic aspects of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the connection between demography and territory, the dimension of time, and the shaping of policy, in this collection you will also find articles on the demography of Israeli society and the Jewish Diaspora, on demography and economics, and on demography and the labor market. Articles on demographic aspects of the area surrounding Israel also appear in the collection, including one on the demographic reality in Egypt and its implications, alongside another on the demography of the refugees in Syria due to the civil war and its regional implications, including the consequences for Israel.

The discussions in this wide and diverse range of topics aims to broaden and deepen analyses in the world of national security, while illuminating the interfaces between the two spheres and examining the impact of the various dimensions of demography on national security, on decision-making processes and on the shaping of policy.

Most of the articles in this publication, including those that relate to a relatively broad and varied range of topics, converge on the impact of demography on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Indeed, a look at the Jewish-Arab conflict over the land from the inception of Zionism until recently, reveals that demographic competition between Arabs and Jews lies at its core. This competition was the driving force of developments at various junctures of the conflict, and it is also its most important strategic horizon. The conflict has revolved around many issues: a struggle over borders and lands, a religious and cultural argument; a conflict between nomads, former nomads and a sedentary population, between immigrants and immigrants, and between two group over the title of "natives." All of these issues are substantive, but the demographic arena dominates this complex conflict and to a large extent is where it will be decided.

The collection includes articles that examine the essence of the demographic challenge in historical perspective and from the viewpoint of the Israeli side and the Palestinian side. These articles emphasize the place of demography in the set of considerations of the national leadership and of decision-makers from the period of the *yishuv* until the Six Day War, and in how it coped with the war's results—the territories added to the State of Israel, including the Palestinian population living in them.

The demographic dimension of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict directly affects a question of great public significance, which has become topical recently: How is victory in the conflict defined? When examining the centrality of demography in the war that has been taking place in the land for over 100 years, one understands that victory for any particular side is related in part to demographic victory. Both sides understand this and thus relate seriously to forecasts on demographic growth or decline, natural increase or chances of the development of migration to or from the land.

Examining the Jewish-Arab conflict from the end of the nineteenth century until today from a demographic perspective, indicates that it is divided into two parts: the period of the **Jewish demographic threat** and the period of the **mutual demographic threat**: Jews towards Arabs and Arabs towards Jews. The Arabs gradually developed anxiety about the immigration of millions of Jews, and over the years their fears were realized. The War of Independence rendered the Arab population within the borders of the State of Israel as a minority. The Jews in turn, experience anxiety about the overwhelming demographic superiority of Muslim Arabs in the whole region—an anxiety that, before the state's establishment, also applied to the Land of Israel.

The Oslo Accords did not settle the demographic conflict between the Jews and the Arabs in the land, but rather postponed its "solution" until a permanent peace agreement between the sides. During the past three decades, the Palestinians' demand to allow the Arabs to settle within the State of Israel has remained in place, and in crises like the civil war in Syria they even demanded that refugees from Syria be permitted to enter the West Bank as well as territories partially controlled by the Palestinian Authority. This did not happen due to the refusal of Israel, which has control of the border crossings. Meanwhile, Israel continued to promote Jewish immigration to Israel, and most Israeli governments have been committed to continued Jewish settlement in the West Bank. It can be stated that the relations between the two sides during these decades, in addition to recurring outbreaks of violence, have been characterized by mutual tension due to the demographic issue, which is rightly seen as a zero-sum game between them.

The demographic stance of supporters of the Oslo Accords and the hope for the establishment of two nation-states side by side in the land, was and to some extent remains based on the prevention of Arab immigration into the State of Israel, and the restriction of the return of the descendants of refugees to the Arab state that would be established in the land. This assumption is influenced by two interrelated premises: one is that over the years of the State of Israel's rule in the Gaza Strip, Judea, East Jerusalem and Samaria, no significant demographic flow of Arabs into the sovereign territory of the State of Israel occurred; the other is that if no demographic flow occurred under conditions of relatively little fighting, then it would also not take place under conditions of peace.

But these premises are problematic: with respect to the first premise, demographic flow has occurred in several ways. One way is via "family unification," meaning marriage by Israeli Arabs to Palestinians and building families in Israel. This occurred on a large scale especially among the Bedouins in the Negev, and even after the cancellation of the legal possibility that existed for Palestinian partners to receive legal standing in Israel, it has continued, often in the framework of polygamous families. The partners live in Israel illegally, but their children receive legal standing in Israel based on the fact that one of their parents is Israeli. In addition, a large-scale phenomenon has become established, of Palestinians working without a permit in Israel and living there illegally. Aside from these, large numbers of collaborators with the Israeli authorities have settled in Israel with the support and assistance of the Shin Bet. The second premise is also unsubstantiated. If under conditions of calm Israel has difficulty preventing demographic flow,

then under conditions of full peace and a much higher quality of life, including an attractive labor market, the difficulty would be much greater. Under conditions of peace and an open labor market, we could expect Arab-Muslim immigration into Israel from neighboring countries, similar to migration to Europe from failed states in the region.

The Palestinians' demographic strategy also explains their insistence on not recognizing a Jewish nation-state. This not only reflects insistence on a "historical narrative" or on ideology, as many try to argue. There is demographic logic in the opposition of the various Palestinian factions, including Arab citizens of Israel, to recognition of the State of Israel as a Jewish nation-state. They reject such recognition, including opposing enshrining it in legislation, in part because it enables the establishment of an Israeli right to demographic defense against Arab immigration into its territory.

As a democratic society, Israel's policy on the Jewish-Arab conflict is one of the focal points of internal controversy, and there is no single clear strategy that is shared by all Israeli Jews, but nonetheless there are points regarding which they are almost entirely united. The first is the aspiration to bring together as many of the world's Jews in Israel as possible. While there is a significant minority that wishes to limit aliyah to Jews recognized by halacha, by deleting the "grandchild clause" in the Law of Return, which grants the right to aliyah to someone whose mother and grandmother are not Jewish but whose grandfather is Jewish, so far their attempts have failed.

Second, it seems that most Israeli Jews share the position that Israel must control its gates of immigration and prevent entry and citizenship for Arab refugees from neighboring countries, Palestinian and non-Palestinian. The scope of the legal system's intervention in the specific policy determined on this matter by the Knesset and the government is a controversial issue.

Third, it seems that most Israeli Jews share the demand that any political settlement of the conflict be conditioned on Palestinian recognition of the Jewish character of the State of Israel. However, it seems that many in Israel do not make the connection between control and sovereignty in the Jordan Valley—which greatly affects the scope of Arab Muslim immigration into the area west of the Jordan, and afterwards also into the territory of the State of Israel—, and the demographic issue.

In addition to the range of Israel's demographic challenges that are related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, there are also domestic demographic challenges. The growth of the Haredi sector affects all of Israeli society in a reality of social differentiation, excessive independence of the Haredi education system, which is lacking in core studies, and insufficient participation of Israel's Haredi citizens in military service and in the labor market. Other domestic challenges relate to the demography of the employment market and its economic consequences, and to the distribution of the population and the Arab sector in Israel and its socioeconomic consequences for the integration of Arab citizens in Israeli society and for Jewish-Arab relations.

Along with the effort to present readers with a variety of ideas and conceptions for the links between demography and national security, in this publication we sought to present different perspectives on the timeline and competing interpretations of data and trends. The wide scope demands modesty and we do not purport to encompass all of the relevant issues for discussion and research in these contexts. It is clear to us that we have not succeeded in including all of the topics and presenting all of the positions, conceptions, and interpretations in this publication. In this sense, we have taken upon ourselves to pave the way for continued research on the demographic issues and their impact on national security. Our hope is that the collected publication of articles by first-rate researchers will extend the scope of research in

this field and the understanding of the importance of research on demography's impact on the various dimensions of national security.

After three years of engaging with this topic, it is clear to us that any in-depth analysis of national security issues would be deficient without relating to the demographic dimension. The variety of articles here indicates that the discussion of demography is not restricted or limited to demographers. Demographic research and assessments of democratic strength are necessary and contribute to all fields of knowledge, and they should be integrated more deeply and significantly in future studies.

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Introduction – The Demography-Security Nexus

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In this paper we seek to define the effects of demography in its broadest sense on issues of national security, and to present a structured theoretical framework that can explain their mutual interactions and effects. The goal is to integrate the various interpretations presented in the articles of this special issue, which is devoted to demography and national security.

Israel is a unique and important test case for examining the interface between demography and national security, as a country that since its establishment has been strikingly demographically inferior to its surroundings, in a challenging and complex security situation, and subject to ongoing existential threats. Israel is a small nation state that survives in a situation of entrenched and ongoing ethnic-national-religious conflict with the Palestinians, while a consistently relatively large minority of some 20% of its citizens are identified as part of the Palestinian people, with whom Israel is in conflict.

We will explore the demographic impact on Israel's national security through four main dimensions, which indicate the close links between demography and security (demography in Israel, demography between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean, demography within the regional context, and the demography of Diaspora Jewry). A theoretical model is also proposed, which apart from the explanation it provides for demographic impact (the independent variable), lays the foundation for further discussion of the possible effects of mediating variables on demography.

Keywords: demography, national security, the Israeli-Palestinian dispute, regional issues, Israel-Diaspora relations

Introduction

From the earliest days of the Zionist movement the demographic issue has occupied the political thinking of its leaders and shaped their attitude towards the project of settling the land, defining and developing a state. In fact, since the "Zionism of Zion" resolution passed by the Zionist Federation in 1905, and particularly from the creation of the British Mandate for Palestine until 1951, demographic

considerations were dominant and decisive in shaping Zionist policy (Halamish 2024). Thus the demographic issue was one of the main factors in the historical and strategic decision by David Ben-Gurion, towards the end of the War of Independence, not to conquer the territories of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. After the Six Day War as well, the demographic question formed the basis of government discussions on the future of the captured territories and how to manage the lives of the Palestinian population and Jerusalem, when the sense of victory was quickly replaced by concern at the demographic change in the form of a million Arab residents in the territories. Thus Levi Eshkol's government reached a decision (that was not implemented during its term) to settle Jews in the West Bank in order to create facts on the ground with continuity of settlement, which was intended not only to create strategic security depth but also to bring about demographic change within the state's new borders (Miller-Katav 2024).

In this article we try to define the influence of demography on national security. In our reference to demography we depart from the narrow meaning of the term, which refers to the size and composition of a population based on agreed criteria of growth or decline, and the presentation of future trends based on demographic models. We have chosen to relate to the term in a broader sense, including reference to aspects of refugees, tensions between minorities and between ethnic and religious groups and their impact on government stability, processes of urbanization, and essential economic resources such as water and energy, and more.

Apart from determining that "Israel's demographic statistics (like those of other countries) are part of the basic data on which its national security is based. Its [Israel's] human capital is the basis of the society's capabilities, the state product, and the construction of the security system" (Even 2020, 165), we will also engage with four different dimensions of demography: demography in Israel (majority-minority relations, in terms of national, religious, socioeconomic, center-periphery aspects and so on); the demography between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea (Israelis/Palestinians); the regional demography of the surrounding states; and the demography of Diaspora Jewry. The influence of each dimension and their interactions point to the close links between demography and national security.

We also present a theoretical model, which apart from its proposed explanation of the effect of demography (the independent variable, classified into two groups of variables: internal and external, reflecting the four dimensions of our present analysis) on variables (national power and threats) that mediate national security (the dependent variable), also lays the groundwork for further discussion on the possible impact of those mediating variables on demography. This article focuses on the impact of demography on national security, but the analysis and development of the model led to an insight on the possibility of a feedback loop in the sense of the impact of the mediating variables on the independent variable, which we chose to present as a possibility, leaving the discussion of this possibility for another article.

The Interfaces and Links Between Demography and National Security

Demography is garnering increased attention within international relations and security studies (Tragaki 2011, 437). The purpose of national security is "to ensure the nation's existence and protect its vital interests. Existence is the basic subject of security" (Tal 1996, 15). Therefore a national security risk is any event, process, trend or development that damages the state's ability to function over time and ensure the security and welfare of its population, providing it with essential services at a decent level and protecting the sovereignty of its strategic assets (Yadlin 2021, 11).

Demography is defined as the study of population composition, dispersion and

changes in size, and their effect on processes of policy-making and politics. While prominent social trends are usually unexpected and hard to predict, demographic developments are the exception to this rule. As soon as a demographic development is identified, it is apparently possible to predict with some certainty (in our assessment this statement is too deterministic, due to the familiar and important failures of demographic forecasts) how it will continue to develop (Goerres & Vanhuysse 2021, 2-5). For example, it is possible to forecast that in the twenty-first century the population of European countries will age—a trend that raises questions over the ability of these states to maintain their generous welfare policies (ibid., 16). Similar forecasts and concerns for welfare policy apply in Asian countries such as Japan, South Korea (Klein & Mosler 2021, 195) and China (Noesselt 2021, 117), while in Africa there is a reverse demographic process (Hartman & Biira 2021, 219). At the national level, demography is concerned with a historic analysis of the four main demographic parameters—fertility, mortality, internal migration and external migration—but also with forecasts that provide the basis for national planning (Winkler 2022).

While demography is obviously an important and vital subject for the analysis of future trends and formation of national policy, the question remains over the place of demography in matters of national security and its impact on decision-making and security strategy. In fact, demography provides a framework for an analysis of the effects of population characteristics and trends on national security, and an assessment of the impact of such trends on global conflicts in the developing world over the next twenty years (Sciubba 2012, 67). Demographic changes and population growth, together with overcrowding and lack of resources, lead to political, social, economic and environmental problems, and accelerate processes of state failure, which in turn can lead to internal conflicts that can spread beyond the state borders, and thus endanger regional stability (Georgakis Abbott and Stivachtis, 1999, 101-102). Moreover, demographic research is essential for deciding how to manage crises that affect national security, such as large scale natural disasters and epidemics. "It is important to state that the pandemic [Covid] stressed the importance of demographic data for crisis management […] The crisis revealed the need for more detailed data, in real time" (Even 2020, 164).

We also note that the link between demographic issues and national security issues finds expression in both the military power derived from the size of the army and the quality of its personnel (the larger the country, the greater its ability to maintain a large, high quality and stronger army) and in its economic power. Indeed demography certainly affects a country's economic power, for good or bad (Krebs & Levy 2001, 64-69).

A focus on demographic changes can enable decision makers to identify trends and the emergence of security threats, and predict how these threats could lead to other problems (Goldstone 2002). Onn Winkler (2004) distinguishes between four main types of demographic threat: the first—when the majority feels threatened by a minority demanding full or partial independence, such as cultural and political autonomy; the second—when there is a fear of the country being overwhelmed by migrants of other religions or ethnic origins, leading to changes in the cultural-religious-ethnic character of the host country; the third—religious or ethnic struggles for priority in the country; the fourth—the age structure of the population, leading to low rates of participation in the work force.

Demographic trends and developments can drive processes that affect national resilience as well as the nature of threats to national security. These influences can be negative or positive, threats or opportunities. But in every case it is important to understand the trends and processes, to trace them and understand their significance for national security, so that

it is possible to prepare in advance how to deal with them. The unique character of Israel derives from the fact that it is a relatively small national state, distinct from the Arab national states that surround it, and exists in a situation of striking demographic inferiority compared to the Arab states, in the shadow of an entrenched and long lasting ethnic-national-religious conflict with the Palestinians, who have ethnic and religious ties to Arab states, while a relatively large minority of some 20% of the citizens of Israel are identified as members of the Palestinian people, who are hostile to Israel. In addition, as a country that since its establishment has lived in a challenging and complex security situation under an ongoing existential threat, Israel has become a unique and important test case for all aspects of the interfaces between demography and national security.

The impact of demography on national security is expressed not only in the domestic sphere (DellaPergola 2024) but also in the regional theatre.

The impact of demography on national security is expressed not only in the domestic sphere (DellaPergola 2024) but also in the regional theatre. "Demographic data in the Middle East has significant influence on the features of Israel's regional environment, including the stability of the surrounding countries, particularly those with broad demographic diversity" (Even 2020, 166). Demographic diversity affects the stability of central government, particularly where it is controlled by a minority group (like the Alawites in Syria), and in cases of tensions between different groups over the identity and borders of the state (Miller 2024) and its power structure (such as the demographic tension between Palestinians and Bedouin in Jordan, between Shiites and Sunnis in Bahrain, and more).

Israel's first Prime Minister, David Ben Gurion, shaped the concept of its national security with reference to its demographic inferiority alongside its advantages in the field of human capital compared to the surrounding states. He noted that both population dispersal within its territory and national unity were important components of defending the borders of the Jewish state (Even 2021, 29). As with many other aspects of Israel's security, its small size means that even relatively small demographic changes can have unforeseen and threatening political consequences. In this context, the definition of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state "obliges it to maintain a demographic balance with an absolute Jewish majority" (Even 2020, 166). Demography had a decisive impact when the Israeli government decided to build the separation barrier dividing it from the Palestinian majority living in the West Bank (Toft 2012, 1), as well as the fence along the border with Egypt, with the aim of preventing refugees and labor migrants from entering the country, but it also affected the policy of encouraging fertility and Jewish immigration.

Here we aim to examine the demographic influence on national security through four dimensions of demography, where the impact of each one separately and the interactions between them indicate the close links between demography and national security.

The Four Demographic Dimensions with Reference to Israel's National Security

The four dimensions are: the internal dimension; between Jordan and the Sea—Israel and the Palestinians; the regional dimension; Israel and Diaspora Jewry.

The Internal Dimension

The overall demographic balance between Jews and Arabs within the State of Israel is a vital component of Israel's security and future as a Jewish and democratic state, which needs a solid Jewish majority to maintain this identity. In societies that exist in a situation of entrenched and ongoing national conflict (for a survey of this concept see Coleman 2006), the dominant

group must have a firm demographic majority to maintain stability. This also applies to the case of Israel in the shadow of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, where most of its Arab citizens define themselves as members of the Palestinian people and identify with the Palestinians who are in conflict with Israel. Since a majority of Arab Israelis and their leaders still object to the existence of Israel as a Jewish state (Raved 2018), the heads of the state over the years, including Yitzhak Rabin and Benjamin Netanyahu, believed that a solid Jewish majority within the borders of the sovereign state was essential to ensure its identity and existence as the nation state of the Jewish people (Wertman 2021; Ravid 2011; Michael and Wertman 2023).

According to estimates from the Central Bureau of Statistics, as of the end of 2023 there were about 9.84 million people living in Israel, of whom 7.21 million were Jews, 73.2% of the total, 2.08 million were Arabs, representing 21.1% of the whole, and 554,000 were others—non-Arab Christians and people not classified by religion in the Population Register, most of whom are not recognized as Jews by Halacha or identify themselves as part of the Jewish majority—, representing 5.7% of the whole (CBS 2023). While the fertility rate of Jewish women is three children on average, the fertility rate of Arab women is lower at 2.8 (CBS 2022), although fertility in the Bedouin population is higher than among the Jews—an average of 5.3 children per woman (Even 2021, 33). Forecasts show that by the second half of the twenty-first century, there should be a considerable Jewish majority within the borders of Israel (including those who are not recognized as Jews by Halacha) of almost 80%, due largely to the lower birth rate of Arabs in Israel—a figure that illustrates that the threat of losing the country's Jewish identity is not on the horizon (DellaPergola 2024).

In the absence of a threat to Israel's Jewish character from the Arab minority, there are numerous claims referring to another demographic threat; that of the growth and separate, non-productive lifestyle of the Haredi Jewish population in Israel, which could eventually pose a security threat to the country's economic power, rendering it poor and backward (Ilan 2019; Ben-David and Kimchi 2023) In addition to the socioeconomic issue, the fact that a large proportion of Haredi Jews do not serve in the IDF or in the Reserves, compared to the non-Haredi Jewish population, is very worrying for Israel's future ability to maintain a sufficiently large army, certainly after October 7, 2023 when it became clear that the required large and strong army relies heavily on the Reserves (Rubinstein and Azulai 2024). In 2020 the non-Haredi Jewish population amounted to about two thirds of the Jewish population as a whole, but in another three decades it is expected to shrink to 55% (DellaPergola 2024). This demographic dynamic highlights deep divisions within Israeli society about equal sharing of the burden of military service (Karni 2024), and this could undermine the unity of Israeli society and affect national resilience, which is an important element of national security.

It appears that the main challenge does not lie in the natural increase of Haredi society but in the gap in its level of education and employment compared to the population in general.

At the end of 2023 there were 1.34 million Haredi Jews in Israel, representing 14% of the total population. The fertility rate in Haredi society is 6.4 children per woman, more than 2.5 times that of a non-Haredi Jewish woman, who gives birth to 2.5 children on average. If this fertility rate is maintained, in 2065 the Haredi population is expected to constitute 32% of the Israeli population, and 40% of Israeli Jews will be Haredi (Kahaner and Malach 2023, 14-15). However, it appears that the main challenge does not lie in the natural increase of Haredi society but in the gap in its level of education and employment compared to the population in general. The level of Haredi general education

(core studies enabling integration into the labor market) is not good news for the future of the Israeli economy or the ability of Haredim to enter the job market with professions that contribute to high economic growth, since only 16% of Haredi pupils are eligible for a matriculation certificate, compared to 86% of pupils in the national and national-religious education systems (Ben-David and Kimchi 2023, 3, 8-9; Kahaner and Malach 2023, 29).

On the other hand, there is data showing positive trends in the integration of Haredi Jews into Israeli society, such as the fast rate of increase of Haredi students in institutions of higher education, which reached 258% in the years 2010-2023, compared to a 17% rise in the overall number of students in the same period. However, while Haredim constitute 14% of the population, they comprise only 5% of the total student body—showing that in spite of the positive trend, the road to full integration of Haredi society is still long (Kahaner and Malach 2023, 33-34).

Strengthening the population of the periphery will have a significant impact on Israel's economy and productive capacity, reduce social gaps, and reinforce social solidarity and unity, which in turn will effect national resilience.

There is also a positive trend in the rate of Haredi employment. In 2002 the rate of employment in Haredi society stood at 42%, while in 2022 it reached 66%, compared to 85% among non-Haredi Jews and 79% among the population as a whole. In fact, the gap is mainly due to men in the Haredi sector, of whom 55% are working, compared to 87% of non-Haredi Jewish men, while the rate of employment of Haredi women is almost the same as that of non-Haredi Jewish women—79.5% compared to 83% (Kahaner and Malach 2023, 61-63).

In addition to these two demographic aspects, it is important to note differences in population dispersal—between the center and the periphery of the country—, and to analyze their significance for opportunities regarding education, employment, standard and quality of life. The process of population centralization does not threaten the sovereignty of most countries worldwide, whose borders are recognized by the international community, but Israel is an exception. Israel's Muslim Arabs, who as stated constitute 20% of the population and do not identify with the Zionist vision, see themselves as part of the Palestinian nation and are concentrated mainly in the periphery—this has special significance for state security (Sofer and Bistrov 2008). Moreover, a high concentration of population in a limited area creates vulnerability in times of war, particularly given its contemporary characteristics involving the threat of precision rockets and missiles such as armed drones. In the circumstances of Israel's current demographic dispersal, with most of the population and national infrastructures concentrated in a narrow, vulnerable area, the probability of widespread damage to crucial targets is far higher.

Strengthening the population of the periphery will have a significant impact on Israel's economy and productive capacity, reduce social gaps, and reinforce social solidarity and unity, which in turn will effect national resilience. The demographic aspects of population dispersal are also significant for maintaining state land and strengthening the border areas, which contributes indirectly to the security of borders and the traffic arteries that are essential for transporting troops during emergencies, as well as aid and rescue forces in cases of environmental disaster.

To sum up, while there is no demographic threat from Israeli Arabs to the identity of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state in the foreseeable future, the Haredi population represents a serious challenge to national security. Haredi society has come a long way in terms of narrowing the gaps between it and non-Haredi Jewish society, on which the Israeli economy and the IDF rely, but in spite of the

positive trend and in view of the high natural growth rate of the Haredi population, it must do more to catch up in terms of employment rates and educational standards, and of course in IDF enlistment rates, to share the military and economic burden and ensure that Israel can successfully meet the whole range of its security and socioeconomic challenges. These demographic aspects, like those of population dispersal and others, affect various components of Israel's capacity to ensure national security.

Between Jordan and the Sea—Israel and the Palestinians

The dispute between Israel and the Palestinians, which began at the end of the nineteenth century, has always featured demographic elements (Zureik 2003, 619). While it appears that Israel will retain a solid Jewish majority in the foreseeable future, the figures show that when the Palestinians living within the Palestinian Authority area and the Gaza Strip are taken into account, the Jewish majority between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River will disappear within a decade. In view of the equal numbers of Jews and Arabs in the whole area of Mandate Palestine, it is clear that in the absence of a clear separation between the peoples, the demographic issue will become an existential threat to the Jewish state. In fact, the demographic discussion has become the core of the political-strategic discourse on the future of Israel as the democratic nation state of the Jewish people. There are those who warn of the loss of the Jewish majority, leading to the loss of the state's Jewish identity or to an apartheid regime, noting the difference in civic status between residents of the geographical area identified with the state even if official sovereignty is not applied to the whole. But others interpret the demographic trends and their significance, and the required course of action, in a different way (Ettinger 2006; Michael 2014; Milstein 2022; Sofer 2006; Abulof 2014; Lustick 2013). According to the more pessimistic view, Israel has only one option in order to maintain its Jewish and democratic identity and character, and that is the two-state solution. Others argue that there are other possible solutions. Some of them claim that a model of Palestinian autonomy could be the response, while a minority support the annexation of land, granting permanent residency to Palestinians with a long and stringent path to obtaining citizenship (like the East Jerusalem model or similar), and there are also those who wish to apply Israeli sovereignty to all the territories and would not hesitate to grant Israeli citizenship to the Palestinians.

Most of Israel's leaders over the years have understood the danger inherent in the demographic threat and therefore chose to block the threat of a binational state. This is what Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin did with his decision to promote the Oslo process with the PLO in the years 1993-1995, based on a desire to create a separation between Israel and the Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and thus safeguard Israel's Jewish and democratic future (Wertman 2021). Rabin declared that:

> I am one of those who do not want to annex 1.7 million Palestinians as citizens of Israel. Therefore I am against what is called Greater Israel […] In the present circumstances, between a binational state and a Jewish state, I prefer a Jewish state. The application of sovereignty to the whole of Mandatory Palestine means that we will have seven million Palestinian citizens within the State of Israel. It may perhaps be a Jewish state with respect to its borders, but binational in its content, demography and democracy […] Therefore I am against annexation (Neria 2016, 25-26).

This was also a central component of the decision by Prime Minister Ariel Sharon to implement unilateral separation from the

Gaza Strip in 2005 (Even 2021, 38; Sofer 2006a). The demographic threat and the desire to avoid a binational state have similarly been a guideline in the strategic considerations of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu with regard to the conflict (Michael and Wertman 2023). "With the renewal of the political process we have two main objectives: to prevent the creation of a binational state between the Sea and the Jordan River, which endangers the future of the Jewish state, and to prevent the establishment of another terrorist state under the patronage of Iran within Israel's borders, which would be no less dangerous for us," he declared (Tivon 2013).

A thorough study of Iran's demographic features could help provide an understanding of trends in the development of the threat it poses, as well as identify the areas of opportunities and chances for positive change from Israel's perspective, particularly where it is possible to exploit demographic developments to undermine the regime.

The Regional Dimension

Israel is situated in the middle of a large Arab-dominated region with a population largely hostile to it, even in the countries at peace with it, and where its enemy states have not come to terms with Israel's right to exist, or even the fact of its existence. Iran, a non-Arab country, represents the most significant threat to Israel and openly calls for its destruction. Iran's demographic features are complicated and include disturbing basic characteristics or trends, with the emphasis on the Shiite population, but also trends with positive potential in terms of the regime's stability and attitudes to Israel (Zamir 2022, 27). A thorough study of Iran's demographic features could help provide an understanding of trends in the development of the threat it poses, as well as identify the areas of opportunities and chances for positive change from Israel's perspective, particularly where it is possible to exploit demographic developments to undermine the regime.

Demography in the region has enormous impact on Israel's security. Demographic data indicates the stability of regimes, societies and economies as well as migration trends. For example, demographic growth in Egypt affects its economy and stability; demographic tension in Jordan affects the stability of the Royal family and the Kingdom's survival; Syrian demography was one of the reasons for the civil war and has an effect on the country's stability and governance, while the Syrian refugees are undermining status-quo in countries such as Lebanon and Jordan. Thus the demographic shifts of the Middle East have "material impact on the features of Israel's regional environment, including the stability of surrounding countries, particularly those where there is a broad demographic range" (Even 2020, 166).

In the case of Middle Eastern countries, the greater the demographic range, the greater the potential for political instability. This is true in general for countries such as Iran with its numerous minorities, Iraq, Yemen and even Turkey. It becomes even more significant in cases where a minority group holds the reins of government. For example, Jordan contains a large number of Palestinians compared to the Bedouin population, which is the source of power for the central government, Syria is ruled by the powerful Alawite minority, and Bahrain by the Sunni minority.

Demographic diversity alongside uncontrolled demographic growth leads to social and political tensions and economic crises. Egypt is a prominent example of a country where crises of food, water and environment are becoming more frequent and severe, and the situation is similar in Jordan, Iraq, Syria and Lebanon (Sofer 2006c). Regime instability, economic and ecological crises, and social and security tensions with demographic causes, lead to increases in migrants and refugees. Israel experienced the arrival of work-seeking migrants

and refugees from Africa until 2012 (Even 2020, 176). Before the construction of the fence along the Egyptian border, Israel faced numerous attempts at entry by Palestinian refugees from Syria, along with threats of refugee entry from the Lebanese border. The fragile situation in the area and the spread of political failure in countries along Israel's borders and across the region (for more on the political failures in the Arab world see: Michael and Gozansky 2016) present Israel with a complex challenge of uncontrolled migration.

"As a Jewish country with a small area and population, it is hard for Israel to absorb large scale non-Jewish migration" (Even 2020, 176). More seriously, Israel's migration policy has not yet been developed as a component of its concept of internal and national security. The authorities in Israel lack sufficient demographic information about the population of work-seeking migrants and refugees in Israel, and in some cases we have seen outbreaks of violence that threaten public security. For example,

> The extreme violence in the clashes between supporters and opponents of the regime in Eritrea in the heart of Tel Aviv […]This exceptionally violent incident highlights the significant holes in the (lack of) Israel's migrant policy and the difficult consequences of the absence of a national domestic security strategy […] [The violence] is another striking example of a systemic failure, the lack of orderly migration policy, the defective function of the Israel Police and its structural weakness, the absence of a sufficient basis of [demographic] information to understand the situation, identify trends and give warnings in good time (Siboni and Michael 2023).

Demographic trends in the United States and Europe that affect their social and political structure can also have an impact on Israel (Even 2020, 166). While Israel is an island state situated in a challenging and partly hostile region, it is also linked economically, culturally and strategically to countries of the west—the United States and Europe. Therefore, any demographic changes in those regions could have possibly far-reaching effects on their relations with Israel. Demographic changes in the United States lead to political changes, particularly among voters for the Democratic party, and such changes send out signals relating to Israel from the progressive wing of the party, which has become larger and more influential. This also applies to the growth of the Muslim, Hispanic and other communities, some of whom are very critical of Israel, while others do not identify with it like the communities of voters from a decade or more ago, and this can affect the identity of future presidents and the degree of their support and that of their parties for Israel. There are those who have already identified the first signs of this during the Obama presidency, and even more so during the Biden administration (Gilboa 2020b).

While Israel is an island state situated in a challenging and partly hostile region, it is also linked economically, culturally and strategically to countries of the west—the United States and Europe. Therefore, any demographic changes in those regions could have possibly far-reaching effects on their relations with Israel

While Israel's special relationship with the United States is a central pillar of its national security, any demographic developments and trends are therefore of serious significance. Any erosion or damage to the relationship causes huge national damage to Israel, its regional and international status, and its ability to handle both security and political threats.

Israel and Diaspora Jewry

Israel's unique situation as the only nation state of the Jewish people gives the demographic issue enormous importance in the connection

between Israel and Diaspora Jewry. It is particularly relevant with respect to the Jews in the United States, who represent an extensive demographic reserve that without doubt could lead to a change in the demographic balance within Israel and between the River and the Sea, in favor of the Jews and economic growth in Israel, as occurred following the immigration of Jews from the former Soviet Union during the 1990s (Dvir 2020; Lan 2020; Leshem 2009). And even if they remain in the United States, the Jews there are a strategic advantage for Israel's security (Gilboa 2020a; News2021 1). They are integrated into American society and leadership, and have great impact in matters of politics, economy, culture and more. The relationship between Israel and United States Jewry has always been a central anchor in the ability of both to develop and thrive since the establishment of the State of Israel, and it is essential not only for Israel's security but for the security of the Jewish world as a whole (Yadlin 2018, 9-10). Even before the establishment of the state, the Jews of the United States played a decisive role in maintaining its national security, by means of support that included help in purchasing military equipment and recruiting political support in American politics (Lesansky 2018, 70-71; Shapiro 2018, 15).

However today there are tensions between Israel and United States Jewry against a background of disagreements on socioreligious issues, mainly over political matters, and above all Israel's policy towards the Palestinians, which is perceived by most American Jews, who traditionally support the Democratic party, as mistaken and preventing the possibility of a resolution of the dispute based on the two-state formula (Shalom 2018, 120; Shapiro 2018, 16). The attitude of the US Jewish public to the transfer of the American Embassy in Israel to Jerusalem is a good illustration of the gap between the Jewish public in Israel and their American counterparts, only 16% of whom expressed support for the immediate move of the Embassy to Jerusalem (Shalom 2018, 104).

Others argue that the problem does not lie in Israeli policy but in a change in the character of American Jewry, which compared to other Jewish communities in places like Britain and Australia, which have very high internal resilience, displays less solidarity with the Jewish state (Abrams 2016). Whatever the case, Jews in the United States are divided more than ever on subjects relating to American and Israeli politics, illustrated by the growing split over questions of politics and values, where Israel is at the center of the controversies (Lasansky 2018, 94). Therefore there are some who warn that "the growing distance between the US Jewish community and Israel on one hand, and Israel's retreat from its obligation to the Jewish people in the Diaspora on the other hand, signifies a danger to Israel's natural strategic depth" (Orion and Ilam 2018, 27).

The October 7 massacre, together with the unshakeable support for Israel by the United States, could certainly have a positive effect on the sense of solidarity with Israel felt by American Jews (DellaPergola 2024), but it is possible that the differences will return with the growing tensions between the Israeli government and the Biden administration over the continuation of the campaign against Hamas and plans for the day after (Eichner 2024). In spite of these differences, the support and activity of Jewish communities in the United States and the world are an important component of Israel's national security.

> The demography of the Jewish people is of great national interest, since Israel is the state of the Jewish people and because immigration from Jewish and Israeli communities overseas has a huge impact on the Jewish-Palestinian demography within the country […] Aliyah to Israel—has been one of the fundamental principles of the Zionist movement and the State of Israel, from its establishment to the present. It affects its foreign

> policy and its security, the nature of its efforts to provide information, immigrant absorption, settlement and infrastructures […] The migration balance of Israelis moving overseas—this too is an important demographic element […] Some of the emigrants leaving Israel have very high skills ("brain drain"), and this could also affect national security" (Even 2020, 169, 171).

As of 2023, there are about 15.7 million Jews in the world, of whom 46%, some 7.2 million, live in Israel. The second largest concentration of Jews is in the United States, with about 6.3 million. While 86% of the world's Jews reside in Israel and the United States, the remainder are split between several countries, mainly in the west: 440,000 in France, 398,000 in Canada, 312,000 in Britain, 171,000 in Argentina, 132,000 in Russia, and 117,000 in Australia, while there are only 27,000 Jews in the Arab and Muslim world.

The Theoretical Model

The model we constructed proposes an explanation of the impact of demography on national security and lays the groundwork for further discussion of the possible effect of the mediating variables on demography, which is the independent variable in the model. The **dependent variable** in the theoretical model is **national security**, defined as **ensuring the long-term existence of a secure and thriving Israel as the nation state of the Jewish people**. The **independent variable** consists of **demographic variables divided into two categories: internal variables and external variables** (reflecting the four dimensions of demography to which we refer in this article). National security as a dependent variable is influenced by two main factors that we define as **mediating variables**: national power, which consists of the means and ability to ensure national security, and threats to national security that we have divided into two categories: external threats and internal threats. The demographic variables in both categories influence both mediating variables, while they in turn influence the dependent variable.

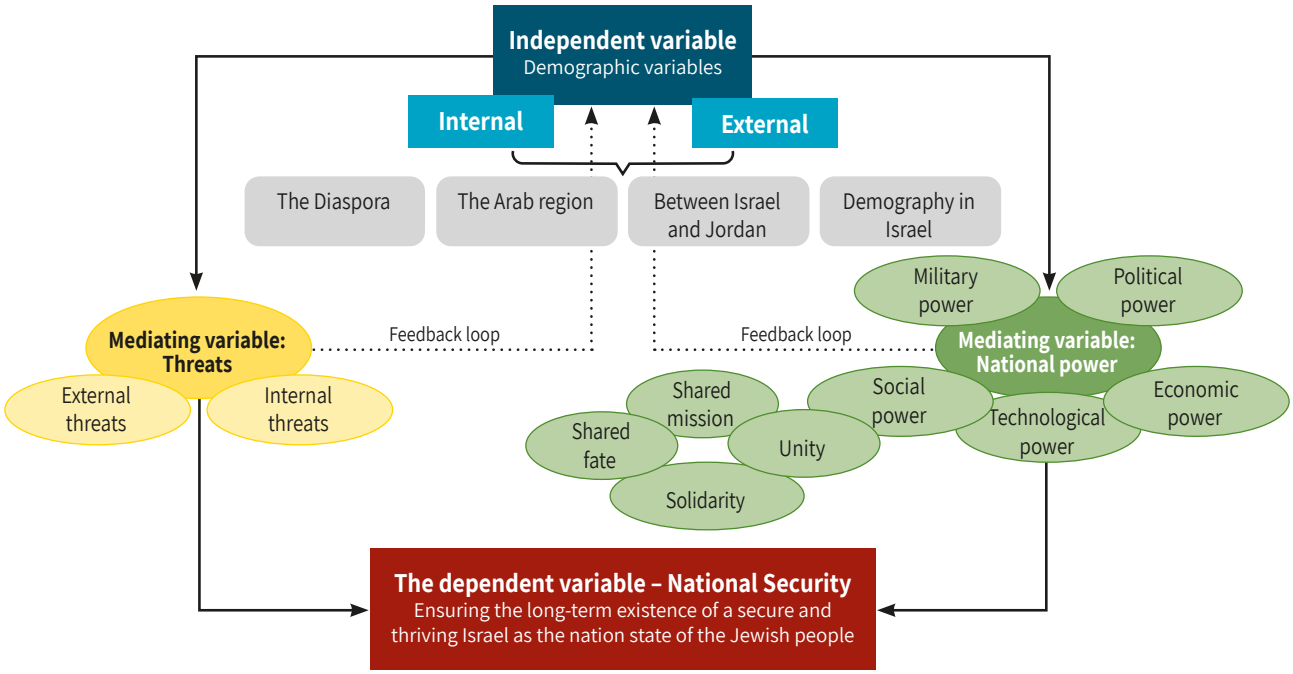
In the **category of internal variables** of the independent variable, we refer to elements such as Jewish-Arab relations in Israel, the religious level of the Israeli Jewish population (secular, traditional, religious and Haredi), the regional demography of the Israeli periphery and center, the demography of the education system, the labor market, the health system and more.

In **the category of external variables**, we refer to such factors as refugees and displaced persons in the region around Israel, poverty, ignorance versus education, rates of employment, demographic trends within regional populations (fertility, mortality, migration), the demography of minority and majority groups, ethnic and religious groups and more. As stated, the range of variables in both categories mentioned are collected into the four demographic dimensions referred to in this paper in the analysis of the link between demography and national security in the Israeli context.

In referring to the two mediating variables, we have defined national power—referring to the sum of capabilities and resources available to the state to ensure national security—by means of several dimensions that when combined create national capacity as a whole. They include military power, economic power, technological power, political power, social power (in the sense of unity, resilience, shared fate and shared destiny as the sub-components of social power). The mediating variable of threats has been split into two categories: external threats—all those originating outside the borders of sovereign Israel, including the Palestinian threat, and internal threats that originate within the country.

There is an interaction between the two mediating variables, since the various components of national power must inter alia enable a response or the ability to tackle the threats, while some of the threats can influence

Figure 1. The Theoretical Model



Key:

- A solid line represents the first level of the model—the impact of the independent variable on the mediating variables, and their impact on the dependent variable.
- The dotted lines represent the second layer of the model—the feedback loop—the impact of the mediating variables on the independent variable —demography.

elements of national power. In this model we have chosen to present these as distinct variables, each of which can stand alone, since we have identified the unique effects of some of the demographic variables on each of them separately and distinctively.

The theoretical model presents the impact of the demographic variables on the mediating variables, and their impact on the dependent variable in a causative and somewhat linear manner. While developing the model we were exposed to the need to develop two additional levels: systematic operationalization of the impact, that is, a definition of metrics to examine the direction and intensity of the effect, and the extent of the feedback loop. In the analysis of the mediating variables we arrived at the recognition that in some cases they could affect the independent variables. For example, military power has an effect on the ability to frustrate and prevent the entry of refugees into state territory, thus repressing or reducing the motivation of migrants to attempt to move to Israel.

Another possibility is the effect of economic power on demographic trends among Israeli Arabs with regard to participation in the labor market, integration into Israeli society, and a decline in fertility as a consequence of modernization and the entry of Arab women into the workforce. In this paper we have tried to focus on the first level of the model as presented below, and not on the possible feedback loop of the impact of the mediating variables on the independent variable—the demography—since the purpose of this article is to illustrate in a general way the influence of demography on national security and provide a preliminary basis for an analytical tool, which can help decision makers and policy-makers to examine issues of national security in terms of demographic influences.

In the presentation of the wide spectrum of demographic variables in two categories, it is

also possible to create a hierarchy of variables based on their importance, and it would perhaps be correct to focus attention and analysis on a limited number of critical demographic variables in each of the categories. Through research manipulation of the variables (shrinking and stretching them) it will be possible to examine the whole range of demographic influences on national security. Another option when referring to the demographic variables, mainly the category of internal variables, is to think about variables relating to the relative power of groups in society, their levels of satisfaction with the existing distribution of resources, the strength of any internal rifts, or alternatively their level of unity and solidarity, the quality of the government's enforcement mechanisms, and so forth, and then to build a model for their impact on national security. Power Transition Theory (PTT) can help to lay the theoretical and practical foundation for this (Organski and Kugler 1980).

Summary

Demography in its various dimensions has enormous impact on national security in general, and in the case of Israel—a country that is strikingly demographically inferior in a challenging and partly hostile environment, in a situation of an entrenched, ongoing dispute with the Palestinians, and under existential threat from Iran—in particular. In this article we have sought to define the interfaces and links, as well as the demographic effects on its national security, with reference to four aspects: internal, between the river and the sea, the regional context and the Diaspora.

We have based the explanations on a theoretical model that presents the effect of the demographic variables in two categories (internal and external) on national security, by means of two mediating variables (national power with its various components, and threats, divided into two categories: internal and external).

We have also referred to some of the articles appearing in this special issue, to draw out the common threads of the various articles dealing with aspects and dimensions of demography and indicate their effect on national security. A deeper understanding of demography and the ability to investigate demographic trends and how they affect national security—these are tantamount to obligatory for decision-makers and policy-formers. Deficient understanding or gaps in perception could damage a state's ability to secure its national security, to identify dangers and challenges in good time, and to develop suitable responses, but could also interfere with its ability to identify the opportunities which can and must be leveraged to reinforce national security.

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The Future of Israeli and Jewish Demography[1]

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This article—which was written prior to the onset of the Swords of Iron War in October 2023—reviews current and expected demographic developments in the State of Israel up to 2050, together with a broad look at the Jewish Diaspora, based on assumptions which will be described in the article. The underlying theory is that the Israeli population is not a closed system but rather draws its human resources from the Jewish communities around the world and from Middle East populations. Israel in turn, is a source of human and other substantial resources for these populations. A central question the article will examine is that of the balance between Jews and Arabs within a geopolitical entity that is supposed to fulfil two conditions—that of a Jewish and a democratic state—in the space between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River. Another weighty question relates to the internal balance between the various segments of the Jewish population within the Israeli state, including their degree of affinity to religion and religiosity. A third question relates to the reciprocal relations between the core Jewish-Israeli state and the Jewish Diaspora around the world in the long term. Based on data from population surveys and demographic forecasts, I will explore a number of implications, which should be at the center of any strategic assessment in the State of Israel in the coming decades.

Keywords: Israel, the Palestinian Authority, population, demography, migration, natural growth, Jewish identity, Diaspora Jews, Jews, Arabs, Haredi (very orthodox), forecasts

The Predictive Value of Forecasts

The French author and artist Jacques Prévert (Prévert 1951) dedicated one of his famous songs to man's ability to predict history. He listed a few dates of important junctures in the history of France and asked ironically who, including the most wise and professional observers, could have predicted what actually took place on those dates?

To borrow this method for important years in the history of Israel in the modern era, who in 1897 could have predicted 1939? Who in 1939 could have predicted 1945? Who in 1945 could have predicted 1948? Who in 1948 could have predicted 1967? Who in 1967 could have predicted 1991? Who in 1991 could have predicted 2022? And who in Israel, on November 1, 2022, could have predicted what took place

on October 7, 2023? These dates represent a collection of critical turning points in Jewish and Israeli history over the past 125 years, more or less. From the first Zionist Congress in Basel to the outbreak of the Second World War, via the Holocaust and the declaration of an independent State of Israel, the Six Day War, the collapse of the Soviet Union, or the attempted legal-regime reform in Israel and the public's response, as well as the still-unknown consequences of the Swords of Iron War. Anyone in 2024 who seeks to predict 2048, which will be the 100th anniversary of Israel's existence, or 2050, will not have much more success. As of the writing of these lines, the future appears more unknown and unpredictable than ever before.

The Mishna states: "Everything is foreseen yet freedom of choice is granted" (Pirkei Avot 3:15). This may not be an optimal formula for contemporary social science, but the fatalist approach that says nothing can be forecast and everything is unexpected is also unacceptable. Indeed there appear to be a number of core elements that have characterized Jewish experience over the past century—including on the social demographic front—that are still at work today and will most likely continue to be relevant in the foreseeable future. These may serve as an overall conceptual framework, or as a compass to navigate in three contexts: the Jewish-Arab equilibrium, the balance amongst Jews with varying degrees of religious identity in Israel, and Israel-Diaspora relations (DellaPergola 2022a).

This article will briefly review a selection of central demographic trends that influence these core issues, in Israel and the Jewish world, and suggest potential scenarios for expected developments and their consequences for the future existence and character of the State of Israel. It will also suggest that increased attention should be paid to these subjects; they are presently almost entirely absent from governing authorities' strategic planning and thought.

A Challenging Road Ahead

The State of Israel was created for one central purpose: to fulfill the right of the Jewish people to a sovereign state in their homeland. The country which was recognized by the General Assembly of the United Nations on November 29, 1947, as the "Jewish state," and whose independence was declared in a speech by David Ben Gurion on May 14, 1948, is the State of Israel. The equal rights promised to all citizens in the Declaration of Independence, regardless of personal identity, emphasized the Jewish and democratic character of the new state. Today, 75 years later, the demographic challenges to Israel's existence as a Jewish and democratic state can be arranged in four overlapping categories:

1. *The identity of the State of Israel in relation to other hostile national and religious identities and realities in its close geopolitical environs.* The results of the unsolved conflict with the Palestinians will determine the identity of Israel, the setting of permanent territorial borders for the state, the profile of the population included within those borders and the nature of reciprocal relations with neighboring states.
2. *The identity of the State of Israel in relation to the national identities and aspirations of the non-Jewish citizens living within it.* The definition of Israel as a Jewish state (or as the state of the Jews) depends on the ethnoreligious demographic balance within the state's borders, while maintaining its demographic character and the individual rights of all its residents.
3. *The identity of the State of Israel in relation to the variety of Jewish communities spread across the world.* In order to ensure the relevant foundation of Israel as the Jewish state it must maintain a coherent balance between competing religious and cultural Jewish components domestically, and develop mutual, agreed upon reciprocal relations with the Jewish people internationally. This requires significant legal,

cultural and socio-economic processes within the state.

4. *The quality of life in the State of Israel for its residents, according to general criteria of ecological and economic sustainability*. The size and composition of Israel's population, its geographic dispersion and density, socioeconomic and infrastructure development and the relations of all of the above to the physical environment will definitively influence the quality of life in the state and people's willingness to live in it.

There are numerous challenges to a contemporary investigation of Israel and the Jews' demographic future. Observers of the present need to be completely aware of the idiosyncratic character of some of the most tragic and the most uplifting developments in all of Jewish history, and of the consequences of political processes taking place before our eyes. It is also clear that most of what we know and what is taking place at the time of writing is the result of extraordinary, unexpected and sometimes disruptive circumstances, and not the result of orderly, planned and linear developments in Jewish chronology.

Nevertheless, taking into account a measure of uncertainty, from the point of view of the empirical branches of the social sciences, certain types of future events may be anticipated and even predicted with a fair degree of accuracy. The common terms of "optimism" and "pessimism" are foreign to such a rational framework. The demographer relies on a small number of components that determine population changes, whose patterns are known in advance, which were chosen for a given simulation of potential outcomes. The analytic roots of any attempt to clarify what the future holds rely on a careful examination of evidence and indications from the past and the present. Following attempts to derive insights into how the motives and results of major processes worked in the past, we apply those insights to understand the chances that the future will see continuity or discontinuity in the trends observed. Beyond the theoretical impact, what occurred may help us expose what we will call "the inherent logic of the system."

Of course, neither in the Jewish or any other experience, does the past determine the future. When forecasting expected population changes, as in any other field, there are no easy deterministic solutions. In demographic terms the implications of a given feedback in the making, even if it is marginal or latent, may be a leading factor in the next stage. It is not only the weight of the different components within a given model that may change over time. The logic of the entire system may shift due to internal changes created in the wake of prolonged variations in the structure and even the nature of the collective. Sometimes a relatively marginal change may affect the balance of the entire system, in what is known as a tipping point (Gladwell 2000). This concept does not refer to the transition from, for example, 50.1% to 49.9% in Israel's Jewish or non-Jewish population, but rather to the point beyond which a given situation is no longer possible—for example that the state will be both Jewish and democratic—and this may be an entirely different ratio. To illustrate on a much smaller scale: a Jewish day school in the diaspora, from kindergarten through the age of matriculation exams, is feasible in a local Jewish community of at least 4,000 Jews, but is essentially unfeasible in a community of 2,000. The implications for local Jewish identity, of this modest quantitative gap, in a situation where there is or isn't a certain communal institution or service, may be significant. Such a threshold of possibility or tipping point, is especially sensitive to the framework of local social and demographic forces, but also depends on national, regional and global developments.

The Jews in Israel and Around the World—Trends and Developments

The point of departure for assessing the future of the State of Israel and the Jewish people, entails a maximally accurate outline of the current

profile of the worldwide Jewish collective and of demographic trends that affect it. To this end, large amounts of raw data—usually of unequal quality—must be collected, evaluated and adjusted, in order to fully and reliably map the current situation and to support comparisons as far as possible (DellaPergola 2023). The current situation is a result of both short term changes that have taken place before our eyes over a brief time span, and deeper transformations that reflect prolonged and convoluted historical trends. Furthermore, it is legitimate to compare the actual situation to what can be defined as the preferred option or even a utopian dream, and to recognize the existence of a few competing ideal models.

The Logic of the Global Geographic System

From a historic-geographic viewpoint, the obvious turning point in the modern era was the establishment of the State of Israel. The latter was the response to a utopian program that was nevertheless quite practical: to grant the Jews a nation-state like many other nations in the world, and to concentrate therein a large proportion—and ideally an absolute majority—of the global Jewish population. Between the belief in a sovereign territorial state and the opposite outcome of decentralized Jewish dispersion with many centers, reality positioned itself somewhere in the middle. However, demographic trends since the end of the Second World War have absolutely tended more in the direction of Israel and less to the Diaspora.

Over recent decades the world Jewish population has risen—from 11 million at the end of the Second World War to 15.7 million at the start of 2023, in comparison to 16.5 million Jews prior to the war and the Holocaust. The Jewish community in Israel grew from half a million people in 1945 to 7.1 million in 2023, while the number of Jews in the rest of the world declined from 10.5 million to 8.6 million. The proportion of Jews who live in Israel out of the total number of Jews in the world rose from 5% in 1945 to 45% in 2023. These are therefore two completely different and contrasting profiles of demographic development.

A systematic analysis of the Jews in the world reveals a high correlation with the Human Development Index of their countries of residence. The HDI was developed by the United Nations (United Nations Development Programme 2020) as a synthetic measurement of three components: the collective health of a country (based on infant mortality and life expectancy); the education level (based on the average number of years of education attained); and the level of income (which is measured in real terms based on the weighted purchasing power of the US dollar in a given country). There is a strong positive correlation between the HDI of a country and the number of Jews in its population, but the stronger and more prominent positive correlation is with the proportion of Jews within the country.

Since its establishment, Israel is the state whose Jewish population has grown the most in absolute terms, and sometime around the year 2015 it housed the largest Jewish collective in a single country in the world—subject to the definition of **core** population, rather than the population **eligible for the Law of Return**. In demographic research, the core population includes all those who declare themselves Jewish or who have Jewish parents, and who have no other religion (DellaPergola 2023). Alongside rapid population growth, Israel's HDI rose to around 20th in the world amongst 190 countries. In relative terms, from 1980-2020 the Jewish population in Israel saw the second-fastest percentage growth compared to Jewish populations around the world. It more than doubled itself thanks to substantial immigration, primarily from the former Soviet Union (FSU), and a relatively high, stable and even increasing fertility rate. Jewish population growth was fastest (multiplying by a factor of more than three) in Germany, which also drew immigrants, primarily from the FSU, but with

a Jewish population growth rate of some 2% more than in Israel. In third place was Australia, and then Canada. The population of Canadian Jews, which grew by 28%, grew faster than that of the United States (14%, based on our corrected evaluation of the 2020 Pew Survey (Pew Research Center 2021). The other Jewish communities shrunk—with the decline in the FSU being the most prominent.

There is a simple lesson about what environment is suitable for the prosperity of Jewish communities, or at least for their stability. Good socio-economic conditions attract and retain large Jewish populations.

There is a simple lesson about what environment is suitable for the prosperity of Jewish communities, or at least for their stability. Good socio-economic conditions attract and retain large Jewish populations. It can also be hypothesized that in developed countries, the political regimes are democratic and tolerant of diversity and pluralism, and they are thus open to the autonomous development of Jewish communities, at both the individual and institutional level. If this lesson is correct, it is powerful for charting the future of the Jews, if not forecasting it. Emotional connection to a place and dreams are essential for the existence of the collective, but they are not sufficient without a worthy, functioning subsistence framework. The power of this statement applies around the world, including in the State of Israel.

Jewish Presence at the Local Level

At the local level, Jewish populations are concentrated in key metropolitan areas around the world (DellaPergola 2023). There are varying degrees of Jewish presence amongst the overall local population. There is no place in the world where Jews make up 100% of the population, but in two places in the State of Israel—the Tel Aviv district and the central district—Jews make up over 90% of the population, while the others are relatively small numbers of Arabs. Jews are defined here broadly and include family members and relatives of Jews who are eligible for the Law of Return. In three other districts of Israel—the South (of which Beer Sheva is the capital), Haifa and Jerusalem—Jews make up between two-thirds and 80% of the total population, while the proportion of Arabs in these regions is higher. In the northern district of Israel Jews are less than half of the total population. And finally, in the Judea and Samaria region (the West Bank) Jewish residents comprise some 15% of the total population, while the majority are Palestinian residents. This means that in Israel there is a Jewish majority in five of the seven regional administrative districts, as they are defined by Israeli law (not necessarily by international law). The dream of a Jewish majority was only partially fulfilled in the State of Israel, and it is a significant question to what extent this aspiration is still important, and whether reality is moving towards or away from it.

In the rest of the world the Jewish human ecology situation is completely different. The greater New York region is the only one outside of Israel in which over 10% of the population is Jewish (though still less than the percentage in Judea and Samaria). In three metropolitan areas in the United States—south Florida, Philadelphia and San Francisco—Jews make up 5-10% of the total population; in six regions in the United States—Los Angeles, Washington D.C., Baltimore, Boston, Chicago and San Diego—and in Toronto, Canada, they make up 3-5% of the total. In four other metropolises around the world—London, Paris, Atlanta and Buenos Aires—they make up 1.4-3% of the total. The Jewish population in other countries and cities in the world constitutes some 15% of world Jewry, and is characterized by smaller local numbers and a lower proportion of the total local population. This typology of population size and density emphasizes (without fully expressing) the ability of Jewish communities to establish predominant patterns of political, socioeconomic and cultural presence. The

central locations with the most developed transnational networks in which the decisive majority of Jews live today offer the kind of environment likely to support Jewish life in the future as well. If in the future cities or metropolitan areas of this type develop in other places in the world, it can be assumed that the chances will rise of finding large Jewish populations there.

Demographic Change Factors: Migration

In relation to potential scenarios of future demographic shifts, there are three principal factors to consider. The first is **international migration**, which stands at the base of the renewed geographic dispersion of Jews around the world. The patterns of change due to this factor are the most consistent and largely predictable. The second factor is the balance of Jewish births and deaths. The third factor is the balance between people joining the Jewish collective and those leaving it, whether this is via a formal conversion process or in some other manner. These change factors were discussed in detail elsewhere, and we will review them only briefly (DellaPergola 2011).

International migration has been perhaps the most influential factor in the history of changing Jewish demography, because of its direct quantitative influence on different regions, and because of the radical changes it generates in the sociocultural environment in which Jewish presence developed. In the distant past the locus was in the Middle East, and afterward in Western Europe. Between the end of the Middle Ages and the early modern era, Eastern Europe arose as the leading center of growth. During the twentieth century the locus, or at least the primary location of Jewish presence, moved from Eastern Europe to North America. Recently Israel arose again, after 2000 years, to the status of the largest Jewish community in the world (DellaPergola 2023).

The high positive correlation noted above between the level of development of host countries and Jewish presence, explains the current strong negative correlation between the level of development of those countries and the inclination of local Jews to migrate. Geographic mobility from weak to strong locations further intensifies this correlation and causes Jewish presence to be increasingly dependent on the good or bad conditions of a given environment. This dependence is not new in Jewish history, and it has a pronounced influence on the analysis of current migration patterns and on those expected in the future. The overwhelming majority of Diaspora Jews live today in countries in which the level of development is higher than that of Israel or equal to it. The chances of a large wave of aliya are therefore very low, unless these countries lose their socioeconomic status or become entangled in destructive geopolitical processes that lead to fatal results for the Jewish population there.

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Since independence, Israel has become the primary destination for migration of Jews, and has frequently been the country that absorbed the absolute majority of Jewish migrants in a given year. A strongly positive international migration balance was the primary growth engine of the Jewish population in Israel until the 1970s, and again briefly in the early 1990s during the tremendous wave of aliya from the FSU. Since then, an extremely positive balance between births and deaths of Jews replaced migration as the leading driver of growth. It is common to assume that Jews migrate to Israel (aliya) based on the ideological, religious and sociocultural attraction of the Jewish state for Diaspora Jewry. But an accurate and detailed analysis of the circumstances and development of migration flows over the years shows that each country of origin

has its own story and timeline, and there was no simultaneous response of global Jewish communities to processes occurring in the State of Israel (DellaPergola 2020). The overall logic of migration to Israel can be understood only by considering the balance between push and pull factors created by the economic, political and social circumstances in Israel and overseas.

Analysis of migration to Israel from 16 primary countries of origin in eastern and western Europe, North and South America, South Africa and Australia during the years 1991-2019 proved beyond a shadow of doubt the decisive impact of socioeconomic variables on the scope of aliya (DellaPergola 2020). The dependent variable that was examined most closely was the relation between the highest and lowest migration rates to Israel for every 1,000 Jews in a country of origin over the course of the research period. The most efficient explanatory variable was the difference between the unemployment rate in the various countries of origin and in Israel. Unemployment affected high or low aliya rates as an expression of social stability or instability in a given country. When migration statistics are presented with a one-year lag in relation to unemployment statistics, this simple socioeconomic model displays the highest impact on variation in aliya rates between countries (74%).

In other words, three-quarters of the substantial differences in the scope of migration from the different countries to Israel reflect the unemployment levels in those countries and in Israel. Unemployment need not relate directly to the Jewish population being studied, but reflects the sense of socioeconomic welfare in a society in general, including Jews. The evidence discussed here admittedly does not sufficiently relate to the choice of olim (Jewish immigrants to Israel) of where to migrate, which is sensitive to ideology, and to the socioeconomic composition of the olim. But it shows that Jewish migration to Israel—like all migration—is highly sensitive to available material conditions and opportunities. It also became clear that the employment level in Israel is a contributing factor. Conditions of full employment versus periods of high unemployment have substantial impact on changes in the number and percentage of olim, other than during emergency situations of war or deep political crises in countries of origin, when the impact of migration was less dependent on the state of the economy. An illustration of these findings is the aliya from France in the twenty-first century. Despite tremendous sensitivity to antisemitism and terrorist attacks that took place there in the past few years, the graph of the number of olim precisely tracks the graph of unemployment in France, and not the timing of terror attacks. This is similar to the situation in other countries that did not experience terror attacks and incidents of extreme antisemitism (DellaPergola 2020).

A parallel assessment can be made for emigration factors away from Israel. The connection between the Israeli economy and the rate of emigration during the years 1991-2019 was very strong. The unemployment rate in Israel managed to explain a very high proportion (68%) of the annual variation in those joining the ranks of Israelis abroad for a period of a year or more. In other words, the ongoing economic situation in Israeli is a powerful factor in the country's ability to retain or lose its residents to other more attractive places in the world, even if only temporarily—much more so than security or ideological concerns.

In recent years, the predictive power of the *economic situation* on the aliya rate in proportion to the local Jewish population, was eight times greater than that of *antisemitism* (DellaPergola 2020). The data convincingly demonstrate how global Jewish migration has functioned in the recent past. We are not capable of predicting the future of the global or Israeli economy, but it is clear that Israel's position in the world economy relative to other countries will translate into its ability to act as an attractive location for new olim, and the opposite—in the case of a severe and

prolonged economic crisis Israel may lose a large number of residents. Above all, it is essential to understand that future trends of immigration and emigration will not be based on hopes and fears. They will reflect rational processes that can largely be tracked in real time and even forecast in advance.

The Family Engine and Age Profile

The other principal engine of growth (or decline) of Jewish population is natural expansion (or deficit)—the **difference between the number of births and number of deaths**. Over the last tens of years, natural increase was high in Israel—actually the highest of all developed countries—and very low or negative in most Jewish communities in other countries. In Israel the Total Fertility Rate (TFR)—the index of the number of children born on average per woman—was three or more around the year 2020. The high birth rate in Israel—apart from the effect of religiosity on family size—is explained by a combination of the improved economic resources available to families and the widespread public sense of optimism and expectation of life improving in the future (DellaPergola 2022b). There is almost no Jewish community in the Diaspora that today reaches an average fertility rate of two Jewish children; this reflects common tendencies of refraining from marriage or marrying late (DellaPergola 2011). An additional factor for low Jewish intergenerational growth across the Diaspora is the high rate of marriage between Jews and non-Jews, only some of whose children will receive a Jewish identity from their parents, or choose one themselves.

Birth and death rates, and sometimes also changes caused by migration, determine the younger or older age profile of a population, which in turn impacts the likelihood of the future birth and death rate. Due to the relatively high fertility rate of three children on average in the Jewish population—and in the Arab population in Israel—the country has a relatively young age structure in comparison to other developed countries, with noticeable differences between the various population sectors.

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Joining and Leaving Judaism

In a human collective like the Jewish population, which is defined by symbolic, cultural or ideological criteria, a third form of demographic changes exists, in addition to the routine physical transition of individuals between life and death and to geographic movement from place to place. This is **the net balance between those joining the collective and those leaving** it, whether via a formal transition ceremony or informally. The Jewish minority in various countries has suffered in the distant past from legal or other types of discrimination in relation to the rest of society, with negative consequences on community retention. Furthermore, the processes of social integration and assimilation have caused a marked erosion of the population. During the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century, there were frequent expressions of a voluntary drive to end the abnormal situation of the Jews as different and often discriminated against. This led to highly visible departures and to other forms of erasure, mainly in relation to Judaism, which was perceived as a religion. For many others, changing the perception of Jewish identity from religious to national helps to maintain a new and more secular form of Jewish belonging. Recently, together with a general process of secularization, assimilation has expressed itself more as a slow distancing from organized Jewish life due to personal and family circumstances, rather than as a deliberate decision with roots in ideological awareness. In most European countries the majority of

mixed couples do not raise their children in a Jewish framework.

In American society changes of religion have been relatively more common than in the rest of the world. Surveys have repeatedly found that communities of Jews, Catholics and mainstream Protestants tended to lose members, while Evangelicals, Eastern religions and those of undefined religion (i.e. people with no religion or of unknown religion) tended to grow (Kosmin et al. 1991; Kosmin and Keysar 2009; Kosmin and Lachman, 1993; Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life 2008; Pew Research Center 2015b; Smith 2009; Rebhun 2016). The Jewish population surveys by the Pew Research Center from 2013 and 2020 (Pew Research Center 2013, 2021) found an intermarriage rate that recently surpassed 60%, while the total number of those leaving Judaism was twice that of those joining. An additional Pew survey from 2015 on religion amongst all Americans estimated a Jewish loss of some 600,000 people due to changes of religion over the course of their lifetime (Pew Research Center 2015). In 2020 10% of Americans who were raised Jewish by religion, and 24% of those raised as Jewish without religion, disconnected from their Jewish identity (Pew Research Center 2021). These findings confirm the impression of a negative balance between joiners and leavers.

In contrast, in certain Latin American countries such as Mexico the rate of intermarriage was much lower than in the United States, and in most cases ended with the non-Jewish partner converting to Judaism. In Europe assimilation and leaving Judaism developed much earlier than on other continents, but contemporary accounts show that the process of assimilation is slowing down and in some cases reversing its direction, perhaps in response to negative anti-Jewish pressure from the external environment (DellaPergola and Staetsky 2020). In contrast to the above, in Israel marriages between Jews and Arabs are extremely rare, but many mixed couples have immigrated from the former Soviet Union and other states (DellaPergola 2017a). The number of potential joiners of the Jewish collective in Israel is estimated at a few hundred thousand, but the local Chief Rabbinate has implemented a very strict conversion policy (Fisher 2019), which has created widespread frustration and deterred many from even submitting a request to convert. It should be noted that the definition of **core** Jewish population supposedly includes people who choose to be Jewish even if they do not undergo conversion (Jews by choice). However, if or when they need the services of a Rabbi, these people will not be recognized as Jews.

Population Forecasts: Successes and Limitations

Before we examine a number of scenarios for the potential development of future Israeli and Jewish demography, we will first raise some issues regarding the general reliability of population forecasts. The validity of demographic forecasts for properly capturing actual trends is sometimes questioned. To what extent can analysis of the past yield valid forecasts for the future? The answer depends on researchers' skills, on understanding the ongoing dynamics of population change and on the chosen research methods.

Demographic forecasts can be reliable, such as for example those carried out by Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) over the years: The CBS forecast the size of the population of Israel in mid-2020 on the basis of the statistics for mid-2005. In 2005 there were 6,930,000 Israelis, including 5,573,000 Jews and others and 1,357,000 Arabs. The forecast for 2020 in their intermediate scenario (out of a high/low range of scenarios) was 8,673,000, of whom 6,679,000 were Jews and others and 1,976,000 were Arabs. In practice, in 2020 the population size was 9,212,000 of whom 7,275,000 were Jews and others and 1,938,000 were Arabs. The forecasting error was minimal for the Arab population (+2%), but was not insignificant for the Jews and others (-7.9%), actually approaching the higher range of the projection.

The total forecasting deviation for the overall population of Israel was -5.9%. The primary reasons for this were an underestimation of the number of new immigrants arriving to Israel and of the Jewish fertility rate, both of which were expected to decline but in practice rose during the forecast years.

A better example of a reliable population forecast was that carried out for the Jerusalem Municipality on the basis of 1995 statistics as part of a strategic plan for the city until 2020 (DellaPergola 2008; DellaPergola and Rebhun 2003). The work related to the entire municipal population and presented the Jewish and Arab sectors separately. In 2020 those forecast statistics could be compared with the true population statistics, a moment anxiously anticipated by those who deal with such simulations. In 1995 Jerusalem had 591,400 residents. The population forecast for 2020 for Jerusalem was 947,000, and the real number was 952,300—a total error of -0.6% in the forecast. The total errors accumulated over 25 years regarding the Jewish and Arab populations were +0.6% and -2.4%, respectively. Such gaps seem small, especially considering that the Jewish population of Jerusalem grew by 40% during the period of the forecast, while the Arab population grew by 110%, or in other words, more than doubled. Such a high level of accuracy regarding such a dynamic demographic context was achieved by breaking the general population down into dozens of smaller forecast regions, each of which had its own special demographic dynamic. In each age group and for each five-year period the expected impact of each component of demographic change (births, deaths, international migration, domestic migration) were taken into account. Partial findings were then recompiled, resulting in good results and reflecting a methodology that could also be applied to nationwide population forecasts.

Population forecasts can therefore provide a reasonable road map, while considering that unexpected events (such as the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, and the breakup of the Soviet Union two years later, or the Covid pandemic in early 2020 and the Swords of Iron War of 2023) may change the course of history, with weighty implications for global trends, world Jewry and Israeli society.

What Lies Ahead for the Population Between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River?

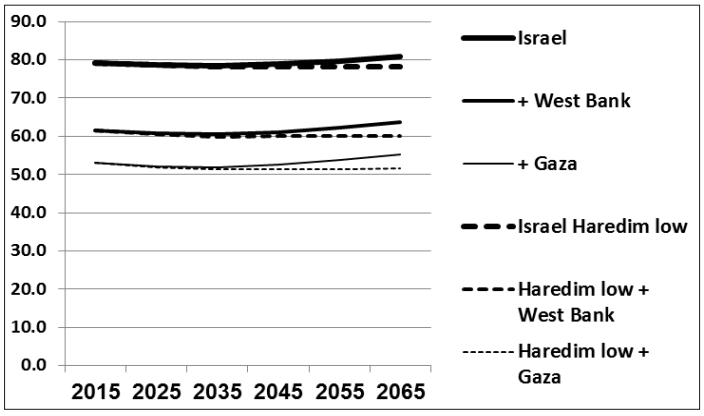
Now we will look ahead and examine firstly the demographic balance between Jews and Palestinians in the entire region between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River, or in other words, the entire area of the Land of Israel during the time of the British Mandate along with the Golan Heights. Changes in the existing balance will decisively determine the cultural, social and political character of the State of Israel (DellaPergola 2016; DellaPergola 2021). The forecast for Israel presented in Figure 1 below is based on CBS scenarios, not including international migration. The projections presented are based on relatively conservative assumptions about fertility levels in the various segments of the population. The primary assumption presented is the continuation of existing trends of stability or moderate decline, unlike the majority of Western countries where fertility is low. Regarding the haredi (very orthodox) population two fertility assumptions were tested, one of stability and one of some moderation. It is clear that in the event of a severe overall moderation of birthrates, the population in reality will be smaller than that presented here.

As noted above, the impact of migration can be significant, but there are endless scenarios of immigration or emigration, on small or very large scales due to a range of circumstances. It is clear that different scales of migration can change the results of the forecast in either direction, but there is no way to accurately predict what developments will occur in practice. The Palestinian population forecast for the West Bank and Gaza was carried out by

the author independently, separately from other existing projections (DellaPergola 2021; PCBS 2022; United Nations Department of Economics 2022). The total population of this region is likely to grow quickly, both in total and within each of its two components—the State of Israel and the Palestinian territories. By 2065, the current number of over 14 million residents in the whole area between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River is likely to nearly double.

History shows that in modern times a Jewish majority across the full territory of the Land of Israel was first achieved in the 1950s, in the wake of the large wave of aliya that accompanied the establishment of the state, and the large wave of Palestinians emigrating from the land of Israel due to the 1948 war (DellaPergola 2021). Afterwards, population growth was faster amongst Jews until the 1970s, and amongst Arabs in the following years. The primary reason was much higher natural growth amongst Arabs compared to Jews within Israel and in the territories of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip—natural growth that more than balanced out the impact of Jewish aliya (with lone exceptions during the peak years of migration from the Soviet Union in 1990 and 1991). More rapid growth in the Arab-Palestinian sectors is likely to continue until the 2030s, at which point Jewish population growth is expected to slightly outpace it. Such a shift is expected to reflect the rapid growth and proportion of haredi Jews amongst all Israeli Jews (see description below). In 2065 in the entire territory of the land of Israel, the enlarged total Jewish population—including non-Jewish household members who are eligible for the Law of Return—is likely to reach 16 million people and the Arab population is likely to reach 13 million—in total, almost 30 million people.

Figure 1. Projected rate of Jews as a proportion of the entire population of Israel, the West Bank and Gaza, 2015-2065 – different versions



Source: Central Bureau of Statistics processed by author; DellaPergola 2021.

The forecasts for the population of Israel in Figure 1 are based on the intermediate projection from a wider set produced by the CBS. If we assume that the population growth of haredi Jews will gradually moderate (in accordance with the lower CBS forecast) as a result of greater integration into broader society and especially into the workforce, the entire Jewish population will grow at a slower pace, and as a result the proportion of the Arab population will increase.

Using a constant definition of the Jewish population broadly defined—including non-Jews eligible for the Law of Return—, within the borders of the State of Israel, by the second half of the twenty-first century there should be a substantial Jewish majority of close to 80%. The picture changes if the calculation includes the Palestinian territories and their populations, in whole or in part. If all of the area and population of the West Bank are added to the territory of the State of Israel, the Jewish majority declines to 60%. This rate would still ensure a Jewish majority across the territory but would render the idea of a Jewish and democratic state uncertain in the face of a statistical reality of a binational state. If the territory and population of the Gaza Strip are also included, the Jewish majority falls to just above 50%, and this would end the project of the Jewish state. As said, all of these forecasts reflect the intermediate scenario of the CBS. However, if we take the lower projection for the haredi population, the Jewish population will grow more slowly and its majority status will decline accordingly.

It should be noted that the forecasts presented here differ from the estimates I published 20 years ago, when the gap between the growth rate of the Arab and Jewish populations was much larger (DellaPergola 2003). At that time I expected that Jews (including hundreds of thousands of non-Jews eligible for the Law of Return) would become a declining minority in the Land of Israel; today this is no longer expected. The reason is that in the interim there has been moderation, later than expected but significant, in the fertility levels of the Arab population components. At the same time, the fertility level of the haredi sector of the Jewish population has not moderated, with slight fluctuations reflecting the current state of families' financial situations. In recent years, there has been a significant convergence in fertility levels between most elements of the Jewish and Arab population, with the exception of Bedouin women in the south of the country and the haredi sector, and some Jewish families in Judea and Samaria. However, due to differences in age composition and the fact that the Arab population is younger than the Jewish population, Arab birth rates are still higher and death rates are still lower than in the Jewish sector as a whole. This is why the natural growth of the Arab sector is higher, even if there are no differences in the level of fertility. These gaps should moderate over the coming decades.

In each scenario, the impact of current and expected demographic trends will be of decisive importance for the cultural, economic and political character, and especially for the bilateral religious-national balance in the geopolitical ecosystem of Israel and the Palestinian Authority. The expected effects of demography oblige the Israeli leadership to pay close attention to strategy and operational planning. The new fact that emerges from these estimates is the dependence of the overall Jewish population on the growth rate of the haredi sector within it, when again, a significant increase or decrease in the size of this sector

Due to differences in age composition and the fact that the Arab population is younger than the Jewish population, Arab birth rates are still higher and death rates are still lower than in the Jewish sector as a whole.

can change the picture one way or the other. If the haredi sector grows to a lesser extent, the rate of growth of the entire Jewish population will decrease and the proportion of the Arab population will increase accordingly. On the other hand, while an increased weight of the haredi sector may make it possible to maintain the current demographic balance, it raises other questions: To what extent will members of this sector be able to better integrate into the economy and improve their living conditions by achieving greater economic independence, reducing poverty and dependence on public subsidies? Will this lead to a situation of families who follow tradition, but are smaller than current families? What is certain is that the key to Israel's demographic future depends mainly on haredi demographics. A kind of "sacred alliance" is created between the different—more or less religious—sections of Israeli Jews within Israel's changing demographics. The question is whether this alliance will also be expanded to other aspects and areas of common life in the country. In any case, demographic change will produce an entirely different Israeli society by the middle of the twenty-first century and onwards.

Sectoral Population Growth in Israel and its Implications

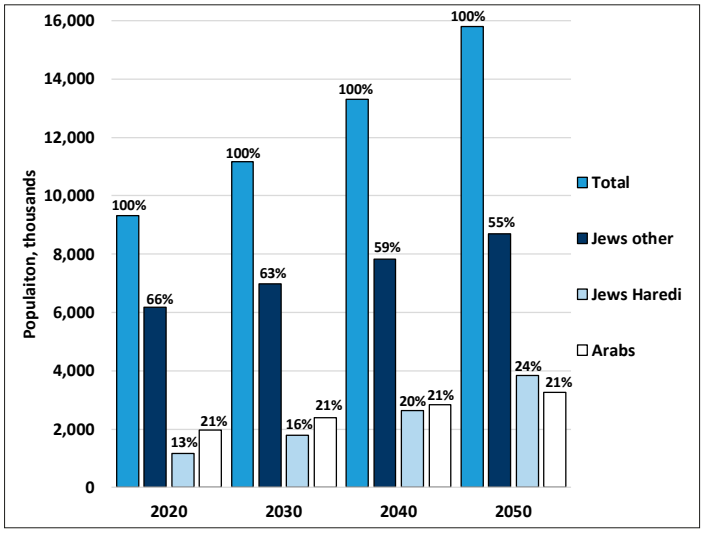
The expected changes in the population of the entire territory of the Land of Israel depend in a large part on what is expected to take place within the State of Israel's borders. When considering Israel's future, a central question is whether the population and the various sectors or "tribes" therein are expected to develop in directions that conform to the aspiration of being a sovereign independent

state that is Jewish (or in other words, open to all Jews around the world), democratic and competitive. One of the important aspects of this demographic change is the non-uniform and non-synchronized pace of change amongst the different population sectors, which will have important implications for the aggregates at the end of a given study period (DellaPergola 2017b). National population forecasts by Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics can offer a partial answer, which extend 30 years, covering the period from 2020 to 2050 (see Figure 2). It should be noted that the forecast presented here is the latest existing full forecast, and CBS is currently working on an updated version. While there is no expectation of extreme shifts in the factors of demographic change that will supposedly affect the coming years, sudden and unexpected events such as the collapse of states and dramatic wanderings of their peoples may absolutely have an influence over the long term. An event like the Covid pandemic can also have an affect due to changes that accumulate in the population composition over the long term. A war event such as Swords of Iron can have very different effects on migration.

The current forecast divides the population of Israel into three main components: Arabs, haredi Jews and other Jews, with the latter including the full spectrum from secular to national-religious, as well as those members of the broadly defined Jewish sector who are not recognized as Jewish under religious law by the Chief Rabbinate and the Ministry of the Interior (and therefore, by the CBS itself). This typology is admittedly too raw, but it is acceptable for initial analytic needs when considering the notable differences between each group in comparison to the other two in relation to religion and religiosity, life patterns, residential concentrations, socioeconomic characteristics (especially workforce participation rates), marriage and fertility patterns and political stances, including attitudes toward cultural pluralism and democracy. This typology assumes there will not be substantial numbers of people transitioning between sectors. The basis for this is the firmness of social boundaries between these sectors. Multigenerational intra-Jewish empirical analysis indicates strong resilience of the haredi sector in the face of secularization processes that are certainly taking place in the religious sector as a whole (Keysar and DellaPergola 2019).

The total population projected for the State of Israel (without the West Bank and Gaza) is expected to grow from over 9 million people in 2020 to nearly 16 million in 2050. A decline in the annual population growth rate is expected, from 2% at the beginning of the period to just over 1.5% at the end of the period. What is expected to change is the relative proportion of each of the three main population sectors, which reflect their differing growth rates. In Israel in 2020, two-thirds of the population were non-haredi Jews, 21% were Arabs and 13% were haredi Jews. Between 2040 and 2045 the number and proportion of haredi Jews are projected to exceed those of Arab citizens of Israel, with a gradual reduction of the non-haredi majority. In 2050 non-haredi Jews are projected to be 55% of the total population of Israel (that is, excluding the West Bank and Gaza), with 24% haredi Jews, and 21% Arabs.

Figure 2. Population forecasts by main ethnoreligious groups, Israel 2020-2050



Source: Central Bureau of Statistics, processed by author.

In addition to the projection of overall demographic change, it is essential to see how expected changes are likely to influence specific age groups that in practice determine the profile of social needs, the type and extent of services needed to meet these needs and the investment policy necessary to establish and manage these services. In the following I will focus on four different age groups of Israelis, in descending order: those aged 65 and above, those aged 20-64, 18 and 19-year-old, and under 18s.

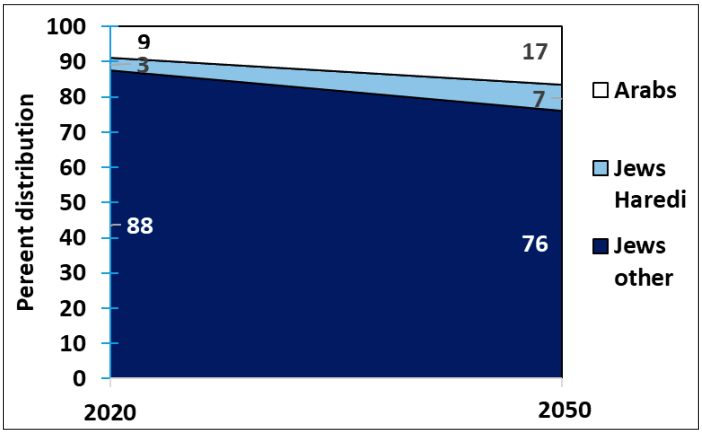
Figure 3 presents the projected structural changes between 2020 and 2050 amongst the population aged 65 and older. Their number in 2020 was 1,135,700 and it is projected to grow to 2,423,100 in 2050—an addition of 1.3 million or 113% (in other words more than doubling). The aging process takes places naturally in each population, and has two aspects. One which applies to the entire population is that it typically reflects the gradual reduction in birth rates, and therefore the reduction in the proportion of children within the total population. Consequently, the relative proportion of the elder population group must grow. The second aspect relates to the absolute growth in the number of elderly people, which in most countries reflects the consistent increase in life expectancy for all ages, including the oldest citizens. Due to the increase in the number of elderly people, and to the relative proportion of the oldest age group within the category of all people over 65, over time all needs relating to medical care, hospitalization and welfare service grow significantly. The financial dependence of the elderly on the existing private and public sector support system also grows. The oldest group in this age profile includes a large population of retired people, although over time the tendency to work beyond the official retirement age is increasing in some sectors, especially amongst those with tertiary education. Changes in the retirement age can affect the functioning of older people, but at this stage not their distribution by categories of religion and nationality.

The State of Israel has a relatively young age profile in comparison to other developed countries, due to high fertility rates in the past and present. But as mentioned, the aging process will lead to more than double the number of people aged 65 and up by the year 2050. In the internal composition of this age group in Israel there is a dominant weight to the Jewish non-haredi sector, with 88% of the total population as of 2020, expected to drop to 76% in 2050. The rate of people aged 65 and up in the other two sectors is lower—9% of Arabs and 3% of haredi Jews in 2020, and is supposed to grow rapidly to 17% of Arabs and 7% of haredi Jews by 2050. In other words—the relative weight of these two smaller sectors, Arab and haredi, will double in the next 30 years, although they will remain a minority.

Figure 4 presents the projected changes in the composition of the 20-64 age group. This group represents the primary backbone of families working, earning and consuming; it requires solutions of employment, housing, and other suitable services. Their number in 2020 was 4,799,300 and is projected to grow to 7,728,500 by 2050—an addition of over 2.9 million people, or 61%.

The dominant weight of the Jewish non-haredi section in this age group is expected to shrink from 69% of the total population in 2020 to 57% in 2050—still an absolute majority of all

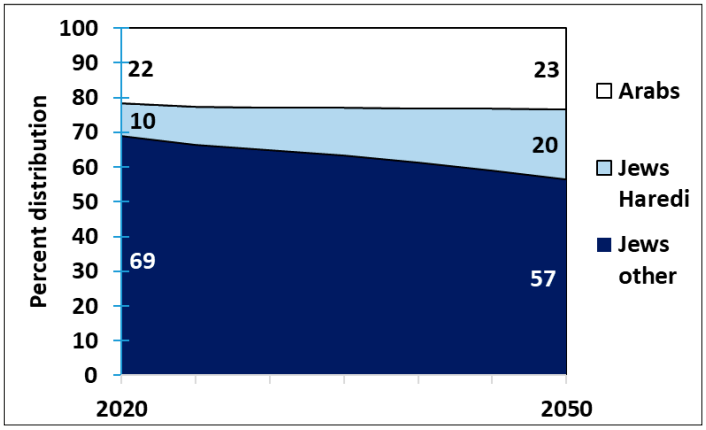
Figure 3. Population 65 years and older, by main ethnoreligious groups, Israel 2020-2050



Source: Central Bureau of Statistics, processed by author.

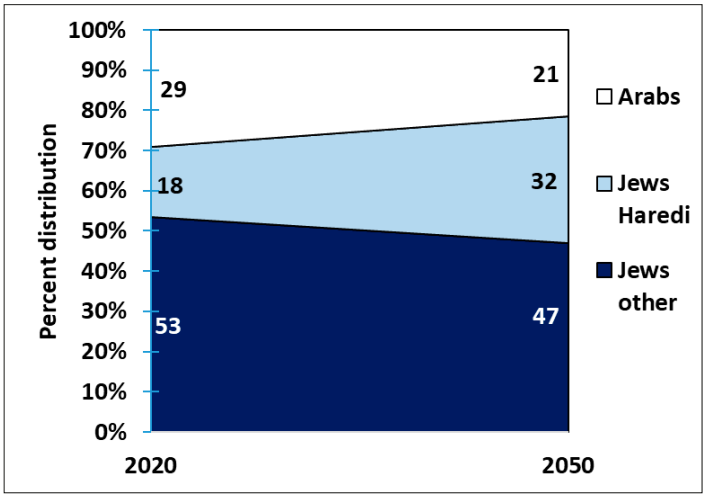
working-age people. Arab adults of working age are expected to remain relatively stable as a proportion of the total population, with their percentage rising from 22% in 2020 to 23% in 2050. In contrast, there is a significant expected increase in the number of 20-64 year-olds in the haredi sector, whose portion of the population will double from 10% in 2020 to 20% in 2050. If calculating the numbers as proportions within the Jewish public alone, there were 87% non-haredi in 2020 compared to 13% haredi, and this ratio will change to 74% vs. 26% in 2050.

Figure 4. Population 20-64 year-olds, by main ethnoreligious groups, Israel 2020-2050



Source: Central Bureau of Statistics, processed by author.

Figure 5. Population 18-19 year-olds, by main ethnoreligious group, Israel 2020-2050



Source: Central Bureau of Statistics, processed by author.

The proportion of haredi Jews is projected to grow from 20% to 38% of the total population of children and adolescents, and the equivalent proportion of Arabs is projected to decline from 24% in 2020 to 18% in 2050.

Figure 5 presents the age breakdown for 18 and 19 year-olds, who are the primary target for recruitment to security forces. Their number in 2020 was 284,500 and is expected to increase to 481,500 by 2050—an increase of nearly 200,000 people or 69%. There are substantial limitations on the scope of actual enlistment in Israel, according to gender and population sector, and due to the non-enlistment of certain sectors and the exemption from enlistment granted to others. Yet, it is still of interest to see the projected numbers for these two points in time.

In 2020, 53% (in other words, just over half) of the 18-19 years old were non-haredi Jews, 18% were haredi Jews and 29% were Arabs. In 2050 this breakdown will change—47% (or less than half) are projected to be non-haredi Jews, 32% haredi Jews and 21% Arabs. If calculating the numbers within the Jewish public alone, in 2020 there were 75% non-haredi Jews vs. 25% haredi. In 2050 59% of Jews of potential enlistment age are projected to be non-haredi vs. 41% haredi.

Figure 6 repeats a similar observation for those aged 0 to 17, in other words children and adolescents in need of early childhood services and the education system. Their number in 2020 was 3,092,000 and is projected to grow to 5,170,300 by 2050—an addition of almost 2.1 million people, or 67%.

Amongst the growing Israeli population, the rate of non-haredi Jewish children and adolescents was 56% of the total in 2020, and is projected to shrink to 44% by 2050. The proportion of haredi Jews is projected to grow from 20% to 38% of the total population of children and adolescents, and the equivalent proportion of Arabs is projected to decline from 24% in 2020 to 18% in 2050. In relation to the Jewish population only, according to

this projection, the proportion of non-haredi Jewish children is likely to decline from 74% in 2020 to 54% in 2050, and the rate of haredi children is likely to increase from 26% to 46% as a percentage of all Jewish children. In other words, non-haredi Jewish children will still constitute a majority of all Jewish children and adolescents under age 18, but not of the total of that age group in Israel.

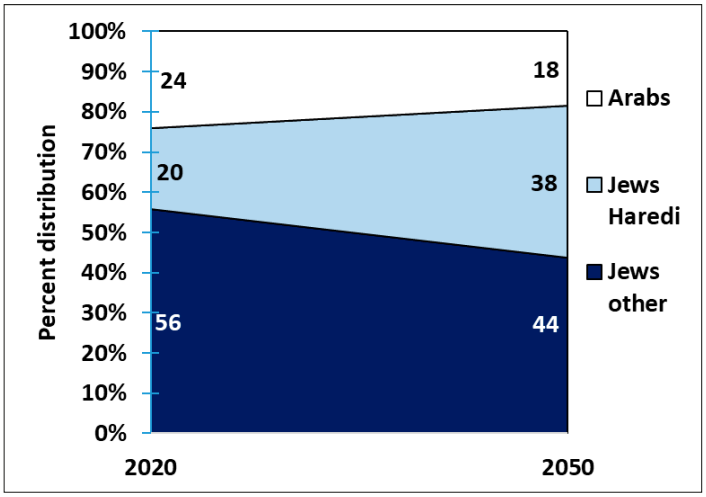
The implications of these projected changes become clearer in Figure 7 below, which presents **the expected population increases between 2020-2050** for each given age group and for each population sector. Amongst the group of 0-17 year-olds, the expected growth from 2020 to 2050 reaches over 2 million children and adolescents, of whom 10% are expected to come from the Arab sector, 26% from the Jewish non-haredi sector and 64% from the haredi sector. In other words, **nearly two-thirds of the total population increase expected in the preschool and school-aged population in Israel is expected to be from haredi young people**. This has far-reaching implications on planning the national education system—public and private sectors, teacher training, construction and other physical infrastructure and additional aspects of allocation of state resources to different sectors.

Regarding the potential enlistees to the IDF aged 18 and 19, between 2020 and 2050 38% of the additional 200,000 young people is expected to come from the Jewish non-haredi sector, 51% from the haredi sector and 11% from the Arab sector. If we examine the breakdown of the expected increase to the Jewish population only, 43% are projected to be non-haredi vs. 57% haredi. In other words, if we follow the recent saying: "50% for the army and 50% for the Torah," **it would be necessary to significantly increase the scope of haredi recruitment** to meet this quota (the value of which is debatable).

Regarding the group of 20-64 year-olds, which as mentioned is the backbone of the future workforce, an increase of nearly three million people is projected between 2020 and 2050, of whom 36% are non-haredi Jews, 38% haredi Jews and 26% Arabs. Beyond the structural change noted between sectors, the significance of the data lie in the different tendencies to enter the workforce among those belonging to each of these population groups. Attention should be paid to the significant gender gaps that exist within each sector. The data indicate that 64% of the increase in the working age population in 2050 is projected to come from population sectors with low participation in the labor force—who today are mainly haredi men and Arab women. In other words, the portion of the total population of those likely to work is projected to shrink considerably, which entails negative consequences for the economic productivity of Israeli society as a whole. An alternative scenario is only possible if the socioeconomic habits of the various sectors of the population change, implying higher workforce participation among the Arab and haredi sectors—which may help preserve future employment patterns at a level closer to the current one.

Finally, regarding the segment of those aged 65 and above, out of a projected addition of more than one and a quarter million people at these ages, 66% are expected to come from the

Figure 6. Population 0-17 year-olds, by main ethnoreligious group, Israel 2020-2050

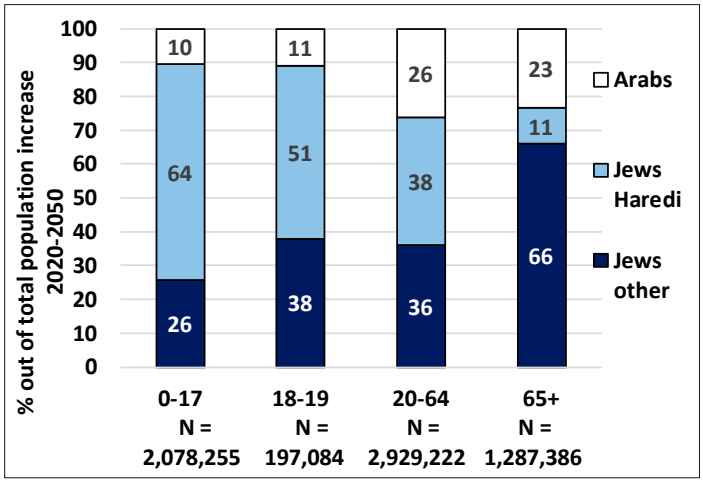


Source: Central Bureau of Statistics, processed by author.

non-haredi Jewish sector, 11% from the haredi sector and 23% from the Arab sector. In this context, it is important to emphasize once again that care for the elderly population is not only a matter of resources and structures, but also requires an understanding of and sensitivity towards the cultural aspect of contact between caregivers and their clients. Appropriate training is therefore required for a professional workforce that will be responsible for a public that, as mentioned, is not homogeneous in terms of its needs and worldviews.

To summarize this section, the projected estimates are not only meaningful in relation to the overall changing structure of Israeli society between the start and end dates of the forecast. The much more significant matter is that the population composition of Israeli society in terms of the main ethnoreligious groups—which themselves have explanatory value for future population growth—, is set to alter dramatically over the next three decades. The difference is not only a matter of theoretical tallying but involves drastic changes for the functional essence of each of these different age groups, in accordance with the various characters, needs, expectations and contributions of each different population sector. The expected additional populations at each age level configure dramatic shifts in the new human capital joining the pre-existing one, and in particular the investments required for each population sector. The results will reverberate for Israeli society as a whole.

Figure 7. Percent composition of expected population growth, by main ethnoreligious group and age, Israel 2020-2050



Source: Central Bureau of Statistics, processed by author.

Looking Outside the Box: Changes in the Relationship Between Israel and the Diaspora

The complex challenges of population composition for Israel's future described above cannot overshadow the fact that Israel is the only growing component of world Jewry, besides a few exceptions. As a result, the population of Jews in Israel as a proportion of all world Jews grew consistently from 5% in 1945 to 45% in 2023. Israel currently increases its proportion of the total world Jewish population by half a percentage point every year. This means that by the mid-2030s Israel might possibly be home to half of the Jews in the world, and soon afterwards, to the majority. These estimates depend naturally on the definitions applied to the boundaries of the Jewish collective. The approach of the **core Jewish population** used here (DellaPergola 2023) relates to a collective that can be compared across different countries and Jewish communal cultures around the world, in contrast to broader or narrower criteria for this definition, which are used in other parts of the world or by one or another stream of the Jewish collective but are not comparable globally.

Outside of Israel, Jewish population projections consistently indicate numerical decline in most countries. The most attractive Jewish communities are in English-speaking democratic states, which are wealthier and have historically allowed for a greater degree of multiculturalism. In this context increased attention must be paid to the United States. All past attempts to forecast the future of the Jewish population in the United States predicted an end to growth followed by a gradual, slow decline. Various researchers set the date for the expected turning point at different points

between 1990 and 2023 (DellaPergola 2013; DellaPergola and Rebhun 1998-99; DellaPergola et al. 2000; Goujon et al. 2012; Klaff 1998; Pew Research Center 2015a; Pinker 2021; Rebhun et al. 1999; Schmelz 1981).

Such a broad consensus regarding the direction of the process (if not regarding its timing) reflects the clear aging of the American Jewish-identified population after decades of low fertility, and only partial success at integrating a large portion of the children born of marriages between Jews and non-Jews in a Jewish communal framework, although this portion is growing over time. Aging leads to higher death rates, which ultimately balance or overcome the Jewish birth rates. The gradual postponing of the expected end of growth may reflect the lengthening of generations as a result of the higher average age of women at the time of giving birth, as well as the constant increase in the proportion of orthodox and haredi Jews amongst the younger generation. Another factor may be a growing flexibility in including people of Jewish origin in the collective, despite them not seeing themselves as a part of it, but rather of no religion or of a different particularist identity. Along with the expected decline in the size of the Jewish population over the long term, the proportion of orthodox and haredi Jews is expected to rise significantly in the United States and in other areas across the Diaspora. If this process continues or even intensifies, the continued trend of several decades of decline in the number of Jews in the Diaspora may U-turn, although from within a much smaller population. These projected changes in the structure of the Jewish population also involve the rise of more conservative affiliations in the Jewish public towards the general politics of their countries of residence and a small increase in the number of immigrants to Israel, which is typically low.

Regarding the changing context of American Jewry, in particular, we for a long time have been accustomed to a paradigm of a primarily white American society which hosts a variety of Hispanic, Asian and African American minorities, who via various paths of social mobility become absorbed in the white Anglo-Saxon Protestant mainstream (Alba and Nee 2003). This process was sometimes slow and not free of conflicts and difficulties. Jews in the US experienced one of its most significant success stories, after beginning very low on the ethnic, religious and social ladder and climbing close to the top (Chiswick 2020). Recently a few other minority groups, mainly Asian Americans, have risen to a leading place in the ranking of high educational achievement and income. The socioeconomic and cultural integration of Jews was very successful in the wider social context, but their rates of cultural assimilation were also among the highest. The dynamic of immigrant absorption on a broad scale, which brought with it differential population growth rates, deeply changed the population profile of the United States. This change was especially pronounced after the immigration law reforms in the 1960s, which allowed entry and upward social mobility for larger proportions of groups of nonwhite immigrants and their descendants. Population projections predict that between 2050 and 2060 non-Hispanic whites will become a minority of the overall US population (Vespa et al. 2020).

The proportion of haredi Jews is projected to grow from 20% to 38% of the total population of children and adolescents, and the equivalent proportion of Arabs is projected to decline from 24% in 2020 to 18% in 2050.

The United States is likely to become a primarily Hispanic or non-white society, with a smaller, more orthodox Jewish community. This is a new scenario with potentially far-reaching consequences, such as a decline in the sensitivity of the United States to the cultural and emotional needs of the Jewish community, including regarding support for the State of Israel, or even hostility towards the Jews due to their

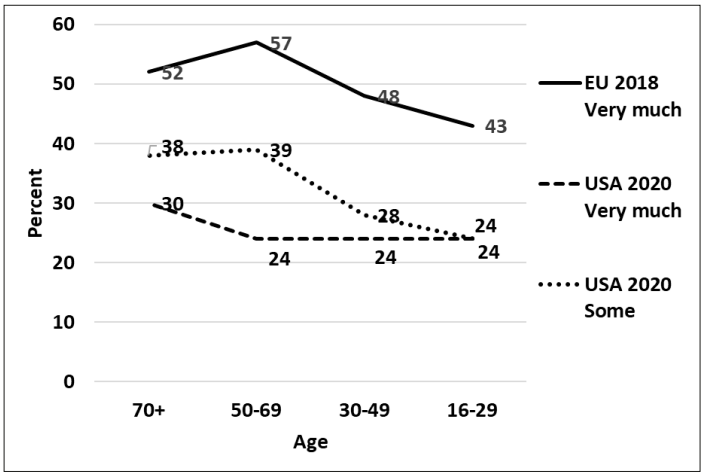
being identified with the allegedly colonialist white population. In contrast to past models, in which Jews—mainly of European ancestry—pursuing modernization integrated easily into and sometimes disappeared within the white American mainstream, today a much different model is emerging. In the future, the degree of closeness and osmosis, communication, mutual empathy and knowledge and cultural exchange between Jews and broader American society may be completely different. The distance in terms of historic memory and political sensitivity between Jews and non-Jews may grow significantly.

One important component that may be influenced by these expected demographic changes is the scope of mutual relations and support amongst Jews from different places around the world, and especially between the two main concentrations in the US and Israel. The centrality of Israel in the perception and emotions of Diaspora Jews was revealed after 1948 as a central and strengthening element of Jewish identity, but it seems that the documented erosion amongst the younger generation leads to different approaches and meanings in this context (see Figure 8).

According to the 2020 Pew Survey (Pew Research Center 2021), the proportion of US Jews who feel that Israel plays an essential or at least some role in their Jewish identity declined from 68% among those aged 70 and up, to 48% (or less than half) among young people below age 30. Of these, the rate of those who felt a very strong connection was 30% of those aged 70 and up, and 24% below age 70. In Europe, based on the FRA survey from 2018 (DellaPergola and Staetsky 2021), the rate of Jews who feel that they have a strong connection with Israel was higher. The rate of those who felt they have an essential connection declined a little among younger respondents, but remained in Europe almost twice as high as in the US. This may hint at reduced empathy and support for Israel amongst Diaspora Jews. On the other hand, the expected increase in the proportion of more religious Jews within US Jewry, while a similar process is expected in Israel, may create a transnational trend of mutual understanding between those who stay Jewish until then, here and there.

Finally, it is important to emphasize the potential effects of political values on the relationship between Diaspora Jew—especially American Jews—and the State of Israel. In Israel there was a certain balance for many years between the progressive and conservative camps, who are divided over central issues such as the legal role of the Supreme Court, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, individual rights, and religion and state, while the government frequently changed hands between the sides. But in the US and other states, an explicit majority of the Jewish public is inclined to a liberal orientation. As long as Israel managed to maintain a domestic political system which could transmit an enlightened image to Jewish audiences with different political orientations overseas, these audiences could see Israel as an important center of reference, despite their different political opinions. A sharp conservative turn—like the one that took place in Israel in 2023—may cause disappointment and alienation to the point of total disconnect between Israel and large liberal-oriented Jewish audiences in

Figure 8. Rate of Jews reporting emotional closeness to Israel, European Union 2018 and United States 2020



Source: Pew Research Center, 2021; DellaPergola and Staetsky, 2021.

the Diaspora. Evidence thereof is beginning to accumulate in major Diaspora countries, where a large majority of the Jewish public has expressed a negative opinion of the Israeli political leadership (Boyd and Lessof 2023; Brym, 2023). The attempted legal reform and the Israeli rabbinical establishment's hostility towards the major Reform and Conservative movements in the United States harm the traditional paradigm of a covenant of shared fate, which characterized Israel-Diaspora relations over previous generations. The gap created may negatively influence emotional and financial support for Israel as well as interest in aliya and absorption in Israel. The Swords of Iron war may influence in highly contradictory directions the sense of solidarity US Jews feel with Israel.

Discussion and Conclusions

First of all, it should be recalled that the prospective findings reviewed in this article draw heavily on what is already known about the present situation based on long-term trends from the past. However, the continuity of demographic development patterns which we have documented from past generations may actually generate a number of dramatic changes within the Israeli space and regarding mutual relations between the State of Israel and Diaspora Jews.

One aspect is the increasing weight of Israel within global Jewish demography if, as seems possible, the majority of Jewish people globally come to live in Israel—at least according to a definition of who is a Jew that is readily acceptable to most of the Jewish public in Israel and abroad. The Jewish population in most countries outside of Israel is shrinking and aging slowly, besides a few exceptions such as the United Kingdom, which has an increasing haredi population that is growing rapidly, or Canada, Australia and perhaps Germany, which still attract sufficient numbers of Jewish immigrants. There are signs—particularly in the US—of a distancing from a sense of shared peoplehood, including significantly weakened affinity of young people towards Israel as a pillar of the contemporary Jewish experience. Continued rapid population growth in Israel is likely to be led in large and increasing part by haredi Jews, which raises questions about socioeconomic functionality and stability, shared core values and a potential increase in poverty here. There is a significant question regarding how sufficient internal solidarity within Israeli society can be maintained in light of increased feelings of alienation, and sometimes even due to the hostility between different opposing extremes of the most religious and most secular (Pew Research Center 2016).

There are also increasingly loud voices being heard opposing a large and overcrowded population in Israel, due to its population growth rate, which is higher than that of any other developed country (Tal 2016). Population growth in Israel's small territory does reflect strong momentum that will be difficult to halt. By way of paradox, the way to slow the pace of growth would be to slow the rate of births or increase the rate of deaths, or halting migration into the country and increasing emigration out of it. China, for example, used draconian measures to reduce the number of births, but due to the harsh consequences of its distorted age profile it ultimately reverted to supporting a higher birth rate. In Israel, the postponement or avoidance of planned births would likely only come about in the context of a deep economic emergency, a crisis of identity and belief or general demoralization, as has occurred in some European countries where birthrates are extremely low. However, it can be assumed that in Israel the orthodox and haredi sectors would be less affected by such hypothetical changes, and therefore any reduction in birthrates would not be uniform and therefore only impact the secular layers of the future population.

Attempts to increase mortality are typically only found in science fiction, including the development of unequal regulation. Similarly one could subsidize and encourage movements

that oppose vaccinations to the Covid pandemic, for example, or cease funding Israel's excellent health system, which successfully fights illness and mortality. Regarding international migration, as mentioned, emigration from Israel responds sharply and clearly to the Israeli economic situation, including the levels of employment and income in Israel and abroad, overseas investments and the opportunities for personal mobility and professional advancement. The imaginary path to restricting population size in Israel via outward migration would be similar to the approach for reducing births, i.e. a deep economic crisis affecting all layers of society. Aliya to Israel is affected acutely by economic factors acting mainly abroad, but in Israel as well, as discussed above. Regarding the ideological added value of aliya, a clear declaration that Israel is abandoning the old paradigm of the Jewish state and cancelling the Law of Return would suffice.

All of these are of course absurd and unreasonable proposals. The likelihood that population growth in Israel will cease in the foreseeable future is extremely low. There is no way that such restrictive measures could be passed by the Knesset, because they contradict the social norms regarding nuclear families and absorption of new immigrants that are widespread among a vast majority of the Israeli public and its political representatives. We must therefore prepare for relatively rapid continued population growth, even if it moderates over time.

A variable which should be related to much more seriously, at least in the medium term, is the dispersal of population in Israel's southern territory and to a certain extent its north, in contrast with the present concentration in the center. The existing national master plans take these alternatives into account to some extent, but much more vigorous and consistent treatment of these issues is needed. The rate of infrastructure development in Israel—such as beds in hospitals, kilometers of highways and railway tracks, building of new classrooms—cannot be slower than the rate of annual population growth, but in practice this is the case. It should also be noted that a deep political crisis that causes a sharp decrease in the level of public trust in leadership and government—like that which occurred in Israel in 2023—may cause a severe change in the core consensus around shared existence, with real implications on demography similar to those described in the paradox above.

If massive aliya to Israel is unlikely and subject to the scenario of avoiding major outward migration from Israel, then continued population growth in Israel will be tied to the two challenges of defining the state's Jewish and democratic character. Major additional growth is likely to come from populations less focused on the Jewish character of the state, such as the Arab-Palestinian sector on the one hand, and on its democratic character, such as the haredi sector on the other hand. In light of employment patterns of these population sectors, the maintenance of an attractive, sophisticated and self-supporting economy is uncertain. These population sectors have remained marginal until now in economic production and security efforts. One of the roots of this problem is the existence of four separate publicly funded education streams in Israel. These serve to preserve separate moral and social norms, a different national ethos, different training levels, orientations towards employment and above all, seeds of mutual suspicion all the way to hatred between graduates of different streams. Without an agreed-upon solution of a core curriculum along with maximum freedom of expression for each school regarding its ideological path, the concept of a state is emptied of its content, and the education system serves as a tool for preserving and widening disparities between the different population sectors.

It is essential to maintain a measure of civic dialog amongst the various population sectors, while cultivating common ground, reducing socioeconomic gaps, encouraging involvement

and concern for the needs of all, and ensuring that all contribute their share to the state's development. In the specific context of existing demographic disparities, an important goal is maintaining the current age structure of children, adults and the elderly. The present balance in Israel is relatively comfortable, as a foundation for future demographic stability as well, in comparison to other developed countries. It is also essential to remember that Diaspora Jewry—which is a hidden factor and a potential partner for the development of Israeli society—is not structured as a copy of Israeli society and does not reflect its party-political structure. A true dialog between Israel and world Jewry requires internalizing and considering in Israel the many ideas and concepts of Jewish identity and peoplehood, which are accepted and even dominant abroad.

At the same time, the central demographic challenge of the State of Israel is to safeguard a clear, unshakeable, productive and economically self-sufficient Jewish majority amongst the entire population of a state with agreed-upon and defined borders. This is a fundamental and decisive condition for the future existence of Israel as the core state of the Jewish people, a Jewish and democratic state and a state that promotes equality and meets the needs of all its citizens. This challenge inherently involves the issue of the state's borders and the inclusion or non-inclusion therein of the territories and their Palestinian populations, who do not identify with the State of Israel and even deny its right to exist. As we demonstrated above, different territorial scenarios lead to different models of a binational state, with very different ratios of a Jewish majority or minority. The historical record shows that a binational state with elements of more or less equal weight, who are hostile to one another, on the basis of religion, nationality, ethnicity and language, is not feasible. Such unified frameworks have fallen apart in the past in a manner involving much violence and suffering, such as in the separation between Norway and Sweden in 1907, between India and Pakistan in 1947, between Rwanda and Burundi in 1962, between Pakistan and Bangladesh in 1971, between Greek and Turkish Cyprus in 1974, in the former Yugoslavia which split into six different countries starting from 1991, and between Sudan and South Sudan in 2011. A rare example of peacefully agreed-upon separation took place in late 1992 between the Czech Republic and Slovakia, and there are continued separatist efforts of Quebec from Canada, of Scotland from the United Kingdom, of Catalonia from Spain and of the Flemish and the Walloons from Belgium.

The idea of one state in the Middle East for two peoples, the Jews and the Palestinians, in the same territory between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River, cannot be considered anything but an intellectual provocation with no possibility of realization. On the other hand, the continuation of the current reality of occupation by Israel and terrorism by Palestinians is not a good alternative, and has high costs for Israel's international status and its core status for the Jewish people. In the future, demographic analysis shows that whoever is interested in Israel's status as a Jewish and democratic state must seek a solution that will fulfill the national aspirations of both sides, while ensuring personal and collective security for all populations in the region.

The central challenge for Jews outside of Israel—Diaspora Jewry—will be strengthening Jewish communities that can maintain unique spiritual meaning, social cohesion and cultural creativity. This is no easy task as the Jewish minority today enjoys the full range of opportunities that an open and accepting environment offers, the values and lifestyles of which have become an inseparable part of Jewish communities. A meaningful connection between Israel and the transnational Jewish Diaspora was over past generations one of the cornerstones of Jewish identity. However, it appears that young generations tend to focus on the religious aspect of their Jewish identity more than the national aspect (DellaPergola et

al. 2019; Keysar and DellaPergola 2019), or on the individual aspect more than the collective-national aspect—so long as they are not numbered among those who abandon any sense of Jewish identity. Paradoxically, the uncertainty caused by the ongoing and increasing effects of antisemitic and anti-Israel prejudice contains the potential to "bring home" some of the more distant margins of the Jewish collective.

From the analysis above it is clear that some of the demographic processes taking place today have highly problematic implications for the future of Israel and the Jewish Diaspora, and for the interrelations between the two. There is a real need to understand these processes better and to deepen an understanding of their implications. It is therefore essential to establish a forum for monitoring and discussing possible policy initiatives connected directly or indirectly to demographic processes and their conditions. Demography may not be fate, but it is certainly essential to the future existence of the State of Israel and the global Jewish collective.

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Note

1 Parts of this article appeared as: Sergio DellaPergola. 2023. The Future of Jewish Demography. In *The Routledge Handbook of Judaism in the Twenty-First Century*, edited by Dean Bell and Keren Fraiman, 47-67. Abingdon: Routledge.

Demographic Processes in Israel 1948–2022

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This article presents the trends in the demographic development of the population in the western side of the biblical Land of Israel in general and the State of Israel in particular and shows that there is no basis to claims regarding the danger of the Jews gradually becoming a minority in the land. From the moment that the Zionist movement began to translate ideology into action, the positive migration balance was a decisive factor in the formation of a Jewish majority in the land. At the same time, there was a continual negative migration balance among the residents of what came to be the Palestinian Authority, which began in the days of Jordanian rule of Judea & Samaria and Egyptian rule in the Gaza Strip.
Learned opinions that prophesied inevitable failure for the Zionist project relied on fertility and mortality figures relating to the Jewish and Arab inhabitants of the land and ignored the dimensions of Jewish immigration (Aliyah) to Israel. Analysis of the demographic data for the years 1948-2022 shows that since 2016 the overall fertility of Jews in Israel has been higher than that of the Arabs, and the proportion of Jews in the population of the western Land of Israel is expected to increase from the fourth decade of the twenty-first century. According to the CBS, by 2065 the proportion of Arabs in the population of Israel is expected to decline. This trend could become stronger if a negative migration balance emerges among Israel's Arab citizens, as has been the case among the Arabs of Judea & Samaria and the Gaza Strip for many years.

Keywords: demographic development, demographic revolution, fertility, migration, Aliyah, life expectancy, birthrate

Introduction

The purpose of this article is to present trends in the demographic development of the population in the western side of the biblical Land of Israel in general, and of the State of Israel in particular. The article shows that there is no basis for claims regarding the danger of Jews becoming a minority in the land. From the nascent years of Zionist activity, the positive migration balance was a decisive factor in the formation of a Jewish majority in the land. In 1878 the Jews in Palestine numbered 25,011, or 5.83% of the total population (Beinin et al. 2014). Zionist activity brought about a demographic revolution whereby Jews became an absolute majority, and in 1972 they accounted for 64.84%

of all residents of the western Land of Israel, from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean coast (CBS 1987). At the same time, there was a continuation of the negative migration balance among the residents of what would later be termed the Palestinian Authority, which began in the days of Jordanian rule of Judea & Samaria and Egyptian rule in the Gaza Strip.

Nevertheless, there were learned voices that predicted unavoidable failure for the Zionist project. They relied on fertility and mortality figures for the Jewish and Arab residents of the country, while ignoring the dimensions of Jewish Aliyah to Israel, which in the opinion of some, would gradually decline and even disappear. For example, according to Prof. Arnon Soffer, "So without even considering future birth rates, to make up one percentage point today we need an additional 170,000 Jews. Who among us really expects that sort of aliya in the near future?" (Petreanu 1988). Contrary to this opinion, in the years 1988-2023 there were 1,659,491 immigrants to Israel (CBS 2023a).

On the decline in Aliyah, it was written that "the latest available data already show that the rate of incoming immigration declined substantially in October. If this continues to the end of the year, the total number of immigrants to Israel in 2023 will plummet to the level of the years 2018-2019, namely 35,000 immigrants, more or less" (Weinreb 2023, 15). But the reality was different, because "During 2023 some 45,000 new immigrants arrived in Israel"—35.3% higher than the forecast (CBS 2023d).

Analysis of the demographic data for the years 1948-2022 shows that since 2016 the overall fertility of Jews in Israel has been higher than that of Arabs. At the same time, and together with a decline in the Arab birthrate, there has been a rise in mortality due to the aging of the "baby boomer" generation, born in the 1950s and 1960s in Israel, and the 1970s in Judea & Samaria and the Gaza Strip. This has led to a gradual decrease in the natural increase in the Arab population, and the proportion of Jews in the population of the western Land of Israel is expected to increase from the fourth decade of the twenty-first century.

Analysis of the demographic data for the years 1948-2022 shows that since 2016 the overall fertility of Jews in Israel has been higher than that of Arabs.

According to the CBS forecast (CBS 2019), by 2065 the proportion of Arabs in the population of Israel is expected to decline from 21.2% in 2022 to 18.4% according to maximal estimates, or to 19.3% according to the moderate option. The proportion of Arabs in the 0-4 age group in Israel is expected to drop from 23.7% to 14.4%. This downward trend could become stronger if a negative migration balance emerges among Israel's Arab citizens, as is the case among the Arabs of Judea & Samaria and the Gaza Strip.

The first parts of this article present data on the annual growth of Israel's population by sectors, on birthrates, life expectancy and total fertility, with a discussion of the influence of Aliyah to Israel on demographic changes. This is followed by a review of the Arab population of Judea & Samaria and the Gaza Strip plus migration from these areas. Finally, the question is raised of how many Jews and Arabs will be living within the Land of Israel in 2065.

Annual Growth of the State of Israel Population by Sector

According to the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), in 2023 the population of the State of Israel numbered 9,842,000 (CBS 2024a). The wider Jewish population (or the Hebrews) numbered 7,762,700 people, of whom 7,208,300 are Jewish and 554,400 are people who immigrated to Israel in the framework of the Law of Return and are not classified by religion.

The population defined as Arab numbered 2,079,300, of whom 1,783,840 are Muslims, including some 15,000 Tatars (Bernowsky 2009), some 5,000 Circassians and some 295,460 Druze and Christian Arabs. The Christian Arab figures include about 12,000 members of the Aramaic

ethnic group whose nationhood was recognized by the Interior Ministry in 2014 (Halul 2015), as well as some 6,000 Armenians.

In 1996, the gap between the Jewish population (4,616,100 people) and the Arab population (1,037,700 people) was 3,578,400. By 2023 the gap had widened to 5,129,000 people.

The proportion of Hebrews in the population fell from 82.0% in 1996 to a stable 78.9% in the years 2020-2023, while the proportion of Jews fell from 80.2% to 73.2%. A calculation of the polynomial trend shows that the proportion of Jews in the Israeli population will rise towards the second half of the fourth decade of the twenty-first century. The proportion of Muslims out of the total population in Israel rose from 14.6% in 1996 to about 18.1% in 2023, while the proportion of Druze and Christian Arabs fell from 3.4% to 3.0%.

Figure 3 shows that over the past twenty years, the annual growth rate of the Arab population in Israel declined by 33.9%—from 3.01% in 2003 to 1.99% in 2023.

As we shall see later, the constant decline in the annual growth rate of the Arab population in Israel is due mainly to a drop in overall fertility.

In 2023 the Jewish population grew by 1.5%, while in most of the years from 2009 to 2022 the average annual growth rate was 1.70%. Among the Hebrew group, the growth rate in 2023 was 1.83%, compared to 1.48% in 2003. In most of the years from 2013 to 2023 the annual growth rate of the Hebrews remained steady at an average of 1.86%.

Fluctuations in the annual growth rates of the Hebrews in general, and the Jews in particular, were due both to changes in overall fertility and also to changes in the scope of Aliyah to Israel. The annual growth of the Jewish population in the years 2003-2013 was very close to that of the Hebrews, but from 2014 to 2019, the gap between them grew significantly. The annual growth rate of the Hebrews remained steady at an annual average of 1.87%, but at the same time the growth rate of the Jews fell by 13.3%, from 1.88% in 2014 to 1.49% in 2019.

In 2022 there were 74,414 new immigrants, and the rate of growth among the Hebrews was 2.26% that year—some 32.9% higher than the annual growth rate of the Jews, and even 10.2% higher than that of the Arabs. This

Figure 1

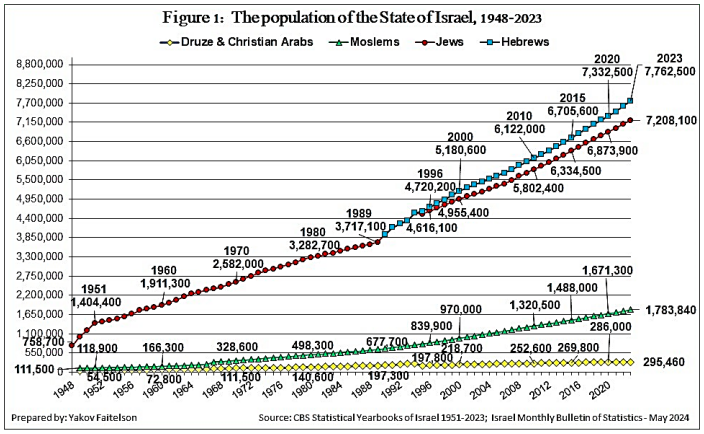


Figure 2

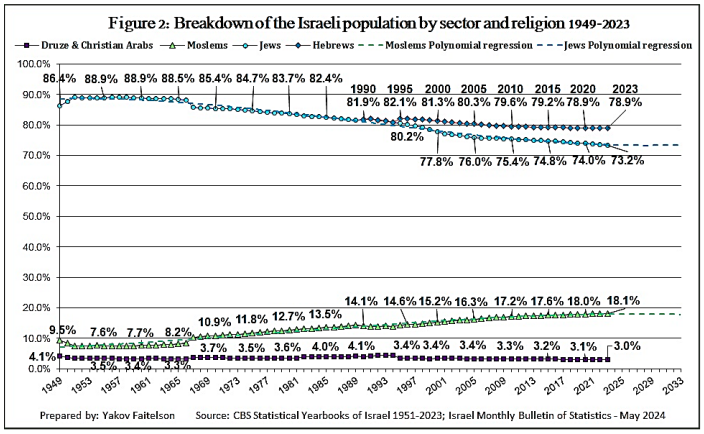
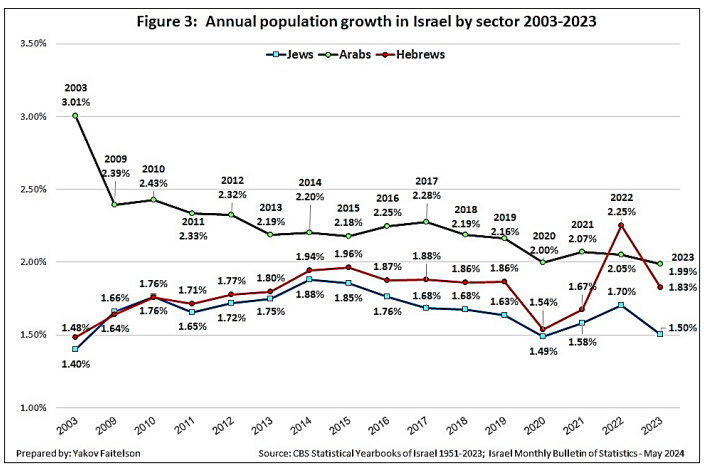


Figure 3



development indicates a trend of increasing numbers of immigrants included in the figures for the population not classified by religion.

Birthrates in Israel by Population Sector

Among the Jews

After 1955 the Jewish birthrate rose by 77.3%, from 42,339 births to 75,066 live births in 1976. From then until the end of the 1980s the number of live births in the Jewish population stabilized at an annual average of about 73,000 live births.

From 1990 onwards, the number of births among Hebrews rose constantly and in 2021 reached an all-time high of 141,237 births, of which 136,120 were to Jewish mothers (CBS 2024b). As of 2023 there were 135,639 live births among Hebrews—a decline of 4.0% in the rate since 2021 but higher by 41.9% than the rate in 2000. Among Jews there were 131,024 births, 3.7% less than the number in 2021 but 42.5% higher than the number in 2000.

As a result of the war that erupted on October 7, 2023, it is reasonable to suppose that there will be a further decline in the birthrate of the Jewish population in 2024. Once the fighting ends and most of the soldiers return home, it is possible to expect the birthrate to rise again—typical of the outcome after every war. For example, after the War of Independence the total fertility rate of Jews rose from 3.43 births per woman in 1949 to 4.02 in 1951.

After that there was a decline in overall fertility, but the trend was reversed after the Six Day War (1967). Prof. Marjorie Honig pointed to the link between the fall in economic activity at the time of the Six Day War in Israel and the drop in fertility, and noted that when money and resources are meager, the birthrate falls (Honig 1974). After the war, the Jewish fertility rate rose for a number of years and then fell, but after the Yom Kippur War (1973) it rose again.

From 1975 to the First Lebanon War (1982), fertility fell and then once again increased after the war. This pattern is expected to be repeated this time as well. “In view of the war currently raging in Israel, the downward trend could be frozen for a few years, particularly among Jews, since an increased birthrate is a common phenomenon after wars” (Weinreb 2023, 10).

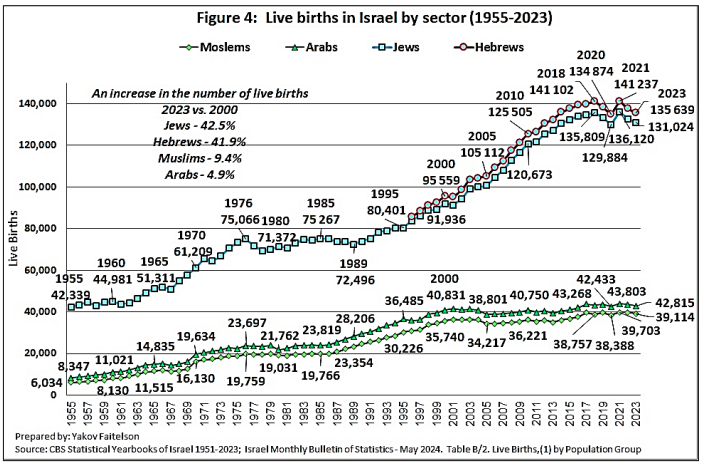
Among the Arabs

From the 1950s to 1976 there was a “baby boom” among the Arab population of Israel. A contributory factor was the health service provided by the state to all residents. The number of Arab live births increased by 183.9%, from 8,347 in 1955 to 23,697 in 1976 (see Figure 4 above). After remaining steady in the years 1976-1985, the birthrate began to rise again, and in the years 2001-2012 stabilized around an average of 40,180 live births per annum.

From 2013 the number of live Arab births began to rise gradually, reaching a record of 43,803 births in 2021 (CBS 2024b). In 2023 the number of births fell to 42,815.

As shown in Figure 5, the average rate of live births among Arabs in the years 1952-1963 was 46.4 per 1000, and in 1964 it reached a record 50.28. After that it consistently declined, down to 34.31 births in 1981. In the years 1984-1994 it stabilized at an average of 32.65 births per

Figure 4



Once the fighting ends and most of the soldiers return home, it is possible to expect the birthrate to rise again—typical of the outcome after every war.

1000, while the rate in 1987 was the lowest for this period—31.36 births.

The birthrate was influenced by the "baby boomer" girls of the 1960s reaching the age of fertility. From 1995 to 2000 the rate of live births in the Arab sector again increased to around 35.50 per 1000. In 1998 it reached the highest rate since 36.25—1980 births, about 93.8% higher than the rate in the Jewish sector—18.70 births. The rate of live births per 1000 in the Arab sector in Israel fell continuously from 2000 to 2013, and stabilized at an average annual level of 23.61 live births until 2016, while since 2018 it has again declined, and in 2023 was down to 20.80 births—42.6% less than the rate in 1998, and only 13.7% higher than the rate among the Jews—18.30 births per 1000 people (CBS, 2024b).

Figure 5

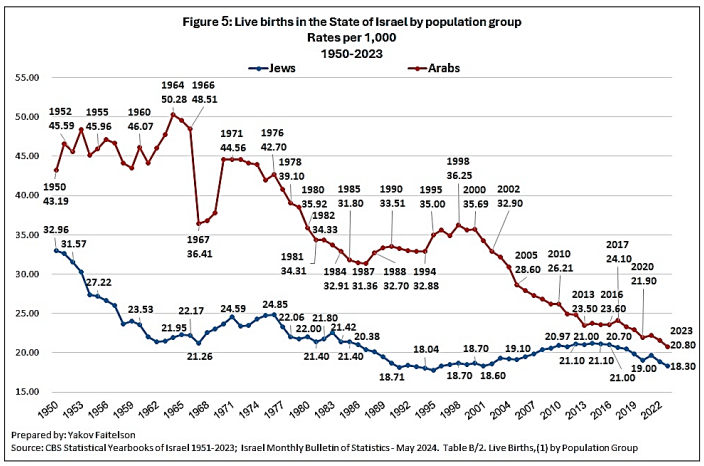
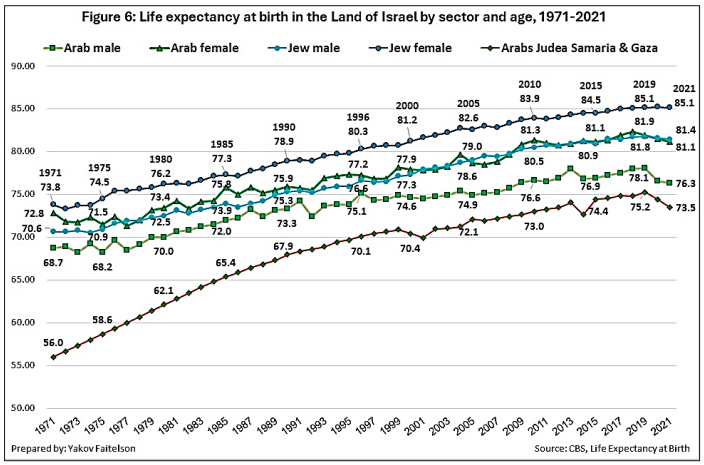


Figure 6



The proportion of Jews in the total live births in the State of Israel in 2023 was 73.42%—10.0% higher than in 2001. Among the Arabs it rose by 9.09%. By contrast, the rate of live births among the Arabs of Israel fell by 20.9% from 2001 to 2023.

Life Expectancy and Total Fertility

"Two mechanisms control the size of a population: life expectancy at various ages and the fertility rate" (Marchetti et al. 1996).

Life Expectancy

According to Figure 6 below, in 2022 the life expectancy for Jewish women was 85.1 years (compared to 80.3 in 1996), and for Jewish men it was 81.5 years (compared to 76.6 in 1996). Life expectancy for Arab women in Israel was 82.1 years (77.2 in 1996), and for Arab men it was 77.5 years (75.1 in 1996) (CBS 2023f).

According to figures from the World Bank, life expectancy for the Arab population in Judea & Samaria and the Gaza Strip in 1996 was 70.1 years, rising to 73.5 in 2021. (World Bank 2023).

From 1971 to 2021 the life expectancy of Jews increased by 15.0% and of Arabs in Israel by 11.0%. In the same period there was an increase in life expectancy of 31.3% among the Arabs of Judea & Samaria and the Gaza Strip; it is probable that this development was due to their exposure to Israeli health services.

Total fertility provides a basis for describing future development in a population group. It is calculated by the number of children born relative to the number of women of child-bearing age in a given year. When total fertility is 2.1 children per women, the population size will remain steady. If it is higher than this rate, the population will grow, and if it is lower, the population will start to shrink.

A decline in total fertility characterizes all populations as they experience social, technological and cultural development of their country, and is particularly linked to a rise in the level of education and the move to crowded urban environments. It has been

defined as a demographic transition in which birthrates gradually fall below mortality rates, the population ages and then gradually shrinks over time.

The peak of total fertility among the Arabs of Israel was in 8.45—1964 children per woman, almost 2.5 times more than the 3.43 children per Jewish woman (CBS 1970). Since then, total Arab fertility has declined and in 1994 stood at 4.10 children per woman—51.5% lower than the 1964 level (Fargues 2000). It rose again in 1998 to 4.40 and since then has constantly declined (see Figure 7).

Total fertility among Jews, which fell to 2.53 children per woman in 1995—its lowest ever level—has been steadily rising. In 2015 the total fertility of Jews and Arabs in Israel was 3.13 children per woman. Since 2016 the total fertility of Jews has been higher than that of Arabs, and in 2018 reached 3.17 children per Jewish woman—the highest rate since 1976. In 2022 the total fertility of Jews was 3.03 children per woman—10.2% higher than that of Arabs (2.75 children per woman) and even of Muslims (2.91 children per woman) (CBS 2023b).

Total fertility is influenced by the scope of migration since it is also a function of the number of women of child-bearing age who immigrate to the country. In 1991 the total fertility of immigrants from the former Soviet Union was 1.31 children per woman—51.5% lower than the total fertility of sabras (native Israelis) (CBS 1999). For that reason, the overall fertility of the Jews in Israel fell from 2.77 children per woman in 1988 to 2.53 children per woman in 1995.

This phenomenon is repeated with each new significant wave of Aliyah. Therefore, calculations referring to the total population of Israel which fail to consider the impact of the demographic features of new immigrant arrivals, create an erroneous picture when used to predict future population size.

In January 2024 it was announced that "during the period of Covid there was a slight rise in fertility rates in Israel, but in 2022 there was a return to the downward trend that began in 2018. The decline in fertility can be seen among Jews, Arabs and others, although fertility in the largest religious populations—Jews and Muslims—remained relatively high" (Taub Center 2024).

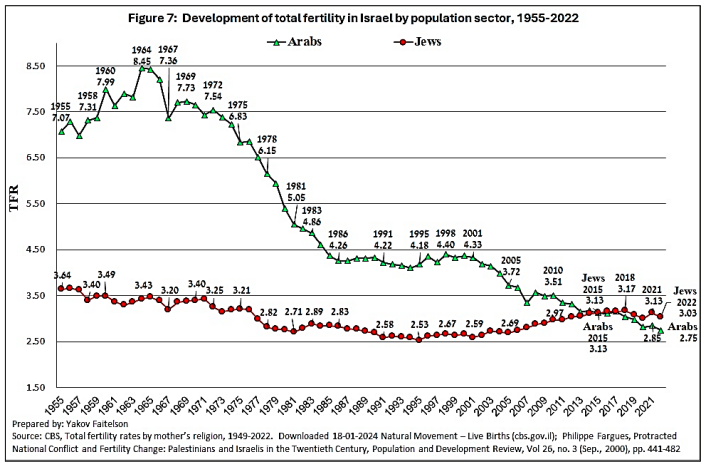
In 2022 the total fertility of Jews was 3.03 children per woman—10.2% higher than that of Arabs (2.75 children per woman) and even of Muslims (2.91 children per woman) (CBS 2023b).

The decline in fertility of the large religious populations did not begin in 2018, and the rise in Jewish fertility during Covid was the outcome of demographic conditions before the outbreak of the pandemic. Figures from the last four years are not a basis for drawing long term conclusions, particularly when the trends among Jews are very different from the trends among non-Jews.

For example, we will compare the developments in fertility of two groups that are less influenced by the balance of migration: Israeli Muslims and sabras, who make up 79.9% of the Jews in Israel (CBS 2023e). As can be seen in Figure 8, until 2017 the total fertility of Israeli Muslims was higher than that of the sabras.

In the period 1978-2005 the total fertility rate of sabras was characterized by ongoing stability, at around 2.78 children per woman.

Figure 7



In 2018, for the first time in the history of Israel, the total fertility of sabras exceeded that of Muslims, and continued to be higher. In 2022 the total fertility of sabras was 3.12 children per woman—7.2% higher than the Muslim rate (2.91 children per woman).

Figure 9 below shows that the total fertility of Arabs fell by 36.5% from 2001 to 2022, from 4.33 children per woman to 2.75, and among Muslims by 38.2%—from 4.71 children per woman to 2.91. The largest drop in fertility in the years 2001-2022 (45.2%) occurred among the Bedouin in the southern region. Among the Druze it fell by 38.7% and among Christian Arabs by 35.9%. By contrast, in the same period the total fertility of Jews rose by 17.0%.

Figure 8

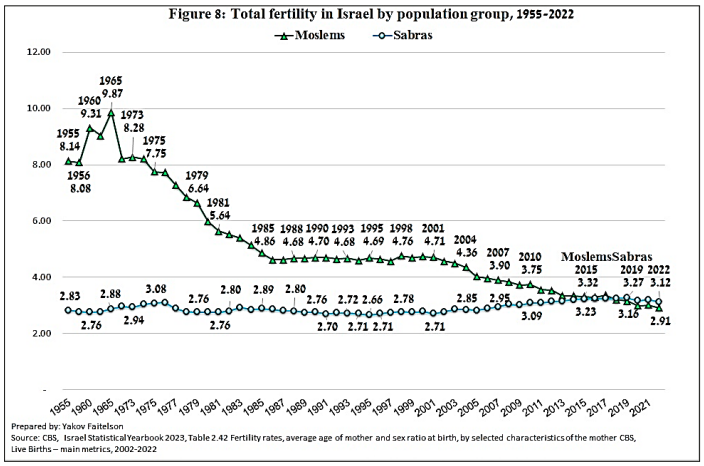


Figure 9

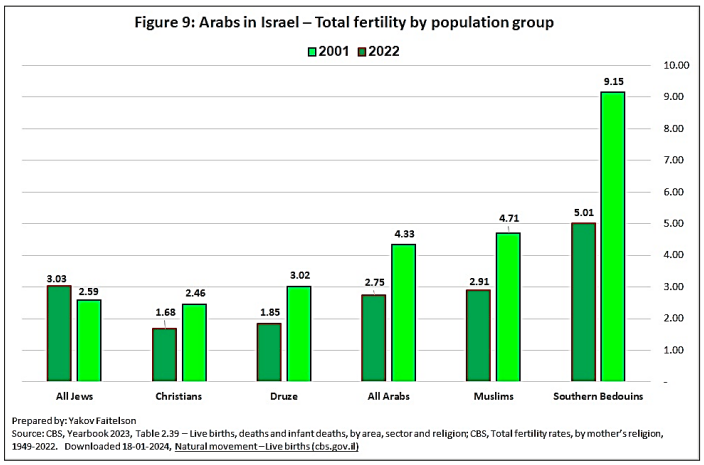
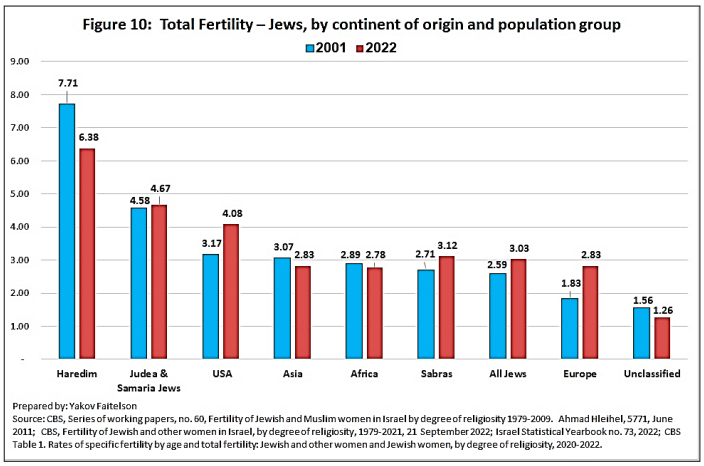


Figure 10



Fertility of Jewish Women in Israel by Continent of Origin and Level of Religiosity

The largest increase in total fertility among population sectors by continent of origin in the years 2021-2022 was among the Jews of European origin—54.6%—who in 2022 constituted 11.8% of the Jewish population. At the same time, total fertility among Jews from the American continent rose by 28.7%, but among Jews from Asia it fell by 7.8%, and by 3.8% for Jews from Africa (CBS 2022).

Following the recent increase in the number of immigrants who are not classified by religion, the total fertility in this group fell by 19.2%.

It is generally believed by the public in Israel that the growth in the Jewish birthrate in Israel is due to the high rate in the Haredi population, and indeed in the period 1981-2001, total fertility among Haredim rose by 37.2%, from 5.62 children per woman to an all-time high of 7.71 children per woman (Hleihel 2011) (See Figure 11 below). This very significant increase followed the taxation reform of the Ben-Shachar Commission, that was approved by the Rabin government in 1975. This reform "changed the method regarding children: instead of tax credits, they moved to a system of child benefits, which were increased" (Lan 2008).

In an annual review of focus groups in the field of sociology, it was reported that, "The major tax reform of 1975 quadrupled the allowances granted until 1969, with each child

from the fourth on receiving a generous sum" (Focus Anthro 2007, 40). A situation was created where the larger the number of children, the less the need for the parents to work to support the family.

According to research by the Bank of Israel in 2009, the decline in birthrate in the years 2004-2007 was mainly due to cutbacks in child benefits:

In the years 2002-2003 there was a turnaround in welfare policy and child benefits were reduced beyond recognition. First the benefit updates were frozen, and then they were reduced by up to 15 percent. This very significant change in the child benefit structure was part of the June 2003 plan for the recovery of the economy (Toledano et al. 2009, 9).

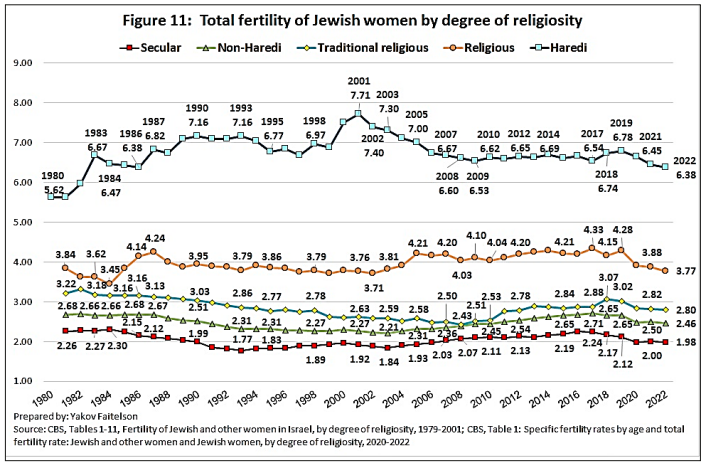
As shown in Figures 10 and 11, total fertility among Haredi Jews in 2009 was 8.9% lower than in 2001, stabilized at an average of 6.64 children per woman until 2020, then fell to 6.38 children per woman in 2022, some 17.25% lower than the 2001 level. Apparently, the reasons for the decline in Haredi fertility rates "are linked to the social, cultural and economic changes affecting Haredi society […] One of the factors' driving change was the sharp reduction in child benefits" (Revhun & Malach 2008).

A similar conclusion was published in a review of focus groups in the field of sociology: "…legislation instituted by Finance Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in 2003 slashed benefits for large families and equalized payments for all children, regardless of birth order (Focus Anthro 2007, 40).

In December 2009 the Bank of Israel published the results of a study: "The research shows that full cancelation of child benefits would lead to a drop in overall fertility of Haredi women and of Bedouin women in the south" (Weiler-Pollack 2009). In 2000 the budget for payment of child benefits was 8.1 billion NIS and by 2008 it had fallen 37% to 5.1 billion NIS.

According to Dr. Gilad Malach, there is another reason for the decline in Haredi birthrates, the postponement of marriage age: "Girls are deciding to study toward a degree and are thus postponing marriage, which affects family size" As cited by Israel Kasnett: "According to forecasts, the fertility rate of the Haredi community, which dropped from 7.5 children per woman to 6.9 between 2003 and 2014, is expected to continue to decline, reaching 5.5 children per woman by 2025 to 2029" (Kasnett 2018).

Figure 11



Following the cuts in benefits, children ceased to be a significant source of income for the family, particularly for Haredim and Arabs in Israel. For that reason, "there was a demographic revolution among the Bedouin after the cuts in child benefits in November 2002 (Bistrov & Soffer 2007, 69). And indeed, total fertility among Haredim fell by 11.7%—from 7.22 children per woman in 2003 to 6.38 in 2022. Nevertheless, total fertility among all Jews rose by 11.0%—from 2.73 children per woman in 2003 to 3.03 in 2022 (CBS 2023b).

Unlike the decline in total fertility among Haredim, in all other Jewish population groups there was actually a rise in overall fertility. The fertility of religious women rose and stabilized at an average of 4.18 children per woman in the years 2005-2019—some 11.2% higher than in 2001, although after 2019 it began to fall and by 2022 had returned to the 2001 level.

Among traditionally religious women, total fertility in 2018 was 16.73% higher than in 2001

(CBS 2023b). From 2019-2022 it fell by 8.79% but was still 6.46% higher than in 2001. The total fertility rate of non-Haredi Jewish women in 2017 was 19.38% higher than in 2001. Among secular women it was 16.66% higher than in 2001. In 2022 the total fertility rate of non-Haredi Jewish women was 9.23% lower than in 2017, and among secular women it was 11.61% lower.

The large waves of Aliyah from countries in the former Soviet Union affected the total fertility rate in Israel, particularly among secular women, and in the years 1984-1993 it fell by 23.0%. This was due to the low total fertility rate that prevailed and still exists in their countries of origin, particularly among the local Jewish communities. Total fertility in Russia in 2022 was 1.42 children per woman, in Belarus 1.50 and in Ukraine 1.27 (World Population Review 2024).

In the years 2016-2022 total fertility among secular women again declined by 11.6% but was still 11.86% higher than the level in 1993 (CBS 2023b). However, the integration of the immigrants into Israeli society affected their fertility rate, which rose by 58.0%—from 1.31 children per woman in 1991 to 2.07 in 2014 (CBS 2016).

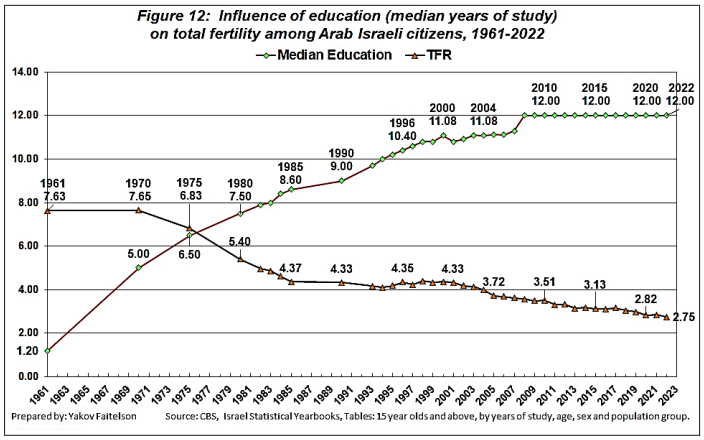
As I noted in a position paper in 2008, another factor that contributed to the fall in total fertility of the Arab population was female education (Faitelson 2008). I quoted a UN report that stated that "The more educated a woman, the fewer children she will bear" (UNFPA 1999). A recent publication stated that "A CBS study found that the higher the education of Bedouin women—the lower their fertility rate" (Kashti 2021).

In 1961 the median education among Israeli Arabs was 1.2 years of study and total fertility was 9.31 children per woman. By 2005 the median education increased to 11 years of study, and total fertility fell to 3.72 children per woman.

In a 2007 forecast I estimated that continuing improvements in the education of Arab women would bring the median education close to that of Jewish women (12.8 years), and accordingly the total fertility of Arab women would continue to fall, becoming close to the rate of Jewish women—2.75 children per woman.

As Figure 12 shows, this forecast was realized: median education for Arabs since 2008 has been 12 years of study, and total fertility was 2.75 children per woman in 2022.

Figure 12



Mortality by Population Groups and the Consequences of the Arab "Baby Boom"

Figure 13 shows that mortality among Israeli Arabs was characterized by a rapid decline in the 1950s and 1960s, and thus contributed to the Arab demographic explosion. The mortality rate fell by 50%, from 11.54 deaths per thousand in 1952 to less than six deaths per thousand towards the end of the 1960s.

The drop in Arab mortality continued at a slightly slower rate until it reached its lowest point—2.67 deaths per thousand in 2014 (CBS 2023c). In 2021 mortality rates among Israeli Arabs began to rise, reaching 3.45 per thousand in 2021—the highest rate for thirty years. In 2022 the rate was 17.2—3.13% higher than in 2014.

The aging of the Arab "baby boomer" generation of the 1950s and 1960s created a wave of deaths. Together with the ongoing fall in birthrates, this accelerated the decline in the natural increase of the Arab population (Petreanu 1988). As Figure 14 shows, in the period 2000-2023 the number of deaths among Arabs in Israel rose by 72.2%—from 3,573 in

2000 to 6,153 in 2023, and among Muslims by 78.4%—from 2,769 to 4,939. Among Jews the number rose by only 26.9%, from 34,203 to 43,415.

In 1989 deaths in the Arab sector accounted for 10.4% of all deaths in Israel, rising to 12.3% in 2023. This trend will intensify over time and also affects the fall in natural increase among Arabs and the drop in their proportion of the Israeli population.

A similar trend is developing, with a delay of about twenty years, among the Arabs of Judea & Samaria and the Gaza Strip. Together with the constant migration of young Arabs and the continuing drop in the birthrate, this could mean that by the middle of the fourth decade of this century the proportion of Arabs in the Land of Israel will fall.

The Arab Population of Judea & Samaria and the Gaza Strip

"Some who estimated the Palestinian population greatly over- or underestimated numbers in accordance with the estimators' political intentions. All of these points must be kept in mind when any statistics on Palestinians are presented, including those presented here. All figures on Palestinian population are estimations." (McCarthy 2001).

According to a CBS census of 1967, the population of Judea & Samaria numbered 585,900 plus 380,800 in the Gaza Strip—a total of 966,700 people. According to the final population estimates of the CBS in 1996, there were a total of 1,238,000 Arab residents in Judea & Samaria, and a further 873,600 in Gaza, a total of 2,111,600 residents (Faitelson 2003).

Thus, from 1967 to 1996 the Arab population of Judea & Samaria increased by 111.2%, or by annual geometric average, by 2.61% per annum, and in the Gaza Strip by 129.4%, or 2.80% per annum. If these growth rates were also true for 1997, then the Arab population of Judea & Samaria would number 1,269,843 plus 898,069 in the Gaza Strip, a total of 2,167,911 residents.

According to a Palestinian census of 1997, the Arab population of Judea & Samaria and the Gaza Strip numbered 2,895,683 (PCBS 1998), including 1,873,476 residents of Judea & Samaria—635,476 individuals or 48.6% more than the CBS figure for the end of 1996. In the Gaza Strip there were 1,022,207—namely 148,607 individuals or 17.0% more than the CBS figure. That means that the Palestinian census figures of 1997 were higher by 784,083 than the CBS figure for the end of 1996. Such a population growth in the space of only one year would not be possible without a serious humanitarian crisis, particularly in a region low in economic and administrative capability.

The PCBS figures for Judea & Samaria also include 193,000 Arab residents of East Jerusalem

Figure 13

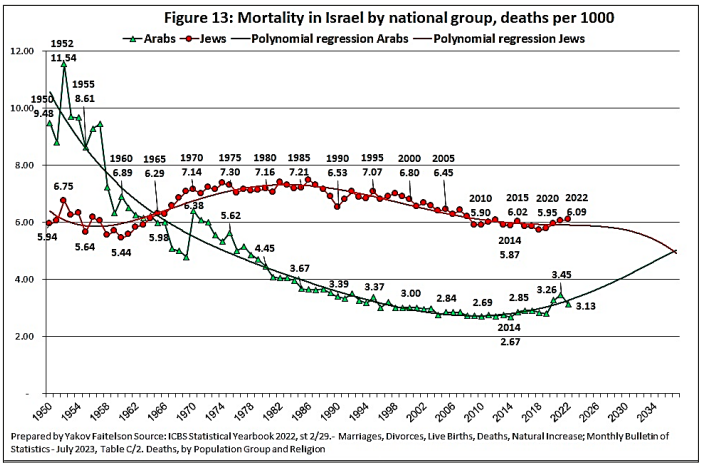
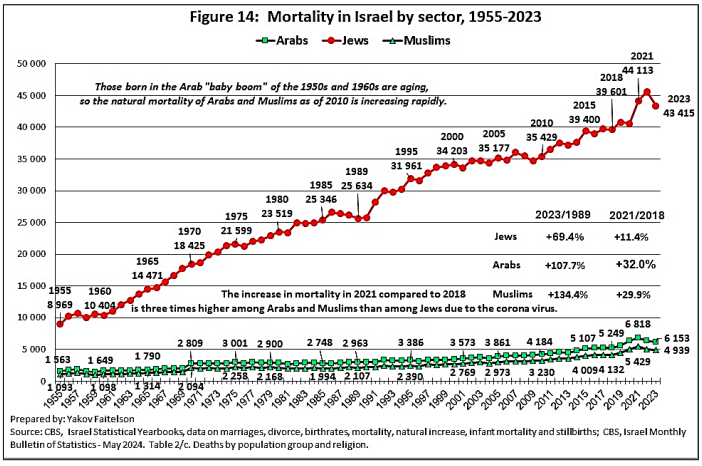


Figure 14



(CBS 1998). The Palestinian Authority also included in its records some 130,000 Arabs who received permanent resident status in the years 1994-2002 in the framework of the family reunification program following marriage to permanent residents in Israel (Rotman 2021).

In a discussion in the Sub-Committee for Judea & Samaria of the Knesset Foreign Affairs & Defense Committee chaired by MK Moti Yogev, on June 7, 2016, representatives of the Civil Administration said that they were only "maintaining" the PCBS figures on the Palestinian population. They also reported that the data includes all those who emigrated from the territories many years ago plus their children born abroad. (Faitelson 2018b). This created a cycle of data laundering, in which the Palestinian Authority figures were sent to the Ministry of Defense and then presented as data from the Israeli government, whose credibility was not in doubt. The reliance on these figures creates a cumulative error leading to mistaken and misleading demographic forecasts.

In fact, demographic data has become a weapon in the Arabs' psychological warfare against Israel. The New York Times quoted Dr. Hassan Abu Libda, the head of the PCBS at that time, in the context of their first population census: "In my opinion, it is as important as the intifada. It is a civil intifada." (Greenberg 1997).

The credibility of the Palestinian population data can be assessed from the following example: On December 21, 2017, the results of the first ever official census of Palestinians in Lebanon were published, showing that there were 174,422 Palestinians in Lebanon, far fewer than the 469,331 registered with UNRWA. According to the Lebanese prime minister at the time, Saad al-Hariri: "This is the real number […] We heard the higher numbers exploited for political [ends] and for sparring [with rivals], the government launched the census, and today we have correct results." (MEMRI 2018).

In response to the census results, the UNRWA spokeswoman in Lebanon Huda Samra told the French news agency that "UNRWA does not have a headcount of Palestinian refugees who are currently residing in Lebanon. What we have as an agency are official registration records for the number of registered Palestine refugees in Lebanon. If someone registered with UNRWA in Lebanon decided to live outside Lebanon, they don't notify us" (AFP 2017).

The falsification of demographic data by Palestinians is not only typical of Lebanon. At a meeting of the Knesset Foreign Affairs & Defense Committee in March 2018, the deputy head of the Civil Administration announced that "the Palestinians include in their population register people who never lived in the West Bank. The Civil Administration believes that the Palestinian Authority issues passports born overseas to Palestinian parents and counts them as Palestinian citizens living under the Palestinian authority" (Berger & Khoury 2018).

Professor McCarthy wrote about the problematic nature of the results of the 1997 Palestinian census already back in 2001: "The census taken by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) was partially a de jure enumeration […]. About 325,253 non-resident Palestinians were included." (McCarthy 2001).

If we deduct the migrants, the residents of East Jerusalem, and the Arabs with permanent resident status in Israel from the PCBS census results, the population of Judea and Samaria and the Gaza Strip could be 2,247,430 in 1997, —135,830 individuals, or 6.5% more than the number published by CBS at the end of 1996. However, this figure is 648,253 less than if we were to base our calculations on the results of the Palestinian 1997 census.

This practice of including migrants in the population registry is in direct contradiction with UN norms. According to these norms, staying outside the country of citizenship for more than 12 months results in the loss of permanent resident status and exclusion from the country's population register. Nevertheless, in Israel, the United States and other countries, authorities continue to rely on the data from UNRWA and the Palestinian Authority when

determining the amount of aid they will provide to fund their activities.

For example, Prof. Arnon Soffer claimed that "In another five years Gaza will have a population of 2.5 million," and that "The number of Palestinians in the West Bank is currently 2.5 million […] In another five years there will be 4 to 5 million Palestinians in Judea & Samaria" (Soffer 2006). This shows that the annual growth rate of the Arabs in Judea & Samaria and Gaza is 10-15% per annum. According to the World Bank, as of 2004, the world's highest annual growth rate was in Eritrea—4.47% (World Bank 2021).

In my article, "Demography—threat or problem?", I quoted from Shalom Achshav (Peace Now)'s 1992 Report no. 5, which stated that "the total number of Palestinians resident in the territories at the start of 1992 was about 1,960,000, of whom 1,200,000 reside in the West Bank and 760,000 in the Gaza Strip. About 260,000 are overseas. Together with the residents of East Jerusalem, at the start of 1992 there were about 1.2 million Palestinians under Israeli rule, including those currently overseas."

In response to this, I wrote:

> According to CBS figures from early 1992, 1,006,200 individuals are living in Judea & Samaria, about 193,800 fewer than the figure quoted by Shalom Achshav. According to the CBS, there were 676,000 individuals in the Gaza Strip, 94,000 less than the Shalom Achshav figure. It appears that Shalom Achshav inflated the numbers actually living in Judea & Samaria and the Gaza Strip in early 1992 with another 547,800 "ghosts" (Faitelson 2003, 4).

At a conference of the AEI Institute in January 2005, an American-Israeli demography research team presented a study on "The one million gap: The Arab population in the West Bank and Gaza." The team's findings matched the conclusions I reached in 2003 (Zimmerman et al. 2006).

Hagai Segal wrote in an article published in the newspaper "Basheva" on January 22, 2004:

> Faitelson […] noted something very strange: during a period of record Aliyah from the former Soviet Union, the Palestinians actually managed to record a bigger record in the expansion of their population here.
> According to their own calculations and UN data, over the nineteen nineties they doubled in number […] within 10 years, 19 percent more than the rate of growth of the Jewish population in those years of welcome immigration. In terms of natural increase this means 7 percent per annum, a fanciful rate by any standard.

I also told Segal that the Palestinian data included not only Arab migrants who had left Judea & Samaria and the Gaza Strip for at least a year but also some who had died, in order to continue enjoying the UNRWA payments received during their lives.

It appears that Shalom Achshav inflated the numbers actually living in Judea & Samaria and the Gaza Strip in early 1992 with another 547,800 "ghosts".

According to a CBS forecast published in 1986, by 2002 there should be some 2.4 million residents living in Judea & Samaria and the Gaza Strip, not including Jerusalem. "The currently accepted assessment in Israel is, as mentioned, three million people. Faitelson wondered from where another 600,000 Palestinians had suddenly appeared" (Segal 2004).

According to the Palestinian census held in 2007, the population of Judea & Samaria, including East Jerusalem, and of the Gaza Strip, was 3,761,126—an increase of 30% over the census results of 1997 (Ettinger 2008). This would indicate an annual growth rate by the

average geometric calculation of 2.66% per annum.

According to the CBS data, at the end of 1996 there were 2,111,125 residents in the Palestinian Authority areas. Based on an annual growth rate of 2.66%, by 2007 this population should be 2,818,000—some 25% less than the figure given by the PCBS.

Figure 16 shows that the PCBS figures are characterized by inconsistencies and discrepancies that recur every year.

As an example, we will only note that the population of Judea & Samaria and the Gaza Strip in 2007 was only 0.8% larger than in 2003, and in effect identical to the number in 2005 (PCBS 2006, 2007; PNA, 2004, 2006a, 2006b; UNRWA 2010).

Figure 15

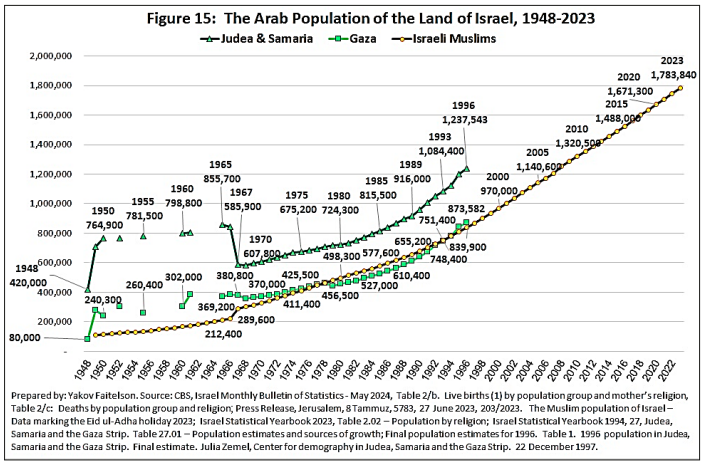
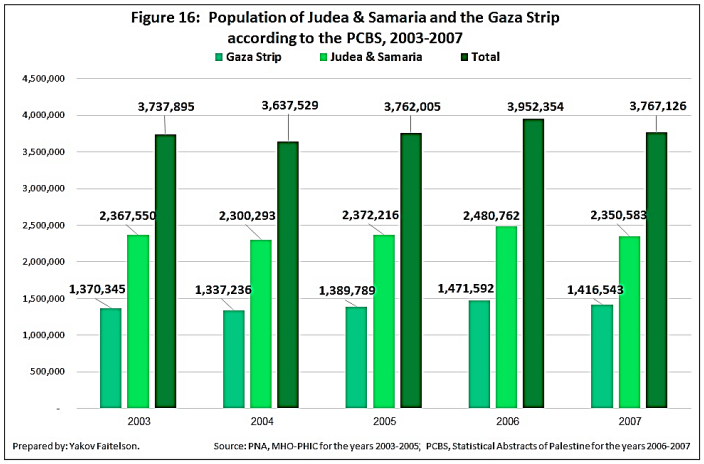


Figure 16



We note that according to the CIA's World Factbook, as of 2023 the population of Judea & Samaria was 3,176,549, of whom 2,471,649 were Arabs, 468,300 were residents of Jewish settlements, and another 236,600 Jews were residents of East Jerusalem (World Factbook 2024). Based on the estimate of Prof. Soffer mentioned above, the Arab population in Judea & Samaria should have reached this level by 2006. According to CIA figures, the population of the Gaza Strip was 2,098,389 in 2023—some 400,000 less than Prof. Soffer's forecast for 2011.

In 2010, reliance on the PCBS data led Prof. Sergio DellaPergola to the following conclusions:

> If we ask when the Jews will lose their majority, then it has already happened. If we combine the Palestinian population of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including foreign workers and refugees, whose numbers have mushroomed in recent years, and ignore Israelis who immigrated under the Law of Return but are not recognized as Jews by the Interior Ministry, then Jews are slightly less than 50% of the population (Shefler 2010).

According to CIA estimates, in 2023 there were 3,176,549 people in Judea & Samaria, including Arab residents of East Jerusalem, and according to their estimate for 2022—there were 468,300 Jews in Jewish settlements in the area, and 236,600 Jews living in East Jerusalem (The World Factbook 2024). And the Arab population of East Jerusalem was 370,500 (Yaniv 2023, 15).

We will deduct from the CIA estimate of 2023 the CBS figures for the Jewish population of the settlements and the East Jerusalem figures for Jews and Arabs, included in the Population Register of Israel. We will also deduct the 161,400 Arab migrants, according to CBS data for 1967-1994, the 231,666 migrants according to Civilian Administration data for 1995-2007, and the 184,065 Arab migrants from Judea & Samaria

according to the USCB for 2008-2022 (CBS 1997, Table 27.1; US Census Bureau 2024. West Bank). Consequently in 2022, the Arab population of Judea & Samaria numbered about 1,524,018 at the most.

According to the CIA estimate of 2023, the population of the Gaza Strip was 2,037,744 (The World Factbook 2024), but these figures include 317,118 people living abroad, including 109,900 migrants according to CBS data for 1967-1993, 108,582 migrants according to Civil Administration data for 1994-2007, and 98,636 migrants according to United States Statistic Bureau data for 2008-2022. If we deduct these numbers from the CIA data, we reach a population of 1,720,626 in Gaza. If we also deduct from the figures obtained from our calculations the 130,000 Arabs in Judea & Samaria and the Gaza Strip with permanent residency status in Israel, then the total population under the PA appears to be 3,245,000 at most.

In 1967 the proportion of Hebrews out of the total population of the western Land of Israel was 64.35%. In 2022, 55 years later, it had fallen to 58.01%. In 1967 Israeli Arabs were 10.60% of this population, rising to 15.52% in 2022. Arabs in Judea & Samaria were 15.82% of this population in 1967, falling to 13.38% in 2022. One of the main reasons for this was the continuing overseas migration of young Arabs from Judea & Samaria. Arabs in Gaza accounted for 10.28% of this population in 1967, rising to 13.09% in 2022.

In the period 1967-2014, the total fertility of the Arabs was higher than that of the Jews, but in 2015 the rates were the same. There was a revolution in the demographic situation in the Land of Israel, and since 2016 the total fertility of the Jews has exceeded that of the Arabs. Since 2020 this rate has also been higher than the total fertility rate of Muslims in the State of Israel.

Total Fertility of the Arabs of Judea & Samaria and the Gaza Strip

The fertility rate of Arabs in Judea & Samaria in 1991 was 6.44 children per woman—149.6% higher than the rate of the Jews, while in Gaza it was 8.13 children per woman—215.1% higher in comparison to 2.58 children per woman among the Jews in Israel (Fargues 2000).

It should be noted that the figures for total Palestinian fertility from different sources, and sometimes even from the same source at different times, significantly contradict each other. I indicated this fact in my article "The development of total fertility in the Land of Israel" (Faitelson 2018a).

For example, according to the PA Ministry of Health in 2005, total fertility in Judea & Samaria and the Gaza Strip fell from 4.39 children per woman in 1999 (4.1 in the West Bank and 5.0 in Gaza) to 4.19 (3.7 and 5.5 respectively) in 2004. Yet the same publication states that total fertility in Palestine according to the PCBS was 5.6 children per woman in 2004 (5.2 and 6.6 respectively). Therefore, the Palestinian Health Ministry figures for 2004 were lower than the PCBS estimates by 29% for Judea & Samaria and 17% for Gaza.

Let us compare the total fertility data from three estimates of the USCB for residents of Judea & Samaria with the figures for Israeli Muslims, and for the residents of Gaza with the total fertility of Egyptians. As can be seen in Figure 17, from 1998 to 2004, the total fertility of Muslims in Israel was higher than the estimates of the USCB for residents of Judea & Samaria. However, its estimates for 2022 and 2023 (the middle and top lines in the diagram) were far higher than the estimates from 2015 (the bottom line in the diagram). (US Census Bureau 2015. West Bank).

The USCB figures from 2022 for total fertility in Judea & Samaria were fairly close to the Israeli CBS figures for Muslims in Israel since 2005. In the years 2010, 2016, 2018, 2019 and 2021 they were identical or only slightly different.

By contrast, the USCB estimates from 2023 for Judea & Samaria were higher than its 2022 estimates, but the diagram shows that until 2012 the gaps between them were relatively small. And yet the USCB estimates from 2023

fell rapidly from 2013 onwards to 3.81 children per woman in 2018. Contrary to this, the total fertility of Israeli Muslims according to the CBS, and of the Judea & Samaria Arabs according to the USCB estimates of 2022 were identical—3.20 children per woman.

Table 18 below shows that according to the estimates of the USCB in 2015, total fertility in the Gaza Strip fell from 5.72 children per woman in 1997 to 5.34 in 2007. (US Census Bureau 2015. Gaza). According to the estimate of 2022, fertility stood at 6.20 children per woman throughout the years 1997-2007, but fell by 42.9% in the years 2007-2021, from 6.20 to 3.54, and according to the estimate from 2023, it fell to 3.60 children per woman. For the purposes of comparison, the total fertility of Muslims in Israel fell by 22.8% in 2021, from 3.90 in 2007 to 3.01.

For most years the USCB estimate of 2015 was far higher than the total fertility of Israeli Muslims and Egyptians. According to this estimate, from 2007 onwards, total fertility in Gaza fell rapidly to 4.24 children per woman in 20.6—2014% lower than the estimate of 2007. According to the 2015 estimate, total fertility in Gaza in 2022 should have been 2.9. The total fertility of Israeli Muslims that year was supposed to be 2.91 and of Egyptians 2.88 (Database. Earth 2024).

The USCB estimates of 2022 and 2023 for total fertility in the Gaza Strip were entirely identical for the years 1997-2013. After that there were some insignificant differences between the two estimates, but in 2022 the total fertility in Gaza, according to the 2023 estimate, was supposed to be 3.50 children per woman—43.5% lower than the level of 1997. The total fertility of Muslims in Israel in 2022 was 35.5% lower than 1997 and in Egypt it was 21.1% lower.

It should be noted that in 2022 the total fertility of Jewish residents of Judea & Samaria was 4.67 children per woman, and of Jewish residents of Jerusalem it was 4.45—far higher than all the USCB estimates regarding the Arabs of Judea & Samaria and the Gaza Strip. From the foregoing it appears that all sources indicate a consistent trend of a decline in fertility of Arabs in all parts of the Land of Israel and in Egypt.

Figure 17

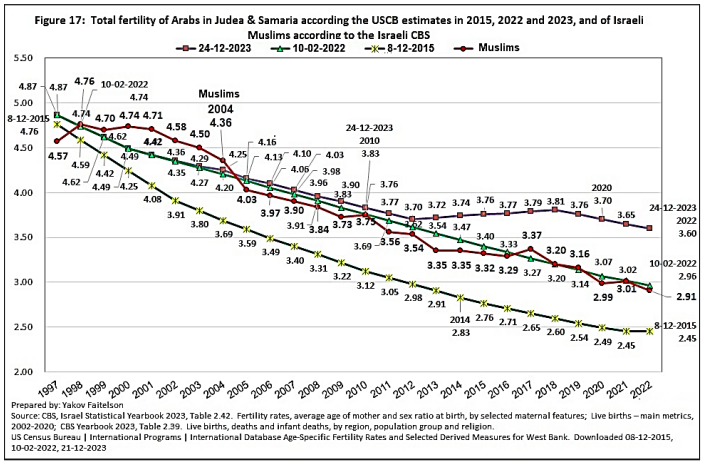
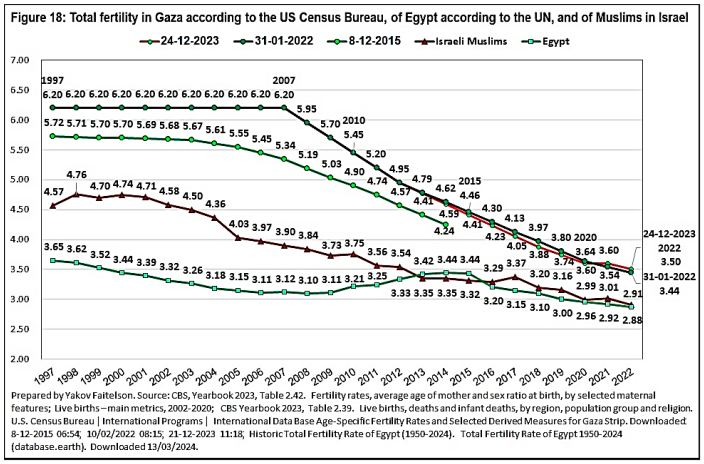


Figure 18

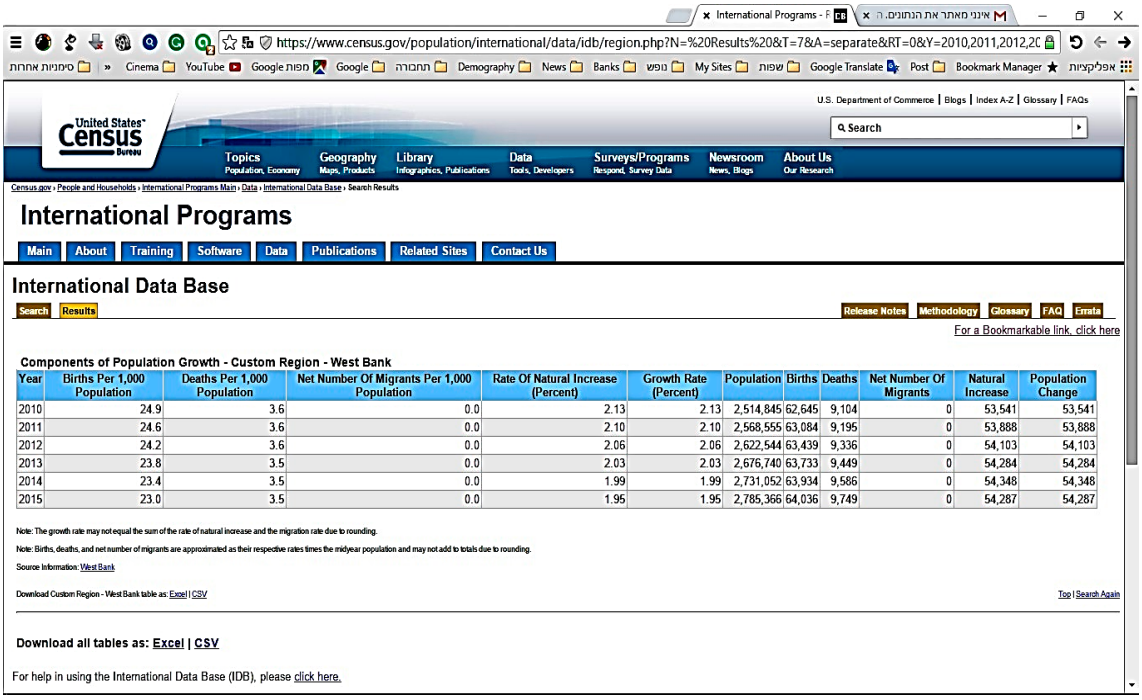


Arab Migration from Judea & Samaria and the Gaza Strip

Arab migration from the Land of Israel did not start in 1967 following Israel's victory in the Six Day War. In all the sources that were examined—the Israeli CBS, the USCB and UN publications—the balance of Arab migration from Judea & Samaria was generally negative, even under Jordanian rule 1950-1966, and in Gaza under Egyptian rule at the end of the 1960s.

According to Prof. Janet Abu-Lughod in 1986, by 1950 some 122,500 Arabs had already moved

Figure 19: Components of Population Growth –West Bank



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Components of Population Growth - Custom Region - West Bank

Year	Births Per 1,000 Population	Deaths Per 1,000 Population	Net Number Of Migrants Per 1,000 Population	Rate Of Natural Increase (Percent)	Growth Rate (Percent)	Population	Births	Deaths	Net Number Of Migrants	Natural Increase	Population Change
2010	24.9	3.6	0.0	2.13	2.13	2,514,845	62,645	9,104	0	53,541	53,541
2011	24.6	3.6	0.0	2.10	2.10	2,568,555	63,084	9,195	0	53,888	53,888
2012	24.2	3.6	0.0	2.06	2.06	2,622,544	63,439	9,336	0	54,103	54,103
2013	23.8	3.5	0.0	2.03	2.03	2,676,740	63,733	9,449	0	54,284	54,284
2014	23.4	3.5	0.0	1.99	1.99	2,731,052	63,934	9,586	0	54,348	54,348
2015	23.0	3.5	0.0	1.95	1.95	2,785,366	64,036	9,749	0	54,287	54,287

Note: The growth rate may not equal the sum of the rate of natural increase and the migration rate due to rounding.

Note: Births, deaths, and net number of migrants are approximated as their respective rates times the midyear population and may not add to totals due to rounding.

Source Information: West Bank

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from Judea & Samaria to the east bank of the Jordan River:

> Nor will the Arab population within Palestine be able to grow indefinitely. Some outmigration, even in the absence of forced expulsion, is inevitable. The tiny Gaza Strip is now one of the most densely settled areas of the world, and there is a limit to its ability to contain more people, even at the appalling levels of subsistence that now prevail. (Abu-Lughod 1986, 12).

According to a 1994 study by Dr. Waal Ennab, from 1952 until May 30, 1967, 88,195 residents left Gaza and 385,294 residents left Judea & Samaria (Ennab 1994). Together with the above estimate, this indicates that 507,794 residents left Judea & Samaria.

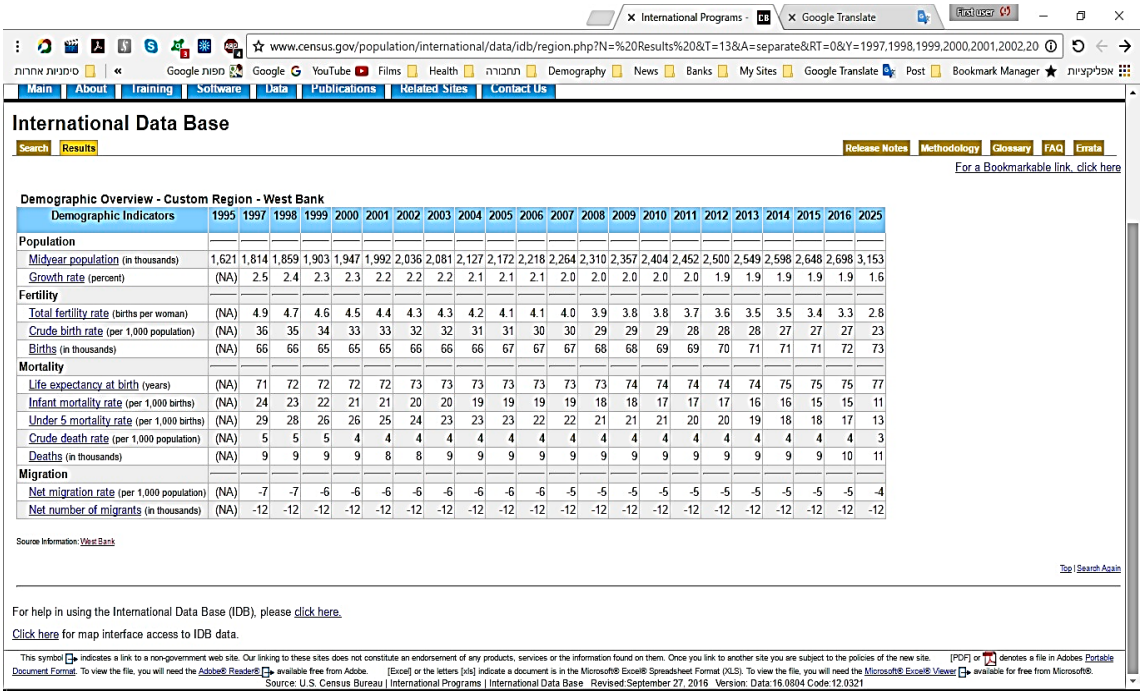
According to UN data, the negative migration balance from Judea & Samaria and the Gaza Strip in the years 1950-1966 totaled 363,399 (United Nations 2022). This balance is close to the figure given by Dr. Ennab as the migration balance from 1952 to May 30, 1967, in Judea & Samaria alone. In this period the total migration balance from Judea & Samaria and the Gaza Strip amounted to 624,348 individuals, of whom 405,766 left Judea & Samaria according to the summary of data from the CBS and the Civil Administration for 1967-2007, and another 218,582 left Gaza.

According to the United Nations, the total negative migration balance from Judea & Samaria and the Gaza Strip in the years 1967-2007 was 531,483 (United Nations 2022).

Dr. Mustafa Khawaja stated that the migration balance for the years 1967-2008 from Judea and Samaria was negative—an average of ten thousand migrants per annum. The balance only became positive during the two Gulf Wars (1991, 2003) and with the arrival of PLO loyalists with their families following the Oslo Accords.

Dr. Mustafa Khawaja stated that the migration balance for the years 1967-2008 from Judea and Samaria was negative—an average of ten thousand migrants per annum. The balance

Figure 20: Demographic Overview – West Bank



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Demographic Overview - Custom Region - West Bank

Demographic Indicators	1995	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2025
Population																						
Midyear population (in thousands)	1,621	1,814	1,859	1,903	1,947	1,992	2,036	2,081	2,127	2,172	2,218	2,264	2,310	2,357	2,404	2,452	2,500	2,549	2,598	2,648	2,698	3,153
Growth rate (percent)	(NA)	2.5	2.4	2.3	2.3	2.2	2.2	2.2	2.1	2.1	2.1	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	1.9	1.9	1.9	1.9	1.9	1.6
Fertility																						
Total fertility rate (births per woman)	(NA)	4.9	4.7	4.6	4.5	4.4	4.3	4.3	4.2	4.1	4.1	4.0	3.9	3.8	3.8	3.7	3.6	3.5	3.5	3.4	3.3	2.8
Crude birth rate (per 1,000 population)	(NA)	36	35	34	33	33	32	32	31	31	30	30	29	29	29	28	28	28	27	27	27	23
Births (in thousands)	(NA)	66	66	65	65	65	66	66	66	67	67	67	68	68	69	69	70	71	71	71	72	73
Mortality																						
Life expectancy at birth (years)	(NA)	71	72	72	72	72	73	73	73	73	73	73	73	74	74	74	74	74	75	75	75	77
Infant mortality rate (per 1,000 births)	(NA)	24	23	22	21	21	20	20	19	19	19	19	18	18	17	17	17	16	16	15	15	11
Under 5 mortality rate (per 1,000 births)	(NA)	29	28	26	26	25	24	23	23	23	22	22	21	21	21	20	20	19	18	18	17	13
Crude death rate (per 1,000 population)	(NA)	5	5	5	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	3
Deaths (in thousands)	(NA)	9	9	9	9	8	8	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	10	11
Migration																						
Net migration rate (per 1,000 population)	(NA)	-7	-7	-6	-6	-6	-6	-6	-6	-6	-6	-5	-5	-5	-5	-5	-5	-5	-5	-5	-5	-4
Net number of migrants (in thousands)	(NA)	-12	-12	-12	-12	-12	-12	-12	-12	-12	-12	-12	-12	-12	-12	-12	-12	-12	-12	-12	-12	-12

Source Information: West Bank

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only became positive during the two Gulf Wars (1991, 2003) and with the arrival of PLO loyalists with their families following the Oslo Accords. The negative migration balance in Judea & Samaria amounts to about 410,000 individuals (Khawaja 2010).

The Channel 20 program "This is the Day" mentioned a report by the Arabic daily Al Quds stating that "At least 400,000 young Arabs have moved abroad from Judea & Samaria in recent decades" (Liel 2019), although publications of the USCB for the period 1997-2015 stated that the migration balance from Judea & Samaria and the Gaza Strip was zero.

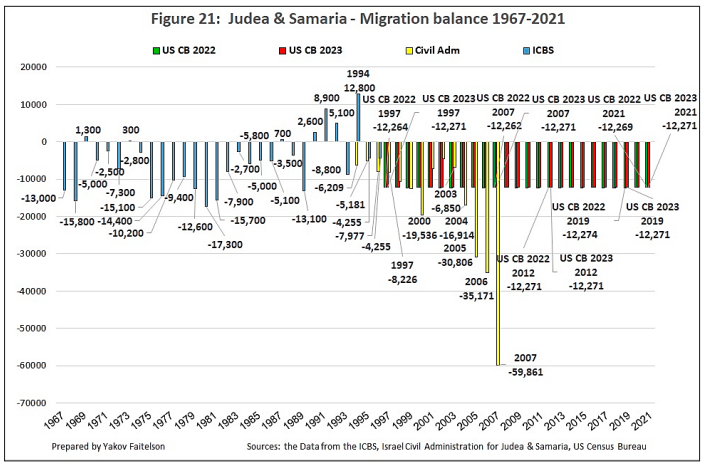
It was only starting in 2016 that the USCB began retroactive publication of data showing a negative migration balance for Judea & Samaria and the Gaza Strip since 1997. But the publication for 2016 showed a negative balance from Judea & Samaria for every year since 1997, and the forecast up to 2025 showed the same number—12,000 migrants (see Figure 20—a screen shot from the USCB website giving the correct figures for 27 September 2016).

Below are figures for migration from Judea & Samaria (Figure 21) and the Gaza Strip (Figure 22) for the years 1967 to 2021.

The most striking fact is that there are considerable differences regarding the scope of Arab migration from Gaza Strip in the assessments for 1997-2021 published by the USCB in 2022 and 2023.

Let us compare these estimates with the data from the Civil Administration and from the UN for the years 1997-2021 (see Table 1 below). According to the Civil Administration, the migration balance in the period 1997-2007 amounted to 309,361 individuals, of which

Figure 21



212,299 were from Judea & Samaria and 97,062 from Gaza.

According to the USCB assessments from 2023, the total migration balance in this period was 24.0% lower at 234,987 individuals. Out of this, the number of migrants from Judea & Samaria was 36.4% lower at 134,981, while the migration balance from the Gaza Strip was 100,006 individuals, 3.0% higher than the Civil Administration data (US Census Bureau 2024).

According to UN data for those years, 229,532 residents left the Palestinian Authority areas (United Nations 2022).

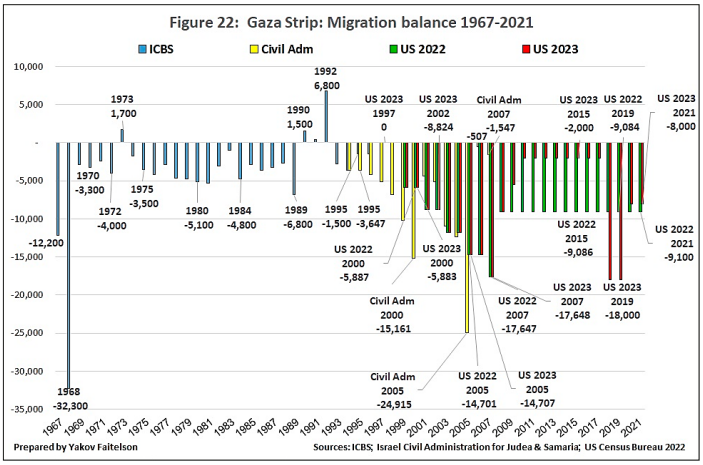
What is particularly striking is that the Civil Administration data clearly reflect the impact of political and security developments in Judea & Samaria and the Gaza Strip following the clashes between Hamas and the PLO leadership in 2005-2007.

The negative migration balance in Judea & Samaria reached a peak of 59,861 in —2007 93.7% higher than in 2005, and 69.7% higher than in 2006. But strangely enough, according to the USCB, in the years 1997-2022 the number of migrants leaving Judea & Samaria was more or less the same each year, at around 12,271 per annum. The USCB data on the Gaza Strip recur every two years.

According to the Civil Administration, the negative migration balance in Gaza in 2005 was 24,915 individuals, in 2006 it was only 507, and in 2007 it was 1,547. But according to the 2022 USCB estimate, in 2005-2006 the figure was 14,701 residents per annum, in 2007, 17,647 and in the years 2008-2021, an average of 9,091 each year. Yet according to the assessment from 2023, the balance was 5,545 in 2009; in the years 2010-2017 it was fixed at around 2,000 per annum; in the years 2018-2019 it was 18,000, and 8,000 individuals in each of the years 2020-2022.

A summary of the CBS 1997 negative migration data from Judea & Samaria and the Gaza Strip for the period 1967-1993, the data from the Civil Administration for the years 1994-2007, and the USCB data for the years 2008-2021

Figure 22



gives 878,878 individuals, of whom 577,660 were from Judea & Samaria and 301,218 from Gaza.

According to UN data, the negative migration balance from Judea & Samaria and the Gaza Strip from 1967 to 2021 was 861,096 (United Nations 2022), but in 2020 and 2021 it was 12,369 per annum, matching the data of the USCB for Judea & Samaria only.

If we add to the UN data the assessment of the USCB for 2020-2021 for Gaza we will see that the total migration balance according to the UN for the period 1967-2021 totaled 877,096—only 0.2% lower than the total of the figures from the CBS, the Civil Administration and the USCB as presented above.

How many Jews and Arabs will be living in the Land of Israel in 2065?

In a discussion at the Foreign Affairs & Defense Committee of the Knesset in May 2018 the CBS presented its demographic forecast for Israel until 2065, that stated:

> No significant changes are expected in the proportion of Jews & others and Arabs in the total population […] In another 50 years (in 2065) the share of Jews & others is expected to rise to 81%, the share of the Arabs is expected to fall to 19% […] The share of Arab

Table 1: Migration Balance from Judea & Samaria and the Gaza Strip

Year	US CBS 2022			US CBS 2023			Civil Administration			The UN
	Judea & Samaria	Gaza Strip	Total	Judea & Samaria	Gaza Strip	Total	Judea & Samaria	Gaza Strip	Total	Total
1997	-12,264	-	-12,264	-12,271	0	-12271	-8,226	-5,141	**-13,367**	10,417
1998	-12,268	-	-12,268	-12,271	0	-12271	-10,666	-6,808	**-17,474**	-13,145
1999	-12,275	-5,878	-18,153	-12,271	-5,883	-18154	-12,549	-10,219	**-22,768**	-13,857
2000	-12,266	-5,887	-18,154	-12,271	-5,883	-18154	-19,536	-15,161	**-34,697**	-11,501
2001	-12,265	-8,828	-21,093	-12,271	-8,824	-21095	-7,224	-4,352	**-11,576**	-25,657
2002	-12,274	-8,822	-21,096	-12,271	-8,824	-21095	-4,496	-5,101	**-9,597**	-35,034
2003	-12,273	-11,762	-24,035	-12,271	-11,765	-24036	-6,850	-10,940	**-17,790**	-35,960
2004	-12,263	-11,771	-24,034	-12,271	-11,765	-24036	-16,914	-12,371	**-29,285**	-32,854
2005	-12,264	-14,701	-26,965	-12,271	-14,707	-26978	-30,806	-24,915	**-55,721**	-28,157
2006	-12,278	-14,703	-26,981	-12,271	-14,707	-26978	-35,171	-507	**-35,678**	-23,450
2007	-12,262	-17,647	-29,909	-12,271	-17,648	-29919	-59,861	-1,547	**-61,408**	-20,334
2008	-12,260	-9,094	-21,354	-12,271	-9,091	-21362				-23,981
2009	-12,273	-9,092	-21,365	-12,271	-5,545	-17816				-25,908
2010	-12,280	-9,090	-21,370	-12,271	-2,000	-14271				-26,350
2011	-12,279	-9,086	-21,365	-12,271	-2,000	-14271				-26,662
2012	-12,271	-9,095	-21,366	-12,271	-2,000	-14271				-26,918
2013	-12,281	-9,091	-21,372	-12,271	-2,000	-14271				-26,976
2014	-12,259	-9,085	-21,344	-12,271	-2,000	-14271				-27,076
2015	-12,281	-9,086	-21,367	-12,271	-2,000	-14271				-22,904
2016	-12,270	-9,098	-21,368	-12,271	-2,000	-14271				-22,774
2017	-12,278	-9,099	-21,377	-12,271	-2,000	-14271				-25,452
2018	-12,280	-9,088	-21,368	-12,271	-18,000	-30271				-25,137
2019	-12,274	-9,084	-21,358	-12,271	-18,000	-30271				-24,737
2020	-12,261	-9,087	-21,348	-12,271	-8,000	-20271				-12,369
2021	-12,269	-9,100	-21,369	-12,271	-8,000	-20271				-12,369
2022				-12,271	-8,000	-20271				-12,369

> children who constituted 25% of the 0-14 age group in 2015 will fall to 15% in another 50 years (CBS 2017, 1).

In June 2021 a conference was held on "Demography and National Security: Rethinking," initiated by the Institute for National Security Studies and the Azrieli Center for Israel Studies at the Ben-Gurion Institute for Israel Research. At this conference Prof. Sergio DellaPergola presented a diagram showing the demographic forecast for 2065, whereby the population of the Land of Israel would number 30 million people. Three scenarios were presented: the population of the State of Israel only, the population of Israel plus Judea & Samaria, and all these together with the population of the Gaza Strip. According to Prof. DellaPergola:

> In the territory of the State of Israel […] the Jewish population including non-Halakhic Jews is around 80%, both today and probably for the coming decades […] If we repeat the same calculation for the unit of Israel plus Judea & Samaria in round figures the percentage of Jews is about 60%, and

> this too is fairly stable […] and will remain so in the future […] The third scenario including Gaza […] gives us around 50-60% (INSS Israel 2021).

Based on these estimates, by 2065 the Hebrew population will number 15 million, Israeli Arabs will number about 3,750,000 constituting 12.5% of the total population of the Land of Israel, there will be 6,250,000 Arabs in Judea & Samaria, representing 20%, and 5 million Arabs in Gaza—16.7%.

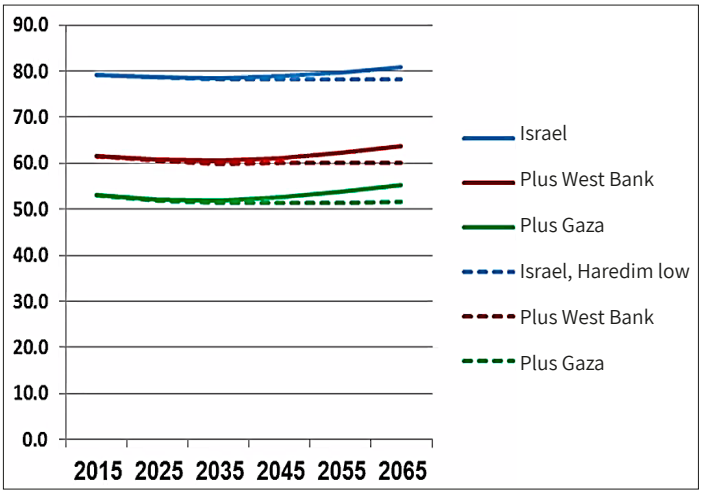
The implication is that contrary to Prof. DellaPergola's previous estimates, the share of the Jewish population is likely to drop to half of the total population in the western Land of Israel only in the fourth decade of the twenty-first century. As shown by his diagram (Figure 23 above), the proportion of Jews will even approach 55% (at least) of this total in 2065.

But reality is complex, and it is wrong to rely on purely mathematical calculations when preparing long term demographic forecasts. In my estimation, in addition to the continuing fall in the Arab birthrate and the rise in mortality, the trend of overseas migration among Israeli Arabs will rise, similar to the existing trend among the residents of Judea & Samaria and the Gaza Strip. One of the factors that could influence this process is the range of options created by the Abraham Accords and changes in the migration policies of the Gulf Emirates and the Saudi kingdom.

The Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman has called on Israeli Arabs to come to live and work in Saudi Arabia. Dr. Shay Attias quotes a senior journalist in the Kingdom: "The best way to improve relations between Israel and Saudi Arabia is to enable Israeli Arabs to work in the Gulf, and thus build bridges between the countries" (Attias 2019).

In an article "How the Jewish majority in Israel will increase," I gave a forecast for the year 2065 whereby the Israeli population could reach 18,234,206, composed of 15,369,916 Hebrews and 2,864,206 Arabs (Faitelson 2020). Assuming

Figure 23. Population Forecasts: Percentage of Jews (Including Non-Jews Under the Law of Return, Without Foreign Workers and Refugees) of the Total Population of Israel and Palestine, with Various Borders, 2015-2065



that the negative migration balance remains at the average level of the past twenty years, that the drop in total fertility increases, and that population aging leads to greater mortality rates—the Arab population in Judea & Samaria and the Gaza Strip would be around 2.6 million.

Thus, the total population of the Land of Israel could be about 20,834,000 in 2065, and not 30 million as predicted by Prof. DellaPergola. In this case, Jews would account for 73.8% of the total population of the Land of Israel, while the Arabs of Israel would account for 13.7%, and the Arabs of Judea & Samaria and the Gaza Strip would be 12.5%.

Summary

Two main factors characterize demographic development in the Land of Israel—natural movement and the migration balance of both Jews and Arabs.

From the early days of Zionist settlement, the Arab birthrate in the Land of Israel was higher than the Jewish birthrate. In 2016 there was a reversal and the total fertility of the Jews exceeded that of the Arabs. The downward trend in fertility of the Arab population, which is adopting patterns of demographic behavior typical of modern educated groups,

is happening simultaneously with the aging of the Arab "baby boomer" generation of the 1950s and 1960s in Israel and the 1970s in Judea & Samaria and the Gaza Strip.

Analysis of developments among the various population groups indicates an increase in the proportion of Jews and a decrease in the proportion of Arabs among the total population of the State of Israel since the 1930s. Based on the intermediate option of the CBS forecast for 2065, the rate of live births among the Arabs will fall from 22.8% in 2016 to 13.9% of all births in the State of Israel in 2065 (CBS 2018).

The proportion of Arabs among the total population of Israel is expected to fall from 21.1% in 2022 to 18.4% according to the higher estimation, or 19.3% according to the intermediate option (CBS 2018). The proportion of Arabs in the 0-4 age group is expected to decline accordingly, from 23.7% to 14.4% (CBS 2019).

According to Dr. Youssef Courbage of the Institut national des études démographiques INED:

> The recent demographic history of Israel and Palestine is characterized by an inversion of demographic trends. For Palestinians, demographic transition and fertility decrease have accelerated, against all odds… For Israeli Jews, on the contrary, fertility is now increasing, for the total population and mainly in the areas of frictions, the West Bank and Jerusalem...it is difficult to imagine how the Palestinians might be able to reverse their present declining population trends. Maybe not the least of the paradoxes is that they have renounced demography as a way to safeguard their land at a moment where their "population explosion" is still making the headlines of the news. (Courbage 2014, 474-475).

Three factors reinforce the success of the Zionist project:

- Total Jewish fertility is currently higher than that of Arabs in the State of Israel, and of Muslims in particular. The total fertility of the residents of Jewish settlements in Judea & Samaria and in Jerusalem is higher than the total fertility of the Arabs of Judea & Samaria and the Gaza Strip.
- Waves of Jewish immigration recur against a background of outbursts of antisemitism all over the world, particularly in countries where there are large, well established Jewish communities.
- The accomplishments of the State of Israel and the amazing advances of its economic, technological and security achievements attract young Jews.

Prof. Yakov Faitelson holds a master's degree in mathematics from the Polytechnic Institute of Kaunas in Lithuania. A seasoned demographer, Faitelson has been immersed in the study of demography in Israel since 1986. His expertise is further evidenced by his role as an adviser to the Dahaf company on demography in 1988.

Faitelson is the author of "Demographic trends in the Land of Israel, 1800-2007" (2008), "The Demographic trends and their implications for the education system in Israel" (2011), "Does population density threaten Israel?" (2018), and other papers published in Hebrew in the framework of the Israeli Institute for Zionist Strategies (2007-2018).

His research papers were published in Russian in the framework of the Institute of Israeli and Middle Eastern Studies (Moscow, Russian Federation, (2007-2019), and in English in the framework of the Middle East Quarterly (2009-2020), among other publishers.

In 2013, the International Solomon University in Kyiv, Ukraine, bestowed upon him an honorary professorship in recognition of his scholarly contributions. faitelson.yakov@gmail.com

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Israel as a Demographic Anomaly: Between Europe and the Middle East

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Israel has a heterogeneous population with a combination of especially high life expectancy and a fertility rate that is well above replacement level. It is therefore seen as a demographic anomaly compared to Western countries. While Israel sees itself as part of the West in many respects—in terms of culture, scientific research, technological advancement, governance and the economy, which in recent years has equaled and even surpassed many European countries in per capita GDP—its demography sets it apart. This paper argues that the key to understanding Israel's unique demographic profile lies in changing the point of reference from the West to the Middle East. From this perspective, demographic trends in Israel are not at all exceptional, and to some extent even expected. Fertility levels and trends in Israel have more in common with those of its neighboring countries than of Europe, as does the low percentage of births occurring outside of marriage. Although life expectancy in Israel is among the highest in the world, patterns of cause-specific mortality are closer to those of the Gulf States (among Arabs) and the Mediterranean Basin (among Jews). Contrary to familiar patterns in the West, mortality rates among low socioeconomic status groups in Israel, such as the Haredi (Ultra-Orthodox) population, are especially low. Patterns of immigration to Israel over the past two decades have also become more like those in the Gulf States than in Europe, due to the decline in Aliyah and the rise in labor migration, almost all of which is directed at the secondary labor market. Recent years have marked a demographic turning point in Israel. Against the backdrop of political instability and external shocks, including the Covid pandemic and the October 7 war, further demographic challenges may lie ahead.

Keywords: Demographic trends, Israel, Middle East, mortality, fertility, migration, uncertainty.

Introduction

Israel is facing a demographic turning point. In the last five years there have been unexpected changes in each of the fundamental components of demography—fertility, mortality and migration—which shape the size and composition of the population (Weinreb 2023). For the first time since the early 2000s, the total fertility rate has begun to fall in all major subgroups of the population. The trend of rising life expectancy was interrupted by the Covid pandemic and the October 7 war. Although these are external shocks whose impact is temporary, they could mark the beginning of a new era, characterized by growing uncertainty and changes in the mix of causes of death. Immigration to Israel has increased unexpectedly since 2022 against the backdrop of war in Ukraine, but there is also growing concern over native-born Israelis leaving the country due to the ongoing political crisis. All of these factors cast doubt on the validity of population forecasts in Israel, whose basic assumption is that past demographic trends will continue into the future or undergo very gradual change.

Moreover, Israel has a unique demographic profile, combining an exceptionally high life expectancy with a total fertility rate that is well above replacement level, and all this in a high-immigration country whose population is religiously and ethnically diverse. In other words, Israel's unique combination of demographic features—what we might term "Israeli exceptionalism"—makes demographic predictions very challenging even in the absence of external and unexpected crises. Demographic theories tend to favor generalizations over time and space. Demographic Transition Theory in particular describes the decline in mortality and fertility rates that occurs during the transition from pre-industrial to industrial societies (Notestein 1945). Although this theory remains widely accepted as a general framework for understanding long-term population change, growing attention has been given to variation between countries and regions of the world in the pace at which demographic rates change, how much they decline, and whether they reach a new point of equilibrium (Kirk 1996). In light of this understanding, regional and cross-country models have been developed to capitalize on past trends in similar countries and to recognize the demographic, social, and economic differences between societies (Rogers 1975; Raftery et al. 2012). However, due to Israel's unique demographic profile and geopolitical location between East and West, there is no clear reference group of countries from which conclusions can be drawn regarding its future trends.

Although many Israelis tend to view Israel as part of the West in many respects—in its economy, scientific research, technological advancement, and form of government—it remains exceptional in its demographic patterns and trends compared to Western countries. It therefore faces fundamentally different demographic challenges to those faced by most Western societies. In this paper we review the gap that has arisen in recent decades between Israel's demography and that of other high-income countries; as an alternative to the Western-European model, we compare Israel's demographic trends to those of its neighboring countries and the Middle East region in general. Our argument is that from this perspective, demographic patterns and trends in Israel are no longer anomalous, and to a large extent are even foreseeable. First, we briefly review Demographic Transition Theory as a general framework for understanding long-term population changes. Next, we provide an overview of key demographic trends in Israel in international perspective, with particular emphasis on Western and Middle Eastern countries. The paper concludes with a discussion of Israel's expected demographic challenges and their social, economic, and political implications. Nevertheless, despite the important role that Israel's demographic makeup plays in shaping the balance of power

between groups in society, it should not be construed as destiny (Sasson & Harpaz 2023).

Demographic Change: A European Model for the Middle East?

The transition from a pre-industrial to a post-industrial society is accompanied by extensive demographic change. According to Demographic Transition Theory, this transition is characterized by a sharp drop in mortality rates, followed by a decline in the birth rate, and in the interim the population grows rapidly (Notestein 1945). Ultimately, birth rates catch up with the low mortality rates and a new equilibrium is achieved, with no significant demographic growth thereafter. This description is based on the European experience in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, although there is substantial variation in the starting points and pace of change in demographic rates across European societies. Many of the social changes associated with modernity have been linked to the demographic transition, including urbanization, reduced gender differentiation, population aging, and decentralization of political power (Dyson 2010). The theory does not refer directly to migration (Fargue 2011), though rapid population growth is thought to induce pressure on resources, which in Europe were previously resolved by rapid urbanization and massive migration to the "New World."

Demographic Transition Theory attracted a range of criticisms leading to several reformulations. The main controversy revolved around two central issues. The first was the question of causation, i.e. what causes demographic transitions, how demographic processes interact, and whether these processes occur independently of one another or in a predictable order. With few exceptions, such as Hungary and Bangladesh, the empirical record shows that a decline in mortality is a necessary precondition to the decline in fertility (Angeles 2010; Kirk 1996). At the same time, considerable variation was found between countries in the time lag between mortality and fertility decline. The pace at which these processes unfolded had decisive implications for population growth. In the first half of the nineteenth century, for example, the rate of natural growth at the height of the demographic transition was three times higher in England than in France (Mateos-Planas 2002). In other words, apart from the decline in mortality, the decline in fertility was also influenced by economic, social, and cultural factors, and the question of which of those factors was most important sparked lengthy debates in the demographic research literature (Cleland & Wilson 1987).

The second controversy concerned the nature of the theory and whether it was formulated as a historical description ("it happened in some societies") or as a predictive model ("it will happen in every society experiencing modernization") (Kirk 1996). This criticism was relevant for Europe, but even more strongly for developing economies after World War II. The theory was formulated after the demographic change had been observed almost in full in most European countries, and the widespread assumption was that a new equilibrium would ultimately be regained between death and birth rates, though at a much lower level than in the pre-industrial stage. But while the theory assumed that fertility rates would stabilize around replacement level—the average number of births per woman needed to replace the parents' generation[1]—in fact this rate continued to fall in the last quarter of the twentieth century, resulting in negative natural growth rates in many European countries (Kohler et al. 2002). This later trend was ascribed to cultural changes common to Western Europe, key among them were the adoption of post-materialist values, individualism, and self-actualization outside of the family (Lesthaeghe 2014). This new and unexpected turn was termed the "Second Demographic Transition," and a new stage was added to the original theory.

While the controversy in Europe focused on the last stage of the demographic transition,

in non-Western countries it revolved around all stages of the transition. Demographic Transition Theory was formulated around the experience of countries in Western and Northern Europe, which in spite of the differences between them, experienced the transition over a unique historical period characterized by industrialization, modernization, economic growth, rising literacy rates, and improved sanitation (Szreter 2004). But in the decades following World War II, many other countries—including those of the Middle East—experienced demographic transitions apart from many of these social processes. Moreover, the pace of demographic change in many countries in Asia, Latin America and the Middle East was much faster than in nineteenth-century Europe. In the Middle East, not only did the transition begin much later and under different conditions from those prevailing in Europe, but it also did not stop at the same point. While fertility rates in Europe continued to fall below replacement level, in most Middle Eastern countries the decline in fertility ceased at much higher levels. Over time, these patterns have led to negative natural growth rates in Europe and high positive growth rates in the Middle East. As a result, the population of Europe is expected to peak in the current decade, after which it will start to decline, whereas the population of the Middle East is expected to grow by 40% by 2050 (United Nations 2022).

The widespread assumption is that countries in the Middle East have not yet completed the demographic transition, but will ultimately conform to the European model. However, the sociologist Arland Thornton warns us against the fallacy of "reading history sideways," in which societies at a single point in time are placed on an imaginary yardstick of development, drawing an evolutionary line between them (Thornton 2001). Thus, we cannot extrapolate from the low fertility rates of Europe, derived from specific economic and cultural conditions, to what will happen in other countries—neither in the Far East, where fertility rates are below the European average (between 0.7 children per woman in South Korea and 1.2 in Japan), nor in the Middle East, where apart from non-Arab countries (Iran and Turkey) the rates remain well above that average.

The population of Europe is expected to peak in the current decade, after which it will start to decline, whereas the population of the Middle East is expected to grow by 40% by 2050 (United Nations 2022).

Thus, the central question for understanding demographic trends in Israel is which model is more suitable, the European model or the Middle Eastern model? On one hand, Israel's economy is similar to European economies and even surpasses them in conventional measures such as per capita GDP. Israel also shares values with the European Union—Western Europe in particular—and regularly participates in regional scientific and cultural initiatives. On the other hand, demographic trends in Israel are certainly different from those observed in Europe. These differences are most apparent with respect to fertility and family formation patterns, such as the combination of high fertility rates and low rate of births outside of marriage, but are also present in mortality and migration. Together, they place Israel on a separate demographic trajectory from European countries, a trajectory characterized by a high rate of population growth and a considerably younger population age structure. Israel shares all those features with its Middle Eastern neighbors.

In order to address this question, we review the demographic trends in Israel (fertility, mortality, and migration) and contextualize them in relation to Europe and the Middle East. Our main argument, on which we elaborate in the discussion, is that the key to understanding these trends lies in the cultural attributes, rather than economic factors, that Israel shares with many of its neighbors.

Demographic Overview of Israel: Fertility, Mortality, and Migration

Fertility

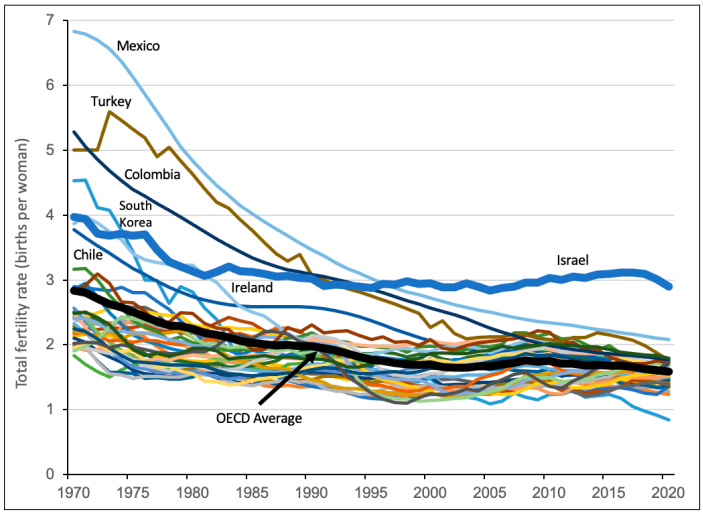
Much has been written about Israel's high fertility rate, which is the highest among OECD countries. Moreover, it has even increased since the early 2000s in spite of the constant rise in the standard of living as expressed by conventional economic metrics such as per capita GDP and average income (Figure 1). Already in the 1990s Israeli demographers speculated on why Israel's fertility rate differed from that of European countries, in spite of the broad similarities in income and consumption levels, as well as in its social values and norms (e.g., positive attitudes towards gender equality and high rate of female participation in the work force) (Friedlander & Feldmann 1993). These researchers argued that whereas most of the population in Israel had completed the fertility transition (secular Israelis of European origin), or was on its way to completing it (Israelis originating in Western Asia and North Africa), other population groups (religious and Haredi Jews) followed a different trajectory. In light of these patterns, they stressed the heterogeneous nature of Israeli society as the key to understanding its demographic future. If high fertility groups maintain this behavior in the long term, their share of the population will increase and potentially counteract the drop in fertility observed among other groups. These researchers further emphasized that religiosity had become an important predictor of fertility, even more than (intra-Jewish) ethnic origin and socioeconomic status. This insight has proven to be correct and remains so to date. However, fertility began to increase unexpectedly in the early 2000s even among traditional and secular Jewish women (Okun 2016). In other words, the decline in fertility that characterized Israel until the 1990s came to a halt not only due to changes in population composition, but also because fertility rose in all sections of the population.

There is a long-standing discussion in the demographic research literature concerning the relative importance of economic versus cultural factors in driving fertility trends (Cleland & Wilson 1987). In Israel, however, it appears that cultural (including religious) factors dominate whereas the association between fertility and economic indicators is relatively weak. Figure 2 shows that Israel's total fertility rate, relative to its per capita GDP, stands out in international comparison. In fact, Israel is currently the only high-income country in which the fertility rate is well above replacement level. A number of hypotheses have been proposed to explain this irregularity, rooted in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and security threats to Israel, the trauma of the Holocaust, and the desire to restore the Jewish people to its former size, often coupled with the religious command to "be fruitful and multiply" (Fargues 2000; Shenhav-Goldbert et al. 2019).

Whatever the case, previous studies have tended to view Israel as a kind of demographic anomaly

Figure 2 shows that Israel's total fertility rate, relative to its per capita GDP, stands out in international comparison. In fact, Israel is currently the only high-income country in which the fertility rate is well above replacement level.

Figure 1. Total Fertility Rates in OECD Countries, 2020-1970

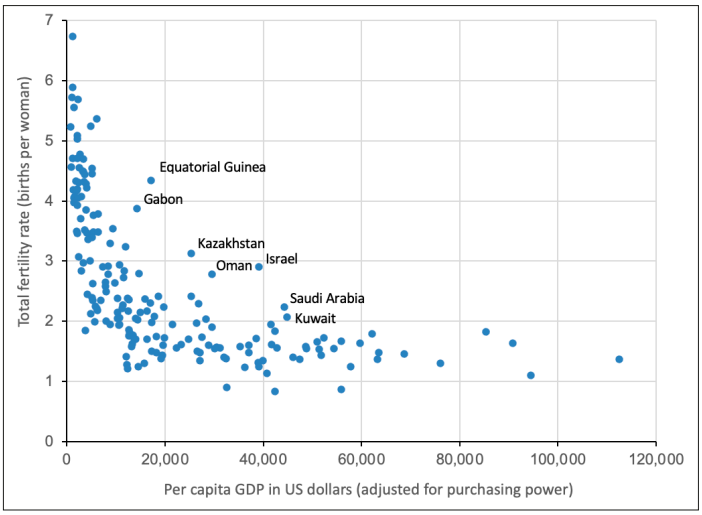


Source: World Development Indicators

when compared to Western European countries, its main reference group. Yet, if we compare Israel to Middle Eastern countries, its fertility level—2.9 births per woman on average—is not at all anomalous, nor is its fertility trend in recent decades, which resembles those of its closest neighbors (Figure 3). In Jordan and in Egypt, the decline in total fertility rate came to a halt in the first decade of the new millennium at about 3.5 births per woman, slightly higher than in Israel; a few years later both countries showed signs of a modest increase (in Egypt more than in Jordan), as did Israel (Cetorelli and Leone 2012; Krafft et al. 2021; Zalak and Goujon 2017). However, in recent years the fertility rate in both countries has resumed a downward trend, converging to the fertility level in Israel. Notably, since 2018 Israel has experienced an almost continuous drop in fertility, except for a slight increase in 2021 in the wake of the Covid pandemic, and it appears that this drop marks a turning point in the fertility trend (Weinreb 2023). Here too the decrease in fertility is observed across all sectors of the population—among Muslim, Christian and Druze women as well as among Jewish women at all levels of religiosity (though the largest drop occurred among religious and Haredi women). Nevertheless, in all three countries—Israel, Jordan, and Egypt—the fertility rate remains well above replacement level and twice as high as the European average.

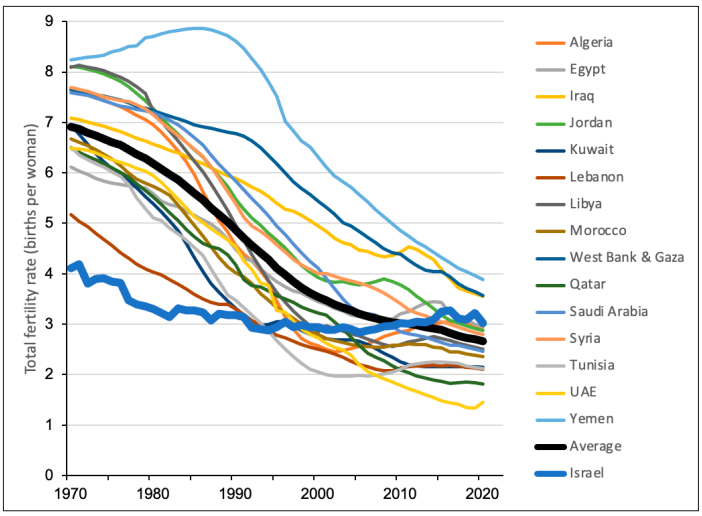
As in other Middle Eastern countries, marriage and family continue to play a central role in Israeli society. It is expressed, for example, in the very low rate of births outside of marriage—less than 8% of all births in Israel—compared with an average of 42% of births in the European Union (Eurostat 2020; CBS 2022). The centrality of the family institution in Israel is also expressed in other ways. Both Jews and Arabs in Israel maintain frequent and intensive family contacts (Raz-Yurovich 2014; Okun and Stecklov 2021), even if the context in which they take place differs between sub-populations (Schwarz et al. 2019). A comparative analysis of intergenerational transfers between households shows that the downward flow of resources from Israelis in their sixties and seventies tends to be larger in Israel than in Europe (Weinreb et al. 2024). In fact, this pattern of intergenerational transfers could be one of the factors that explain why the effective retirement age in Israel is high by international comparison. Older adults in Israel remain in the work force longer than most of their European counterparts, particularly in white-collar professions, and on average they

Figure 2. Total Fertility Rate by Per Capita GDP in 2020



Source: World Development Indicators

Figure 3. Total Fertility Rate in Countries of the Middle East and North Africa, 1970-2020



Source: World Development Indicators

also spend more time caring for grandchildren (Axelrad et al. 2021; Kimhi & Shraberman 2014). These empirical findings are consistent with the positive effects of grandparents on fertility in Israel (Okun & Stecklov 2021). Without such support, it is hard to imagine how Jewish women in Israel could have managed to sustain both the highest fertility rate and second highest participation rate in the work force (after Iceland) among OECD countries.

Without such support, it is hard to imagine how Jewish women in Israel could have managed to sustain both the highest fertility rate and second highest participation rate in the work force (after Iceland) among OECD countries.

However, it is worth noting a few emerging trends in marriage and family formation in Israel. There are signs of a drop in the marriage rate in the Jewish population, as well as a modest increase in the number of births outside of marriage (some to couples in long-term cohabitation which substitutes for marriage). More importantly, the divorce rate is rising steadily among all age groups in the Muslim Arab population, particularly among younger women. These trends are consistent with the increase in women's educational attainment. Among Israeli Arabs in particular, more than two thirds of all Arab students in higher education in Israel are women (75% of Arab Master's degree students). These trends will likely have consequences for marriage, family formation, and Israeli society overall (Weinreb 2022).

Mortality

In terms of mortality patterns and trends, Israel is not a typical Mediterranean country. According to UN estimates Israeli life expectancy at birth in 2019, prior to the Covid pandemic, was 81 years for men and 85 years for women. These figures are higher by 8.8 and 7.4 years, respectively, than the average among Israel's direct neighbors—Egypt, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon—and about three years higher than the average in the rich Arab countries, including Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the Emirates (United Nations 2022).

Israel is also not a typical Middle Eastern country in terms of infant and child mortality. Estimates by the UN Inter-Agency Group for Child Mortality show that 2.7 infants out of 1,000 births in Israel die before their first birthday, compared with an average of 15.1 deaths in Israel's direct neighbors and 5.4 deaths in the rich Arab countries. The differences between Israel and other Middle Eastern countries in child mortality (under the age of five) are even greater (UNICEF 2023).

According to the same metrics, however, Israel does not fit precisely into the European model either; it is positioned between the Europe and the Middle East. More precisely, the core metrics of the Jewish population of Israel are closer to those of Southern Europe—particularly Greece, Italy, France, and Spain—whereas the core metrics of the Arab population of Israel are closer to, and often better, than the equivalent metrics in rich Arab countries.

For example, the infant mortality rate in the Jewish population of Israel was 1.9 deaths per 1,000 births in 2021—similar to the rate in Southern European countries—despite the higher proportion of high-risk births among Haredi women that occur in the absence of prenatal checkups (CBS 2022). Jews in Israel are also similar to Southern European countries in (age-adjusted) death rates from suicide, heart disease, and stroke (in fact, the latter two are even lower in Israel) (Weinreb & Sela 2021). Given these similar patterns in causes of death, it is not surprising that the life expectancy of Israeli Jews, currently standing at 86 for women and 82 for men, is similar to or higher than the figures among their Southern European counterparts.

By contrast, life expectancy at birth among Israeli Arabs—although lower than that of Israeli Jews by about 5.2 years for men and 3.9 years for women—is similar to life expectancy in Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (World

Bank Open Data n.d.). The infant mortality rate among Israeli Arabs, about 5.2 deaths per 1,000 births, also falls within the range of the rich Arab countries (excluding Kuwait, where the infant mortality rate is higher).

These mortality patterns echo the aforementioned heterogeneity of Israel's population, not only in terms of group differences between Jews and Arabs, but also with respect to the baseline levels of Israeli Jews. The demographic research literature argues that health disparities between groups derive both from gaps in access to and quality of health services, and from differences in lifestyles and health-promoting behaviors (Sasson & Regev 2022). A systematic comparison of population health metrics between Europe and the United States indicates that the first factor—access to and quality of health services—is shaped by government policy and national wealth, in that order (Bleich et al. 2012). The second factor is to a large extent a function of "health inputs:" smoking prevalence, nutrition, and physical activity (both daily and intensive).

Each of these health inputs is the result of other downstream factors, some structural and some behavioral. Structural factors such as living environments, work conditions, socioeconomic status, and even institutional discrimination have become the preferred explanations for researchers, because they can be framed in terms of social inequality and injustice. But in Israel it appears that the Haredi population is healthier than average; based on indirect measurement, they also have remarkably high life expectancy relative to their low socioeconomic positioning in society (Chernichovsky & Sharoni 2015). If our goal is to understand why Israel is a demographic outlier, behavioral factors—particularly "risk factors" as they are referred to in the epidemiological literature—are no less important than the structural factors. It is precisely in this aspect that Israel differs from Europe and is closer to both the Mediterranean Basin and the Middle East.

Israel has one of the lowest levels of alcohol consumption per capita in the OECD (3.0 liters annually compared to an average of 8.6 liters), and it ranks fifth in daily consumption of fruits and vegetables by adults .

We illustrate this argument using two examples. First, Israel has one of the lowest levels of alcohol consumption per capita in the OECD (3.0 liters annually compared to an average of 8.6 liters), and it ranks fifth in daily consumption of fruits and vegetables by adults (World Bank Open Data n.d.). These patterns are deeply rooted in local drinking and eating habits. Although these habits are prone to change over time, they are nevertheless part of a cultural heritage passed down from generation to generation, in a society characterized by strong (nuclear and extended) family ties. Second, the age-adjusted smoking prevalence among adults in Israel, estimated at 20.7% in 2021, is low in comparison to Europe but lies in the range of Egypt (24.5%), Kuwait (19.9%), and Bahrain (15.2%) (WHO n.d.). It is worth noting, however, that the link between these risk factors and obesity and diabetes is expressed differently in Israel than in Arab countries. Whereas the proportion of overweight or obese adults in Israel is one of the lowest among OECD countries—only South Korea, Japan, and France have lower rates—a 2016 report from the World Health Organization attributes some 6% of all deaths in Israel to type 2 diabetes—more than twice the OECD average (2.9%), with Mexico alone exhibiting a higher proportion of deaths from diabetes (WHO 2016). It is without a doubt the clearest pattern of Middle Eastern morbidity in the modern era. The prevalence of type 2 diabetes in the Middle East is higher than in any other region of the world (Sherif & Sumpio 2015), and in Israel it is higher among the Arab population than among the Jewish population. In the 30-55 age range, for example, the age-specific incidence rate of type 2 diabetes is

two to three times higher among Arab women compared to Jewish women, and 1.5 times higher among Arab men compared to Jewish men (Jaffe et al. 2017).

The key message that emerges from these comparisons is that the morbidity and mortality patterns in Israel resemble those of its geographic region, whereas fewer characteristics are shared between Israel and Northern or Eastern Europe. Thus, with respect to health and mortality, Israel should be benchmarked against high-income Mediterranean countries with similar lifestyles and nutritional characteristics. Moreover, with the exception of attitudes to alcohol, the rich Arab countries (together with elites in the poorer Arab countries bordering on Israel) are part of the same cultural-demographic context.

The current models used for forecasting mortality and life expectancy are not well suited for this emerging reality.

It is worth noting that the long-term mortality trends in Israel were interrupted in recent years by unforeseen mortality shocks. Conventional methods for forecasting mortality and life expectancy rest on the assumption that changes in cause-specific mortality are gradual and, as a result, life expectancy is not subject to large fluctuations. This assumption has proven correct for most European countries since World War II, a period characterized by relative political stability, and it has also been valid for Israel in recent decades. However, recent events may mark a turning point. First, the Covid pandemic led to a reduction in life expectancy at birth of two to three months in 2020 (Weinreb 2021). However, this decline was relatively small by international standards and in the following years Israel experienced a fast recovery (Aburto et al. 2022). Mortality rates in Israel were lower than ever when the trend was overturned again with the outbreak of the October 7 war (Weinreb 2023).

These were external shocks whose impact on life expectancy is likely temporary. However, they may indicate the beginning of a new epidemiological era characterized by the return of epidemics and wars as prominent causes of death, and as a result also by growing uncertainty. The current models used for forecasting mortality and life expectancy are not well suited for this emerging reality. Deterministic population projections ignore the uncertainty altogether and more sophisticated methods (e.g., random walk models) may underestimate it because they depend heavily on the choice of countries and reference period. Here too, benchmarking Israel against post-war Western and Northern Europe may prove too narrow to capture the effects of global and local crises.

Migration

In historical perspective, Israel can be viewed as an immigrant country. In 1990, the proportion of Israelis born abroad reached 36%, though this figure declined gradually to 25% by 2015 (World Bank Open Data n.d.). Alongside natural increase, immigration has been an important component of population growth in Israel, which has increased 12-fold in its 75 years of existence. The basis for the historical migration to Israel was, and to a large extent remains, ethno-religious, which distinguishes Israel from most immigrant-receiving countries in Europe. Over the past two decades, however, the number of Jewish immigrants arriving based on the Law of Return ("Aliyah") declined considerably. From 2002 to 2021, they numbered 22,000 each year on average, compared with nearly triple that number in the preceding twenty-year period (CBS 2024). Breaking from this trend, Israel received some 74,000 Jewish immigrants in 2022 against the backdrop of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February of that year.

Figure 4 illustrates how Israeli migration patterns stand out from a global perspective. Over the past four decades, the net migration rate in high-income countries was positive

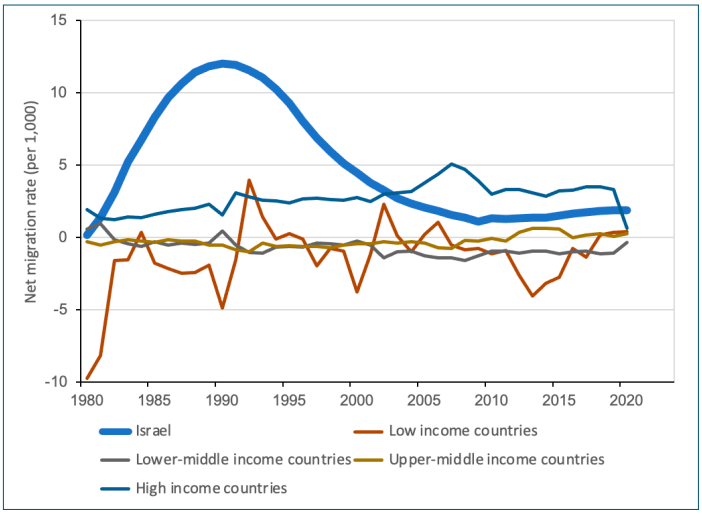
overall and it generally increased throughout this period. By contrast, in low and middle-income countries the net migration rate was close to zero or negative on average in most years. Israel stands out relative to both of these groups, since it had far higher net migration than the average across high-income countries in the 1990s. Yet, as soon as wave of immigrants from former Soviet Union subsided at the start of the new millennium, net migration dropped in Israel below the average for high-income countries (though unlike low and middle-income countries it remained consistently positive). In other words, in the past two decades Israel has been positioned between those two broad groups, high-income countries on the one hand and low and middle-income countries on the other. Moreover, net migration actually fell in Israel during a period in which it increased in other high-income countries.

In addition to Aliyah, over the past three decades, the Israeli labor market began to rely on labor migrants in the aftermath of the first Intifada. Israel has high per capita income and therefore makes an attractive destination for labor migrants from lower income countries. However, unlike many Western European countries, Israel does not offer those immigrants any path toward naturalization or permanent residence in the long term (not even for skilled workers). From 2010 onward, Israel began regulating the status of migrant workers in a series of bilateral agreements with their countries of origin—first with Thailand and subsequently with Bulgaria, Moldova, Romania, Ukraine, and China (as well as more limited agreements with Nepal and Sri Lanka) (Reichman and Kushnirowitz 2019). These agreements helped regulate immigrant rights but did not break from the organizing principle of Israeli migration policy, which affords the right to permanent residence and citizenship only to those eligible under the Law of Return and their families. In this respect, Israel resembles the Arab Gulf countries more than Western Europe, and as a result does not face the same challenges that Europe faces in this regard (we expand on this issue in the discussion). Given its relatively high levels of income, Israel is expected to remain an attractive destination for work migrants from lower income countries, particularly for those in the secondary labor market (e.g., agriculture, construction, and caregiving). At the same time, Israel is unlikely to become a prominent destination for skilled workers from countries with similar levels of income.

Alongside immigration, a non-negligible trend of emigration from Israel has emerged in the past decade. The Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) recently revised its definition of emigration in order to reflect more accurately population movements in the new millennium. According to the old definition, Israelis were defined as emigrants if they had spent 365 consecutive days abroad. The new definition, on the other hand, includes Israelis who had

According to the new definition, the number of emigrants (but also returning migrants) are about 2.5 times higher than previous estimates. Based on these new estimates, between 2012 and 2020 a total of nearly 60,000 Israeli residents were deducted from the population base estimate.

Figure 4: Net Migration Rate in Israel and Other Countries by per Capita Income, 1980-2020



Source: UN Data

spent a total of 275 days or more abroad in the year following their departure, of which the first 90 days were consecutive. According to the new definition, the number of emigrants (but also returning migrants) are about 2.5 times higher than previous estimates. Based on these new estimates, between 2012 and 2020 a total of nearly 60,000 Israeli residents were deducted from the population base estimate (Cohen-Castro 2023).

An important caveat is that Aliyah during this period compensated for the deficit and net migration remained positive. Nevertheless, this trend is disconcerting for several reasons. First, we know little about those who choose to emigrate apart from the most basic demographic attributes such as age, sex, and marital status (Ravhon 2023). Yet, there is reason to believe that emigrants have higher levels of human capital than average, and that if this trend intensifies their departure may thwart future economic growth in Israel (Ben-David 2019). Due to the scarcity of microdata on both immigrants and emigrants in Israel, we do not currently know if the former compensate for the potential loss of human capital at population level. Second, the ongoing political instability in Israel may fuel the emigration trend, especially among the economic and academic elites. Israel's political instability was marked by five rounds of parliamentary elections between 2019 and 2022, followed by highly controversial attempts at a judicial overhaul and the October 7 war in 2023. Regrettably, in this case too we lack credible estimates of the number of emigrants in the aftermath of recent events, and it may take several years before a clear picture can emerge.

Discussion and Conclusions

Our central argument in this paper is that Israel appears to be a demographic anomaly primarily when it is compared to high-income Western countries. However, when the frame of reference is shifted to the Middle East, the demographic trends in Israel are not so exceptional and to some degree even predictable. With respect to fertility levels and trends, Israel resembles in recent decades its closest neighbors—Jordan and Egypt. Although Israel's life expectancy at birth is very high by international comparison, its age and cause-specific mortality patterns place it among the countries of Southern Europe (Jews) and the Arab Gulf countries (Arabs). Israel has also become more similar to the Arab Gulf countries than to Europe in its migration patterns over the past two decades, against the backdrop of decreasing Aliyah (except in the last two years) and the increase in labor migration. Unlike Western Europe and North America, Israel's migration policy is oriented primarily toward the secondary labor market (agriculture, construction, and caregiving).

Comparing and drawing analogies between countries is a common analytical strategy (Dogan 2008). Yet, the choice of reference group must be tenable in order to yield accurate demographic forecasts, as well as their social and economic implications. Despite the tendency to view Israel as a society mid-demographic transition according to the European model, there is in fact no guarantee that Europe is the right model for Israel. The comparison with Europe, almost by default, is rooted in two unsubstantiated assumptions. The first assumption is Eurocentrism—one that is not unique to Israel—whereby Europe is seen as the ultimate model for human populations since the industrial revolution, if not earlier. The second assumption is prioritizing economic over cultural proximity, which implies that because of Israel's similarity to Western Europe in macro-economic indicators, and perhaps also because of their close mutual contacts, the two will also resemble demographically. In this paper we demonstrated that, by international standards, cultural norms and social policies in Israel prevail over economic factors in predicting demographic behavior. For the same reason, Israel does not follow the same demographic trajectory as Western Europe and North America, and in light of those

differences Israel's frame of reference must be reexamined.

One example of challenging these basic assumptions can be found in the critique of secularization theory. According to the theory, as societies undergo modernization, religious practices are abandoned and the role of religion as a central social institution is minimized, culminating in the separation of church and state (Swatos and Christiano 1999). Although the theory gained some empirical support in European societies (Gorski and Altinordu 2008), it has generally been refuted in the Middle Eastern context, including in Israel. As previously stated, religiosity remains a major demographic determinant in Israel and there is no basis for assuming that its population is on its way to a second demographic transition—a transition rooted in a shift of social values from collectivism to individualism. Further evidence of the endurance of cultural norms and values can be found in the central role that marriage and the family continue to play in Israeli society (Weinreb 2022).

After reviewing the key demographic trends in Israel, as well as how they compare with trends in other countries, we can derive several conclusions. First, it appears that each of the three fundamental demographic processes—fertility, mortality, and migration—has undergone important changes in Israel in recent years. Some of those changes reflected a reversal of the long-term trend (the decline in fertility), whereas others were the result of external shocks whose impact is likely temporary (sudden increases in mortality and immigration to Israel). These unforeseen developments make forecasting Israel's demographic future all the more difficult. External crises by their very nature are difficult to predict, and they may become more frequent against the backdrop of growing political instability in Israel and elsewhere. Demographic forecasting relies on past trends. To the extent that they are based on the historical record in Western countries, which were characterized by political stability since World War II, these forecasts are likely to underestimate the uncertainty inherent in each of the three demographic processes. As a result, the forecasts will also understate the uncertainty regarding the population's future size and composition. With respect to migration in particular, the uncertainty relates not only to the number of immigrant and emigrants but also to their sociodemographic profiles, because the former may not substitute for the latter in its overall contribution to economic growth and national resilience.

Second, although Israel may be facing a demographic turning point, population momentum ensures that its population will continue to grow in the coming decades (i.e., the absolute number of births will continue to grow each year despite the drop in fertility rates due to the population age structure). Thus, the demographic challenges faced by Israel are fundamentally different from those faced by Europe and North America, and are closer to those of other Middle Eastern countries. Israel's population continues to increase at a rate of about 2% per annum, and according to the Central Bureau of Statistics forecast, will reach 15 to 20 million over the next 30 years. The steady population growth in Israel has clear benefits compared to Europe: the pace of population aging is slower and Israel does not depend on immigrants to maintain a shrinking labor force (Harper 2014).

However, there are also many drawbacks to rapid population growth. Population density will continue to increase in an ecologically sensitive region with limited resources (Tal 2017). Israel has thus far managed to deal with this challenge, for example with large investments in water desalination and reclamation systems. But will it continue to meet this challenge through its 100th birthday, with a population far greater than today, in addition to about eight million Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, and all this in a sensitive climate zone where extreme heatwaves are likely to become more frequent? Furthermore, Israel's neighbors will be facing

similar challenges but without sufficient investments in infrastructure. The collapse of food and water sources in neighboring countries is a plausible scenario, though it is difficult to incorporate into demographic forecasts. Imagining such scenarios, as well as their demographic consequences, is all the more difficult when Europe and North America serve as Israel's reference group.

In this paper we have reevaluated Israel's demographic profile, which is indeed anomalous relative to Western Europe and North America, but is not so exceptional relative to the Middle East. In some respects Israel more closely resembles its immediate neighbors and in other respects it is similar to the more distant Arab Gulf countries. If there is any resemblance to Europe, it lies in countries around the Mediterranean Basin. All of those countries together form the demographic reference group for Israel.

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This study was funded by the Ministry of Innovation, Science and Technology through its support of the Archimedes Center for Applied Systems Analysis at Tel Aviv University. The views and positions expressed in this paper are solely those of the authors.

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Note

1 In countries with a low mortality rate, the replacement rate is about 2.1 births per woman.

At Home and Abroad: The Changing Demographic Threat to Israel

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Since its inception, the Zionist Movement has been accompanied by a sense of "demographic inferiority." It was a struggle between two national movements for the same piece of land—a kind of "zero-sum game." Naturally, the demographically weaker side—the Zionists—tried to close the gap as much as possible through both immigration and encouraging higher fertility among the Jews in the Yishuv. However, while the sense of demographic inferiority among the Zionist movement prior to the establishment of the State of Israel and even after it is understandable, it was supposed to diminish after the Oslo Accords, and even more so after the withdrawal from the Gaza Strip, with the main purpose of both to achieve a "demographic separation" from the Palestinians. The peace agreements with Egypt and Jordan; the collapse of the "eastern front" after the elimination of Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003; and the outbreak of the civil war in Syria were all expected to mitigate the Israeli sense of demographic inferiority even further. In effect, however, this was not the case, and the feeling of "demographic inferiority" changed into a "demographic appetite," which perpetuated the concept of "growing as much as possible." This paper aims to examine why every Israeli government, whether "right-wing" or "left-wing," has sought to maximize the number of Jews in Israel; the implications of the various governmental demographic policies for the standard of living of Israel's citizens; and finally, the external demographic threats to which Israel is exposed. The main conclusion of this paper is that even without the annexation of all or even part of the West Bank, Israel is experiencing steady rapid population growth, leading to increased crowding and accordingly a decline in the quality of life for its citizens.

Keywords: demographic threat, natalist policy, the Law of Return, annexation, population density, cost of living, refugees, environmental quality

Introduction: What Is the Meaning of Demographic Threat?

The academic literature distinguishes between four types of demographic threat: The first and most common threat is the religious or ethnic majority/minority ratio, wherein the majority feels threatened by a minority demanding full or partial independence. Striking examples of such a threat are the Catalans and the Basques in Spain and the Kurds in Turkey and Iraq, who have been demanding autonomy or even full independence for many years, sometimes accompanied by violence against the regime (Laitin 1995).

The second type of demographic threat involves the fear of the country being inundated with migrants of different religions or ethnic backgrounds, thereby altering the cultural, religious, and ethnic character of the host country. The fear of being overwhelmed by non-white and non-Christian migrants has fueled the European right, particularly since the al-Qaeda attack on the United States (September 11, 2001), and has further intensified with the influx of Muslim Arabs into Europe since the onset of the Arab Spring (December 2010). Another striking example of this type of threat is the determined opposition of Arabs to Jewish immigration to Palestine during the British Mandate. A more recent example of the perceived threat of a change to a country's religious-cultural character due to mass immigration can be heard in the words of Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán in July 2022: "We [Hungarians] are not a mixed race and we do not want to become a mixed race" (Walker and Garamvolgyi 2022).

The fear of losing cultural, religious, and ethnic identity, coupled with the escalating violence perpetrated by fundamentalist Islamic organizations in the Middle East and Europe, has led to a significant decrease in the pace of Muslim migration to Europe. Even German Chancellor Angela Merkel, who in September 2015 declared that "our economy is healthy, there is no limit on the number of refugees we can take in" (Calcalist 2015) and opened the gates of Germany to Arab Spring refugees, particularly Syrians, changed her policy a short time later. After the success of the right-wing party Alternative for Germany in the September 2017 elections, Merkel was obliged to change her immigration policy, and Germany began to restrict entrance from the Middle East (Shavit 2022; Shubert and Schmidt 2019). In order to limit the scale of migration from the Middle East and Afghanistan, since 2016 the European Union (EU) has paid Turkey billions of euros to prevent migrants from moving from its territory to the EU (Uni 2020).

The third type of demographic threat is an internal struggle that may be religious or ethnic, or sometimes both, for dominance in a country. A clear example of this type of demographic threat is that all internal struggles throughout the Arab region since the onset of the Arab Spring, without a single exception, are based on religious and/or ethnic grounds. This is the situation in Yemen, Syria and Iraq, as well as in Lebanon almost since its independence. In each of these countries, at least one religious or ethnic group is vying for dominance over the entire country, or to obtain some form of autonomy, as is the case with the Kurds in Iraq. In the Syrian case, with over 90% of the refugees who have left the country since the onset of the civil war in 2011 being Sunni Muslims, the Alawite regime has succeeded in increasing the proportion of Alawites among the population remaining in Syria from approximately 12% prior to the onset of the civil war to about a third a decade later (Kleiman 2020; Winckler 2017; Nowrasteh 2015).

The fourth type of demographic threat derives from the age structure of the population. In countries with a youthful age structure—a result of many decades of much higher fertility rates than the replacement-level rate[1]—the threat lies in a very low labor force participation rate, as a large proportion of the population is below working age, resulting in a low breadwinners/dependents ratio. This situation will persist for at least three more

decades, even if the fertility rate declines to the replacement-level rate due to "the demographic momentum" phenomenon.[2] Currently, this is the situation in Egypt, Jordan, and the Palestinian Authority (PA) in the Middle East, as well as in all sub-Saharan African countries. In contrast, in countries with an old age structure resulting from fertility rates persistently below the replacement-level rate for an extended period, the demographic threat manifests as a low labor force participation rate. This is due to a large proportion of the population being above working age.[3] Additionally, there are escalating costs associated with providing health and welfare services to an increasingly aging population (Slobodchikoff and Davis 2021). This situation necessitates countries to accept an increasing number of migrant workers in order to maintain a reasonable breadwinners/dependents ratio.

At first glance, it seems that Israel has always clearly belonged to the third category, namely, facing a demographic threat due to a struggle between two different religious and ethnic groups, engaging in a zero-sum game on the same piece of land, while the solution of dividing the territory into two separate political entities is not acceptable to at least one of the rival communities.[4] In this context, parallels can be drawn between the Zionist–Palestinian struggle for the area west of the Jordan River and the struggle among various religious sects for dominance in Lebanon, the Sunni–Shiite struggle for control of Iraq, the Sunni–Houthi (Shiite) struggle for control over Yemen, and, to a certain extent, the struggle between Arab-Sunni rebels and the Alawite regime in Syria, which led to the onset of the civil war.

However, while the sense of demographic inferiority among the Zionist movement prior to the establishment of the State of Israel and even after it, is understandable in light of the fact that the 1948 War did not end with peace agreements but rather by cease-fire agreements, it was supposed to diminish after the Oslo Accords, and even more so after the withdrawal from the Gaza Strip.[5] The main purpose of both was to achieve a "demographic separation" from the Palestinians in order to maintain a solid Jewish majority in the State of Israel (Wertman 2021).

At first glance, it seems that Israel has always clearly belonged to the third category, namely, facing a demographic threat due to a struggle between two different religious and ethnic groups, engaging in a zero-sum game on the same piece of land, while the solution of dividing the territory into two separate political entities is not acceptable to at least one of the rival communities.

Was this really the situation, and if not, why? Did the peace agreements with Arab countries, from Egypt (1979), Jordan (1994), to the Abraham Accords (2020), alongside the collapse of the "eastern front" following the elimination of Saddam Hussein's regime, and the outbreak of the civil war in Syria, weakening the Syrian army, lead to a change in the traditional Israeli demographic concept of "growing as much as possible"? What were the consequences of the Israeli demographic policy in both areas of the Law of Return and the desired fertility rate?[6] And finally, what are the external demographic threats to which Israel is exposed?

Changes in the Israeli Demographic Discourse: From Deficit to Appetite

Since the balance between the number of Jews and Arabs in the area of Mandatory Palestine was perceived by both sides as a zero-sum game, it was clear that without a critical mass of Jews in the territory they would not be able to realize their aim of establishing an independent political entity. From the beginning of the Mandate period, the Zionist leaders did everything they could to increase the Jewish population of Palestine through immigration, both legal and illegal, and by encouraging higher fertility among the Jews (Rosenberg-Friedman 2023). In order to prevent an increase in the number of Jews in Palestine, the Palestinian

Table 1. The Composition of the Israeli Population by Religion and Nationality, 1949–2022 (end of the year, in thousands)

Year	Jews	Arabs*	Others**	Total citizens	% of Arabs out of total citizens	% of others out of total citizens	% of non-Jews out of total citizens
1949	1,013.9	160.0	0	1,173.9	13.6	0	13.6
1966	2,344.9	312.5	0	2,657.4	11.8	0	11.8
1967	2,383.6	392.7	0	2,776.3	14.1	0	14.1
1980	3,282.7	638.9	0	3,921.7	16.3	0	16.3
1990	3,946.7	875.0	0	4,821.7	18.1	0	18.1
1995	4,522.3	1,004.9	85.1	5,612.3	17.9	1.5	19.4
2000	4,955.4	1,188.7	225.2	6,369.3	18.7	3.5	22.2
2005	5,313.8	1,377.1	299.9	6,990.7	19.7	4.3	24.0
2010	5,802.4	1,573.1	319.5	7,695.1	20.4	4.2	24.6
2015	6,334.5	1,757.8	371.1	8,463.4	20.8	4.4	25.2
2020	6,873.9	1,957.3	458.6	9,289.8	21.1	4.9	26.0
2021	6,982.6	1,997.8	472.5	9,453.0	21.1	5.0	26.1
2022	7,101.4	2,028.8	521.9	9,662.0	21.0	5.4	26.4

* The category "Arabs" includes Muslims, Arab Christians, and Druze.

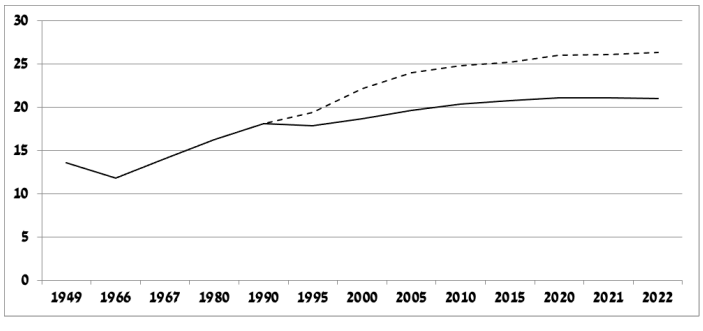
** The category "Others" includes members of other religions (Buddhists, Hindus, and more) as well as citizens who are not classified as either Jews or Arabs in the Population Register ("eligible for the Law of Return"). Until the 1995 census, "Others" were included in the Arab population.

Source: CBS, 2023d, Table 2.1.

leaders did everything they could to limit Jewish immigration to Palestine and their ability to purchase land (Kimmerling and Migdal 1999).

Since the 1948 War ended only with cease-fire agreements and not with peace treaties, the debate regarding the balance between Israeli Jews and the populations of Arab countries, especially those hostiles to Israel and the Palestinians, only intensified, even after the establishment of Israel (Winckler 2022; Tal 2016; Rosenberg-Friedman 2015). In the publications of the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) to the present day, distinctions in the demographic data are made not only on the basis of religion but also between Jews and Arabs as two separate national sectors. The National Insurance Institute (NII) publishes data on poverty only on the basis of Jews and Arabs, and not on the basis of religion (Endeweld et al. 2022, 11, Table 4).

Figure 1. The Proportion of Arabs and "Others" Among Israeli Citizens, 1949–2022 (%)



The slowdown in the pace of immigration to Israel after the October 1973 War until the start of the large immigration from the Soviet Union at the end of 1989, as well as the high natural increase rate of the Israeli Muslims,[7] led to a constant increase in the proportion of Arabs among the total Israeli citizens—from 11.8% at the end of 1966[8] to 18.1% in 1990 (see Table 1).

Table 2. Total Fertility Rate in a Number of Industrialized Countries and Israeli Jewish Women, 1980–2022

Country Year	Israel (Jewish women)	Germany	France	Britain	United States	South Korea	Australia	Japan
1980	2.76	1.44	1.85	1.90	1.84	2.82	1.89	1.75
1990	2.69	1.45	1.77	1.83	2.08	1.57	1.90	1.54
2000	2.66	1.38	1.89	1.64	2.06	1.48	1.76	1.36
2010	2.97	1.39	2.03	1.92	1.93	1.23	1.93	1.39
2022	3.03	1.46	1.79	1.57	1.67	0.78	1.43	1.26

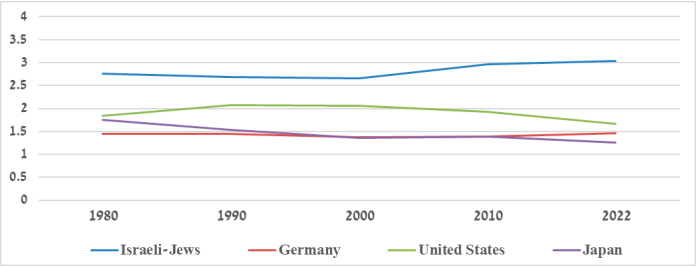
Sources: Central Bureau of Statistics 2023b; World Bank, n.d.a.

The perceived demographic vulnerability, whether in comparison to hostile neighboring countries or concerning the number of Arabs "west of the Jordan River," has prompted Israeli governments, regardless of political orientation, to enact policies aimed at increasing as much as possible the Israeli Jewish population. From 1970 to 1996 the child allowances for the children of ex-servicemen and women were substantially higher than for children whose parents had not served in the security forces. For the children of new immigrants who had not served in the army, the difference between the normal child allowance and that of children of army veterans was funded by the Jewish Agency. The aim, of course, was to encourage higher fertility among the Jews (Ofir and Eliav 2005; Doron 2005; Winckler 2022). While the fertility rate in all industrialized countries, without exception and despite the various economic benefits given to large families,[9] fell continuously from the 1970s, the fertility rate among Israeli Jewish women increased to 3.03 in 2022—double the average in the EU countries (see Table 2).

The peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan, the Abraham Accords, the thawing of relations with other Gulf oil countries, along with the ongoing instability in Iraq and the deterioration of Syria to the point where it no longer constitutes a military threat to Israel, as well as the establishment of the PA and the withdrawal from the Gaza Strip, were all expected to change the demographic discourse in Israel. Not only was Israel no longer militarily threatened by its neighboring Arab countries, but it was also apparently no longer demographically threatened in the area "west of the Jordan River" since the Palestinians, according to the Oslo Accords at least, were supposed to set up a separate political entity. Moreover, the large influx of immigrants from the former Soviet Union,[10] coupled with the ongoing decline in the fertility of Israeli Muslims,[11] as well as the increased fertility rate among Israeli Jews (see Table 2), halted the rise in the proportion of Arabs in the Israeli population. From 2010 to 2022, the percentage of Arabs in the Israeli population grew by only 0.6%—from 20.4% to 21.0% (see Table 1).

Therefore, in the absence of a demographic threat from the hostile countries and the Palestinians "west of the Jordan river," and considering the economic deterioration since the onset of the Second Palestinian Intifada (*al-Aqsa* Intifada) in September 2000, as well

Figure 2. Total Fertility Rate in a Number of Industrialized Countries and Israeli Jewish Women, 1980–2022



as the burst of the "dot-com bubble,"[12] it was necessary to reduce child allowances and other financial benefits for large families. Indeed, from 2002 and even more so after the second Sharon government came to power in early 2003, child allowances for larger families were sharply cut. Although there have been several changes since then, child allowances and tax credits for children form only a small percentage of household income in middle-class households (Winckler 2022). In December 2023, the aggregate allowance for the first three children was only ILS 578 (NII n.d.).

Why did Israeli governments, even in periods of deep economic recession, not change their demographic policies and try to slow down the rate of the population growth among Israeli Jews?

Indeed, the sharp cuts in child allowances and in the other economic benefits for large households were among the main factors leading to a dramatic drop in the fertility rate among Israeli Muslims, particularly the Bedouin in the Negev, whose fertility rate fell from over 10 children per woman at the end of the 20th century to 4.99 in 2022 (CBS 2023d, Table 2.39).[13] In 2022, apart from the southern region, the fertility of the Israeli Muslims was less than three children (CBS 2023c; CBS 2023d, Table 2.39). Among Christian Arabs[14] and Druze, the fertility rate fell below the replacement-level rate (CBS 2023d, Table 2.41).

In 2016, Alon Tal (2016, 137) wrote that "With such high subsidies, there is great economic logic to having many children." However, among Israeli Jews, even though the child allowances and other benefits in kind given to large families were sharply reduced,[15] the fertility rate among the Ultra Orthodox—the poorest sector among the Israeli Jews—only fell slightly.[16] This was partly due to the channeling of economic benefits to this sector other than child allowances, such as discounts on municipal taxes according to the number of people in the household (and not according to the per capita income of the household), special economic assistance to married yeshiva students, both from the yeshiva where they studied and from the Ministries of Education and Religions (Ministry of Education 2023), and more recently special food vouchers (Arlosoroff 2023). It should be noted that the fertility rate among non-religious Jewish women did not decrease even after the sharp cuts in child allowances.[17]

The main question that arises from these figures is why did Israeli governments, even in periods of deep economic recession, not change their demographic policies and try to slow down the rate of the population growth among Israeli Jews? Why even now, in 2024, when Israel's population is groaning under a rising cost of living, alongside the enormous economic damages of the war in Gaza (Operation Swords of Iron) and high interest rates that affect monthly mortgage payments[18]—the highest single expense for a large percentage of households—no party is proposing to adopt the "Singaporean model," namely full state funding for the first two children only, with costs passed to the parents from the third child onward in the form of high taxes (Lee et al. 1991).

It should be noted, however, that the lack of attempts to slow down the growth rate of the Israeli Jewish population was expressed not only by the almost complete absence of a debate on the anomalous fertility rates of Israeli Jewish women and all that entails (as we shall see later), but also by the fact that there has been no change to the Law of Return,[19] even though since the mid-1990s many immigrants, and during the past decade, the overwhelming majority of them, do not meet the definition of "Jew" (Nachshoni 2019). In 2020, only 28.3% of all immigrants from the former Soviet Union were registered as Jews, compared to 93.1% in 1990 (Eliyahu 2022, Figure 1). During 2021 alone, the number of "Others" rose by almost 50,000, and since 1995, when CBS began to publish data on this sector, the population of "Others" has increased at a faster rate than any

other religious sector in Israel (Table 1). Why, in response to Tomer Moskowitz,[20] expressing that "the Law of Return should be amended" to remove the grandchild clause (allowing the law of return of those who are a grandchild of a Jew), did two Knesset members from the Yisrael Beiteinu party[21] immediately submit a complaint against him to the minister of the interior and the prime minister for "exceeding his authority"? (Rubin 2022). In the context of the desirable natalist policy for Israel, Trajtenberg et al. (2018, 9) wrote: "For the Israeli political system, any deviation from the premise that 'children are a blessing' still amounts to heresy."

The answer to this question apparently lies in a number of processes occurring over the past two decades that led to a new perception of the nature of "the demographic balance west of the Jordan River": The first and, in my opinion, the more prominent was the outbreak of the Second Intifada. Unlike the First Intifada, this one was accompanied by numerous terror attacks in Israel itself, including high-trajectory shooting fire from the Gaza Strip into Israel. Operation Defensive Shield (March–May 2002) only reinforced the feeling among the Israeli Jewish public that the PA under Arafat's control was "not a partner for peace." Arafat's successor, Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) was perceived from the outset as weak and thus deemed incapable of making decisive political moves. This feeling grew stronger after Fatah lost to Hamas in the elections of January 2006 for the Palestinian Legislative Authority. The failure of the Olmert–Abu Mazen negotiations (September 2006–December 2008) further added to this feeling, both among Israel's political leadership and the general public, that it is at least currently impossible to end the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. Indeed, Benjamin Netanyahu repeated many times that "there is no Palestinian partner for peace" (Benziman 2018).

The takeover of the Gaza Strip by Hamas in June 2007 essentially created a separate political entity distinct from both Israel and the PA. This occurred alongside the growing notion within Israel that "there's nobody to talk with," collectively shaping a new "demographic equation"—the numerical balance between Jews and Arabs "west of the Jordan River." However, in contrast to the past, this equation no longer includes the Gaza Strip, and even following the onset of the Swords of Iron War, very few in Israel's political elite or among the general public support the renewal of Jewish settlements in the Gaza Strip (Ciechanover 2023).

"The Million Person Gap: The Arab Population in the West Bank and Gaza" by Zimmerman et al. (2006) provides evidence for supporters of annexing all or part of the West Bank to Israel. Its main conclusion is that the number of Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip is considerably less than the number given in the official Palestinian publications. According to the findings of Zimmerman et al., the actual number of Palestinians in the West Bank (not including East Jerusalem) and Gaza Strip was 2.47 million in early 2004: 1.4 million in the West Bank and 1.07 million in the Gaza Strip. These figures are strikingly lower than the official Palestinian figures. In view of these findings, it is clear that Israel's fears of demographic pressures from these areas were largely exaggerated.

Opponents of the "two state solution" have frequently cited this research since its publication.[22] This is because it supports the feasibility of annexing all or part of the West Bank to Israel without jeopardizing the Jewish majority "west of the Jordan River." Eldad (2016), for example, wrote, "Anyone who relies on the Palestinian CBS data in order to determine whether there are more Arabs than Jews west of the Jordan River, and thus influence decision makers, is relying on propaganda, not science." Therefore, once the Gaza Strip is removed from the demographic equation following the unilateral withdrawal, the demographic balance "west of the Jordan River" increasingly favors the Jews. Since the CBS includes the "Others" with the "Jews by nationality" in the national demographic

equation,[23] and the majority of them vote for right-wing parties,[24] the continuation of the Law of Return in its current format not only increases the proportion of "Jews by nationality" within Israel's existing borders, but also preserves a solid Jewish majority "west of the Jordan River." It goes without saying that the larger the Jewish majority between the Jordan River and the sea, the better. In light of these circumstances, it is easy to understand why there is a focus on encouraging high fertility among Israeli-Jewish women and a reluctance to change the Law of Return (including the "grandchild clause," which effectively includes the fourth generation), especially since immigration from the industrialized countries, where most Jews living outside Israel are concentrated,[25] is very low. In 2022, out of 74,714 immigrants to Israel, only 7.0% (5,163) came from the United States and France—the two largest concentrations of Jews outside Israel (CBS 2023a).

East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights as a Precedent?

Without a political decision regarding the future of the West Bank, along with the economic advantages for Israeli citizens living there, such as significantly lower housing costs, tax benefits, and better quality public services (Macro 2016; Melnitchi 2019), as well as the proximity to Israel's main employment centers, living beyond the Green Line is perceived as the most accessible solution for improving the quality of life, especially for young couples. Indeed, even after the signing of the Oslo Accords, the Jewish population in the West Bank continued to grow rapidly. By January 2022, nearly 492,000 Israeli citizens were living in these areas (Yesha Council 2022), compared to 116,340 at the end of 1993 (CBS 1994, Table 2.13), right after the Oslo Accords were signed. While the Israeli "Jews and Others" population grew by 69% from 1993 to 2021 within Israel, the Israeli Jewish population in the West Bank increased by a factor of 4.2 (CBS 2022a, Table 2.1). In 2021 alone, the number of Israeli citizens living in the West Bank rose by 16,000 (Yesha Council 2022), representing a 3.3% increase—nearly double the growth rate of the Israeli Jewish population. Assuming that the annual growth rate of the Jewish population in these areas remains at 3.3% in the medium term due to positive migration and a high fertility rate,[26] the number of Israeli citizens in these areas will increase by another 170,000 in one decade reaching about 700,000 by the end of the next decade. If the Shomron Regional Council's "One million residents in Samaria by 2050" program (Shomron Regional Council n.d.) is realized, even partially, and housing prices within the Green Line—especially in the country's center—continue to rise, demand for housing in the West Bank will likely increase, attracting more Jewish residents to the area.

Alongside the rapid growth of the Israeli population in the West Bank and its dispersal throughout the territory (Arieli 2022), there has been a gradual process of economic integration between the Israeli and PA economies. This integration has led to increasing mutual dependency, which is evident in the following five areas:

(a) **The PA's heavy dependence on taxes collected by Israel**: The Paris Protocol (April 1994) established a customs union between Israel and the PA, allowing Israel to collect indirect taxes for the PA, including import taxes, excise,[27] and VAT, and 75% of all direct taxes collected from Palestinians employed in Israel (after deducting commission and collection charges). Since the establishment of the PA, these taxes have accounted for at least two-thirds of its budget. The remaining third largely consists of donations that have steadily declined—from over 20% of the PA GDP in 2008 to 10% in 2013 and to only 1.8% in 2021—about a billion NIS (IMF 2023)—due mainly to the sharp drop in US aid during the Trump presidency and other international aid (Bossa et al. 2020). The PA's revenues from fees and local direct taxation account for only a

small percentage of its total revenue (Michael and Milstein 2021).

(b) **Mutual employment dependence**: Despite the option of importing foreign workers for the construction industry, Israeli contractors have preferred to hire Palestinians. This preference for Palestinian workers is because the contractors do not have to arrange accommodation and health insurance, which significantly increases the cost of employing foreign workers. The state also has favored the employment of Palestinians rather than foreign workers for two main reasons: First, the Palestinians do not live in Israel and therefore do not consume public services (health, education for their children, and so forth), nor do they contribute to the demand for housing in the major employment centers. Second, the security services maintain that extensive employment of young Palestinians in Israel reduces their motivation to commit acts of terror against Israel (Bohbot 2023; Zubida 2023). Indeed, since 1967, the Israeli residential construction industry has heavily relied on Palestinian employees. According to Bank of Israel data, in 2022, 177,300 Palestinians were employed in Israel, of whom 95,900 worked in the construction industry, representing 28.5% of all employees in the sector (Bank of Israel 2023, Tables H-N-3, B-N-35). Additionally, another 44,000 Palestinians were employed illegally in Israel, and about 40,000 worked in the Israeli settlements in the West Bank (Etkes and Adnan 2022). Therefore, more than half of all workers in the PA area were either directly employed in Israel and the Israeli settlements in the West Bank, with or without permits, or in the PA public sector, which, as stated above, is funded mainly by taxes collected by Israel. The paralysis that gripped Israel's housing and infrastructure sector due to restrictions on the employment of Palestinians in Israel, following the outbreak of the Swords of Iron War, illustrates the mutual employment dependence between Israel and the PA.

(c) **Foreign trade**: The PA's foreign trade, both import and export, is almost entirely conducted with Israel in NIS, rather than in foreign currency, which allows the PA to avoid holding foreign currency reserves. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Israel was the destination for about 80% of all Palestinian exports, worth about 3 billion NIS per annum (Shusterman 2020). Since the end of the pandemic, this figure has increased to about 90% in 2021 (U.S. Department of State 2022; IMF 2023).

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(d) **Water supply**: Due to its limited natural water resources, the PA cannot rely solely on its own water sources. However, unlike other Middle Eastern countries, the PA (excluding the Gaza Strip) does not have access to the sea, making it unable to utilize desalination. As a result, the PA is entirely dependent on water from Israel.[28] With the PA's rapid population growth, coupled with the ongoing climate crisis causing a decrease in precipitation across the eastern basin of the Mediterranean Sea, this reliance on Israel is expected to increase. According to data from the Water Authority, Israel supplied the PA with 76 million cubic meters of water in 2021.[29]

(e) **Electricity supply**: The PA does not have any electricity power stations in the West Bank. Apart from a small amount of electricity produced by solar panels, Israel generates all electricity in the West Bank.

The PA's economic dependence on Israel was described by Arie Arnon as follows: "The existence of 'Palestine' as a united, independent and separate economic entity is a fiction […]. Fifty-four years of Israeli control have erased the border between Israel and the Palestinians—not just the physical border but the economic border as well" (Goldstein 2021). The Israeli population in the West Bank, which stretches from the Jordan Valley in the north to beyond Mount Hebron in the south, combined with the mutual dependence of the two economies, means that the feasibility of a physical separation between Israel and the Palestinians on the West Bank is continually shrinking.

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At the same time, at least up to this point, when Israel annexed territory and subjected it to Israeli law, the non-Jewish residents gained permanent residency status. This was the case in East/Arab Jerusalem in 1967 and also for the Druze residents of the Golan Heights after the Golan Heights Law was passed in December 1981. In addition to the security issues arising from the free movement of West Bank Palestinians within Israel, which is permitted for all permanent residents, consolidating the territory west of the Jordan River into one political entity would have significant economic consequences, which have received little attention until now. Even before the COVID 19 pandemic severely harmed the PA economy, its per capita GDP was one-eighth that of Israel (Bossa et al. 2020). Since the residents of the PA (the West Bank, excluding East Jerusalem) are equivalent to about a quarter of the Israeli citizens,[30] combining the two economies into one would cause a dramatic drop in Israel's per capita GDP. Moreover, granting permanent residency status to the PA population would significantly increase the burden on Israel's public services, particularly welfare, health, and education. As we will see below, these services already struggle to meet the standards expected of an OECD economy.

Apart from the steep decline in the standard of living for Israel's citizens, if the territory of the PA is annexed wholly or in part, the Israeli regime will have to change accordingly. In this context, Peri (2016, 114) argued that "the Israeli Jews will not allow Palestinians to be equal partners in running the country […]. In this situation, the inevitable outcome will be a significant decline in Israeli democracy."

In contrast, the establishment of an independent Palestinian state with control over its own borders poses a threat to Israel, both in terms of security and demographically, especially if the borders are opened to Palestinian refugees or even to citizens of adjoining Arab countries facing severe economic crises, particularly Lebanon and Syria. This danger is not merely hypothetical. In September 2015, prior to the UN General Assembly meeting, Abu Mazen requested that Palestinian refugees from Syria be permitted to enter "Palestine" (i.e., the West Bank) given the ongoing civil war in Syria (Channel 20, 2015). For Israel's preferred option—annexing part of the territory according to Trump's "deal of the century" (Sher 2020)—there was not a single Palestinian partner, while Jordan rejected it outright (Issacharoff and Itiel 2020). Regardless, since the end of Trump's presidency, this plan has become irrelevant.

The Impact of the "Growing as Much as Possible" Policy on the Quality of Life in Israel

Israel's unprecedented rapid population growth and its young age structure[31] have significant consequences, some of which are irreversible in the short and medium term. The main ones are as follows:

(a) **A Low Breadwinners/Dependents Ratio**: Studies of the demographic history of industrialized countries show that their most significant economic leap forward occurred during a period of "demographic gift" (or "demographic dividend")—a period when at least 70% of the population was of working age (64–20) and the economic activity rate[32] of both men and women was high. Even though this period is temporary, lasting only three to four decades (in accordance with the age structure), it provides the necessary timeframe for economic advancement. This is because during this period, not only is the ratio of breadwinners to dependents optimal, with a small proportion of people below and above working age, but the country can also allocate resources from education, health, and welfare services to areas that promote rapid economic growth, such as physical infrastructure, scientific research, and technological development. The "Asian Tigers"[33] during the 1960s and 1970s are the best example of the contribution of the demographic gift age structure to rapid economic development (Madsen et al. 2010).

In Israel, however, due to the high fertility rate, the population under the age of 20 has increased rapidly.[34] Israel also faces a specific problem that hinders improvement in per capita income—a very low labor force participation rate for ultra-Orthodox (Haredi) men (56%) and Muslim women (45%)[35] (CBS 2022b; Peleg-Gabai 2022; Eretz 2023). It should be noted that not only is the labor force participation rate of ultra-Orthodox men substantially lower than the average rate of Israeli men, but many of them are also employed within their own community as teachers in schools and yeshivas. Additionally, a significant percentage of them do not work full-time. Among Muslim women, the rate of full-time employment is lower than the average for all Israeli women (Malach and Cahaner 2022; Ministry of Labor 2023).

The combination of a significant portion of the population being below working age, coupled with low labor force participation rates among ultra-Orthodox men and Muslim women—two sectors with much higher-than-average growth rates—contributes to an overall low labor force participation rate for the entire country. Indeed, Israel's overall labor force participation rate is 7%–8% lower than that of most other OECD countries (World Bank n.d.b; n.d.c).

(b) **Deterioration of public services**: The rapid population growth has led to an increase in demand, contributing to a decline in the quality of public services. One of the clearest expressions of this is in healthcare: by the end of 2020, the number of hospital beds per capita was 8% lower than a decade previously (Hillel and Haklai 2021), placing Israel among the countries with the lowest rates in the OECD (Chernichovsky and Kfir 2019). As population growth continues to outpace the expansion of health infrastructure, education, law enforcement, and welfare services, the quality of these services and the overall standard of living continue to deteriorate.

(c) **Overcrowding**: Overcrowding is particularly evident along the coastal plain where most of Israel's population is concentrated. Attempts by various governments to disperse the population, mainly to the Negev and Galilee—through generous economic incentives such as significant tax cuts—have had only limited success. This is largely due to the lack of an advanced transport infrastructure and suitable public services (Kahana 2022; Rosner 2023). In addition, the IDF's need for extensive areas in the Negev for bases and firing zones further complicates the relocation of large numbers of people to the region. The result is steady overcrowding along the coastal plain, leading to rising air pollution and violence. This overcrowding is a major factor in the decline in the quality of life. Simply observing the continuously growing commute time between and within major employment hubs reveals that overcrowding not only diminishes the quality of life but also increases

living expenses. This includes the time wasted on commuting, along with associated travel costs. Moreover, it disregards expenses such as childcare for parents with young children and other additional costs resulting from longer commuting times.

(d) **Rising cost of living**: One of the most pressing concerns is the rising cost of living, particularly concerning items that cannot be imported, primarily land for housing construction. Several factors have contributed to the dramatic rise in housing prices in Israel since 2008, including the reduction of interest rates to only 0.1%, which lowered borrowing costs; the slow marketing of land; bureaucratic complexity in planning committees; and more. However, the main factor is the widening gap between supply and demand, which has risen by about 2% annually due to population growth (Brezis 2021). In addition to rapid population growth, the increasing divorce rate has also contributed to the demand for housing.

(e) **Perpetuation of high poverty rate**:[36] The likelihood of poverty naturally increases with the size of the household, meaning that a high proportion of large families inevitably leads to a higher incidence of poverty. In July 2023, fourth and subsequent children accounted for 14.4% of all children in Israel (NII 2023, Table 6.3.1). Of all households that received child allowance, 17.7% received the allowance for four or more children, and 8.6% for five or more children (NII 2023, Table 6.2.1). In 2019, even before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the poverty rate among households with four or more children was 45.2%, rising to 55.6% among families with five or more children (Endeweld et al. 2021, 15, Table 4). In view of this data, it is clear why the incidence of poverty among children in Israel reached 28.7% in 2020 (Endeweld et al. 2022, 10, Figure 2). As long as the fertility rate does not decline and the proportion of children living in households with six or more people remains high, the poverty rate in Israel will remain above 20%, even with substantial increases in child allowances.

External Demographic Threats

The external demographic threats to Israel—those beyond its direct control—can be divided into three main categories based on different timeframes:

(a) **The short term: Refugee influx**: Since the end of 2019, the Lebanese economy has almost ceased to function, with recent reports from Lebanon describing almost total chaos. According to the Fragile States Index, Lebanon ranks 29th,[37] similar to Venezuela and Iraq (Fund for Peace 2022), both of which have already "exported" large numbers of refugees to neighboring countries. Given the ongoing political deterioration in Lebanon, with no foreseeable solution, and its hosting of approximately 1.5 million Syrian refugees—over a quarter of its population (Yasin 2023)—it is plausible to anticipate a potential influx of Lebanese refugees seeking safety in neighboring countries, including Israel.

A similar threat of incoming refugees, particularly Druze, exists along Israel's border with Syria. Although the civil war in Syria ended some time ago, the rebuilding process has yet to commence. As a result, Syrian refugees in Lebanon, Turkey, and Jordan, and certainly those who fled to Europe have not returned to Syria.[38] Any worsening conditions, especially in southern Syria, could prompt refugees to cross the border into Israel.

However, the greatest and most immediate risk of an influx of refugees to Israel comes from the Gaza Strip, home to about 2.2 million people, with a natural growth rate of almost 3% annually (PCBS 2022)—doubling in size in just three decades. As a result of the war in Gaza, almost the entire population of the Gaza Strip has become displaced. Egypt has consistently refused to open its border to provide refuge for fleeing residents of Gaza.

Even under optimal conditions, can the Gaza Strip's economy support such a large population? It is very doubtful. Therefore, in a situation of a humanitarian disaster, which becomes increasingly likely as the war

continues, refugees from the Gaza Strip will naturally seek refuge in Israel. And Israel, like any other democratic country, has no solution for refugees arriving at its borders but to provide humanitarian aid. When discussing Palestinian refugees from the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, Lebanon, or Syria in the context of Israel, the issue involves not only humanitarian concerns but also, and perhaps more importantly, politics and security.

(b) **The medium term: Greater pollution**: Israel is already in the unflattering 57th position (out of 180 countries) on the EPI (Environmental Performance Index), placing it lower than nearly all other OECD countries (Wolf et al. 2022). Rapid population growth will require the construction of more power stations and water desalination plants, leading to a rise in air pollution—even if new facilities are built and operated according to the strictest standards. Furthermore, Israel supplies water not only to itself but also to the PA, the Gaza Strip, and Jordan, whose populations are also growing rapidly; this will significantly increase the demand for desalinated water in Israel. Israel has another environmental problem—its proximity to the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. In these areas, levels of air pollution are higher and likely to rise in the future. This increase is not only due to rapid population growth but also to the failure to enforce environmental quality standards, which Israel cannot impose in these areas, since it does not formally control them. The rising air pollution is already affecting the air quality in Israel, and this will continue, particularly in areas close to the Green Line (Assayag 2023).

(c) **The long term: The climate change consequences**: Global warming affects Israel in three main areas. The first is the expansion of desertification, a critical issue for a semi-arid country like Israel. Increasing desertification will harm agriculture and even reduce precipitation, forcing Israel to desalinate much larger quantities of water—due not only to rapid population growth but also to declining rainfall. Second, global warming has already led to flooding, especially in the densely populated coastal plain. Forecasts indicate that flooding will become more frequent, not only due to changes in rainfall caused by global warming but also because the increasing population pressure means fewer open areas that can absorb runoff water. Even today, the coastal plain, from Ashkelon in the south to Nahariya in the north, is effectively one continuous urban space. Third, Israel's location on the seam between Asia and Africa could expose it to not only political refugees from neighboring areas but also to climate refugees from Africa. It should be remembered that Israel is already hosting tens of thousands of refugees from failing African countries (Michael et al. 2021).

What makes Israel unique is that even without significant financial incentives, the fertility rate of the middle class is almost double the average in OECD countries.

What Next?

Although Israel's rapid population growth affects all areas of life-from skyrocketing housing prices to deteriorating environmental quality, growing congestion on the roads, rising violence, and the ever-growing cost of living—the subject of the desirable fertility rate for Israel remains an "absent presence" in the public, professional, and political discourse. What makes Israel unique is that even without significant financial incentives, the fertility rate of the middle class is almost double the average in OECD countries. This is driven by the victory of the "Zionist demographic ethos." However, unlike economic changes, demographic shifts occur slowly over many decades. Even if the current fertility rate is controlled, Israel, already overcrowded, would still experience increased population due to the phenomenon of the "demographic momentum," with significant implications for its standard of living.

Although any change to Israel's demographic policy, whether regarding the desirable fertility

rate or the Law of Return, is an internal decision, it requires broad national consensus. As of the time of writing in early 2024, achieving a general consensus on such a sensitive issue seems impractical, given the wide divergence of views among the different sectors of Israeli Jews on this issue and others.

In addition to the "domestic demographic danger" posed by rapid population growth, the "two-state solution" is becoming ever more distant as the Israeli population in the West Bank continues to grow rapidly. Contrary to the common perception that Israel controls the future of the West Bank, preventing the creation of one state "west of the Jordan River" is something that Israel cannot do unilaterally; it requires a settlement with the PA, whether the existing one or any future version that may emerge after the war in Gaza. At present, the PA is widely seen as incapable of making any decisions, let alone implementing them, on reaching a settlement with Israel, whether concerning the West Bank alone or including the Gaza Strip in the post-war period.

What will be the outcome of the ongoing process of Israel's integration with the West Bank? How will this process affect the standard of living in Israel? What resources will be required to protect the growing Israeli population in the West Bank, and how will this security be achieved? When and under what circumstances will Israel's rapid population growth become unsustainable? Only time will tell.

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Notes

1 The replacement-level fertility rate is the fertility rate that is sufficient for one daughter to replace one mother. In industrialized countries, where the age-specific mortality rate is low, this rate is 2.1 children per woman.

2 The demographic momentum is the effect of the current age structure of the population on its future growth rate.

3 In 2021, of the entire EU population, 21% were above the age of 65 while the median age was 41.1. This age is expected to rise to 50 in the next generation (Eurostat 2023).

4 As a generalization, it can be said that until the Rabat Conference (October 1974), the Palestinians were opposed to any option of dividing the territory "west of the Jordan River" into two separate political entities, while after the June 1967 War Israel was, and still is, opposed to such a solution.

5 See, for example, the stormy debate in the Knesset on December 30, 2003 on the subject of "The loss of Jewish majority between the Jordan River and the sea." On October 25, 2004, during the debate on the disengagement from the Gaza Strip, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon said: "We don't want to rule forever over millions of Palestinians whose number doubles every generation. Israel, aspiring to be a model democracy, cannot sustain such a situation for long." https://katzr.net/1e677d. See also Even, 2021.

6 Demographic policy refers to the governmental policy in three areas: natalist policy; population dispersion within the country itself and in territories under its control, namely the settlements in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip (until the disengagement in 2005) in the Israeli case; and the immigration policy, which, in the Israeli case, includes the Law of Return (1950) and its amendment (1970), and the Citizenship Law (1952).

7 Overall, during the years 1974–1989, the number of Israeli Jews rose by 27.9%, while the number of Israeli Arabs increased by as much as 63.7% (CBS, 2021a, Table 2.1).

8 Prior to Israel's annexation of East Jerusalem and the granting of permanent residency status to its non-Jewish residents. A permanent resident can live in the country and enjoy all the rights of an Israeli citizen, except for the right to vote for the Knesset (the Israeli Parliament). Although permanent residents are not citizens, they are included in the population count of Israel. In mid-2022, 355,000 Arabs residing in East/Arab Jerusalem had permanent resident status.

9 The attempts by industrialized countries to adopt policies that encourage higher fertility show that high child allowances and other economic benefits for families with multiple children encourage or maintain high fertility only among families of low socioeconomic status (Winckler 2008).

10 During 1990–2001, the total number of immigrants to Israel amounted to 1.09 million (CBS 2016, Figure 1).

11 The fertility rate of Israeli Muslims fell from a peak of 9.87 children per woman in 1965 to 2.91 in 2022 (CBS 2023b).

12 During 2001–2003 Israel's per capita GDP fell by 6.1%—more than in any other period in Israeli history, including 2020, during the COVID 19 pandemic (CBS 2022a, Table 11.2).

13 On the sharp decline of the fertility rate among the Bedouin of the Negev, see Abusrihan and Anson 2021.

14 Out of 179,500 Christian citizens of Israel at the end of 2020, 76.7% were Arabs and nearly all the rest were Christians who immigrated to Israel due to the amendment to the Law of Return (CBS 2021b).

15 Income in kind (or in-kind income, benefit in kind) is income that is not cash but equivalent to cash, for example, a discount on municipal taxes, reduced electricity and water tariffs, cheaper public transport, or tax credits for young children.

16 The fertility rate of ultra-Orthodox Israeli women fell from a peak of 7.36 on average in the years 2003–2005 to an average of 6.56 in the years 2017–2019 (CBS 2020, Table 3; CBS 2023c).

17 The overall fertility rate of non-religious Israeli-Jewish women rose slightly, from 1.93 on average in the years 2003–2005 to 2.08 on average in the years 2017–2019. The main factor in this rise was the increased fertility rate among the second generation of immigrants from the former Soviet Union and those who came at a young age and were educated in Israel, compared to their mothers. Most of these women married native Israelis and adopted the fertility patterns of non-religious Israeli-Jewish women (CBS 2020, Table 7; see also Winckler 2022).

18 In March 2024, the Bank of Israel interest rate was 4.50% and the prime rate stood at 6.00%, after ten consecutive rate increases since April 2022. This steep increase in the interest rate meant an average rise of more than ILS1,000 in monthly mortgage payments (Green 2023).

19 For details of the Law of Return and the 1970 amendment, which allowed the "third generation" to immigrate to Israel, see Gavison 2009.

20 The Director General of the Population and Immigration Authority.

21 Yulia Malinovsky and Elina Bardach-Yalov.

22 It should be noted that the findings of this study have been refuted by many, notably by Sofer and Gambush (2007) and Della Pergola (2007).

23 In the religious composition of Israel's population, the "Others" appear in a separate category (2023d, Table 2.2), while in the presentation by "population group" (2023d, Table 2.3), the categories are "Jews and Others" and "Arabs." See also Sasson, 2022.

24 In previous elections, about two-thirds of the immigrants from the former USSR voted for immigrant parties (primarily Yisrael be'Aliyah followed by Yisrael Beitenu). The remaining third mostly voted for right-wing parties (Likud, Kulanu, and Tikva Hadasha), with only a few voting for left-wing parties (Konstantinov 2022).

25 As of September 2023, out of 8.5 million Jews living outside Israel, more than 7.7 million were living in OECD countries (The Jewish Agency 2023).

26 In 2022, the fertility rate of the Jewish population in the West Bank (excluding East Jerusalem) was 4.59—about 50% higher than the average among the Israeli-Jewish population (CBS 2023d, Table 2.42).

27 Excise is a fixed-rate tax applied to each unit of a product, such as benzene and diesel fuel in the case of Israel.

28 The second option for water supplies to the PA is from Jordan. However, due to the severe water shortage in Jordan, this option is not realistic, as Jordan itself relies on water supply from Israel.

29 This figure was provided by Itai Kovarski from the Water Authority in the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee of the Knesset on May 30, 2022, https://katzr.net/87a95c

30 According to PCBS, in mid-2021 there were slightly more than 2.6 million people living in the PA territory, excluding East Jerusalem (PCBS 2022).

31 In 2022 the median age of Jews and Others was 32.3 years, while that of the Arabs was 24.8 years (CBS 2023d, Table 2.5).

32 The economic activity rate is the proportion of employed people to the total number of the population of the working age.

33 The term "Asian Tigers" refers to four countries—Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan—which, within a few decades (1960s–1980s), transformed from developing economies into industrialized ones.

34 In 2020, the Israeli population under the age of 20 numbered 3.31 million, compared to 2.34 million in 2000—a nominal growth of 41.1% over only two decades (CBS 2001, Table 2.10; CBS 2021a, Table 2.3).

35 The data refers to the second quarter of 2023.

36 The term "poverty rate" refers to the proportion of individuals or households living below the poverty line.

37 The higher a country ranks on the index, the greater the threat to its stability.

38 Estimates of the number of Syrian refugees are roughly seven million, while another seven million are internally displaced (UNHCR 2023).

Demographics and Economy in Israel

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The Swedish economist Knut Wicksell wrote at the beginning of the twentieth century that any basic book on political economy must begin with a chapter on population. Despite the importance of demography, Wicksell noted that it is often neglected in favor of other issues (Strøm & Thalberg, 1979). For years, the State of Israel has had the highest fertility rate among OECD countries. While many developed countries employ diverse measures—including immigration—in order to cope with manpower shortages and to support the economy, natural fertility in Israel is so high that it creates the opposite challenge for the economy. The "demographic anxiety" that characterized Israel in its first few years, which stemmed from being a small population surrounded by enemies that was forced to cope with military and economic challenges requiring significant population resources, no longer exists. The Israeli economy is now stretched by the effects of high natural population growth in a small country, along with technological changes that impact the labor market. This article examines demographic developments and their economic consequences in Israel according to recent trends and forecasts for the coming years.

Keywords: Economy, GDP, GDP per capita, birth rate, fertility rate, public investment, population growth, standard of living, pension, private expenditure, economic challenges, infrastructure, education, density.

Demography in Israel

The Israeli model of recent years is unique by any measure. The combination of an advanced and developed economy and a high birth rate is not common in the modern world. Demographic concerns were among the main shapers of the State of Israel when it was established in 1948. At the time of the declaration of independence, there were only about 800,000 residents in the State of Israel, some of whom had immigrated from Europe just a short time before, carrying the horrors and terrible losses of the Holocaust. The small country faced enormous challenges, first and foremost militarily, as fewer than a million people were forced to contend with a hostile environment of tens of millions. The trauma of the Holocaust, with the destruction of a third of the Jewish people, added another weighty layer to the anxiety.

This initial context rendered the growth of the population as a strategic, existential necessity, which was expressed in a policy that emphasized coping with quantitative demographic inferiority as an important component of Israeli policy in general and Israel's defense doctrine in particular, as expressed in "Ben-Gurion's Seminar" (Ben-Israel 2013). Social norms advocating large

families, a policy encouraging a high fertility rate through grants, and encouraging Jewish immigration to Israel were the most prominent aspects of the State of Israel's attempt to decrease the quantitative population gaps vis-à-vis the Arab countries. In effect, security and economic considerations pushed for a policy of increasing natural growth via immigration and a high fertility rate (Krampf 2015).

Discussions on the encouragement of Jewish immigration as one aspect of promoting population growth, usually focus on the security and settlement aspects that were fateful to the existence of the Jewish people, and rightfully so. However, in the long term, the importance of population increase is also felt in the economic sphere. The understanding was that in the short term, coping with waves of immigration and an increasing birth rate would make things difficult for the new country and add to the existing economic challenges. Welcoming hundreds of thousands of Jews, many arriving empty-handed, and providing workplaces and food, would be a burden for any country in the world; all the more so for a small, young country that was coping with existential threats from the moment it was established. However, in the long term, the growth of the population is also an economic goal in and of itself, as increasing manpower in factories and increasing high-quality human capital are as important as the need for boots on the battlefield. Thus population growth was also the need of the hour from an economic perspective.

The Israeli case of an advanced and developed economy with the natural increase of a developing country is unique, and it may not be sustainable over time, thus necessitating a reassessment of the policy of encouraging a high birth rate in Israel.

Today, 75 years after the establishment of the State of Israel, we can clearly see that Israeli demographic policy has been very successful. At the beginning of 2023, the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) announced that the population of Israel at the end of 2022 was 9.656 million people. In that year Israel's population grew by 2.2%. The sources of growth are quite interesting, with 62% natural increase and 38% immigration—mainly Jewish immigration from various diaspora countries (CBS 2022b). A growth rate of about 2% has been maintained for a long period and it is a figure that stands out and is unprecedented in the developed world, as well as the undeveloped world. For comparison, Sri Lanka and Myanmar (formerly Burma) are two other countries that declared independence in 1948. In Sri Lanka there were about 7 million people at the time of independence, while in Myanmar there were about 17 million people. As of 2022, about 22 million people live in Sri Lanka, while about 54 million live in Myanmar (United Nations n.d.). That is, the population of each of those countries tripled during this period, while Israel's growth was much greater, at 12 times. It should be noted that population growth in Sri Lanka and Myanmar matches population growth in the world, whose population grew 3.5 times from 1948 to 2022, but the level of economic development in each of them is much lower than in Israel—which further highlights the gap between the countries. According to the UN human development index, which examines the development of countries comparatively, using metrics such as education, income, and mortality, in 2021 Israel's level of development was very high, ranking 22 out of 191 countries. Sri Lanka ranked 73, while Myanmar was ranked 149 (HDI n.d.).

Israel in 2023 is a completely different country than it was in 1948. Numerically it is no longer tiny. According to World Bank figures, in 2021 Israel's population placed it 97th in the world out of over 200 countries (World Bank n.d.c). Economically, the population's growth contributed greatly to a dramatic increase in GDP growth over the years, as is expressed in the same database. Israel's GDP in 2021 was 488 billion dollars, placing it 26th in the world (World Bank n.d.b).

The quantitative and qualitative growth of Israel's population is a critical component that has significantly contributed to the country's impressive economic growth since its establishment. However, it may also be true that what was necessary for many years to serve the society and economy as a catalyst for this growth, could become a burden on the economy in the coming years. We must examine the positive impacts of population growth on the economy in the past while soberly looking at its potential future impacts, which will not necessarily continue the positive trend that has existed so far. The Israeli case of an advanced and developed economy with the natural increase of a developing country is unique, and it may not be sustainable over time, thus necessitating a reassessment of the policy of encouraging a high birth rate in Israel. But first, we will present a theoretical framework that will illustrate the importance of demography to the economy.

Demography and Economics

The implications of demography for economics are numerous, diverse, and weighty. Demography is much more than fertility rate, mortality, and the age of the population. The literal meaning relates to the characteristics of the population and is thus connected to a very broad range of economic contexts. A demographic economic analysis includes birth rates, mortality rates, and the age of the population, but it must also include references to the characteristics of each of them. For example, the age of the population is not a permanent variable, as it has various contexts in accordance with a certain point in time, place, and needs. A demographic economic analysis examines the population according to gender, religion, skills, rural or urban, consumer patterns, and more. Hence, it appears that demography is in effect the main shaper of the economy and influences the economic development of every country and its balance of payments (Roy 2021).

Until the industrial revolution and ensuing technological changes, demographic concepts were largely underdeveloped, as population growth was almost the only path to economic growth. The population was an essential resource for increasing the workforce via increasing human capital, which is an important resource for the development of the economy. The view that population growth supports economic growth and with it an increase in the standard of living, in effect encouraged further population growth.

According to the "Malthusian trap," every improvement in the standard of living would encourage excess births, which would counterbalance the additional production with additional demands, thereby maintaining subsistence at the lowest threshold.

At the end of the eighteenth century, the English economist Thomas Malthus related to demography as the most important variable in economics. His approach is rooted in a pre-industrial world where the earth was the main source of profit. Thus, more people working in agriculture could increase the total profit. According to the "Malthusian trap," every improvement in the standard of living would encourage excess births, which would counterbalance the additional production with additional demands, thereby maintaining subsistence at the lowest threshold. Malthus' theory of catastrophe is founded on the assumption that the world's population grows exponentially, while the food supply grows linearly. Therefore, a larger population will increase general production but reduce per capita production. Each increase in per capita production will bring about an improvement in the standard of living that will be expressed in a higher birth rate, and hence again there will be a decline in per capita production. The only way out of this trap is via significant technological changes to boost food production faster than

population growth. This is exactly what occurred a short time after Malthus' prophecies of doom (Aghion et al. 2021).

During the 200 years that have passed since then, the industrial revolutions and the technological improvements that they brought about, have changed everything. Expedited processes of urbanization, educational opportunities, the integration of women in the labor market, and many other processes, including enormous investment in human capital that contributed to improvements on the level of the population—all of these prevented the fulfillment of the theory. Over the past 50 years, the world's population has doubled—from 4 billion people at the beginning of the 1970s to 8 billion people in 2022. In the same time period, global production increased 28 times, from 3.5 trillion to 100 trillion dollars.

The impressive growth of the last 200 years has fundamentally changed the demographic characteristics of the world's population. The industrial era sharply lowered the birth rate of the developed world in light of the secondary importance of manpower for producing capital, combined with other processes such as women's education and their integration in the workforce. If in the nineteenth century a woman could expect to give birth to six children during her life, in the middle of the twentieth century a woman gave birth to five children, and at the beginning of the twenty-first century the global average was 2.5 children per woman (Lee 2003). This sharp drop is not accompanied by a decline in the world's population, but by an increase that stems from other processes. The dramatic changes and developments in science and medicine have increased longevity. A man born in the middle of the nineteenth century lived for about 30 years on average, a man born in the middle of the twentieth century lived for 50 years on average, while a man who will be born in the middle of the twenty-first century is expected to live more than 70 years (Lee 2003). The new demography of the industrial era requires that countries prepare accordingly, for example by raising the retirement age.

The view that industrialization and progress sharply lower the fertility rate while increasing longevity is expressed well in Warren Thompson's paradigmatic 1929 model. The American demographer precisely predicted the balance that would emerge in countries, between the death rate and the birth rate in industrialized societies, due to progress and technological, scientific, and economic changes. Thompson's demographic transition model (DTM) comprises five stages, each of which relates to the industrial stage that society is in and its impact on the birth rate, death rate, and population growth (Roy 2021). These are the five stages according to Thompson:

1. The pre-industrial stage—characterized by a high birth rate due to the importance of manpower to the economy, but without knowledge and technology; also by a high death rate at a young age.
2. Fast population growth—in the second stage, society begins to experience industrialization and economic development that improves the quality of life. This is expressed in a greater supply of food and improved medicine and hygiene. All of these create conditions that decrease incidents of death caused by sickness or hunger. Meanwhile, the birth rate remains the same as in the pre-industrial stage, which creates an imbalance and fast population growth.
3. The population growth starts to balance out—as part of the industrial development of the society and the improved quality of life in the second stage, the birth rate starts to decline. This is due to social and economic processes—for example, greater exposure to education, which brings women into the world of employment. Meanwhile, the death rate continues to decrease, leading to stable population growth.
4. Stabilization of the population—in the fourth stage, the birth rate is low but so is the death rate. In this situation, significant population

growth is not expected but rather very slow growth, and if it declines, society moves to the fifth stage.

5. Population decline—the fifth stage stems from a very low birth rate and low death rate, which together lead to population decline over time.

Most developed countries nowadays are in the fourth and fifth stage, while developing countries are in the second and third stage. Population growth to power the economy is less important than in the past. Today, families do not need to give birth to five or six children for the sake of economic output, but this does not mean there is no stage at which the economy will be affected by a birth rate that is too low. Today it is customary to place the necessary replacement level at 2.1 children per family. Without immigration, any level lower than this will decrease the population and could create a shortage of productive workers. Today the average in the developed world is 1.62 (Roy 2021), which forces developed countries to balance this through the immigration of workers and to deviate from the fifth stage in Thompson's model.

For example, Japan and Germany have been in the fifth stage for years, given a death rate that is higher than the birth rate. But Germany has succeeded in returning to the fourth stage thanks to immigration, while Japan, which refuses to take in immigrants, is stuck in the fifth stage. This situation could harm the local economy, because fewer and fewer young people are forced to provide for a growing senior population. The result of the fifth stage—a decreasing population—for the economy, can be destructive. Along with population contraction, in recent years Japan has also experienced a decline in GDP and GDP per capita (IMF n.d.). In effect, immigration is the quickest solution for a low birth rate and for the economic problem that it causes for developed countries. Today, one out of every ten residents in an OECD countries was born in another country. Given the low birth rates, these countries take in millions of immigrants each year in order to avoid a fate like Japan's. For example, in 2022 they absorbed 6.1 million immigrants (OECD n.d.e).

In this context, Israel is a fascinating test case, as it is one of the only countries that does not match any of the stages of Thompson's models, and in general constitutes an interesting demographic anomaly.

In recent years, no country is in the first stage of Thompson's model; they have all experienced various levels of industrialization, which reduces the birth rate, increases economic growth, and changes the path of historical development that Malthus predicted. However, despite the impressive defeat of the Malthusian trap, the consequences of this fast population growth combined with tremendous economic growth are not always positive. First, with respect to the population density on earth. The population has grown ten times since Malthus' prophecy, while the earth's area remains the same; second, such fast growth requires maximum exploitation of natural resources such as water, and damages them; third, air pollution and climate change. These threaten the development of agricultural crops and food in certain areas and even threaten human settlement in other areas that may become too hot, thus further reducing the areas of the earth that can be settled.

All of these and more illustrate the limits of the earth, challenge continued growth, and threaten the continuation of the positive trend. It may be that what was desirable and even necessary in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is becoming one of the biggest question marks of the twenty-first century, as the continuation of this rate would be quite destructive. In this context, Israel is a fascinating test case, as it is one of the only countries that does not match any of the stages of Thompson's models, and in general constitutes an interesting demographic anomaly.

High But Changing Birth Rate—A Curious Contribution to the Israeli Economy

The birth rate in Israel is high and is unusual by any measure for one main reason—it is always high and is almost unaffected by economic changes, which in any other place would affect birth patterns. In the years when Israel was a developing country, the birth rate was high, and in the years when Israel made the transition to an industrialized and advanced country as presented in Thompson's model, the birth rate remained high. In the years when there were economic crises, the birth rate was high, and even economic crises that were accompanied by military tension, such as the years of the Second Intifada, did not change the birth rate in Israel, which remained high. In effect, since the end of the 1970s, the fertility rate has hovered around three children per family and has not been affected by events (Macrotrends n.d.). Also during the COVID-19 crisis, a rare health crisis that led to serious economic damage, the birth rate in other countries decreased but in Israel it remained high (Matthews 2021).

Aside from the high birth rate, Jewish immigration from the Diaspora has been a main component in the high rate of population growth in Israel over the years. About one fifth of Israel's current residents were not born in Israel (OECD n.d.a). Over the years, Israel has benefited from Jewish immigration, which has greatly contributed to economic growth. A large portion of the immigration to the State of Israel since its establishment was of highly skilled people with means and education. It is difficult to express this immigration's contribution to production over the years in numbers, but it can be partially expressed via the human capital that came from the former Soviet countries in the 1990s. In 1989, before the waves of immigration, there were about 15,000 doctors and 30,000 engineers in Israel. From 1989 to 1993 alone, about 12,000 doctors and 60,000 engineers immigrated to Israel (Katz 2022).

For many years the combination of a high birth rate and the immigration of human capital to Israel advanced the local economy. David Ben-Gurion's view that a qualitative human edge should be created to combat the quantitative advantage of Israel's hostile neighbors, proved itself in both the military and civilian spheres (Even 2021). Today the army relies on qualitative technological superiority that stems from an advanced economy and investment in education, research, and development. But nothing lasts forever, and it could be that 2% annual population growth cannot continue in such a small and crowded country as Israel.

The accelerated growth since the state's establishment has made Israel one of the most densely populated countries in the world in general, and among developed countries in particular. The problem worsens if we take into account that there are desert areas in the southern Negev that are much harder to settle, unlike more densely populated countries like the Netherlands, South Korea, and Hong Kong that do not suffer from a similar problem. Furthermore, the severity of Israel's small physical size is intensified by the fact that it is surrounded by hostile countries, which is very different from a country like the more densely populated Netherlands, whose residents enjoy free access to the neighboring countries.

The current demographic trends do not bode well: A continued population growth rate of 2% per year means that Israel's population will grow 75% by 2050, when it will be over 15 million people.

Referring solely to the average number of births presents a partial picture of the economic contribution of natural increase to Israel's economy, as each sector's contribution to GDP is different. Therefore, the demographic forecasts of the various groups should be examined in accordance with their participation in the labor market. As part of a comprehensive survey that the CBS performed in 2017, a study was conducted that examined demographic trends

Table 1. Area, population, and density[1]

	Israel	Ranking out of 38 OECD countries	World ranking out of 200 countries*
Area (km^2)	**22,072**	**# 37** Only Luxembourg is smaller	**# 150**
Population (millions)	9.6	# 23	# 97
Population density (no. of residents per km^2)	**426**	**# 3** after South Korea and the Netherlands	**#26****

* According to UN figures there are 233 countries and territories, 200 of which have a population of more than 100,000 residents, and 172 of which have a territory of over 1,000 km2

** According to the World Bank

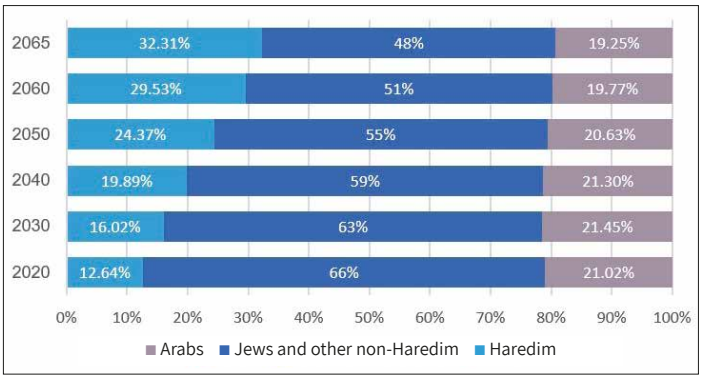
Table 2. Israel compared to OECD countries

	Israel	OECD average	Rank in OECD
No. of children per woman	2.9	1.6	# 1
Population growth rate[2]	**1.9%**	**0.5%**	**# 3** After Iceland and Luxembourg

in Israel until 2065 (CBS 2017). The study divides Israel's population into three main groups: non-Haredi Jews, Haredim, and Arabs. According to the forecasts, the most dramatic change that will occur by 2065 will be among Jews and not among Arabs, as many mistakenly think. Despite the high birth rate among Israeli Arabs in the first years of the state, it should be noted that education and an improved economic situation have shifted the fertility rate in the Arab community. The fertility rate of Arab women today is comparable to that of Jewish women and is in a downward trend, which is strengthened as women acquire higher education and integrate into employment. If in 1975 the average woman from the Arab community gave birth to six children during her life, in recent years the average has stabilized around three children (Heruti-Sover 2022). Consequently, Israeli Arabs, who currently constitute one fifth of the country's population, are expected to continue to constitute about one fifth of the population in 2065.

The phenomenon that is unique to Israel on a global scale is in the Jewish sector, not including Haredim, which constitutes the backbone of Israeli society and economy. The average in this category is over two children per secular or traditional woman and has been increasing since the 1990s. This is an unusual phenomenon, because in the developed world, as education and GDP per capita increase, the fertility rate decreases among the middle class. In addition, it would be wrong to conclude that secular women of a lower socioeconomic standing tend to give birth to more children, thus pushing the average up. According to CBS figures, in Israel,

Figure 1. The CBS' demographic growth forecasts



Source: The Author, according to CBS figures, 2017

even in the highest socioeconomic decile, the average woman is expected to give birth to 1.95 children during her lifetime (CBS 2022a).

The most anomalous birth rate in the State of Israel is that of the Haredi population. In recent years the average has been 6.65 children per Haredi family—a moderate decline from an average of seven children per family at the beginning of the third millennium. This figure explains the dramatic changes that the Jewish community in Israel can expect by 2065. Despite the relatively high fertility rate of non-Haredi women in Israel, the relative weight of this population in the overall population is expected to decline from two thirds to half of Israel's population. Furthermore, if current trends continue, in the 2040s the Haredi population is expected to constitute one fifth of Israel's population, in the 2050s Haredim are expected to be one quarter of the population, and in 2065 one third of Israel's population will belong to the Haredi community (CBS 2022a).

These figures, which indicate a transformation of Israeli society in the coming years, become significant when analyzing the integration of the various groups in the employment market. When dividing by sector, we can say that the beating heart of the Israeli economy is the Jewish sector, not including Haredim. This sector constitutes the largest portion of the population, the large majority of which is employed in the economy. According to CBS figures, this sector comprises two thirds of Israel's population. As of the time of writing, the employment rate is 87% of Jewish men ages 25-64 and 83% of Jewish women (CBS 2022a). Historically, Jewish men who are not from the Haredi sector have always maintained a high employment rate of over 80%, except during economic slowdowns, while the rise in the employment of Jewish women is a unique and fluctuating phenomenon. Their employment rate increased from 60% in the 1990s to 80% in the second decade of the twenty-first century (Fuchs and Weiss 2018). The training of women for the modern employment market has been an important component of Israel's economic development and its impressive growth in recent years.

Turning to the two other sectors that constitute about a third of Israeli society today, presents a picture that is far from optimal. As of 2022, the employment rate among the entire Haredi population was 66%, whereas the breakdown by gender indicates an imbalance. About 81% of Haredi women worked, a rate that is similar to that among non-Haredi Jewish women, while only half of Haredi men were employed (Knesset Research and Information Center 2022). Yet examining the trends of the entire sector raises hope that it is possible to increase the employment rate.

In the 1990s the employment rates of men and women were similar, more or less: less than half of Haredi women and Haredi men were employed. At that point we see the first divergence by gender, as there was a jump in the employment rate among women while the employment rate among men declined below 40% at the beginning of the twenty-first century, before returning to its previous level at the end of the second decade (Knesset Research and Information Center 2022). The same phenomenon that characterizes Haredim exists in the Arab sector, except that the genders are reversed: men are employed at much higher rates than women. As of 2022, the employment rate among Arab men ages 25-64 was 77%. This indicates a recovery from the decline during the COVID-19 crisis, when their employment rate dropped below 70%. In general, the employment of Arab men has stayed at the same level since the beginning of the twenty-first century. In contrast, the employment rate among women was only 45%. This is a much lower figure, but it is important to note that it is a significant improvement over past figures. In fact, the employment rate among Arab women ages 25-64 doubled within two decades (Shaked 2022). Moreover, in the near future, the Arab population's increasing exposure to higher education is expected to improve not only their

employment market participation rate but also the quality of employment, as many in the Arab community are acquiring education that will enable them to improve their occupational status.

There is no doubt that the high and anomalous birth rate in Israel, combined with the waves of Jewish immigration, have very positive aspects. Israeli culture, which consecrates the values of family and community and tries to strengthen the sense of the collective for the sake of a shared future, is reflected well in the high birth rate. Even during a difficult time like the COVID-19 crisis, when the birth rate in the world decreased further due to concerns for the future, Israel saw no such trend. This expresses a level of social resilience and the belief that together we can overcome the difficulties and challenges that we face (Weinreb 2021).

The contribution of high birth rate to the economy is well-known, as young people are considered the engine of innovation and creativity and bring economic growth (Wagner 2012). An economy that rests on a young population ensures the flow of youthful and fresh energy into the employment pool. In a country like Israel that relies heavily on innovation and entrepreneurship, this has tremendous importance. But continued growth at the current pace brings enormous challenges that, without policy, will quickly turn into negative economic results. The economist Dan Ben-David has been warning about these trends for years. In many articles he has emphasized that the extreme combination of the current demographic trends and the continuation of current trends in the education of Israel's children in general and the Haredi population in particular, poses an existential danger to Israel. He argues that the lack of a core curriculum and continuing the policy of government funding for Haredim under the current conditions, are leading Israel to a demographic point of no return (Ben-David 2019). Ben-David's arguments have been heard for years in academia, in the media, and in other forums, but without a change in policy, his gloomy forecasts may come true.

The Consequences of Demographic Changes for Israel's Economy

Economic growth is the first variable that it is important to examine in the context of demographic growth. The average growth rate of the Israeli economy in the past 20 years is 3.5% (IMF n.d.). This represents success on a global scale and is even more impressive when compared to other developed countries. It reflects the dynamism and creativity of the Israeli market and its ability to maintain a high growth rate despite the major changes that the world's economy has gone through in the era of globalization. But in addition to the adaptations that the Israeli economy has made, this growth should be examined in comparison with other developed countries, including from the perspective of demographic growth, which in turn affects economic growth. Average annual growth of 2% places the economic growth picture in a different light, as the annual growth per capita is only 1.5%. For example, in 2019, before the COVID-19 crisis, the Israeli economy grew by 4.2%—a rate that is higher than the average of the past 20 years, placing Israel fifth among OECD countries. But the population growth rate that year was 2%—which lowers the per capita growth to 2.2% and pushes Israel outside of the top 10 in the chart of GDP per capita among OECD countries (World Bank n.d.b). In fact, half of the growth in that year is attributed only to population growth.

The standard of living in Israel will increase at a very low rate if Israel maintains a per capita growth rate that is significantly lower than the nominal growth rate. Furthermore, normally the rate of increase in growth per capita does not exceed 2% but is around 1-1.5% (World Bank n.d.b). This means that many portions of the population in Israel will not see any improvement in their situation, and it could even worsen. The major differences in the working populations in Israel are expressed in

the sixth Diversity Index, which was published in 2022 by the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission in the Ministry of Economy and Industry and presented a multi-year comparison of the working populations in Israel during the years 2015-2020. According to the report, during these years and despite the improvement in the integration of the Haredi and Arab sectors in the labor market, these sectors did not experience an increase in wages in most industries (Diversity Index 2022). As for the employment of women, according to the report, the wage gaps between women and men continued to decrease, but to a moderate extent.

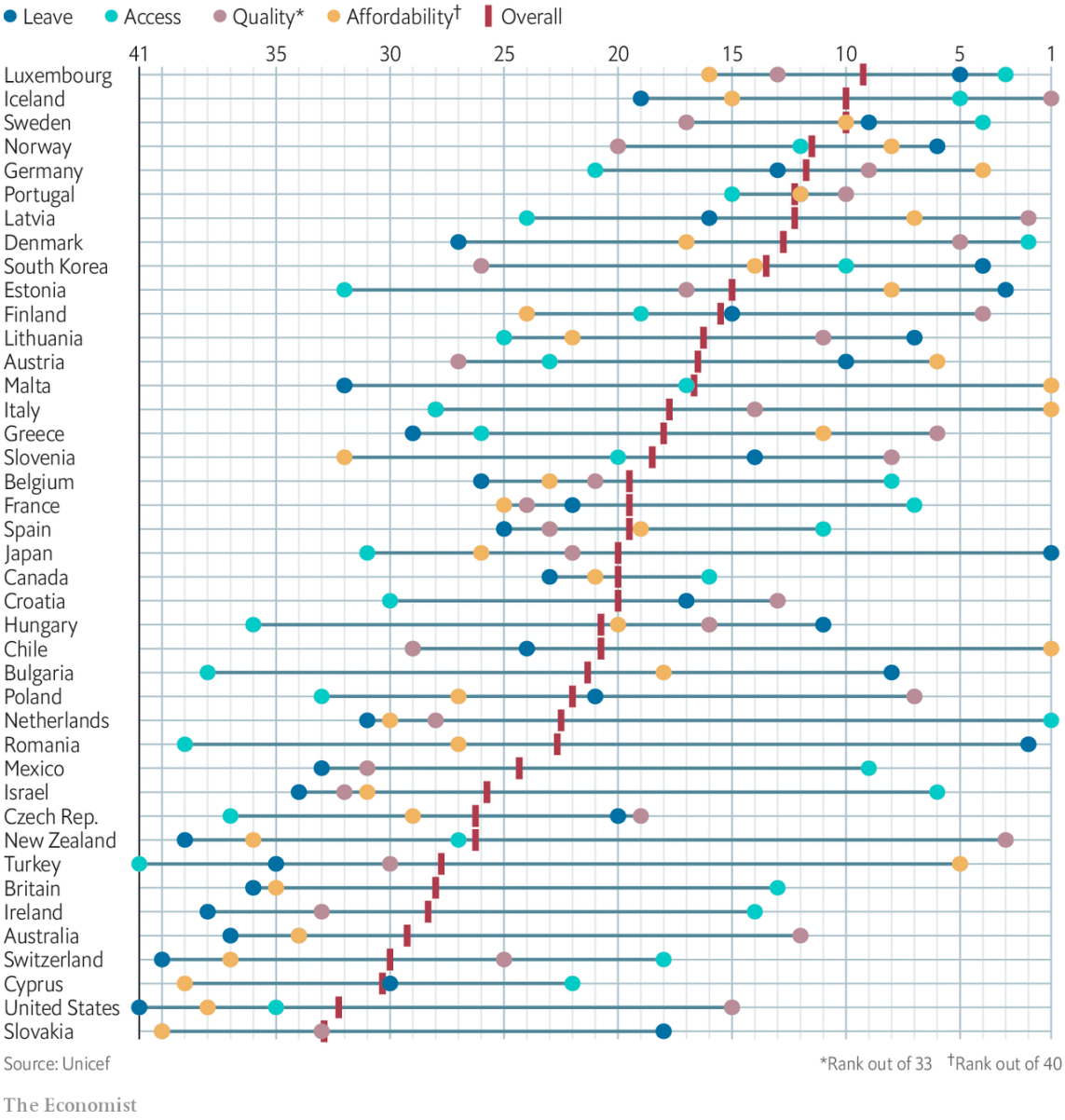
The Israeli high-tech industry is an interesting case study, which illustrates the gaps between the various groups in society and the unequal distribution of the fruits of growth. A report published by Israel Advanced Technology Industries in cooperation with Deloitte in February 2023, sheds light on the industry's contribution to the economy in general, and to growth in Israel in particular. According to the report, the high-tech industry is responsible for more than half of Israeli exports (67 billion dollars in 2021) and its total contribution to GDP was over 300 billion NIS (a fifth of GDP), but its contribution to growth during the years 2017-2021 was 45%. In effect, about half of GDP growth in Israel as described above comes from the high-tech industry (Avital 2023).

The non-Haredi Jewish population is the beating heart of the Israeli high-tech industry and it can take the credit for these impressive figures. A Ministry of Economy report from May 2022 presents the slow integration of the Haredi and Arab populations into the high-tech industry. According to the findings, about a tenth of Israelis are employed in the high-tech industry, and the distribution by sectors does not represent the overall population of Israel. The percentage of Haredi young people (25-35 years old) who are employed in high-tech is 5.9%, while only 4.4% of those employed in high-tech are from the Arab community (Cohen Kovacs 2022). The findings reveal that the two populations that together constitute more than a third of Israel's population constitute only about a tenth of workers in the "engine of the Israeli economy," which is responsible for half of its growth. This is an important illustration of the critical way that we should treat per capita growth figures in Israel. The big differences among the working populations in Israel, certainly between them and those who are not employed, could lead to a deepening of the polarization between the various groups in society, which is already suffering from serious socioeconomic tensions.

Seemingly small differences in growth rates create a big difference over the long term. For example, if the birth rate in Israel were to decrease to 0.5% per year instead of 2%, this would lead to the doubling of GDP per capita by 2050, compared to only 35% growth if we continue on the current path (Trajtenberg 2018). Additionally, if GDP per capita were to grow by 2.5% per year, there would be a much greater chance of reducing the levels of poverty and inequality in Israel, as there would be more resources per capita for these purposes.

The population growth rate with respect to GDP demands a discussion on the size and composition of the state budget vis-à-vis existing trends. The stabilization plan that was presented in 1985 put an end to the lost decade in the Israeli economy, which reached a climax with three-digit inflation in the 1980s, and welcomed a significant period of responsible fiscal policy. From that point on, Israel's economic policy has sought to reduce the stage budget and to shrink government. This policy was justified in the 1980s and constituted an important component of the stabilization plan, which succeeded in bringing the economy out of the economic crisis. This policy's contribution to the success of the Israeli economy is significant, but the policy continued aggressively even when the economy thrived: massive privatization processes, cuts to social services, and a decline in government intervention in the economy. The result of the process is that the extent

Figure 2. Ranking of Developed Countries by Level of Childcare Support



Source: Gromada & Richardson 2021

of government involvement in the economy decreased below 40% of GDP—less than the OECD average, and far below the average in the developed countries of the European Union (OECD n.b.d).

As a result of this process, a large portion of the services that were previously provided by the government have been imposed on households in recent years. Health, education, and welfare stand out in this process, which still continues today. The large social protest movement in the summer of 2011 expressed a public attitude that the government had not fulfilled its role and had not provided citizens with the services that would enable them to have a good quality of life without an overdraft at the bank. Today young working populations feel that they need to pay much more from their

On one hand, the state encourages people to have children, including through universal child allowances that are ineffective, and on the other hand, the state disclaims responsibility for granting services to these children and easing the burden on their parents.

own pocket in order to provide their children with the quality of life that the government provided in the past. People in Israel also look towards other developed countries overseas with jealousy. A 2021 UN report examined 41 developed countries according to the level of support provided for childcare. Four different categories were examined: the number of vacation days offered to new parents; the ease of access to early childhood education; the quality of teaching; and the accessibility of childcare according to its cost. The countries that led the table were of course Western European countries, which are known for quite generously subsidizing and enabling excellent conditions for young parents. In contrast, out of 41 countries examined, Israel comes in 31st place (Gromada & Richardson 2021). The situation in Israel is much worse than in European countries, as without proper support, working parents are forced to pay out of pocket for educational frameworks for their children. These frameworks cost tens of thousands of shekels per year for children up to age 3, and afterwards the state ostensibly funds them, but in practice, supplementary frameworks such as afternoon childcare or private lessons (because of the crowdedness in classrooms in Israel, students often do not manage to complete everything within the limited time frame) also require large sums.

It is easy to say that Western European countries suffer from low birthrates, so encouraging more births is a necessity. But the State of Israel has also encouraged people to have children since it was established, which leads to inconsistent policies: on one hand, the state encourages people to have children, including through universal child allowances that are ineffective, and on the other hand, the state disclaims responsibility for granting services to these children and easing the burden on their parents. This is expressed throughout the length and breadth of government expense categories related to children, including maternity leave.

The inconsistency becomes even more striking when examining objective comparative metrics between all of the OECD countries. For example, when examining the number of students per teacher, the State of Israel is close to last place among developed countries, with an average of 21.4 children per teacher—almost twice the OECD average (OECD n.d.d). This is also the case for schools in Israel, as the shortage of classrooms in the education system and the large number of students per class have become a trademark of the education system and led to the "sardines protest" in 2015 to lower the number of students per class. According to a report published by the Knesset Research and Information Center in 2020, the gap between schools in Israel and schools in the rest of the OECD countries is large and is not expected to decrease soon due to the high birthrate. Today the average in developed countries is 21 students per class, compared to over 26 students in Israel (Knesset Research and Information Center 2020).

The bleak conclusion of this short paper is that a continuation of the current trend of the state budget with respect to GDP and the population growth rate will lead to continued deterioration in the education system, and in turn to additional burdens on young families. The continuation of this trend will also increase the gaps in Israeli society, as the upper echelons compensate for the overloaded education system by funding private lessons in many subjects. The substantive inequality that stems from this is expected to grow in the coming years. This trend exists against the backdrop of the tremendous upheavals of the current

technological era and the changes that artificial intelligence will bring to our world.

The potential for artificial intelligence to replace a large portion of occupations in the coming decades requires adaptation and adjustments. The positions relevant for the future will be those that require higher levels of skills. Such a world demands specific training geared towards high-level and high-quality skills, and thus greater investment in human capital first of all via the education system, and not the minimal investment that exists today. All of this requires investment, adaptation, and changing patterns in order to prevent the emergence of a large mass of working age people that is a burden on a small, educated, highly skilled section of the population.

Government budgets that are shrinking with respect to GDP in the face of increasing needs, partly as a result of population growth, affect many sectors, and aside from education, healthcare also stands out. Private healthcare in Israel has been flourishing in recent years, at a time when public expenditure on medical care remains lower than the average in developed countries (7% of GDP vs. 10%) (Taub Center 2018). The shortage of hospital beds and recurring protests by doctors have become regular news items in recent years, given the increasing congestion in the public system. The way to compensate for this, which is already occurring in practice, is the acquisition of private insurance that provides proper services. For example, expenditure on private insurance out of total household expenditure on health increased from 18% in 2000 to 37% in 2018 (Taub Center 2018). This process is very similar to what has happened in the education system: those with financial means can compensate for the government's weakness via private expenditure, which further emphasizes the inequality in Israel.

Furthermore, the increase in the number of people retiring is also going to burden the already overburdened public system, thus increasing private expenditure for supplementary health services for those who can afford them. In this metric too, Israel is trailing behind other developed countries. Expenditure on retirement constitutes only 4.6% of GDP, compared to an average of 7.7% in the OECD countries (OECD n.d.c). It should be noted that the high birth rate combined with the increase in the number of people retiring creates a situation in which a shrinking tier of people of working age[3] (15-64) is forced to carry the burden of funding seniors and children. This metric is called the dependency ratio, and in the past decade alone, it rose from 61% during the social protest movement in 2011 to 67% in 2021 (World Bank n.d.a). This means that for every 100 people of working age, there are 67 people under the age of 15 or over the age of 64. However, the situation is Israel is much more serious, because not everyone in the 15-64 age group actually works.

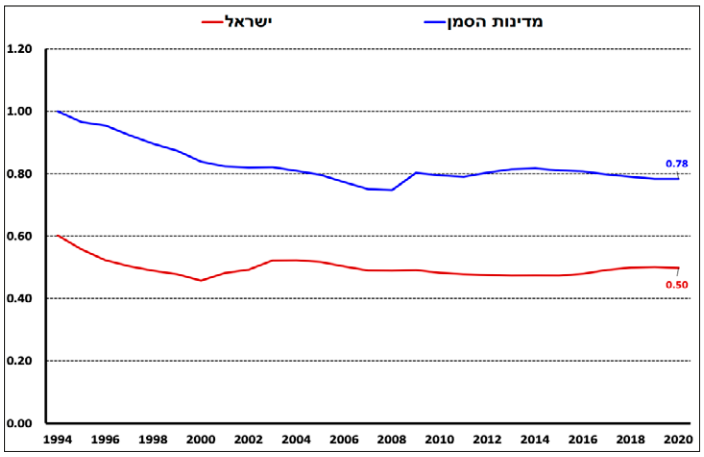
The fast population growth also affects the housing market, which was at the heart of that same social protest movement in the summer of 2011. The starting point is already non-optimal when you take into account the size of the country and the fact that about a third of it is desert that is difficult to settle. The high rate of natural increase has created considerable demand for homes for new households and for more spacious homes due to the large number of children, and it contributes decisively to the expansion of the gap between the demand and supply of homes—a gap that is difficult to reduce. Given that the areas designated for construction are limited to begin with, in particular in high-demand areas in the center of the country, it is no wonder that a very serious housing crisis has emerged in the last few years, which has left most young families without a reasonable housing solution. The state's attempts at intervention in recent years have included several government programs—from zero VAT for first-time buyers, to Mechir Lemishtaken (a national program that promotes affordable housing units for young families)—but they have not succeeded in creating the

hoped-for change. Furthermore, the increasing divorce rate in Israel has created demand for smaller homes that are almost nonexistent, due to the natural tendency to build bigger homes for families with children. This characteristic increases the demand for homes and intensifies the crisis.

In addition to the direct impacts of population growth, there are also "external impacts" that worsen with time. The small physical space in which people are constantly being added will lead to heavy economic costs. Despite the attempts to improve public transport, road congestion continues to take a toll on the Israeli economy. The total annual cost of overcrowded roads is as high as 40 billion NIS. The cost of traffic congestion is estimated at 22 billion NIS, the cost of car accidents is estimated at 9 billion NIS, and in addition, there is a cost of over 7 billion NIS that stems from the damage caused by air pollutants and greenhouse gases (Ministry of Environmental Protection 2021). According to some estimates, without massive investment in public transportation and if the current growth rate continues, the economic cost of road congestion will be about 70 billion NIS in 2030 (Cohen 2020). Today we are in the midst of a transportation crisis, due to very low government investment in this field compared to the resources needed for it. If in the past people could leave for work "before the traffic" and return "after the traffic," today it's basically impossible to avoid the jams during reasonable hours.

This also raises a critical question for the country's future: Can Israel maintain a first-world standard of living with a third-world birth rate?

Figure 3. Public Capital to GDP Ratio, 1994-2020



Countries with Similar Characteristics to Israel: Austria, Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, and Sweden.

Source: OECD (Government Expenditure by Function, Gross Capital Formation and Investment Grants), CBS.

Some of the national challenges resulting from population density have of course led to innovation and technological renewal and will help cope with the situation—consider the Waze app for example—, but broadly speaking, the negative consequences of the continuation of current trends outweigh the positive. The competition for every piece of land and the congestion in hospitals and classrooms are felt every day. So is the reduction of public spaces, and leisure sites in open natural areas in Israel almost always involve close contact with tens of thousands of other visitors. Under these conditions, trips abroad (Ben-Gurion Airport has also become too small to contain the number of travelers) simply to escape the crowdedness create challenges on the national level for the coming years. If this is the state of affairs at the beginning of 2024, with about 9.7 million people, what will it be like in 25 years, on the State of Israel's 100th anniversary, when the country's population is expected to be 15 million people? (Trajtenberg 2018). This also raises a critical question for the country's future: Can Israel maintain a first-world standard of living with a third-world birth rate?

Conclusion

The Israeli model of recent years is unique by any measure. The combination of an advanced and developed economy with a high birth rate is uncommon in the modern world, but according to most economic indications, a continuation of the model is not sustainable. This conclusion stems not only from the uniqueness of the

Israeli phenomenon: a country that enjoys an annual 2% GDP growth rate per capita while population growth is also about 2% per year, in contrast to western countries where it is generally less than 1%. It also stems from Israel's natural conditions, which will make it very difficult to maintain the economic achievements under changing conditions of growing population density. The small territory of Israel combined with the growth in the population of groups whose contribution to the economy is minor, will make it difficult to continue to improve residents' quality of life each year, if current trends continue. In order to enjoy the "demographic dividend" and avoid a scenario in which population growth burdens and harms the economy, the State of Israel should focus on two spheres. One is preparing for the current situation in which current population growth will continue in the short term and require suitable preparations. In the other sphere, the state should plan how to reduce the population growth rate from 2% to a target of 1% per year.

In the first sphere, the state should prepare for the population increase expected in the coming years. For example, the state should avoid a situation in which overcrowding harms productivity, which is already relatively low compared to OECD countries. This means first and foremost investing in public capital stock, which contributes substantially to productivity and to GDP per capita. Public capital stock is public investment in infrastructure assets over time (Eckstein et al. 2022). In the State of Israel, the figures are usually lower than those of developed countries in general, and comparable countries in particular. Israel's population growth demands greater investment in infrastructure—paving roads, railroads and more—as it is not currently built to cope with this growth. But aside from the fact that investment is not keeping pace with population growth in Israel, it is also not close to that of other countries that face a similar problem. The lack of greater investment in infrastructure in the coming years will lead to a further decline in productivity in Israel. An important study conducted in 2022 shows that increasing investment in public capital by 2% per year from 2023 to 2030 can increase GDP growth by 0.5 percentage points (Eckstein et al. 2022). This study shows how increasing the debt-to-GDP ratio in the short term considerably reduces the negative potential consequences of the massive natural increase. At the same time, an effort should be made to encourage greater integration of populations in the Israeli economy, such as Haredi men. This effort requires professional training and education to integrate into the modern employment world, which will also provide essential high-level skills that are suitable for high-quality employment.

In the second sphere, there is a need to moderate population growth in Israel, because the current trends are difficult to maintain. This requires, first of all, an understanding that continuing to encourage a high birth rate, which has accompanied the State of Israel since its establishment, is not essential like it was in the past, and could even lead to economic harm. This recognition can help with the adoption of suitable policy measures to moderate population growth. Israel is in a situation in which, unlike other developed countries, maternity wards are full every day. In addition, Israel is in a good situation because it can learn from countries that have failed in attempts to reduce the birth rate by means of dramatic measures like China's one child policy. The measures needed in this sphere are gradual and mainly educational, health-related, and economic. Encouraging employment and education among women, education on proper family planning in accordance with needs and financial means and reducing child allowances, are only a small set of measures that are in the state's toolkit but not being used. These are not tools that will lead to demographic contraction in Israel, as this would have negative consequences for the economy, but the idea is to cut the population growth rate, which

currently stands at 2%, in half, in order to prevent a level of population density whose economic consequences for the individual could be similar to those of demographic contraction.

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Notes

1 As of summer 2023 and based on Trajtenberg 2018.

2 The figures represent the year 2019 before the COVID-19 pandemic. Without 2022 figures, the figures from 2020-2021 do not accurately represent various trends, given the limitations on movement in the world during those two years.

3 According to the customary OECD definition, the working age is 15-64.

Population Dynamics and the Demographic Dividend in Israel

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In this article we analyze population dynamics in Israel, while focusing on changes in population age structure since the 1950s. We emphasize the decisive role of fertility patterns in long-term demographic processes, while identifying the important impact of large waves of international migration that substantially enlarged the small original population of Israel. The analysis focuses on the central variable that impacts GDP per capita—the proportion of the population of working age. We show that this proportion rose significantly in the 1990s, and may have played a decisive role in raising the standard of living in Israel. Based on population forecasts published by the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), we analyze potential changes in the population structure, focusing in particular on the percentage of working age people in the population. We show that fertility levels during the coming decades will have a definitive impact on the rate of population growth and the proportion of working age people. We demonstrate how a future reduction in the current high fertility rate, which is unique to Israel amongst developed societies, may bring with it the potentially positive effect of a "demographic dividend," which may significantly improve Israel's chances of successfully managing expected challenges to its economic growth—challenges that result from (geo)political conditions and climate change, as well as growing population density, an aging population and changes in the composition of the working age population.

Key words: Israeli demography, demographic dividend, age structure, population dynamic

Introduction – Age Structure and Economic Growth

Population characteristics, such as age structure, are determined by changes over time in patterns of fertility, mortality and migration. The population age structure has important implications for many social and economic processes, including economic growth. In this research we examine how historic changes in fertility, mortality and migration in Israel have

determined the age structure of the population, and how they may continue to influence it in the future.

The potential and actual influence of demographic processes on economic growth and welfare have been discussed extensively, in particular the connection between age structure and economic growth (Bloom et al. 2003, 1-23; Coale and Hoover 1958, 18-25; Mason 2007, 81-101; Misra 2017, 99-107). Studies show that the age structure of the population changes dramatically in the wake of changes in fertility and migration, and to a lesser extent mortality (Friedlander 1975, 581-599), and that changes in age structure and especially in the proportion of the population of working age[1] can substantially influence economic growth. It has also been claimed that appropriate policy measures can enhance the positive impact of the growth of the proportion of the population of working age and significantly extend the duration of its impact (Mason 2007, 97).

The link between demography and economic growth has been extensively analyzed. Many studies focused on the primary questions raised by Thomas Malthus in 1798 regarding the connection between the rate of population growth and economic well-being. In a seminal work from 1958, Ansley Coale and Edgar Hoover analyzed how demographic factors can influence per capita income. They examined three variables: population size, rate of population growth and age distribution. Their work demonstrated that in developing countries there are many short- and medium-term benefits to a reduction in fertility, and as a result a reduction in population growth (Coale and Hoover 1958).

A trenchant debate on this subject coalesced around two primary approaches: the pessimists claimed that continued population growth would lead to an economic disaster in terms of income per capita, while the optimists claimed that population growth would lead to economic growth. Over the years a third, neutral approach became more widespread; it claims that population growth is not inherently connected to economic growth (Bloom et al. 2003, 1-23). In recent decades the role of age structure in economic growth has been emphasized more and more, while focusing on what is known as the "demographic dividend" (DD), which yields an opportunity for economic growth in the wake of reducing fertility from high to low.

The pessimists claimed that continued population growth would lead to an economic disaster in terms of income per capita, while the optimists claimed that population growth would lead to economic growth.

The logic behind the DD can be illustrated in a basic manner via the formula (Bloom and Canning 2004, 13):

$$Y/N = Y/L * L/WA * WA/N$$

Where Y=income, N=population size, WA=working age population, and L=labor force participants.

We can denote this as: $y = z * p * w$

In other words: Income per capita ($y = Y / N$) equals production per worker ($z = Y / L$) times the proportion of people of working age ($w = WA / N$) times the proportion of labor force participation ($p = L / WA$).

If the rate of working age people **w** in a given population increases to $\mathbf{w'} = \mathbf{w} + \boldsymbol{\delta}$ (where $\boldsymbol{\delta} > 0$) with no change in **p** and in **z**, the gross domestic product per capita will increase by a factor of $\mathbf{w'/w}$. Thus if **w**=50%, an increase of 1% means a ratio of $\mathbf{w'/w}$ of 1.020 (=51/50), meaning that income per capita will increase by 2%. If **w**=40 than an increase of 1% is translated to an increase of 2.5% (41/40=1.02) in income per capita. Given that in most populations the proportion of working age people ranges from 40%-60%, an increase of 1% in **w** will translate to a change of between 1.7-2.5% in income per capita. (The same logic in reverse applies if $\boldsymbol{\delta} < 0$.)

The processes discussed here are of course more complex. The rate of labor force participation and production per worker depend on exogenous and endogenous factors, some of which are linked to one another and to the proportion of working age people. This basic illustration was merely intended to show the **potential effect** of an increase of one percentage point in the proportion of the population of working age on GDP per capita. And in fact, based on detailed empirical models and data from many countries it has been estimated that an increase of one percentage point in the proportion of people of working age does indeed lead to an increase of 1.6% in per capita production (Cruz and Ahmed 2018, 100). Other studies found that the annual growth of production per capita that can be attributed to the demographic dividend in the years 1970-2000 ranged from near-zero in sub-Saharan Africa (0.08%) to 1.7%-1.9% in Latin America and South and East Asia accordingly (Mason 2007, 94). It should be noted that the demographic dividend effect is temporary, and afterwards a reversal is expected (a reduction in the proportion of the population of working ages), but the dividend's effect may continue for decades and allow for savings in order to better manage the eventual reversal. The dividend is considered an opportunity for countries with relatively high fertility to raise their income per capita by reducing their fertility. In order to take advantage of this opportunity, appropriate conditions and policies are necessary. For example, in Latin America the annual increase attributed to the demographic dividend of 1.7% led to a rate of growth of only 0.9% in GDP per capita, because other factors pushed towards decrease in GDP per capita; though without the effect of the dividend, the annual per capita growth rate in Latin America would have been negative (-0.8%). On the other hand, in South and East Asia the dividend contributed some 44% of an annual per capita growth rate of 4.2%. It should be emphasized that economic conditions and policy (Mason 2007, 97) and levels of education (Lutz et al. 2019, 12802) determine the extent to which advantage is taken of the opportunity offered by the demographic dividend.

Below we analyze the particular dynamics of change in the age structure of Israel's population since the founding of the state, and three possible scenarios of expected future changes. Emphasis is placed on the relative size of the working age population, and changes that according to the current literature cited above will have fundamental implications for Israel's per capita income and economic growth. The Israeli population is comprised of groups with distinct demographic patterns (especially regarding fertility and migration) and economic patterns (especially employment rates and productivity). However, the present analysis focuses on the collective effect of these groups at the population-wide level as one complete unit.

Israel – Rapid Growth Due to High Natural Increase and Large Waves of Immigration[2]

Israeli demography is characterized by rapid population growth—a combined result of significant natural increase and a large positive migration balance. Since the establishment of the state in May 1948 the population has increased 12-fold, from 806,000 to 9.6 million in 2022, with an average annual growth rate of 3.4% over the course of 74 years.

The population growth rate was not uniform over these years. In the first decade it averaged some 8% per year and reflected the impact of a massive immigration wave, which began in 1948 and led to a doubling of the population within less than four years, alongside high natural growth (2.5% per year). During the second decade population growth slowed and remained just over 3%, and during the third decade it slowly converged on a growth rate of slightly below 2% per year with some variability, mainly due to additional waves of immigration.

Two large waves of immigration took place during the years 1948-1952 (some 750,000 immigrants) and 1990-2000 (around one million immigrants). Smaller waves occurred between 1955-1957 (167,000), 1961-1964 (229,000) and 1969-1974 (259,000). However, the waves that came after the large 1948-1952 wave had less impact on demographic developments, because the absorbing population was significantly larger. In particular, the demographic impact of the largest wave of immigration, which took place in the 1990s, was significantly lower in comparison to that of the first wave. Overall, from the establishment of the State of Israel until the end of 2020, the migration balance was 2.8 million people, or one-third of the population growth during that time. However, during that same time period, natural increase (including that of immigrants) was the primary component of growth (67%). It ranged from 2.7% per year in the 1950s to 1.6% annually over the past decade.

High natural growth was the result of a high fertility rate that went from over four births per woman on average in the 1950s to the (high) rate of 2.9 births per woman in the 1990s, and went up again after 15 stable years to 3.1 births per woman in the years 2015-2019. Such a high fertility rate led to a crude birth rate of 30 children for every 1,000 people in the population in the 1950s, which decreased to 20 per 1,000 people in recent years. The contribution of the crude mortality rate to population growth was minimal: a small decrease from six deaths per 1,000 people in the 1950s to five per 1,000 people in recent years reflected an increase of life expectancy from around 60 years to over 80 years (82 years for men, 86 for women).

The Special Dynamic of Changes in Age Structure

The age structure of the population at a given time, or in other words, the share of the different age groups in the overall population, is determined by changes in the three demographic movements over the preceding decades: fertility, mortality and migration. In other words, the age structure is not only influenced by these changes over recent years but also by the age structure that was created as a consequence of changes in these movements in the distant past. In this way a process is created, by which the age structure at a given point in time is influenced by the age structure at a more distant point in the past. For example, in a population without migration and with low mortality levels, the number of children aged 0-4 at a given time is a function of fertility rates over the preceding five years (during which those children were born), and of the proportion of people at the childbearing ages in the overall population during those five years. This proportion in turn is determined by the fertility rate and the portion of the population of childbearing age in the distant past, and so on. At the other end of the age structure, the number of people aged 85 and above in the population at a given time, is influenced by the accumulated mortality rate of the previous 85 years, but also by the original size of their birth cohort (born over 85 years ago). It is understood that with the addition of the migration component the process becomes somewhat more complex, but the principle remains the same.

When discussing a population transitioning from a high to low fertility rate, "population growth momentum," a concept first coined and defined by Nathan Keyfitz, is created (Keyfitz 1971, 71-80); it can also be understood as "the inertia of the age distribution" (Potter et al. 1977, 555). This momentum guarantees that rapid population growth during a certain period will continue for many years, until the influence of the cohort size of women born during the time of high fertility disappears—which may take several generations, or in other words, many decades. The Israeli population provides an extraordinary and interesting example of this process.

The unique dynamic of the age structure of Israel's population primarily reflects the influence of the large migration waves and

particularly the mass immigration of 1948-1952, the initially high fertility rate, and its prolonged decline until the 1990s. The impact of the reduction in mortality is more modest; it is expressed primarily in a slow but ongoing growth in the rate of the elderly population. As a rule, age pyramids can be considered as demographic "story tellers", wherein time moves from the top (the older groups—the past) down (to the most recent births—the present). Israel is a good example of this.

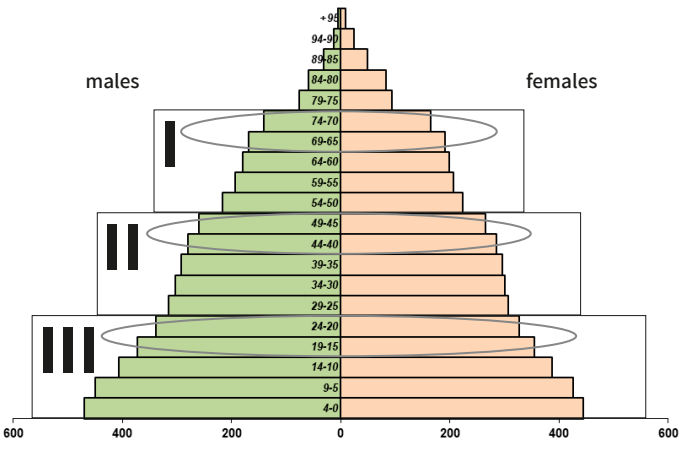
Upon first glance, it appears that the age structure of the pyramid of Israel in 2020 (Figure 1) is typical for a population with high fertility: a wide base and a triangular structure. Upon closer examination, however, details are revealed which tell a unique story

Upon first glance, it appears that the age structure of the pyramid of Israel in 2020 (Figure 1) is typical for a population with high fertility: a wide base and a triangular structure. Upon closer examination, however, details are revealed which tell a unique story. We will look at the top of the pyramid in 2020, at those aged 65 and above who are (the survivors of) those born before 1955. The shape of this group is not the triangle expected with a wider right side (reflecting better survival among women). This triangle exists only for those aged 75 and older, but below it the 65-74 year old age group is unusually wide: these are (the survivors of) those born between 1945 and 1954, around the time of the establishment of the State and during the wave of immigration that followed. This unusually wide group is a result of the sudden increase in births after 1945, arising from the combined influence of the wave of 750,000 immigrants during the years 1948-1952 and their higher rates of fertility, and to a lesser extent from the "baby boom" after World War II (Friedlander 1975, 597). The cohorts born immediately afterwards, after 1954, increased in size more modestly for some 15 years, and this is evident from the moderate growth (narrow "steps") in the 60-64, 55-59 and 50-54 age groups in the 2020 pyramid. This moderate growth resulted from the decline in fertility rates that began almost immediately after the massive immigration wave (and continued declining until the early 1990s). As a result of these changes, the age groups from 50-74 (rectangle I) form a unique parallelogram shape.

When looking at the age groups of the following 25 years (ages 25-49), the age groups 45-49 and 40-44 seem much wider than those above them—the age groups 55-59 and 50-54—which reflects the population momentum effect:[3] those aged 40-49 are primarily (the survivors amongst) the children of the large groups born around the time of the establishment of the state, and therefore the groups are wider. Further on, because the groups born after 1954 grew less, the younger age groups (their children) aged 25-39 in 2020 show more modest growth (as was seen with the 50-64 age group in parallelogram I). This creates a second parallelogram.

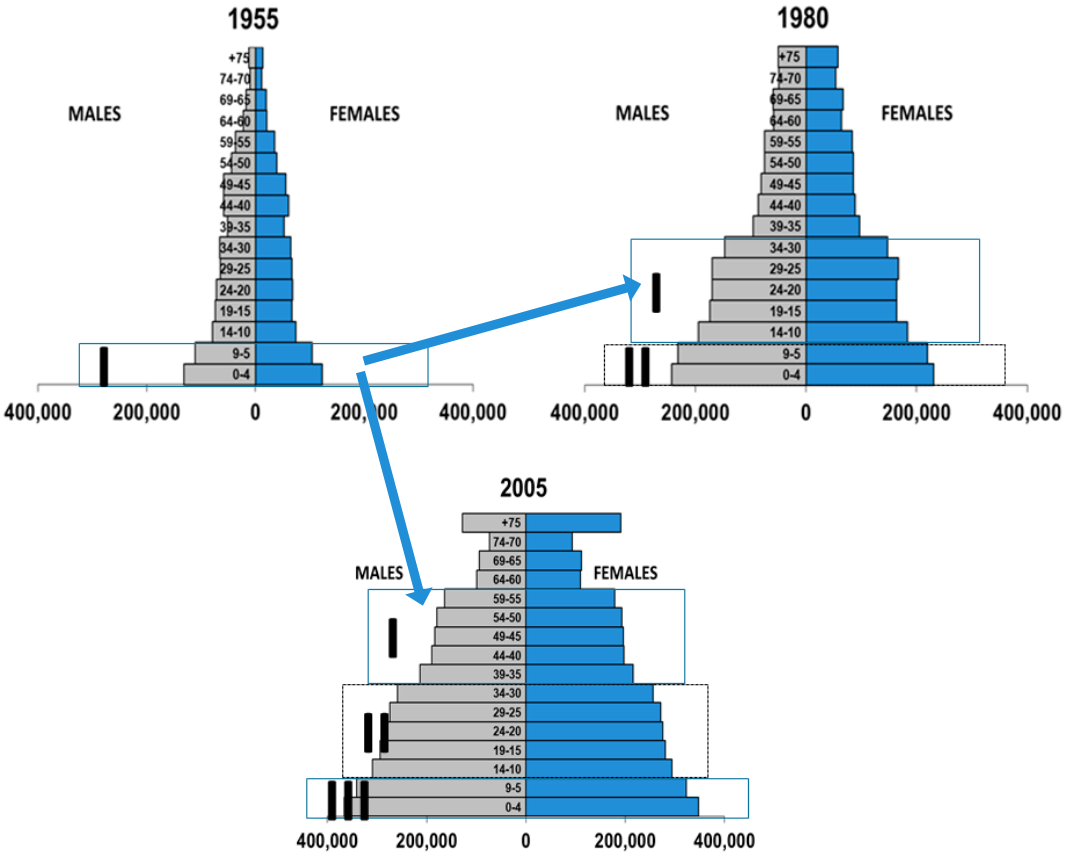
In the 2020 pyramid the process described above takes on the final shape of three parallelogram-like shapes of 25 years each, which expand as one descends along the pyramid: the first and highest shape

Figure 1. Israeli Population Age Pyramid, 2020 (Population Size in Thousands)



Source: CBS yearbook, 2021

Figure 2. Age Pyramids of Israel: 1955, 1980 and 2005 (Population Size in Absolute Numbers—thousands)



Source: CBS yearbooks, 1956, 1981 and 2006

(parallelogram I) includes 50-75 year olds and after it is a new, wider but similar shape (parallelogram II), made up of 25-49 year olds. It seems as if the first shape was reproduced, but wider. Afterwards (below parallelogram II), a third shape (parallelogram III, ages 0-24) appears to be a wider reproduction of the previous two shapes, although its pace of development is different, and its base is wider.[4]

The age pyramids of the years 1955, 1980 and 2005 (Figure 2) allow one to follow the process of creation of the parallelograms and the flow of the cohorts that comprise them, during the years across the various age groups. The base of the 1955 pyramid shows the beginning of the creation of the first parallelogram; in the 1980 pyramid the population from the first parallelogram has already reached ages 10-34, which means that most of it has reached the age of parenthood and their children appear at the bottom of the pyramid, heralding the creation of the second parallelogram; in the 2005 pyramid the first parallelogram has left the age of becoming parents and populates the ages of older workers (ages 35-59), and it is the turn of the second parallelogram to populate the age of parenting, whose children herald the creation of the third parallelogram at the bottom of the pyramid. The three shapes are also connected to the new immigrants who arrived during the early years of the state: the first parallelogram consists primarily of the children of these immigrants, the second of their grandchildren and the third is primarily their great-grandchildren.

Dov Friedlander (Friedlander 1975) analyzed this unique process until the early 1970s and named it the “echo effect” of the massive

migration wave of 1948-1952. It is interesting to discover how this echo, which we know today as population momentum, continued to play a decisive role in Israeli population dynamics for over 65 years (and is expected to continue doing so in the future), while the population grew from 1.5 million in 1955 to over 9 million in 2020—many of whom (over 2.5 million) are immigrants who arrived after 1955.

The differential growth of such close cohorts presents complex challenges. For example, when the large cohorts of those born between 1945-1954 began entering elementary school, there was a need for a great number of schools and teachers, in comparison to previous years. Later on, in the late 1960s, these large groups reached the age of higher education, leading to demand for new universities (which was also enhanced by an increase in general levels of demand for higher education). These large groups also needed housing and workplaces at the same time, meaning that they created pressure to rapidly and significantly increase the supply of apartments and workplaces. Even the marriage market was heavily influenced, when large groups of women of marriageable age, who had traditionally married men older than themselves, found that the older age groups of potential husbands were relatively small (Ben Moshe 1985, 87-95). When there is a crisis in the housing market and the job market, the weaker parts of society suffer more: it is not a coincidence that the Black Panthers protesters took to the streets in 1968, when the competition in the housing and job markets had become more difficult.

From the analysis of population dynamics in this section we learned about the process of cohort flow over the years, and in the specific case of Israel—how the flow of a unique structure caused a sharp expansion of certain age groups every 25 years (the approximate length of a generation), and how this may have influenced certain systems and especially, the proportion of the population of working age, which is the focus of our analysis.

Changes in the Proportion of the Working Age Population

In this section we will examine how the demographic movements with their special dynamics reviewed in the previous chapter, are reflected in changes in the proportion of the working-age population. To do so we will focus on three age groups: people of working age 20-64,[5] children aged 0-19, and elderly people aged 65 and up. We know that changes in the proportion of the working age population are inversely connected to changes in the sum of the proportions of the younger and older age groups. In Figure 3 below the development of the age structure amongst these three groups is presented for the years 1950-2020.

Four key periods that can be identified in the figure, show clear trends of change in the proportion of children and the proportion of people of working age, which changed as expected in opposite directions, while the proportion of the population at the older ages shows an ongoing trend of apparently gradual increase across all periods.

During the first period between 1950 and 1963 there was a sharp increase in the proportion of children (+4.7%) alongside a decrease in that of working age people. The proportion of the elderly in the population also increased (modestly: +1.5%), which exacerbated the decline in the proportion of working age people that went down -6.2% in total (from 55.6% to 49.4%).

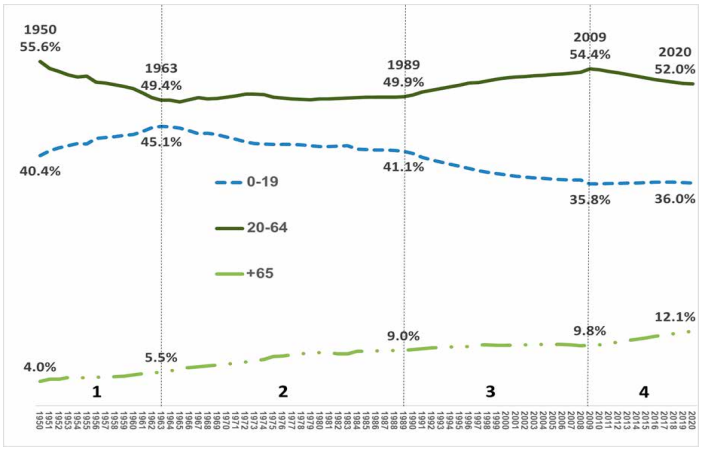
As we saw, during these years the form of the age structure at the base of the pyramid took shape (parallelogram I in the previous section). New immigrants who arrived in high numbers during the early years of this period made up some half of the population during this time, and the age structure that was created was influenced primarily by their high fertility rate and by their concentrated arrival during a short time span (Friedlander 1975, 592-595), as well as by the decline in infant and child mortality and the decline in the fertility rate afterwards. It is more challenging to explain the small increase

in elderly people, because throughout this period most of these were immigrants who arrived from many countries, most of them from Europe.[6] It seems that this increase was caused by the entry of larger cohorts into old age than those that had come before, together with the ongoing decline in the rate of mortality (which continues until today, see Figure 4 below.)

During the second period from 1964-1989 the trend of increase in the proportion of children reversed, and underwent a prolonged decline of -4.0%. Nevertheless, because of a parallel increase in the proportion of the population of elderly (+3.5%), the proportion of people of working age increased only moderately (+0.5%).

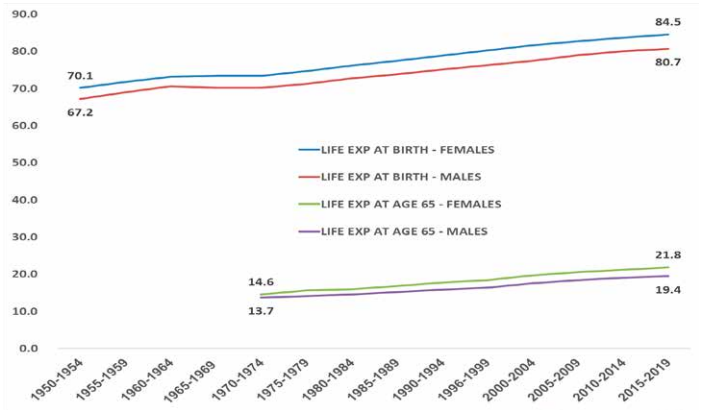
The decline in the proportion of children aged 0-19 is related to the continuing fall in fertility rates, which began in the early 1950s after a peak of 4.4 births per woman (see Figure 5 above). For the first 20 years this decline picked up speed and within a decade total fertility fell to 3.1 births per woman and continued to decrease slowly to the level of 2.9 births per woman during the early 2000s. At the same time, the large cohorts born during the years 1945-1969 (parallelogram I) reached childbearing age, which led to an increase in the number of births during that period (and following that to an increase in the number of children aged 0-19) and reduced the effect of the decline in fertility rates. An important additional factor that contributed to the decline in the proportion of children and to an increase in the proportion of people of working age was immigration: during this period some 675,000 immigrants entered Israel (see Table 1 below). Those who entered came primarily (75%) from Europe and America with relatively few children (33% of the immigrants were children, as compared to 45.1% for the entire population at the beginning of this period) and a high proportion of people of working age (57.1% compared to 49.1% of the population). Also during this period, it is challenging to explain the causes of the increase in the proportion of the elderly population, which mainly included immigrants from Europe

Figure 3. Age Structure of the Israeli Population, 1950-2020[7]



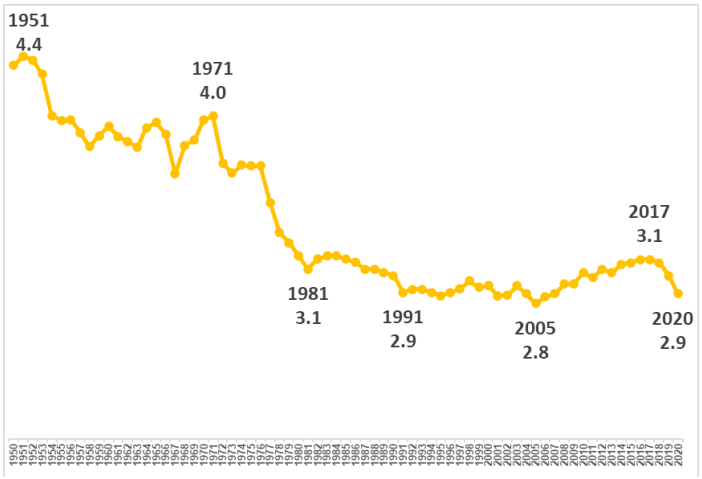
Data source: CBS, statistical yearbooks

Figure 4. Mortality: Life Expectancy at Age 0 and at Age 65 by Sex—Until 1965-1969 for Jews Only, From 1970-1974 for the Entire Israeli Population



Data source: CBS, statistical yearbooks

Figure 5. Overall Fertility Rate for the Israeli Population, 1950-2020[8]



Data source: CBS, statistical yearbooks

from various periods,[9] beyond the continued moderate growth of the cohorts entering old age and the continued decline in mortality rates.

During the third period from 1990-2009 there was a sharp decrease in the proportion of children aged 0-19 (-5.3%), alongside a parallel increase in the proportion of the working age population (+4.5%) and a mild increase in the proportion of the elderly (+0.8%).

Two main factors contributed to these changes. The first factor—the reduction of the proportion of children—was, as in the previous period, the accumulated effect of the earlier reduction in the fertility rate: those aged 0-19 at the beginning of the period (1990) were born during the years 1971-1990, during which as we saw the fertility rate dropped sharply from 4.0 to 3.0 births per woman, and those who were 0-19 years old at the end of the period were born during the years in which the fertility rate was a full child lower than it had been at the beginning of the period. The second factor was, once again and even more so, immigration[10] (see Table 1 below). During this period over 1.2 million immigrants, primarily from the former Soviet Union, arrived in Israel. Their fertility rate was especially low (below replacement level fertility), the proportion of children they brought with them was substantially lower (30.2% on average across the entire period) and the rate of working age people (58.2%) was high in relation to that of the population that absorbed them (41.1% and 49.9%, respectively, in 1989). The immigrants also had a higher proportion of elderly people (11.6% versus 9.0% in the receiving population); nevertheless, and in spite of the ongoing decline in mortality rates across all years, the proportion of elderly people changed very little during this period because the cohorts entering old age were relatively small.[11]

Table 1. Immigrants (in Thousands) and their Age Structure Compared to the Israeli Population at the Beginning of Each Period, 1948-2020

Period	Immigrant population (thousands)	Age structure of the immigrant population during the period			Age structure of the Israeli population at the beginning of the period		
	Total	0-19	20-64	65+	0-19	20-64	65+
1963-1948	1,155	40.7%	55.0%	4.3%	40.4%	55.2%	4.4%
1989-1964	674	33.4%	57.1%	9.5%	45.1%	49.4%	5.5%
2009-1990	1,225	30.2%	58.2%	11.6%	41.1%	49.9%	9.0%
2010-2020	253	24.7%	61.8%	13.5%	35.8%	54.4%	9.8%

Data source: CBS, statistical yearbooks

During this period the population of childbearing age transitioned from those who were the children of the mass immigration (parallelogram I) to the larger generation of their children (parallelogram II). However, due to the continued reduction in fertility rates this change did not have a significant effect on the proportion of children aged 0-19 (and therefore not on the relative proportion of working age people).

During the fourth and final period 2009-2020, the proportion of children aged 0-19 was stable, but the proportion of people of working age declined by 2.4% along with a sharp increase in the proportion of elderly, from 9.8% to 12.1%.

The relative stability in the proportion of children aged 0-19 during this period was the result of counterbalancing effects of, on the one hand, a small increase in the fertility rate

in previous years (2005-2017) and also of a very small increase in the proportion of the population at the primary childbearing ages, and, on the other hand, the arrival of immigrants (250,000) with low numbers of children and low rates of fertility. These combined effects resulted in little net effect on the proportion of children aged 0-19, and therefore on the proportion of people of working age.

The decline in mortality contributed, as in previous years, to an increase in the proportion of the elderly in the population, but the aging of the large cohorts born between 1945-1954 (parallelogram I) was what really caused the jump in the number of elderly, and with it the decline in the proportion of the population of working age.

During this period the fertility rate, which had remained stable at around 2.9 births per woman between 1990 and 2010, began to increase from 2011 onwards. It reached 3.1 births per woman in 2017 and then declined again to 2.9 in 2020, but the effect of this increase in fertility is likely to be felt in the coming years.

Conclusion

Since the establishment of the state the proportion of the working age population has undergone many changes. The first period saw sharp decline, the second period exhibited long stagnation (25 years) at a relatively low level, the third period saw an impressive 20-year increase, and then in the last decade there was a rapid decrease.

It also clear (according to Table 1) that all the waves of migration except the post-1948 mass migration, reflect an age structure with higher proportions of working age people than in the host population. This is similar to most migrations around the world. In other words, from this point of view over time immigrants have a positive impact on the society that receives them.

Three main factors have played a central role in this process: The fertility rate, the age structure of immigrants (which is primarily a result of their fertility prior to their arrival in Israel), and the decline in mortality. The high fertility rate during the first period caused a decline in the proportion of working age people. During the second period fertility began to decline but the impact of the high fertility rate of the past, along with the increase in the population of elderly, reduced the effect of this decline and caused long-term stagnation. The decline in fertility was fully expressed during the third period, but together with the age structure of the many immigrants, the overall result was a sharp increase in the proportion of working age people. In the last period stagnation in the fertility rate (and even a certain increase) together with an increase in the proportion of elderly (also a result of the high fertility during the 1950s) caused a concerning decrease in the proportion of working age people.

We also saw that fertility patterns played a central role in determining the age structure in the past, and we assess that this will be the case in the future as well. In the next section we will examine how different scenarios, which are primarily focused on alternative fertility patterns, are likely to influence the future age structure of the Israeli population.

Future scenarios

Description of population forecasts

After analyzing historic changes in population structure, we will focus on assessing potential future developments. In order to do so we will make use of population forecasts prepared by the CBS that describe three different potential scenarios.

The CBS prepared scenarios according to age and sex for 50 years (2015-2065) according to three scenarios. The scenarios differed in the assumptions regarding mortality and fertility for three subgroups of the population (non-ultraorthodox Jews, ultraorthodox Jews and Arabs) which together comprise the total population in Israel.[12] The highest forecast used the lowest mortality rate and the highest fertility rate for the three population groups,

and the lowest forecast used the highest mortality rate and the lowest fertility rate. The medium forecast, as its name indicates, used intermediate assumptions regarding mortality and fertility. Assumptions regarding migration are identical in the three scenarios.

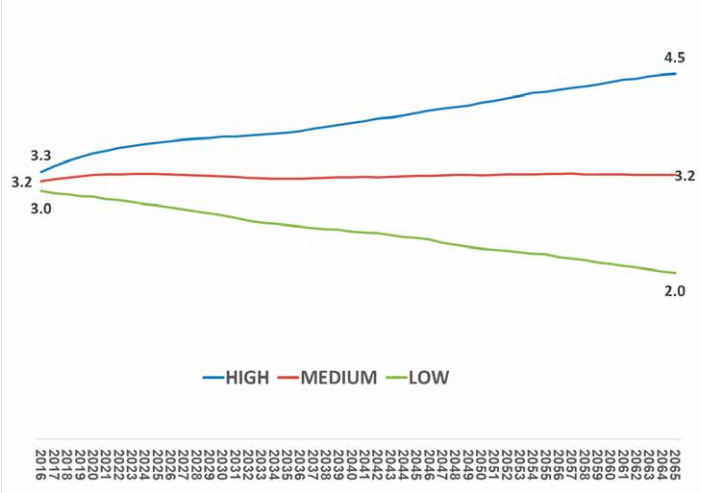
As a result of large differences in fertility between the three population groups, the rate of population growth differs substantially for these groups, which causes changes in population composition. This is expressed most notably in the prolonged increase in the proportion of ultraorthodox Jews, the group with the highest fertility, at the expense of the other groups.

Figure 6 below presents the assumed fertility for the total population[13] for these three scenarios: An increase from 3.3 births per woman to 4.5 in the high forecast, a decrease from 3.0 to almost 2.0 in the low forecast and relatively stability at around 3.2 births per woman in the medium forecast.

As a result of large differences in fertility between the three population groups, the rate of population growth differs substantially for these groups, which causes changes in population composition. This is expressed most notably in the prolonged increase in the proportion of ultraorthodox Jews, the group with the highest fertility, at the expense of the other groups. In other words, there is a composition effect which pushes the fertility for the whole population upwards even without a change in the fertility levels of each subgroup.

As a result, in the medium scenario, fertility remains stable at 3.2 throughout the forecast period at the population-wide level—a result of the assumption that for all groups fertility will decline significantly: for ultraorthodox Jews from 6.7 to 5.2, for non-ultraorthodox Jews from 2.5 to 2.3, and for Arabs from 3.1 to 2.3. In the low forecast, the decline in fertility in all groups is much steeper than in the overall population: for ultraorthodox Jews from 6.4 to 3.0, for non-ultraorthodox Jews from 2.4 to 1.7, and for Arabs from 3.0 to 1.6. In the high forecast, fertility increases from 3.3 to 4.5 for the total population, due to much smaller increases within the groups: in the ultraorthodox group from 7.0 to 7.4, in the non-ultraorthodox Jewish group from 2.6 to 2.9 and in the Arab group from 3.2 to 3.0 (a slight decline).

Figure 6. Total Fertility Rate for the Whole Population in Three Scenarios, 2015-2065



Data source: CBS, data processed under specific request (based on the forecast assumptions for each group)

Changes in Age Structure

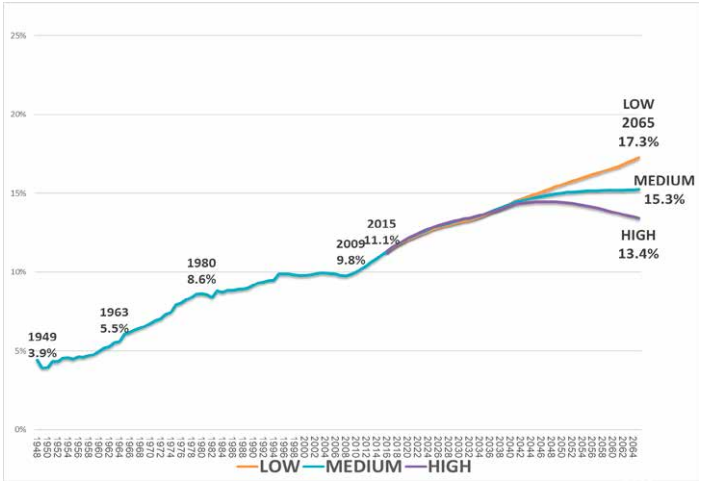
If no large unexpected migration occurs, the primary factors that will influence the population structure in the coming decades will be trends in future mortality and fertility. This is in light of the expected waning of the echo effect of the large birth cohorts born during the years of mass immigration. At the same time, declining mortality is expected to continue the perpetual increase in the proportion of the population who are elderly. In this context the main unknown variable is the pace of decline in mortality in the future, and to what extent the incidence of new mortality events such as the Covid pandemic is likely to influence the overall trend of over 100 years of continued decline in mortality. The mortality forecasts on which CBS population forecasts are based use various mortality rates, which translate

to a 22% difference (or 0.6 million people) in the size of the population aged 65 and above in 2065. Although this difference is nontrivial, it is very small in comparison to the potential effects of predicted fertility trends. Fertility is thus expected to be the primary factor driving population changes in the future: in the low fertility scenario, the number of 0-19 year olds in 2065 (4.3 million) is expected to be 6.2 million people smaller than in the high fertility scenario (10.5 million).

As expected, the change in the proportion of children in the population varies significantly in the different scenarios (see Figure 7 below): In the high forecast their proportion is expected to grow from 36.1% to 42.3% by 2065 (comparable to their proportion at the beginning of the 1970s). According to the fertility assumptions of the medium scenario, the proportion of children in the year 2065 (35.6%) will remain at almost the same level it was in 2015 (36.1%), and according to the low forecast, the proportion of children in 2065 will be 8.5 points lower than it was in 2015, at 27.6%—lower than any level recorded for the State of Israel.

It should be emphasized that these variations in the proportion of children will take place while their **absolute** number changes dramatically. The number of children in 2016 was 3.1 million, while in 2065 it will be 10.5 million, 7.1 million or 4.3 million according to the three forecasts. The proportion of elderly people is expected to rise in the wake of the expected decline in mortality in all three forecasts (see Figure 8 below). However, the differences between the scenarios are significant beginning from the 2030s. Until then, in all three scenarios there is a sharp and nearly identical rise: from 11.1% in 2015 to 13.9% in 2037 (+2.8%) over a period of 22 years. From that point on, their proportion of the population will vary depending on the scenario: In the high forecast (high fertility, low mortality) their proportion will continue to grow slowly over time, reach its peak around 2045 (14.4%), and afterwards will decline, reaching 13.4% in 2065. In the low forecast (low fertility, low mortality) their proportion will continue to rise sharply, reaching 17.3% in 2065. In the medium forecast (stable fertility and moderate decline in mortality) their proportion will increase more modestly and will stabilize near its expected peak (15.3%) in the early 2050s.

Figure 7. Proportion of Children Aged 0-19, 1948-2015, and in the Three Forecasts, 2015-2065



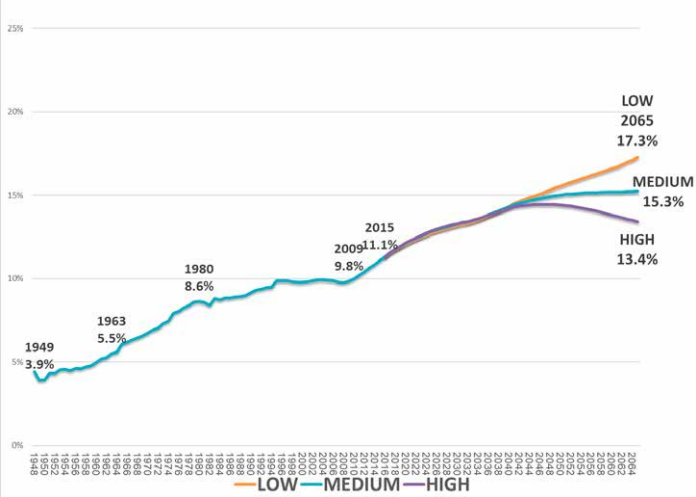
Source: Authors' Processing of CBS Population Forecasts – Israel Population Forecasts, 2015-2065.

The differences between the scenarios can be understood based on the different assumptions regarding mortality and fertility (which influence the proportion of children, and therefore the proportions of the other age groups), but why does the difference between them only develop 20 years into the forecast? The answer is that during this period, all three scenarios foresee a profound increase in the proportion of elderly as determined by population momentum. Indeed, during the years 2016-2030 the first parallelogram-like structure will fully enter the 65+ age group and will cause a jump in the rate of elderly people in all the scenarios. The next parallelogram (the next generation) also has relatively large cohorts, but they have much less influence. Therefore, only during the late 2030s and onwards will the differences in the proportions of people aged 65 and above in the three forecasts become dependent on the different assumptions about mortality and fertility.

Changes in the Proportion of Working Age Population (20-64)

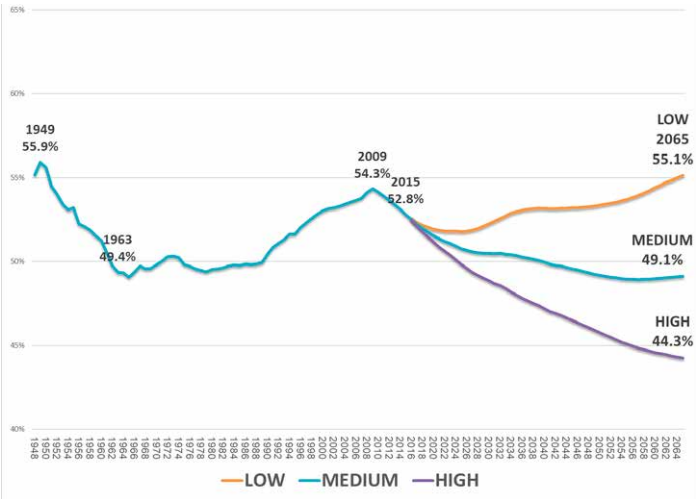
As a result of the differences between the forecasts in the proportion of children and the proportion of the elderly, the proportions of the population of working age exhibit different patterns in each scenario.

Figure 8. Proportion of People Aged 65 and Above, 1948-2015, and According to the Three Forecasts, 2015-2065



Source: Authors' Processing of CBS Population Forecasts – Israel Population Forecasts, 2015-2065.

Figure 9. Proportion of People Aged 20-64, 1948-2015, and According to the Three Forecasts, 2015-2065



Source: Authors' Processing of CBS Population Forecasts – Israel Population Forecasts, 2015-2065.

In the high forecast (high fertility, low mortality) the proportion of elderly in the population is likely to grow less than in the low forecast (low fertility, high mortality), but the proportion of children is expected to grow much more sharply. The proportion of working age people is the complement of the sum of these two factors and therefore, in the high forecast it will be much lower than in the low forecast: In the high forecast the proportion of working age people is expected to decrease consistently from 52.8% in 2015 to 44.3% in 2065 (a decrease of 8.5%). This decrease primarily reflects the increase in the proportion of children (+6.2%) but also the parallel increase in the proportion of elderly (+2.3%). Such a proportion of working age people—44.3%—would be five points lower than the lowest proportion ever recorded in Israel.

At the other end, in the low scenario (low fertility, high mortality) the proportion of people of working age shows a complex pattern over the years: after a slight decrease of a percentage point between 2015 (52.8%) and 2022 (51.8%) and a period of stagnation of several years, from 2027 onwards the rate will increase by 1.3 percentage points until 2035 (53.2%). After that, it will enter a second and longer period of stagnation at this level until the year 2047, when a slow but continuous increase will begin that will reach a rate of 55.1% in 2.3—2065 percentage points higher than in 2015 and one of the highest ever recorded in Israel.

The proportion of people of working age according to the medium scenario (stable fertility and a moderate decrease in mortality rates) shows a downward trend, but less pronounced than in the high scenario. Starting with a relatively sharp decrease between 2015 (52.8%) and 2027 (50.5%) of 2.3 percentage points, the proportion will remain stable for several years, and from 2032 a slow but continuous decrease begins until it stabilizes around 49.0% starting from 2053—a level similar to the lowest recorded in Israel (49.4% in 1964).

Discussion – Future Demographic Challenges, Declining Fertility and the Demographic Dividend

Population forecasts show that different trends in fertility levels are likely to significantly affect the dynamic of the Israeli population, and especially the proportion of the population of working age. In the near future the influence of the state's early mass migration, which had a profound influence on the demographic dynamics of the Israeli population until now, will fade. In the absence of a large, unexpected wave of immigration, the primary forces that will shape the future population dynamic in Israel will be patterns of fertility and mortality. Taking into consideration that historic trends in mortality indicate that life expectancy is likely to continue rising, the main question about mortality is the pace of decline. The future of fertility is much more uncertain.

The forecasts also indicate that it is not likely that Israel will enjoy another significant demographic dividend in the coming decades similar to the one that it experienced in the 1990s and early 2000s, unless there is a significant and rapid decline in fertility. This conclusion is also reflected in the long-term Israeli growth model developed by the Bank of Israel (Bank of Israel 2019; Argov and Tsur 2019), because "the basic forecast indicates that the future growth rate of GDP and GDP per capita are expected to be lower than historic averages, mainly due to future demographic developments and the exhaustion of significant growth drivers that operated in the past." (Argov and Tsur 2019, 2).[14]

In spite of the above, the expected potential demographic dividend of a decline in fertility is far from negligible: in comparison to the situation in 2022 (51.8% of the population at working age), a decline in fertility according to the low forecast would lead to an increase of more than three percentage points in the proportion of population at working age in 2065. This would be translated into a potential per capita income growth of over 6%, in contrast with the high forecast, in which fertility continues to rise further, and which would lead to a decline of more than 7% in the proportion of population at working age in 2065. This would likely result in a decline of 15% in income per capita—an overall gap in per capita income of over 20% between the high and low forecasts.

In recent years Israelis have dealt with longer traffic jams, manpower shortages in education and health care, and serious difficulties in renting or purchasing an apartment—these are the most widely noted challenges, and they all share a common cause: rapid population growth that requires the system to adapt and grow at least at the pace of population growth, in order to maintain the level of services that were provided in the past.

High rates of population growth have already become a challenge for Israeli society. In recent years Israelis have dealt with longer traffic jams, manpower shortages in education and health care, and serious difficulties in renting or purchasing an apartment—these are the most widely noted challenges, and they all share a common cause: rapid population growth that requires the system to adapt and grow at least at the pace of population growth, in order to maintain the level of services that were provided in the past. Even in a relatively developed country such as Israel, it is difficult to cope with a prolonged high rate of population growth.

Today most countries in the world report a fertility rate of around 2.1 births per woman or below;[15] this is known as replacement rate (the fertility rate which over the long term ensures a population growth rate of zero). The present fertility and mortality rates in Israel imply a stable natural increase rate of over 1.5% per year (Coale and Demeny 1983). However, recently it looks like the fertility rate has stabilized and may be beginning to decline. Fertility, which reached 3.1 during 2016-2017, went down to 2.9 in 2020.[16] Such a decline is not supposed to indicate a change in trend but, as discussed

above, we would have expected fertility to continue increasing and not to decrease in light of the expected changes in population composition.[17] Yet a sharp decrease would be necessary to cause a significant reduction in population growth rates and the production of a meaningful demographic dividend. Calculation of alternative scenarios of fertility decline (while using the same assumptions for mortality and migration used by the CBS) shows that the faster fertility declines to 2.0, the higher the potential demographic dividend is: If fertility immediately drops to 2.0, the proportion of working age people will peak at 57.1% by 2040 (in contrast with 52% in 2040 and 55.1% in 2065 in the low forecast). If fertility drops to 2.0 only by 2030, the peak will be at 55.5% in 2045. It should be emphasized that a drastic reduction in fertility is not expected to bring Israel closer to a negative natural population growth rate (as has occurred in other developed countries). Even if the fertility rate immediately drops to 2.0 births per woman, population growth is expected to remain above 0% until nearly the end of the twenty-first century.

The fertility rate may decline further in the future and perhaps this decline has already begun. It is also clear that a sharp decline in fertility would significantly benefit the Israeli population. Future demographic challenges will require the allocation of significant financial resources, such as the ongoing challenge of coping with rapid population growth (which even in the low forecast is expected to remain between 0.6% and 1.6% throughout the entire forecast period); the aging of the population; the absorption of ultraorthodox population of working age into the workforce;[18] the increase in population density—these are the most noteworthy. But not only demographic challenges lie ahead; there are also geopolitical risks and the consequences of climate change, which will consume substantial resources.[19]

Rapid population growth could also have other negative effects on Israeli society. Developed-world countries have experienced a long-term decline in fertility rates, to below replacement level, and are currently dealing with shortages in the working age population. As a result, many countries have decided to reduce formal and legal obstacles to immigration in order to attracts "skills and talent" (European Commission 2022, 1-22). In practice these countries plan to draw skilled and talented young immigrants from outside of the European community. If the situation in Israel does not improve rapidly, outward migration of skilled and talented working age people is likely to further exacerbate the situation.

The primary conclusion from this analysis is that if the current high fertility rate is maintained, it may endanger the Israeli economy in the near future; however, a significant reduction in the fertility rate will create an opportunity for a demographic dividend that will allow better management of expected economic, social and climate changes.

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Notes

1 In the literature the "dependence ratio" is sometimes used, which measures the ratio between the dependent population (the elderly and children) and the working age population, instead of the proportion of the population of working age. These two measures are equivalent but it is correct and simpler to use the proportion of the population who are of working age.

2 All statistics in this chapter and the following chapters are taken from publications of the Central Bureau of Statistics, primarily from the Statistical Yearbooks for the years 1949-2022.

3 The population momentum effect is the tendency of a population with a high fertility rate that grew rapidly, to continue to do so for decades even after the onset of a significant decline in fertility.

4 This turn of events resulted from the change in the fertility trend: In the early 1990s the fertility rate stopped declining after 30 years, and during the years 2005-2018 it even rose by one-quarter birth, from 2.84 to 3.09.

5 In the labor market young and old people are active, but the rates of labor force participation of those below aged 20 and above aged 64 are very low in comparison to the participation rate of those aged 20-64. It has been found that the two types of dependence (dependence of children and dependence of the elderly) are not fundamentally different in relation to the net "burden" on the working age population (Taub Center 2020). Therefore it is possible to understand relatively well the effect of changes on per capita income if we observe the proportion of the population aged 20-64 as representing the primary working age population, without analyzing separately the two groups of dependents.

6 In 1951 the proportion of those born in Europe and America amongst those aged 65 and up was estimated at 73%, and in 1963 at 69%.

7 For the years 1950-1954, during which the CBS did not publish any statistics about the age structure of the Arab population, the calculation is based on the assumption that the age structure of the Arab population that was published for 1955 was fixed at this level during the years 1950-1954.

8 The fertility rate, like all other indices in this work, is an average for the entire Israeli population and not just the Jewish population, which as a majority has a more dominant effect than minority groups. For this purpose, regarding the years 1950-1954 when the CBS did not publish fertility statistics for the Arab population, the rate is based on the assumption that the fertility rate of the Arab population that was published for the year 1955 was fixed at this level during the years 1950-1954. During these years the percentage of Arabs in the total population was estimated at below 12%, so that even if this assumption is challenged, its impact on the total population fertility rate would remain minor.

9 71% of those aged 65 and up in 1989 were born in Europe.

10 Based on the statistics published by the CBS (in the 2006 Statistical Yearbook) for immigrants who arrived between 1990-2005 and the children they brought with to Israel, we can estimate the effect of the immigration during these years on the age structure of the population. It becomes clear that these immigrants contributed to a 0.9% increase in the working age population, which is one-quarter of the total 3.6% increase in this sector from 1989 to 2005. This increase was accompanied by a -1.9% decline in the number of children born and an increase of 1.0% in the number of people of old age.

11 This may be linked to the fact that these were in large part children born during World War II, when fertility rates in Europe were very low, who replaced those born during the period between the two world wars. Throughout this entire period most of those aged 65 and above were of European origin: 66% in 2009, 60% in 2010.

12 Separation of these three groups is due to their highly distinctive demographic patterns (particularly fertility and migration), and allows for the best analysis of potential changes in the age structure of the entire population, which is the focus of our work. See methodology and assumptions of the population forecasts on the CBS website, Israel Population Forecasts 2015-2065. [Hebrew]

13 These were calculated on the basis of the assumptions regarding the three population subgroups that serve for the construction of the population forecasts and express the fertility rate of the general population for each forecast year.

14 The model weighs demographic variables together with a variety of economic indices. Amongst other things, the model takes into account the potential contribution of workers with foreign citizenship and Palestinian workers.

15 1.9 births per woman on average in Asia and Latin America, 1.6 in Europe, 1.5 in North America. Only in African countries is fertility very high, at 4.4 births per woman, according to the UN world population forecast statistics database for 2022 (United Nations n.d.).

16 Fertility rose slightly in 2021, but this may be connected to the Covid pandemic.

17 The decline was also recorded amongst the Jewish population and not only amongst the Arab population, where fertility continues to decline.

18 The ultraorthodox population of working age is estimated at half a million people (10%) in 2015, but by 2065 their number will grow to over 2 million (between 2.2 and 3.2 million, based on the different forecasts), who will make up over 25% (between 26%-30%) of the working age population. This population has low workforce participation and low productivity (see Bank of Israel 2019; Argov and Tsur 2019; Shraberman and Weinreb 2024), and therefore this growth is a highly important future challenge.

19 Israel is in a region defined as a "hot spot" (high risk region) and is therefore more exposed to the risks of climate change (State Comptroller 2021; Ali et al. 2022, 2235).

The Reciprocity of Demography, Territory and Time in Shaping Zionist and Israeli Policy—1897-1951

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This paper discusses the relationship between three variables that shaped Zionist and Israeli policy: **Demography**, which refers to statistical data and their interpretation, assumptions regarding future developments, and even wishful thinking about the absolute and relative number of Jews in Eretz Israel, and the number of Jews in the world who need, want or are able to immigrate; **territory**, that is, the boundaries of the Jewish state; and **the time** available to Zionism to create a Jewish majority in Eretz Israel, as well as the time available to the *State* of Israel to ensure the Jewish majority on its territory.

At the heart of the paper lies the claim that, since the adoption of the resolution on "Zionism of Zion" by the Zionist Organization in 1905, and even more intensely from the start of the British Mandate in Palestine until 1951, demographic considerations were dominant and decisive in shaping Zionist policy. A further claim is that in the history of Zionism and Israel, the demographic issue has been comprised of two aspects—Eretz Israel and the Diaspora—and that until 1951 the interests of the *Yishuv* and of Israel dictated Zionist and Israeli immigration policy.

This paper has a dual purpose: to confirm the claim regarding the dominance of demographic considerations and the priority of Israeli concerns, by describing and analyzing test cases at the junctures of fateful decisions; and to propose alternative or additional interpretations to those already existing in research and the public discourse regarding the motives that led to the decisions taken at those junctures.

Keywords: demography, Aliyah, Jewish immigration, 1937 Partition Plan, Biltmore Plan (1942), the Million Plan, the West Bank, the Mass Aliyah (1948-1951), Aliyah Regulations 1951.

Introduction

The Zionist Movement was founded as a national liberation movement that sought to establish a political entity for a people scattered all over the world, on territory ruled by an external power (first the Ottoman Empire and then Britain), with an existing Arab population. At the heart of this paper is the claim that since the 1905 Zionist resolution on "Zionism of Zion," and more intensely after the establishment of the British Mandate in Palestine following the First World War, demographic considerations

were dominant and decisive in the formation of Zionist policy. Demographic considerations refer to statistical data and their interpretation, assumptions regarding future developments and even wishful thinking about the absolute and relative number of Jews in Eretz Israel, and the number of Jews in the world who must, want or are able to immigrate. Alongside demographic considerations, there were two additional variables: territory—the boundaries of the Jewish state to be founded in Palestine, and from 1948, of the State of Israel—and time—the time available to Zionism to achieve a Jewish majority in order to justify Jewish sovereignty in Palestine, and the time available to the State of Israel to ensure the Jewish majority within its territory.

In Ruppin's view, the goal of Zionism was Jewish autonomy in Palestine, and this he believed would only be possible when the Jews became a decisive majority and owned most of the land.

The article therefore discusses the interaction between these three variables: demography, territory and time, and has a dual purpose. The first is to confirm the claim regarding the dominance of demographic considerations by describing and analyzing test cases at the junctures of fateful decisions. The second is to propose an alternative or additional interpretation to those already existing in research and the public discourse concerning the motives that led to the decisions taken at those junctures.

The demographic question appeared on the Zionist agenda as an issue requiring practical attention only in the mid-1930s, when it became clear that the time was approaching for a decision on the political future of Palestine, and it assumed its full significance following the recommendations of the Peel Commission (1937). The discussion throughout the first four decades of the Zionist Organization was therefore a kind of preface to the main one, comprising the following junctures:

1. The resolution of the twentieth Zionist Congress regarding the Partition Plan proposed by the Peel Commission (1937).
2. Outlining Zionist policy for the period following World War II (1942).
3. Defining the political goals of Zionism at the end of World War II (1944-1946).
4. The question of conquering the West Bank in the War of Independence (1948).
5. Israel's immigration policy in its early years (1948-1951).

1897-1937: The Zionist Organization's Early Engagement With the Demographic Issue

In its first platform (The Basel Program, 1897), the Zionist Organization presented the aim of Zionism as "establishing for the Jewish people a publicly and legally assured home in Palestine." From the start the Zionist leaders were aware of the limitations of Palestine as a destination for mass immigration, and after the 1905 resolution on "Zionism of Zion" it was clear that the demographic dimension of the Zionist solution to the Jewish problem depended on the immigration absorption potential of Palestine. A short time afterwards, the Zionist Organization embarked on practical work in Palestine, directed by Arthur Ruppin, who was the first to point out the link between demography and territory for the realization of Zionism's goals in Palestine. During his tour of the country in 1907, Ruppin noted that the Jews, who formed 10% of the population, occupied only 1.5% of its area, and that the land they owned was concentrated in three geographical blocs. In Ruppin's view, the goal of Zionism was Jewish autonomy in Palestine, and this he believed would only be possible when the Jews became a decisive majority and owned most of the land. The data he collected in 1907 showed him that it would not be possible to achieve these two objectives in the near future, and he therefore saw "an absolute imperative to

limit the Zionist goal in terms of territory for the time being. We must try to achieve autonomy not in the whole of Palestine but only in certain areas" (Ruppin 1937, 2).

The two aspects of the demographic question—the number of Jews who needed, wanted or were able to immigrate to Palestine, and the ability of the country to absorb them—did not at that time top the Zionist agenda. Palestine was controlled by a regime that objected to mass Jewish immigration, while the pressing difficulties of the Jews in eastern Europe had a solution at that time over the Atlantic ocean. The Balfour Declaration and the occupation of Eretz Israel by the British Army aroused hopes and the desire to move to Palestine, above all among the Jews of eastern Europe, who were suffering from persecution and pogroms. Particularly difficult was the situation of the Jews of Ukraine, who in the winter of 1918-1919 became trapped in the battlefield between the "Whites" and the "Reds," and from the end of 1917 to 1920 tens of thousands of Jews were killed there, many others were wounded, women were raped, and large amounts of Jewish property were stolen and destroyed. However, since at that time Palestine was under British military rule that did not permit Jewish immigration, the heads of the Zionist Organization tried to dissuade potential immigrants from coming to the country, citing the lack of clarity over the political fate of the country, and above all the economic conditions that made immigrant absorption impossible (Halamish 2006, 15-17).

The standard bearer of the opposition to the moderate and cautious line taken by the Zionist leadership was Max Nordau, who in 1919-1920 delivered a series of speeches and published numerous articles focusing on the slogan: "Mass immigration and without delay to Palestine" (Nordau 5722, 98). He explained it as follows: "Our masses in the lands of pogroms yearn to shake from their feet the dust of those countries, which is soaked in their blood—not after fifty years, not tomorrow, but today!" (Nordau 5722, 64-65). His practical proposal was to bring half a million Jewish immigrants to Palestine immediately: "Either we create a decisive majority in Palestine now, or the land will be lost to us forever" (Nordau 5722, 133). While he spoke of the urgent need to help the distressed Jews of eastern Europe, the number stated by Nordau was essentially based on political Zionist needs: to create a demographic fact before Britain obtained the Mandate for Palestine (Nordau 5722, 98).

When Sir John Hope-Simpson visited the country in 1930, he posed a question to the Jews he met: "Did you not have enough time to become a larger force in the country, why did you not make use of this time?

The main practical aspect of the demographic question was the extent of Jewish immigration to Palestine, which was one of the central issues in the history of Mandatory Palestine. The question of immigration played a decisive role in the positions taken by the three sides of the Palestine triangle: the British rulers, the Arab majority that consistently opposed Jewish immigration, and the Jewish minority who saw it as a non-negotiable issue (Halamish, 2020). The guiding line of the Mandatory immigration policy was the principle of the country's economic absorptive capacity (Halamish, 2003), to which the Zionist Organization gave its consent (Peel Report, Chapter 10, Paragraph 65),[1] partly because it believed (until the beginning of 1936) that immigration to the full absorptive capacity would, with the financial help of Diaspora Jewry, lead to a Jewish majority in the foreseeable future. During the 1920s the demographic question did not dominate the Mandate authorities' agenda and did not play a significant role in Zionist policy. The 1920s are often labelled the decade of Zionism's great missed opportunity, because it did not manage to significantly increase the Jewish population

in the country at a time when Arab opposition to Jewish immigration was dormant and Mandate immigration policy rested purely on the principle of economic absorptive capacity. When Sir John Hope-Simpson visited the country in 1930, he posed a question to the Jews he met: "Did you not have enough time to become a larger force in the country, why did you not make use of this time?"[2]

A short time later, in the early 1930s, the Zionist leaders were gripped by the sense that time was running out for Zionism in Palestine, and the political future of the country would soon be decided. Looking at the British political reaction to the disturbances of 1929, and considering the moves towards greater independence in neighboring countries under Mandatory rule, it was clear to them that there had to be a critical mass of Jews in Palestine before any political decision was taken that would perpetuate the minority status of the Jews.

The Zionist Organization avoided any public declaration of its goals, as long as the demographic reality did not justify the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine. In this regard the time dimension refers to timing: when was the time ripe to declare the aim of creating a Jewish majority in the land? At the seventeenth Zionist Congress in 1931, the Revisionists proposed that the Congress should openly declare that the "ultimate goal" of Zionism was the establishment of a Jewish state with a Jewish majority in the whole area of the Mandate for Palestine, on both sides of the Jordan River. By a majority of 162 to 62 it was decided not to put this proposal to the vote, not because of opposition to its content, but for considerations of demography and timing: at that time Jews constituted less than 17% of the population of Palestine west of the Jordan River, and far less if both are included in the calculation. At the same time, in the Zionist Organization there was opposition to any expression of willingness to renounce the desire for a Jewish majority in Palestine. When Chaim Weizmann said in a press interview: "I have no sympathy or understanding of the demand for a Jewish majority," his words were received with reservations and even anger, and contributed to his failure to be elected President of the movement in 1931 (Golani & Reinhartz 2020, 323-340, quote on 329).

Until the mid-1930s, the desire for a Jewish majority in Palestine was therefore a kind of "unwritten rule." However, loyalty to this aim was a litmus for allegiance to the Zionist camp. For example, Hashomer Hatzair, who for many years supported a binational solution to the Palestine question, never renounced two principles: the continuation of immigration with no numerical restriction, and no compromise on the goal of a Jewish majority in the country. In this way the movement differed from other bodies who supported a binational solution, such as Brit Shalom and Ichud, who were ready to give up the demand for a Jewish majority and compromise on the extent of immigration, and thus removed themselves from the Zionist circle.

In June 1932, Chaim Arlosoroff (head of the Political Department of the Jewish Agency) predicted that the end of the British Mandate for Palestine and a decision on its political future were imminent. He inferred that the Zionist Organization must "strive to settle hundreds of thousands of Jews in the country as quickly as possible, in order to ensure at least a substantial equilibrium between the two peoples there." Based on the demographic data and the geographical dispersal at that time, Arlosoroff returned to the idea proposed by Ruppin in 1907—to limit the area for the realization of Zionism: "Instead of the whole of Palestine, only certain regions or parts of it," however even in these areas the Jews were a minority. This sad demographic reality led Arlosoroff to a revolutionary conclusion (as he wrote in a secret letter to Chaim Weizmann that was not made public until after the establishment of the State): a transitional period is needed in which the Jewish minority will rule "in order to

prevent the danger of the non-Jewish majority taking control and revolting against us […] During this transitional period there will be a systematic policy of development, Jewish immigration and settlement," creating a new demographic and territorial reality (Arlosoroff undated, 333-342).[3]

A short time later, after the Nazis rose to power and the deterioration of the situation for Jews in eastern Europe, the significance in general and particularly the demographic one of an event that had occurred in 1924 became clear: the change in United States immigration laws that had almost completely closed its gates to migrants from Eastern Europe. At first this had a positive effect on the volume of Jewish immigration to Palestine: In 1924, 59% of all Jewish migrants went to the United States while only 16.4% went to Palestine, but in 1925 the picture was reversed—52.1% of all Jewish migrants went to Palestine, while only 15.6% made their way to the United States (Gurewitz & Graetz 5705, 13). The fourth wave of Aliyah, which reached a peak in 1925, led to a sense of "it's happening," masses of Jews are coming to Palestine and there will soon be a demographic Jewish mass. But this optimism faded at the end of 1925 when the Jewish economy went into crisis, and in 1927 the number of Jews who left the country was almost double the number of new arrivals. There was some recovery in the early 1930s, and in the years 1933-1935 more than 130,000 people immigrated. As the mirror image of the Zionist optimism aroused by the huge wave of Jewish immigration, it increased Arab fears of losing their majority status in their country, and was the main cause of the Arab revolt that erupted in the spring of 1936 (Peel Report, Chapter 10, Paragraph 5).[4] This signaled the start of a new era in the history of Palestine, during which the Zionist Organization formulated its policy while considering the interaction of the three variables: demography, territory and time (timing).

The Partition Controversy, 1937: Willingness to Accept Territorial Constraint for Reasons of Demography and Time

July 1937 saw the official publication of the report of the Royal Commission (known as the Peel Commission), which was charged with investigating the causes of the Arab revolt and recommending moves for the future. The Commission reached the conclusion that "an irrepressible conflict has arisen between two national communities within the narrow bounds of one small country," where "about 1,000,000 Arabs are in strife, open or latent, with some 400,000 Jews" (Peel Report, Chapter 20, Paragraph 5). The Peel Commission proposed ending the Mandate and dividing the country into three parts: an independent Jewish state along the coastal plain and in the Galilee; an Arab region to include about 85% of Palestine and to be united with Trans-Jordan as an independent state; and an area that would remain under permanent Mandatory government: Jerusalem and Bethlehem, and a corridor leading to Jaffa.

The conclusions of the Peel Commission were formulated against a background of the existing demographic situation (and assumptions about its future development) and the geographic distribution of the population. The idea was "separate the areas in which the Jews have acquired land and settled from those which are wholly or mainly occupied by Arabs" (Peel Report, Chapter 22, Paragraph 17), and make reasonable allowance within the boundaries of the Jewish State for the growth of population and colonization (Chapter 22, Paragraph 18). That was why the Galilee was included in the Jewish state, although parts of it were inhabited almost entirely by Arabs. The Commission's main problem when deciding the lines of partition lay in the inability to draw lines that would completely separate Jews and Arabs—lines that had only Jewish-owned land on one side and only Arab-owned land on the other. According

to the Commission's calculations, there were almost 225,000 Arabs in the area designated for the Jewish state, while there were only 1,250 Jews in the intended Arab area. The Commission therefore proposed reaching an agreement on land and population exchanges, that "should be part of the agreement that in the last resort the exchange would be compulsory."(Chapter 22, Paragraphs 35-43, quote from para. 43).

In addition to these more familiar recommendations, the Commission also suggested a less known option, if the partition plan was rejected and the British Mandate remained in place. The core of this recommendation was a dramatic change in the Mandate immigration policy. Instead of the practice (formally, at least) of regulating Jewish immigration solely according to economic considerations, in the future, political, social and psychological factors would also be considered when determining the extent of Jewish immigration (Chapter 10, Paragraph 73; and Chapter 19, Paragraph 10). And in practice:

> We advise that there should now be a definite limit to the annual volume of Jewish immigration. We recommend that Your Majesty's Government should lay down a "political high level" of Jewish immigration to cover Jewish immigration of all categories. This high level should be fixed for the next five years at 12,000 per annum, and in no circumstances during that period should more than that number be allowed into the country in any one year. (Chapter 10, Paragraph 97).

The alternative recommendation was implemented immediately in the White Paper published in July 1937, which stated that for the next eight months, no more than 8,000 Jews would be permitted to immigrate (Great Britain, 1937).

The logic behind this number was clear to everyone: freezing the demographic balance between Jews and Arabs in Palestine and perpetuating the status of Jews as a minority, comprising about a third of the population. In 1937 the British estimated that the difference between the natural rate of increase of the Arabs and that of the Jews was about 12,000 per annum, and two years later the number rose to 15,000. In May 1939 the British government unhesitatingly announced that the number of Jewish immigrants over the next five years, 75,000, had been determined so that the Jewish population in Palestine would reach about a third of the Arab population, and Jewish immigration thereafter would be conditional on Arab consent (CMD 6019).

The Twentieth Zionist Congress that met in the summer of 1937 accepted the idea of partitioning the country and establishing a Jewish state in only part of the territory, and empowered its Executive "to enter into negotiations with a view to ascertaining the precise terms of His Majesty's Government for the proposed establishment of a Jewish State in Palestine," and "in the event of the emergence of a definite scheme for the establishment of a Jewish State, such scheme shall be brought before a newly elected Congress for decision." (The Twentieth Zionist Congress undated, 359-360).

The academic and public discussion of the partition controversy usually focuses on the territorial aspects of the partition proposal, but it is impossible to understand the support for the idea of partition without considering the alternative proposal and its demographic significance—arbitrary restrictions on Jewish immigration, eliminating the chance of a Jewish majority in Palestine and putting an end to the possibility of setting up a Jewish sovereign entity. The Zionist leadership realized that it would not be possible at that time to set up a Jewish state on the whole of Palestine, and they were therefore prepared to discuss the option of the immediate establishment of a Jewish state on part of the land, assuming that a small but sovereign Jewish state could manage its own

immigration policy and bring in more Jews than the quota allotted by the British.

"The position of the Zionist Organization regarding the conclusions of the Royal Commission and the decision of the British Government" refer directly to demographic matters (The Twentieth Zionist Congress undated, 359-360) stating that "The Congress condemns the 'palliative proposals' put forward by the Royal Commission as a policy for implementing the Mandate, such as curtailment of immigration, fixing of a political high-level in substitution for the principle of economic absorptive capacity;" and "The Congress enters its strongest protest against the decision of His Majesty's Government to fix a political maximum for Jewish immigration of all categories for the next eight months."

Similar to the disagreements during British military rule (1918-1920) over Jewish immigration to Palestine at a time of acute distress in the Diaspora, in the controversy over partition and the formation of Zionist policy from then on, there were two sides to the demographic piece. On one side: the need to increase the Jewish population in order to create a majority that would lead to sovereignty, or at least a demographic mass that would make it impossible to ignore the Jewish *Yishuv* in any plan for the political future of the land; and on the other side, the number of Jews in the Diaspora who were in need, or wished, to immigrate to Palestine. Both sides of the partition debate raised the distress of Europe's Jews as a reason for their position, but an examination of their statements shows that they were thinking in terms of Palestine. This is clearly shown by the number of immigrants stated in the arguments—around 100,000 a year for the next ten to twenty years. These numbers would bring about a demographic change in the country, but they were far from providing a solution to the growing suffering of Europe's Jews, and did not even cover their population's natural rate of growth.

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The sense that time was running out, felt by the Zionist leaders since the early 1930s, derived from an analysis of the situation in **Palestine**. Again and again they warned and worried of approaching war and in their view, the future of the country demanded mass immigration, and fast. This can be seen in Arlosoroff's secret letter in 1932 (Arlosoroff undated), and in a speech by Berl Katznelson in 1935: "Anyone who sees what surrounds us **here**, and what lies in wait for us **there**, anyone who sees the global political situation […] the danger of war that fills the space of our world, cannot dismiss the grave command: **to strive for the maximum number as soon as possible**" (Meeting of the Zionist Executive Committee 1935, 151 [my emphases]).

Towards the end of the 1930s, when it appeared that world war was likely, the demographic aspect acquired further significance, that was well expressed by the Peel Report:

> Jews must realize that another world-war is unhappily not impossible, and in the changes and chances of war it is easy to imagine circumstances under which the Jews might have to rely mainly on their own resources for the defense of the National Home. There, then, is a second and a very potent reason for haste. The more immigrants, the more potential soldiers. "There is safety in numbers," said a Jewish witness. And again: "If we are kept in

> a state of permanent minority, then it is not a National Home, it may become a death-trap." (Peel Report, Chapter 5, Paragraph 21).

And what about **Jerusalem**, which according to the partition plan was supposed to be part of a permanent Mandatory area? Even those who accepted the idea of partitioning the country objected to the map proposed by the Peel Commission, and their suggestions for changes included the demand to bring Jerusalem into the future Jewish state. They were referring to the new part of Jerusalem (and not the Old City), and even if their position involved national and emotional elements, at its basis were demographic considerations: about a sixth of the Jews in the country were living in Jerusalem. This is what Weizmann said to the Congress:

> So what are the essential changes in our opinion, for the proposal to serve as a basis for negotiations? Firstly, it concerns the question of **Jerusalem**; the 70,000 Jews in Jerusalem are very important to us, and we have a justified demand that the new Jerusalem, largely inhabited by Jews, be annexed to the Jewish state (The Twentieth Zionist Congress undated, 71 [emphasis in the original]).

The Biltmore Program, 1942: Demographic and Territorial Maximalism

The Zionist leaders estimated that after the Second World War there would be political changes in the Middle East, and just as Zionism had obtained a promise for a "national home" in Palestine during World War I, so at the end of World War II it would obtain international support for the establishment of a Jewish state in the whole of Palestine. In the spring of 1942 the Zionist Organization outlined its policy for the day after the war in a document known as The Biltmore Program. For the purposes of the present discussion, its main points were the opening of the gates of Palestine for Jewish immigration and the establishment of a Jewish state in the whole area (the text speaks of a "Jewish commonwealth" for tactical reasons; it was clear to everyone that the intention was a state) (Jewish Agency Executive meeting 1942b).

In the discussions held before ratification of the plan (early October 1942—the date is important, as will become clear) Ben-Gurion stated:

> The role of Zionism after the war is to use state means, in different dimensions, to take two million Jews and settle them in Palestine in one go, to transfer two million Jews, the younger generation from Europe, **if any remain**, to settle in Palestine […] Something of this kind did happened nowadays, they settled 2 million Greeks in the course of 18 months" (Jewish Agency Executive meeting 1942a [my emphasis]).

The Biltmore Program was passed at the height of a war that changed the world order and laid the foundation for optimism over the chances of a Jewish state, **before** the systematic extermination of the Jews in Europe was known. Nevertheless, in early November 1942, Ben Gurion qualified his remarks about the younger generation in Europe—"if any remain," but even as the Zionist leadership gradually internalized the scale of the catastrophe that had befallen the Jews of Europe, in public they kept to the slogan of "two million" until the middle of 1944.

When preparing the demands to be submitted to the Allies at the end of the war (mid-1944), Ben Gurion clarified that the real content of the Zionist demand was to bring a million Jews immediately to Palestine. He admitted that the original meaning of the Biltmore Program was to bring two million Jews to the country

immediately after the war, but "I am taking into account what has happened in the meantime […] the extermination of 6 million Jews […] For that reason I am now stating a number, but that number derives from this fact. In my opinion the real content of our demand is to bring a million Jews immediately to Palestine." He said this before the tragic destruction of the Jews of Hungary, with the hope that "the fate of the million remaining in Hungary [will be] better" (Jewish Agency Executive meeting 1944). Where would the million Jews come from? First we should bring "all the Jewish refugees remaining in Europe" and "then all the Jews from the Arab countries," whose number he estimated at about 800,000. Even at this critical juncture the numbers used were rooted in the Palestinian reality: "If a fact is created by bringing a million Jews to Palestine—the conflict with the Arabs is finished […] If there are a million and a half Jews in Palestine—this conflict is finished" (Jewish Agency Executive meeting 1944). The Million Plan was the official policy of the Zionist Organization before the end of the war (Hacohen, 1994).

In view of the scale of the destruction of the Jews of Europe, and the fear that there would not be sufficient numbers to realize the vision of a Jewish state in the whole of Palestine, Zionist Organization institutions began to discuss bringing the Jews from Islamic countries (Weitz 1989; Meir-Glitzenstein 2001). As soon as the facts about the systematic murder of European Jewry became known, the head of the Jewish Agency Aliyah Department, Eliyahu Dobkin said: "The Jews of the East will perhaps be the first **to add strength to the country**, because who knows when we will be able to reach the Jews of Europe, and **our job is to increase the Yishuv by all means possible**" [my emphases] (Dobkin 1942).[5] In fact, it was only in mid-1944 that the Zionist Organization began to relate to the demographic potential of the Jews in Islamic countries as a new Archimedean point to leverage the Zionist enterprise. But while the immigration to Palestine of Jews from Islamic countries was included, explicitly and implicitly, in all the declarations, the testimonies, the memoranda and the demands of the Jewish Agency from the end of World War II to the establishment of the State of Israel (Meir-Glitzenstein 2004, 44), it was not possible to realize the demographic potential of the estimated 750,000 Jews in Islamic countries to the Zionist struggle in the years 1945-1947, as will be explained later.

As soon as the facts about the systematic murder of European Jewry became known, the head of the Jewish Agency Aliyah Department, Eliyahu Dobkin said: "The Jews of the East will perhaps be the first to add strength to the country, because who knows when we will be able to reach the Jews of Europe, and our job is to increase the Yishuv by all means possible"

The Paris Conference, Summer 1946: Again, Willingness to Accept Territorial Restraint for Reasons of Demography and Timing

The Zionist struggle was resumed at the end of the war under a dual slogan: the establishment of a Jewish state in the whole territory of Palestine, and the immediate immigration of a million Jews. The two elements of this slogan quickly underwent changes. Almost immediately regarding the demographic element, and later (summer 1946) for the territorial element, for demographic reasons. At the end of the war the Zionist leadership distinguished between the declarative demand for the immigration of a million Jews, and the official concrete requests to allow 100,000 Holocaust survivors and displaced persons to enter the country immediately. The more general request for the one million referred to Jews "from European, Oriental and other countries who desire, and need, to settle in the ancient home of the Jewish people" (Ch. Weizmann to W.S. Churchill 1945). The more specific and actual plea for 100,000 was focused on Jewish Displaced Persons in

Europe (M. Shertok to The High Commissioner 1945). 100,000 was widely quoted for the extent of Jewish immigration to the country in the two years after it was first officially raised in public in August 1945, by US President Harry Truman in his request to the British Government. This number reappeared in the report of the Anglo-American Committee in Spring 1946, and in the report of the Morrison-Grady Committee a short time later.

The British government's refusal to grant President Truman's request to permit the immigration of 100,000 Jews to Palestine within two years rendered the displaced persons as a lever for promoting the establishment of a Jewish state through the illegal immigration project. Illegal immigration served to prove the link between a solution for the problem of displaced Jews in Europe and the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine. The apparently obvious goal of increasing the Jewish population in the country was not the main focus of the project in those years, and indeed it did not lead to an increase in the number of Jews who entered the country in the years 1945-1948 (until the establishment of the state) beyond the allocated British quota, because the authorities simply deducted the number of illegal immigrants from the 1500 monthly permits (Sicron 1957, 2, Table 1A). The demand to bring the Jews from Islamic countries could not play a role in the struggle for the Jewish state according to the Zionist Organization's tactics, and the number of Holocaust survivors in Europe was too small to make a significant demographic impact in Palestine.

The process of internalizing the new demographic reality, that of the Jewish people and of Palestine, came to a head in the summer of 1946. After a year of struggle in which the Yishuv had achieved some military gains, Zionism had made no progress towards the realization of its goal as defined at the end of the war. On the contrary, it appeared to be in retreat. In spring 1946 the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry recommended that the country should be neither Arab nor Jewish for the present, and eventually become a binational state (Report of the Anglo-American Committee 1946). It did recommend the immigration of 100,000 Jews within two years, but even if Britain had responded to this recommendation, it would not lead to a dramatic demographic change in the country, where there were 600,000 Jews at the time and twice as many Arabs. Even worse, from the Zionist perspective, was the Morrison-Grady plan that was published in summer 1946 and which indicated the continuation of the British Mandate with no signs of an independent Jewish state on the horizon.

At this crucial confluence of the three variables that shaped Zionist policy—demography, territory and time—the Zionist leadership understood that it had no choice but to reformulate its territorial demands, before the political window of opportunity closed and the chance for a Jewish state was entirely lost. At an emergency meeting of the Jewish Agency Executive convened in early August 1946 in Paris, it was decided that, "the Executive is prepared to discuss a proposal for the establishment of a viable Jewish state in an adequate area of Palestine."[6] The driving force behind this decision was Nahum Goldman, who told the participants:

> I felt for years that partition of Palestine is the only way out. Biltmore is no realistic policy at the moment, because we have no Jewish majority and we cannot wait until we have the majority to get the State. I know it is a tragic decision, but we have only the choice between two things: British rule with the White Paper policy, or a Jewish State in part of Palestine.[7]

In research and the public discourse there is disagreement over a possible causative link between the Holocaust and the establishment of the State. For the present discussion, it is sufficient to mention two elements

of this debate. Firstly—the demographic consequences of the Holocaust had almost destroyed the chances of establishing a Jewish state in Palestine. Before the war, the Zionist Organization had claimed that a Jewish state was the only solution to the distress of Jews in Europe, and that the Jews of Europe who would come to the country would create a demographic reality that would justify the formation of a sovereign Jewish state. The Holocaust destroyed both aspects of this claim. Secondly—while the question of whether the Holocaust had influenced the positions of policy makers in UN member countries is controversial, there is agreement that it had a resounding impact on the positions of Jewish leaders, both Zionist and non-Zionist, so that even those who objected to the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine before the Holocaust changed their minds, and some of those who were strongly against any partition of the land understood that there was no alternative to limiting the territorial ambitions of Zionism, in view of the demographic situation of the Jewish people.

At the time of the controversy over partition in 1937 the Zionist leadership was worried that the proposed boundaries of the Jewish state were too small to accommodate all the Jews who needed Palestine, but after 1942 the fear was that there would not be enough Jews to establish Jewish sovereignty over the whole territory. We saw how dealing with the new demographic situation led immediately to an expansion of the circle of potential Jewish immigrants to Palestine; in mid-1946 the Zionists adjusted the **territorial** dimensions of their ambitions to the **demographic** reality of the Jews worldwide, while taking account of the **time** factor. Or to put it another way, the demographic catastrophe of the Holocaust for the Jewish people obliged the Zionists to limit their territorial aims in order to obtain international agreement for the establishment of a Jewish state on part of Palestine, and the sooner the better.

1948: Accepting a Territorial Minimum for the Sake of a Demographic Majority

In research and public discourse there is an ongoing discussion about why the West Bank was not captured during the War of Independence. The debate has drawn attention to the meeting of the temporary government held on September 26, 1948, where Ben-Gurion ostensibly presented a proposal to conquer the West Bank and it was rejected by one vote (six for and seven against). Careful scrutiny of the minutes of that meeting shows that the subject of conquering the West Bank or any part of it did not arise, and Ben-Gurion had not presented detailed plans for such a conquest (Lavid 2012). It appears that the discussion emerged later from a feeling of a double missed opportunity: the missed opportunity to increase the area of the State of Israel by taking the West Bank, and that of establishing a Jewish majority there by increasing and accelerating the exodus of Arabs from Israel (Shalom 1998).

Obviously, increasing the exit of Arabs from Israeli territory and then preventing their return (a subject that is not discussed in the present paper) was done first and foremost for demographic considerations. The conquest of the West Bank involved other considerations: while there was no doubt as to Israel's **military** capability of execution, there were concerns as to its **political** implications. And still, even the decision not to conquer the West Bank was taken mainly because of **demographic** considerations. As time has passed, more emphasis has been placed on the demographic aspect, which is bound up with the question of the Jewish and democratic nature of Israel.

In the Knesset discussion of April 1949 on the armistice agreements, Ben-Gurion tied the two "misses" of the war to the two desired features of the State—its Jewish and democratic nature, with the words Deir Yassin denoting an active step by the Israel to encourage the Arabs to leave its territory:

> A Jewish state without a Deir Yassin in the whole country can only exist with a dictatorship of the minority. […] A Jewish state in the current situation, even in the west of Palestine only, without a Deir Yassin, is impossible, if it is to be democratic, because the number of Arabs in the west of Palestine is greater than the number of Jews—and Deir Yassin is not our program! […] Do you [supporters of taking control of additional areas of the country] now in 1949 want a democratic State of Israel in the whole country, or do you want a Jewish state in the whole of Palestine and for us to expel the Arabs […]? (Twentieth Session 1949).

It was demographic considerations more than any other that also shaped the position of the government on the question of annexing the Gaza Strip to the State of Israel in 1949. At the government meeting that discussed this matter, Foreign Minister Moshe Sharett presented the arguments for and against, and summarized them as follows: "If we demand the area for ourselves, we are taking on one hundred and fifty thousand Arabs, and most of them will want to return to their homes in the State" (Meeting 1949 5709/42). Sharett made similar remarks at the Knesset Foreign Affairs Committee: "Annexation of the [Gaza] strip means willingness to accept one hundred and seventy thousand Arabs within Israel. Our Arab minority will in one leap reach three hundred thousand" (Knesset Foreign Affairs Committee 1949).

Ben Gurion returned to the question of the link between territory and democracy and what he considered the missed opportunity of the War of Independence, when he wrote in his diary in the summer of 1954:

> I am against a war of expansion unless it is forced upon us. Our problem is a lack of Jews, not a lack of land—at this time. Conquering land up to the Jordan River would be a doubtful gain at present. If the Arabs remain—that means an additional million Arabs in the country, more than we can bear […]. During the War of Independence we missed something important—but we can't take back what has been done (Ben Gurion's diary 1954).

In a private letter sent 14 years after the War of Independence, Ben Gurion clarified that he did not intend to conquer the whole of the country, "because I knew that a small state with only about seven hundred thousand Jews cannot materialize if the Arab population exceeds the Jewish population, or even if it is slightly smaller." However, he considered the conquest of Jerusalem and access to the Dead Sea very important. He noted that he had suggested to the government (in 1948) "to conquer **all of** Jerusalem and the southern pocket including Bethlehem and Hebron, where there were a hundred thousand Arabs." And what about the demographic aspect? "I assumed—without absolute certainty, but with sufficient probability—that most of the Arabs in Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Hebron would flee, like the Arabs of Lydda, Ramla, Jaffa, Haifa, Tiberias and Safed, and we would control the whole width of the country up to the Jordan (to the north or south of Jericho) and all the western Dead Sea will be in our hands," but "there was no suggestion from me to conquer the triangle" (Ben Gurion letter 1962).[8]

Many years after the war, in a conversation with Haim Gouri, Ben Gurion specified his reasons for not seeking to expand the territorial framework of the State of Israel at the end of the War of Independence. In his eyes, conquering the West Bank would amount to "over-reach:"

> Getting involved in a hostile Arab area would have forced upon us a choice that we could not and would not bear:

> to use Deir Yassin methods to expel hundreds of thousands of Arabs who at that time would not have abandoned their homes and fled, or to accept them among us. They would have exploded the young state from within (Gouri 1986).

Soon after the end of the War of Independence, Ben Gurion expressed what he saw as the desirable ratio between land and population, moving decisively away from the territorial aspect to the demographic one:

> "The question is, what is the interest of the State of Israel at this time. Well, the interest is to **absorb Aliyah**. That is the long term interest […] Perhaps we could have conquered the triangle, the Golan, the whole of Galilee. But these conquests would not improve our security as much as absorbing Aliyah is likely to do. The fate of the country lies in Aliyah (Remarks during a consultation 1949 [emphasis in the original]).

And indeed, increasing the number of Jews in the state became central to Israel's policy immediately after its establishment.

The Open Immigration Policy, 1948-1951: Demographic Needs and Time Considerations in a Given Territorial Reality

Immediately after its establishment, Israel adopted a policy of free immigration, or more precisely—open immigration. The section of the Declaration of Independence that defines the character of the new state opens thus: "The State of Israel will be open for Jewish immigration and for the ingathering of the exiles." One of the objectives of the first elected government was to double the Jewish population of the country within four years (Eighth Meeting 1949). Ben Gurion, in his determined way and with his talent for identifying a central target, pushing aside every other consideration, announced in the Knesset that the government's position was that "At the present time, Aliyah takes precedence over absorption […] Aiyah is not conditional upon and limited to possibilities for absorption, and some time may elapse […] between the Aliyah and its economic absorption. That is the decree of fate" (Eighty Seventh Session 1949). About 26 months after the establishment of the state, during which some 415,000 people arrived (Hacohen 5744, 328), the Knesset passed the Law of Return, whose essence is contained in these words: "Every Jew has the right to immigrate to Israel." This was an immigration policy without equal and without precedent in other countries, with the government intervening in the immigration process at every stage: encouraging Jews to come, paying their travel expenses, and in some cases even paying a ransom to the country of origin (Halamish 2008).

Two variables dictated Israel's open immigration policy: demography and time. We saw that in the early 1930s Zionism was in a dual race against time: in Palestine and in Europe. The establishment of the State did not put an end to this race in both arenas. In Eretz Israel, the desire for a Jewish majority that had accompanied Zionist policy at least since the start of the British Mandate did not diminish, even after the establishment of the State. Indeed in 1948 it simply became a matter of strengthening the Jewish majority within Israel and strengthening Israel against its external enemies. As for world Jewry, those who shaped and implemented policy were worried about changes in the exit policies of countries with concentrations of Jews (Islamic states and eastern Europe) that may close the window of opportunity; and also concerned that the Jews in other places, mainly the remaining Holocaust survivors in western Europe, would settle down and build a new life where they were, or be tempted to try other destinations.

And so at the end of 1951, the Jewish Agency Executive decided on a series of rules for regulating immigration, with the intention to apply them only to countries where "potential immigrants have the option to choose"—code for countries where there was no urgency for the Jews to leave—, notably "Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, Turkey, Persia, India, central and western European countries, etc." The regulations, which became the official policy of the Israeli government, referred to the age of the immigrants, their health situation and their ability to earn a living in Israel. They were fundamentally similar to the rules in force during the Mandate and harmonized with the accepted principles in other countries that receive immigrants (Jewish Agency Executive meeting 1951, 12).

In both scholarly and public discourse the question often arises: Why did the Israeli government change its policy on immigration so suddenly? Perhaps it would be more correct to ask why it took so long to step on the brakes. The reason proposed here is the continuation of the Zionist and Israeli race against time in its two tracks —both in the country and in the Diaspora—, and so even though the difficulties of absorbing the immigrants were known earlier, the attempt to limit Aliyah and set quotas failed. Even if decisions were taken to limit the number of immigrants in given time periods, until the end of 1951 they were bypassed and not enforced.

So what changed in November 1951 compared to the 42 months that had elapsed since the establishment of the State (Picard 2013, 69-87)? Whole libraries of assessments and interpretations have been written about the motives for deciding to limit Aliyah, above all the claim that the intention was first and foremost to limit immigration from North Africa, and Morocco in particular (Picard 1999; Picard 2013, 63-110; Tzur 2000). To this was added the economic crisis in 1951 and the fears of the collapse of the health and education systems. This paper does not address the validity of these explanations, but rather proposes to examine the attempt to change Israeli immigration policy in a broader context, beyond the lessons of the mass immigration of the early days of statehood and the absorption difficulties of that time. By late 1951 it appeared that the Zionist race against time had reached the finish line on both tracks: within Israel there was already a solid Jewish majority, and no Jewish community was in immediate existential danger.

The 1951 regulations did not last long. They were gradually relaxed and finally disappeared in the second half of the 1950s. In the middle of that decade there was a gradual return to the policy of open immigration with no filtering mechanisms, when it appeared that the North African Jewish communities could be in danger, due to the process of decolonization and fears that the newly independent states would limit or prohibit the exit of Jews from their territory (Picard 2013, 294-352). This time the decisive factor that shaped policy was the situation of Jews in the Diaspora rather than Israeli demographic factors.

The Supremacy of Palestine/ Israeli-centered Demographic Considerations in Shaping Zionist and Israeli policy, 1937-1951

The central claim of this paper is that since 1905, the shaping of Zionist policy has been dictated by an interaction between three variables: territory, demography and time, and that from the start of the British Mandate over Palestine until 1951, demography was the dominant consideration. For some time in the years 1933-1935 it appeared that the objective of creating a Jewish majority in Palestine, that would justify the claim for a sovereign Jewish state over the whole of Palestine, was within reach. But external forces—economic, political and military—blocked the growth of the Jewish population through immigration, and the desired goal rescinded. Then in 1937 emerged an agreement to partition the country and establish a Jewish state on only part of it,

and thus to change the order of the realization of Zionism: no longer immigration to create a majority leading to sovereignty, but rather the instant establishment of a state, which, with its other benefits, would enable the Zionist Organization to manage immigration policy as it wished. During World War II the Zionist Organization retreated for some time from the idea of territorial restriction, but the demographic catastrophe of the Holocaust for the Jewish people not only restored it to the Zionist agenda but also persuaded the Organization's leaders to initiate moves to recruit international support for a Jewish state on only part of Palestine, with a sense of now or never. The superiority of demographic considerations is also clear in resolutions of the Israeli government regarding territorial expansion in the War of Independence and the policy of open immigration in the early years of statehood.

Another claim presented in this paper is that in the history of Zionism and Israel the demographic element comprised two aspects—Eretz Israel and the Diaspora. From the start, Zionist leaders were aware that Palestine could not contain all the Jews in the world, not even those who needed to migrate from their countries of origin due to persecution. Until 1951 it was the situation and interests of the Yishuv and the State of Israel that dictated Zionist and Israeli policy. Once there was a solid Jewish majority in the State of Israel, the Israeli demographic concerns became less important for shaping Israel's immigration policy, and were overtaken by the State's obligation to the Jewish People in the spirit of "All Jews Are Responsible for One Another." This was one of the manifestations for the role reversal between "immigration" and "state," on the means vs. goals axis in the definition of the supreme aims of Zionism which occurred after 1948. After immigration had served as a means for establishing the State, it was the turn of the State to serve as the means for the ingathering of the exiles, as stated in the Declaration of Independence. Reciprocity for the monetary aid that Israel received from the Jews of the free world was the opening of its gates to every Jew who needed or wished to come. After 1951 demographic considerations no longer played a central role in shaping Israeli policy, and the open immigration policy was largely driven by the fact that Aliyah was the State's raison d'être, the unifying ethos within the country and the recruiting ethos abroad.

After immigration had served as a means for establishing the State, it was the turn of the State to serve as the means for the ingathering of the exiles, as stated in the Declaration of Independence.

From the end of 1951 to mid-1967 Israeli policy makers were no longer required to navigate between the three variables—demography, territory and time. An examination of the relationship between the three after the Six Day War—with reference to the question to what extent Israeli policy since 1967 is consistent with the vision, the principles and the policies that guided the Zionist movement from its earliest days, and the State of Israel in its first two decades—is a subject for another paper.

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Notes

1 Palestine Royal Commission Report: Submitted to Parliament by the Government Secretary for Colonial Affairs on the command of His Majesty in July 1937." CMD 5479. [hereinafter: Peel Report]; letter to the High Commissioner Arthur Wauchope from Moshe Shertok, Jewish Agency Executive, February 15, 1938, Central Zionist Archive (hereinafter: CZA), S25/2615.

2 David Bloch at the second sitting of the Mapai Council, October 25-26, 1930, Labor Party Archive (hereinafter: LPA), 22/4.

3 Letter from Chaim Arlozorov to Chaim Weizmann, June 30, 1932, http://tinyurl.com/3yprfrmn.

4 In 1937 the Peel Commission calculated that the immigration of 60,000 Jews a year would lead to equal numbers of Jews and Arabs in Palestine within ten years.

5 The discussion on the position of the Zionist Organization regarding the Jews of Islamic countries is limited here to the demographic aspect only.

6 CZA, S25/7161

7 Minutes of the Jewish Agency Executive Emergency meeting, Paris, August 1946, CZA.

8 The end of the quote refers to the area to the west of the Green Line, east of the Sharon plain, at the lower slopes of the Samarian Mountains, where there were numerous Arab villages. This area, that was not captured by Israel in the War of Independence, was transferred from Jordan to Israel following the armistice agreement with Jordan in 1949, and given the name "the triangle."

Science and Politics in Demographic Planning: The Question of Encouraging Arab Emigration from the Territories

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Israeli public discourse around the demographic balance between Jews and Arabs in the Land of Israel/Palestine, tends to coalesce around the need for a political agreement. According to this view, Israel must decide between permanently holding onto the post-1967 territories along with their Arab residents, or giving up the territories in order to maintain a solid Jewish majority within the geographical area of the state. This article explores how researchers from the social sciences sought to offer an alternative to the 1967 Israeli leadership, in order to formulate a different, more dynamic demographic policy, which could alter the demography without the use of coercive measures. The researchers formulated a plan for demographic change between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea that would significantly reduce the number of Palestinian Arabs in the territories, especially the population of 1948 refugees. One principle of the plan was that those who were not in the West Bank at the time of the census in September 1967 could not return to it. A second principle was that employment and education needs were the main "push" factors at Israel's disposal to encourage Arab emigration. A third principle was that the government must maintain secrecy with respect to any policy of encouraging emigration, so as not to provoke mass opposition by the population of the territories.

Keywords: Demography, social sciences, Palestinians, military conquest, military rule, the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS)

Introduction

The desire to create a Jewish majority in the Land of Israel was one of the foundations of the Zionist movement. This aspiration also gradually became one of the main causes of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. What Jews understood as a return to their historic homeland in order to create one place in the world where Jews were not a minority group, was perceived by the Arabs as an invasion that threatened to turn them from a majority into a minority (Gorny 1985, 12; Cohen 2013, 237; Morris 2003, 634). The Zionist demographic objective was fulfilled when the Jewish-Israeli forces defeated the Arabs in the 1948 war. Following the war, the State of Israel was established on parts of the Land of Israel

/ Mandate Palestine, and a Jewish majority was achieved by means of the displacement of about 700,000 Arabs from the country and the opening of the country's gates to unlimited Jewish immigration.

The results of the Six Day War in June 1967 upset the demographic balance. IDF forces conquered the remaining parts of the Land of Israel within its historical Mandate borders, that is, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, where about a million Palestinian Arabs lived at that time (about 2.4 million Jews and about 400,000 Arabs lived in Israel at that time). The government, like most of the Jewish public, was interested in including these territories in the State of Israel, but not their large Arab populations, precisely because from the Israeli perspective the size of this population threatened to undermine the solid Jewish majority within the state. Then prime minister Levi Eshkol aptly described this dilemma using a metaphor: After the war he wanted to receive the dowry (the West Bank and Gaza Strip) without the bride (the Palestinian people) (Raz 2012, 3).

Israeli public discourse since 1967 has offered no solution to the issue of "the bride and the dowry" without a political agreement: Israel must decide at some stage between permanently holding onto the territories or relinquishing them in order to maintain a solid Jewish majority in the state in the long term. This article shows that the Israeli leadership and scientists who served it imagined that the demographic situation in the country would be more dynamic in the first few months after the 1967 war. They sought to plan and implement a demographic shift between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea that would significantly reduce the number of Palestinian Arabs in the territories, especially the population of 1948 refugees. They hoped at least to diminish the severity of the demographic problem at that time, and perhaps to keep possibilities open for more significant changes in the future. Their primary tools of choice were economic measures.

This article discusses three Israeli initiatives for such demographic planning. The first was the 1967 census. This census was conducted by Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) employees in September 1967. Although the census was carried out by professionals from an institution with a respectable scientific reputation, it had two clear political goals: to prove that the number of 1948 refugees in the territories was lower than in UNRWA reports, and to minimize the number of residents in the West Bank. The second initiative was an economic survey of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The survey enabled Israeli economists to propose a series of policy measures to reduce the number of Palestinians under their control in general, and to make it easier for refugees to leave the Gaza Strip in particular. The third initiative was also a research initiative, led by Israeli researchers from the social sciences. These studies provided the Israeli leadership with tools to plan the encouragement of Arab emigration from the territories with minimum opposition. Shortly after the Six Day War, the three initiatives together created a database and policy measures that aimed to fulfill geopolitical objectives of the Israeli government with respect to Palestinian demography.

The Census: Bureaucratic Displacement

On June 18 and 19, 1967, CBS director Roberto Bachi met with representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Military Governorate, the Military Intelligence Directorate (MID), the Shin Bet, the Office of the Advisor on Arab Affairs in the Prime Minister's Office, and the Ministry of Interior, in order to discuss conducting a census in the newly conquered territories. It was the staff from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs who initiated the meeting on this topic. In the 19 years preceding the war, Israeli representatives had waged an ongoing diplomatic struggle in the international arena on the issue of the Palestinian refugees, during which they claimed, based on MID assessments, that UNRWA and

the Arab countries had inflated the numbers of refugees. The importance of accurate data on the number of refugees stemmed from the scope of potential future demands on Israel in a peace agreement, to absorb or resettle a certain percentage of the total number of refugees.

The higher the official number of refugees, the higher the number of people Israel would have to take in. At that time, when Israel had suddenly taken control of a large portion of the refugee camps, Ministry of Foreign Affairs staff sought to show the world the real number of refugees using scientific methods. In this way, any future negotiations with the Arab countries, whether Israel remained in the territories or not, would be based on the new numbers found in the census and not on the inaccurate numbers used before then. Immediately after the Six Day War, the leaders of the State of Israel expected that the clear victory would lead to diplomatic negotiations, during which the Arab countries would accept Israeli terms that they had refused so far. One of the expectations was that a solution to the Palestinian refugee problem would be found by resettling the vast majority of them outside of the State of Israel.

During the census the Military Governorate imposed a complete lockdown, to ensure that residents would be at home when the CBS census-takers knocked on their doors, and to ensure that only those who were physically present in the conquered territories on the day of the census would be counted, and no one else.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs initiated the meeting with CBS staff in order to prepare for such future negotiations by gathering all of the relevant figures, but they were not the only stakeholders in the census. Representatives of the security forces said in the meeting that they were interested in having a list of names of all of the people in the territories and needed an analysis of the demographic and economic character of the population. This information, they said, would provide them with a crucial means of control. The census was approved on July 11, 1967 at the Ministerial Committee on the Interior and Services. However, CBS staff requested that its implementation be kept secret in order to prevent UNRWA employees from organizing "acts of sabotage" against it in the meantime. UNRWA's employees received notice of the census only a few days before it began "as a courtesy" (*The Census* 1967; *Population Census* 1967; *Census in the West Bank and Gaza and UNRWA* 1967).

The census was conducted over a few days in each of the three areas: In the Gaza Strip from September 10 to 14, 1967; in the northern West Bank from September 17 to 19; and in the southern West Bank from September 21 to 29. The Israeli census-takers, Arabic-speakers accompanied by security forces, went from home to home in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip (about 200,000 "home visits" in total) until they had visited all the residents in the territories.

During the census the Military Governorate imposed a complete lockdown, to ensure that residents would be at home when the CBS census-takers knocked on their doors, and to ensure that only those who were physically present in the conquered territories on the day of the census would be counted, and no one else. In each home they conducted a ten-minute interview, in which they asked set questions on demographic and economic topics. Among others, the interviewers asked the names of all the family members, their family status, their ages, their number of children, their religion and their professions. Couples with children were asked how many of their children live abroad—a question that aimed to achieve a snapshot of the number of emigrants. The questionnaire also included these two questions: Where did the family members live in 1947? Did the members of the household receive assistance from UNRWA? These two questions aimed to determine the number of 1948 refugees in the territories. A longer interview that lasted for

half an hour was conducted in a representative sample of 20% of the homes. The census-takers were instructed to count only people they saw with their own eyes. The only people counted who were not physically present in the home were family members who were abroad, but they were noted in a separate list and not as part of the list of residents. At the end of each interview, the census-takers gave the father of the household a slip of paper that confirmed that he and his family members were present in their home on the day of the census and were counted for the purposes of the census. The residents were told that the Military Governorate would later replace the slip of paper with an ID card (this was done within a few months). Those who were outside of the West Bank or the Gaza Strip on the day of the census, such as the "emigrant" family members who were counted separately, were not listed on the slips of paper and were not entitled to an ID card. As a result of this technical procedure, they were denied the possibility of returning, and their emigration became permanent. At the conclusion of the census, the officer of the Military Governorate's statistics staff reported with satisfaction that "there were no problems of refusal." The census was hailed as a success (*The Census* 1967; *Minutes from Meeting on Performing the Act of Registry* 1967; *Government Meeting 74/5727* 1967b; *Population Census* 1967; *Minutes of Smaller Coordination Committee* 1967; *Meeting Minutes* 1967; *Organizational Process of Census* 1967).

The government ministries and the Military Governorate in the territories gathered an enormous amount of demographic and economic data. On October 1, 1967, Roberto Bachi presented the census's main findings to the government, revealing for the first time basic demographic data on the population in the territories. In the West Bank 602,607 people were counted, of whom 107,566 were 1948 refugees. In the Gaza Strip 392,563 people were counted, of whom 204,855 were 1948 refugees. According to the CBS's count, the number of residents in the West Bank was considerably lower than expected.

Based on Jordanian government figures, CBS employees and the government expected to find about 250,000 more people in the West Bank than were counted. The reason for the considerable gap in the numbers was inherent in the methodology of the counting. CBS decided that only those who were in their homes when the census was conducted were residents of the West Bank. 200,000 residents who had fled, were expelled, or were displaced by the Israeli forces in the period between June and September 1967 were not counted as residents. 200,000 additional residents who left the West Bank during the period between 1949 and 1967 for the purposes of study and work, that is, temporary purposes, were also not counted. The "emigration" of 80% of them, according to Bachi, had been a relocation within the Kingdom of Jordan; that is, they did not choose to emigrate from their country—Jordan. The CBS chose not to check which of the residents of the West Bank who had left it during this period, did so permanently, and which maintained ties with it, for example through frequent visits, as they were entitled to enter the West Bank whenever they chose by virtue of their Jordanian citizenship.

The initial motivation for holding the census was political—the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' desire to count the exact number of 1948 refugees in the territories in order to prove that their number was lower than what UNRWA reported, and the desire of the Military Governorate for information on the population now subject to their control.

Thus, in effect, it was the Israeli counting method that displaced at least 200,000 people (who had left between June and September 1967), and at most 400,000 people (including all those who left between 1949 and 1967). As for the 1948 refugees, the total number of refugees was thus 312,421. This figure was about half of the figure of 627,000 refugees that UNRWA

provided on the eve of the Six Day War. In this case too, the Israeli figure did not take into account that about 100,000 1948 refugees were displaced from the West Bank during and immediately after the war, with no possibility of returning to the West Bank. Nevertheless, a considerable gap remains between the number reported by UNRWA and the figure that the CBS employees found (*Government Meeting 74/5727* 1967b; CBS 1967; CBS 1970).

The initial motivation for holding the census was political—the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' desire to count the exact number of 1948 refugees in the territories in order to prove that their number was lower than what UNRWA reported, and the desire of the Military Governorate for information on the population now subject to their control. The most significant result of the census was also political—the permanent displacement from the West Bank of up to 400,000 Palestinians. Using the census, the State of Israel considerably reduced the number of residents of the West Bank. The figures were convenient for the Israeli leadership, and in order to boost their credibility, the political leadership emphasized the professional methods used in the process.[1]

Demography and Social Sciences

The government's discussions on Israel's territorial-demographic stance prompted Prime Minister Eshkol's decision to establish an expert committee to help him formulate demographic policy. Various voices were heard within the government regarding the future of the territories and their population, but a relevant knowledge base was lacking. Questions such as where it was best to settle refugees (in the case of a political agreement), in the West Bank or El-Arish in the Sinai; and questions on the incorporation of a large Arab population under Israeli rule, required professional examination. At the government meeting on July 16, 1967, five days after the decision to conduct the statistical census, Prime Minister Eshkol announced the establishment of a committee to study the economic and social implications of the new Israeli "empire" (as Levi Eshkol described it in that meeting). He emphasized to government members the shared aspiration to encourage Arab emigration and to plan practical proposals regarding the 1948 refugees; and stated that fulfilling these goals depended on professional knowledge and feasible schemes.

The committee's official name was The Committee for the Development of the Administrated Territories (*Government Meeting* 1967 *5727/59*a). The letter of appointment of the committee's members stated that they were to prepare a plan to develop the territories while examining economic, security, and social aspects, and placing an emphasis on finding solutions to the refugee problem by rehabilitating them within Israel and Arab countries and via "their emigration overseas" (The Committee for the Development of the Held Territories 1967a; *From Prime Minister Levi Eshkol* 1967). The term development was not understood as aiming to benefit the residents of the territories but rather as a collection of economic measures to further Israel's policy goals.

The committee was composed of senior Israeli researchers and academics: the economists Michael Bruno and Don Patinkin, the demographer and director of the CBS Roberto Bachi, the sociologist Shmuel Noah Eisenstadt, and the mathematician Aryeh Dvoretzky. Three senior officials from the Israeli security and civilian services were added to the committee: Lieutenant-General Tzvi Tzur, the former chief of staff and commander of the Gaza Strip during the Israeli occupation in 1956-1957, and since June 1967 an advisor to Minister of Defense Dayan on the conquered territories; Ya'akov Arnon, the Director-General of the Ministry of Finance and head of the director-general's committee for handling civilian issues in the held territories; and Raanan Weitz, head of the settlement department of the Jewish Agency, who had a wealth of experience resettling Jewish refugees and immigrants in the State of Israel. The composition of the committee—academics

combined with three senior officials—, aimed to create a promising combination of academic knowledge, practical experience and security considerations. In order to fulfill the goals of the committee, the prime minister permitted its members to hold any survey or study of the conquered territories and their population that seemed necessary to them (*The Committee for the Development of the Administrated Territories* 1967a).

The Economic Report: Employment and Emigration

The committee was divided into two research teams: an economic research team and a social research team. The economic team consisted of nine economists (Miriam Beham, Yoram Ben-Porat, Haim Ben-Shahar, Eitan Berglas, Nadav Halevi, Giora Hanoch, Ezra Sadan, and Yakir Plessner) and was headed by Michael Bruno. Their work was based on economic, social, and demographic data from the Jordanian census conducted in 1961, on data collected by the Economic Planning Authority in the Prime Minister's Office, and on data that the Central Bureau of Statistics started to collect. On September 10, 1967, less than two months after its establishment, the economic team submitted its findings (hereinafter, the Bruno Report). These were approved by all of the committee's members and submitted to the prime minister a few days later.

The Bruno Report presented the prime minister with an ambitious and detailed decade-long plan whose goals were: emptying the Gaza Strip of 1948 refugees; resettling those refugees in the West Bank; and encouraging Palestinian emigration (in general) from the territories. The Israeli government's plan at that time was to encourage the Gaza Strip's refugee population to move to other places, including the West Bank, in order to annex the Gaza Strip to Israel without a significant "demographic problem" (Shafer Raviv 2021, 343-347).

According to Bruno, the decade-long plan would begin with the large-scale construction of housing in the West Bank for the refugee population. Since this would create great demand for workers in the construction industry in the West Bank, unemployed refugees from Gaza would begin moving to the construction sites. Afterwards their family members would gradually move, and they could be housed in the same homes that had just been built. In the next stage, the state would industrialize the West Bank with labor-intensive factories such as textiles, which could take in a large number of unskilled workers. This industry would also absorb the construction workers after the construction projects were completed, along with the rest of the unemployed refugee population.

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Bruno presented a detailed timetable, guaranteeing that within ten years it would be possible to move 50,000 refugee families or 250,000 people from the refugee camps (mainly those in Gaza) to resettlement in the West Bank. According to the plan, about 2,000 families could move in 1968; about 4,000 families each year from 1969 to 1971; and about 5,000 families each year from 1972 to 1978. After all of the families had moved to their new homes and the heads of the families were integrated in the new workplaces, it would be possible to "completely eliminate" the refugee camps. The plan also guaranteed that at the end of ten years, only the original residents of Gaza would continue to live there. During the implementation of the plan, it was determined that the government would not need to invest in the economic development of the Gaza Strip due to a "significant decrease" in its population (Bruno 1967).

A second topic in the Bruno Report was encouraging the emigration of Palestinians—

whether they were permanent residents or refugees—from the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, to outside of the areas under Israel's control. Bruno's plan was based on trends of emigration from the West Bank that existed during the Jordanian period and on providing additional incentives to expedite it. The economic team analyzed Jordanian census data from 1961 and discovered that from 1952 to 1961 about 2.5% of the West Bank population emigrated each year, totaling about 200,000 residents by the end of the period—half of them moved to the East Bank (that is, in practice they remained inside the country of Jordan) and the other half left Jordan. Out of the latter, about 80% emigrated to other Arab countries, mainly to Kuwait, and the rest moved to countries oversees, especially in South America. According to data collected by the members of the economic team, most of the emigrants during the Jordanian period had a distinct profile—young unmarried men with a profession and a relatively high level of education. This profile fit the demands in the labor market in the countries they arrived in or in the growing capital of Jordan.

The search for employment, they found, was the main reason for emigration from the West Bank during that period, and Bruno expected that employment emigration trends from the Jordanian period would continue also under Israeli rule. However, Bruno admitted the inherent contradiction between the factors that pushed young people to emigrate from the West Bank during the Jordanian period and the development plan that he himself proposed. In his economic view, development was a necessary condition for the resettlement of refugees from the Gaza Strip in the West Bank, as such development would necessarily lead to the creation of demand for workers in the local market. But if talented young people from the West Bank could find sources of employment close to home, then their main reason for emigrating would no longer apply.

Bruno sought to overcome this contradiction between emigration and development via a proactive policy of encouraging the emigration of young people from the West Bank alongside the implementation of his decade-long plan. The measures that he recommended as part of this policy were:

1. To increase government investment in education and professional training. Bruno's economic development plan was set to increase the number of unskilled jobs in the West Bank. In contrast, the international labor market valued workers with higher levels of education. Bruno noted, for example, that the demand for teachers in Arab countries was high, and therefore a good place to start was by increasing the number of professional training positions for teaching. Under the category of investment in education, Bruno also included a recommendation to grant scholarships to young people from the territories to encourage them to pursue higher education abroad.
2. To grant personal compensation in a "liquid form" to those going abroad, in return for their property, which would be left behind.
3. To permit anyone wishing to leave the territory of Israel to reserve the right to return. The reason for this, Bruno stated, was that a large portion of the emigrants during the Jordanian period left as temporary migrants who held temporary resident visas in other countries, as migrant workers or for studies. Only afterwards did some of the temporary migrants choose to settle in their new countries, and only then did family members tend to join them. Consequently, Bruno believed that temporary migration had a high likelihood of becoming permanent. But if the temporary migrants had known in advance that they could never return to their homeland, most of them would not have left in the first place. Providing the possibility of return to everyone who left, Bruno stated, would reopen the doors of

temporary emigration and ultimately create a trend of permanent emigration.

4. To keep the policy of encouraging emigration a secret. Bruno explained that the issue was "sensitive" and "very dangerous" politically, so there was a need to present the measures covertly. He recommended that the government engage international migration organizations, so that actions such as travel and housing arrangements would not be carried out directly by Israeli agencies.
5. To quickly adopt the proposed policy of encouraging emigration in order to act prior to the emergence of a "leadership and clear political aspirations" (Bruno 1967).

The Bruno Report presented a work plan for fulfilling the vision of eliminating the refugee population by emptying out the refugee camps in the Gaza Strip and transferring refugees to the West Bank and to other countries within one decade. The report linked the desired demographic change to the employment structure and workforce. It divided the refugee population between skilled and unskilled labor. For the latter it proposed a state industrialization process in labor-intensive fields (in a way reminiscent of the industrialization of development towns implemented by the government during the 1960s), and for the former it offered a "departure package" in order to encourage their emigration to other countries. The report's authors recognized the political sensitivity of their proposals, although they did not describe them in the report itself, so they recommended implementing both parts of the initiative covertly.

The Social Report: Emigration, Employment, Education

The committee's social team was composed of researchers from the social sciences including sociologists, anthropologists, a political scientist, an economist, and a historian. The team's members dispersed to conduct focused field studies in the Palestinian towns, villages, and refugee camps in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, equipped with questionnaires and ready to hold interviews. The political scientist Nimrod Raphaeli prepared two research reports, one on the residents of the Jabalia refugee camp in the Gaza Strip and the other on Palestinians leaving for the East Bank via the Allenby Bridge; the economist Yoram Ben-Porat, the anthropologist Emanuel Marx, and the historian Shimon Shamir conducted a study together on the residents of the Jalazone refugee camp in the West Bank; the sociologist Aharon Ben-Ami—about the residents of the village of Sinjil in the West Bank; the anthropologist Arik Cohen—about the residents of the town of Khan Yunis in the Gaza Strip and about the residents of the town of Nablus in the West Bank; and the sociologist Yochanan Peres conducted a sample survey of residents of the West Bank from different regions. The coordinator of the social team was the sociologist Rivkah Bar-Yosef, and she also prepared the concluding report on the team's work. Before they went out into the field, the Military Governorate issued special travel permits to the members of the team so that they would be able to move freely in the territories, and instructed its staff to help them in any possible way to further the success of their work (*The Committee for the Development of the Held Territories* 1967b).

On September 10, 1967, the social team submitted an interim report on its findings together with the submission of the final report of the economic team. The final papers, including a summary report of all of the studies, was submitted in February 1968 and the findings were then sent to the prime minister.

The members of the social team focused their attention on the two issues that the Bruno Report also discussed: Resolving the refugee problem and encouraging emigration. The field studies discovered two prominent characteristics of the refugee population in the camps: The first was that since their displacement in the 1948 war, the refugees had undergone a significant process of modernization. The beliefs and values that had characterized their rural and traditional

Despite their personal desire to acquire an education and a profession in order to integrate into the urban and industrialized world and despite their distance from agricultural work, the sociologist Rivkah Bar-Yosef noted that second-generation refugees still demanded to return to the rural lands of their fathers in order to fulfill nationalist aspirations.

society until 1948 ceased to be relevant after people lost their lands and their homes.

In their new situation, parents stopped orienting their children towards agricultural work as they had done for generations, and instead encouraged them to acquire education and professional knowledge that would be suitable for the industrialized world. Education became an important goal in the eyes of the refugee population, and its acquisition became the only means of improving their living conditions in the future (*Survey of the Social Problems* 1967; Elnajjar 1993, 34-50). UNRWA's education system was an improvement on the Jordanian or Egyptian ones, and so the second-generation of 1948 refugees could be characterized as a more educated social force compared to the rest of Arab society. Hence the most important distinction between the first generation of refugees who were displaced from their lands and the second generation who grew up in the camps, was the level of education. For example, a study in the Jabalia refugee camp in the Gaza Strip found that the illiteracy rate among members of the first generation was 71%, compared to only 7% among the second generation. This educated and professional generation in Palestinian society, the researchers speculated, would continue to move away from the traditional society of its fathers and would adapt its lifestyle to the characteristics of modern society. Aside from education, modernity included characteristics such as urbanization, secularity, and mobility, which themselves contributed to the potential for emigration. However, the report's writers warned, modern man is also characterized by a high level of political awareness, public involvement, and the adoption of nationalist ideas. The modernization process among the refugee population did indeed raise the chances of emigration, but at the same time increased the potential for opposition to the State of Israel (Ben-Porat et al. 1968, 22, 25, 47; Bar-Yosef 1968, 7-9; *Survey of the Social Problems* 1967; Raphaeli 1968, 7, 14-15, 29-30).

The second characteristic of the refugee population that the members of the social team noted, was their tenacious belief in the idea of returning to their original lands and homes in the State of Israel, and their opposition to other solutions, such as receiving compensation. For example, when the sociologist Yohanan Peres asked refugees in the West Bank what they think is the best solution to their predicament, 86% of them answered that the only solution is to return to their previous homes in Israel (Peres 1968, 12-13).

The orientalist Shimon Shamir claimed that refugees from the first, traditional generation, held this position mainly out of hope of restoring their lost dignity—which in their eyes was connected to land ownership. For example, one interviewee said to Shamir: "I will not give up on my land for all the wealth in the world." But members of the second generation of refugees supported the idea of return out of nationalist aspirations (Ben-Porat et al. 1968, 70-72).

Despite their personal desire to acquire an education and a profession in order to integrate into the urban and industrialized world and despite their distance from agricultural work, the sociologist Rivkah Bar-Yosef noted that second-generation refugees still demanded to return to the rural lands of their fathers in order to fulfill nationalist aspirations (Bar-Yosef 1968, 9). The fact that they insisted on returning to their agricultural lands and were willing to live as refugees until then was a contradiction that was difficult to resolve for the social scientists.

The researchers pointed out the difference between the Palestinian refugees and the Jewish

immigrants in the 1950s, who wished more than anything else to leave the transit camps and settle in permanent housing. The explanations for the Palestinian refugees' opposition to any other solution, such as compensation were: The important status of refugee in the inter-Arab arena, as those who carried the burden of the struggle against the State of Israel; the encouragement of these attitudes by the UNRWA workers themselves; and even the services and material benefits they received as part of life in the refugee camps (*Survey of the Social Problems* 1967).

These findings led the social team to several key recommendations: First, that a precondition for any attempt at resettlement or encouraging emigration was secrecy. Whether the refugees were motivated by agricultural-rural values or by nationalist ideology, their demand and their aspiration to return to their original homes were deeply ingrained in their consciousness. Thus, any public or official attempt by the State of Israel to empty out the refugee camps and permanently eliminate them was expected to encounter "collective resistance" (Ben-Ami 1968, 20-21; Ben-Porat et al. 1968, 57, 71-73; Peres 1968, 12; *Survey of the Social Problems* 1967; Raphaeli 1968, 35-38). A better course of action in their opinion, was to appeal to the refugees' personal aspirations to acquire an education, a profession, and work. If Israel encouraged modernization processes among the refugee population, they believed, it would accelerate their departure from the refugee camps, which would outwardly appear "spontaneous." According to Bar-Yosef, the conditions in the refugee camps were not so different from in other rural areas around the world, and there too modernization processes had pushed young people towards the industrialized cities (Bar-Yosef 1968, 7).

Encouraging Palestinian emigration from the territories in general was, as mentioned above, the second topic that the social researchers focused on. Going out into the field enabled the Israeli researchers to ask Palestinians why they intended to emigrate or why they chose to stay. The political scientist Nimrod Raphaeli set up an interview station at the Allenby Bridge where, during September and October, he interviewed a sample of 500 people a few minutes before they crossed to the East Bank.

The respondents were not aware that the interviewer was a researcher from the university, because they were directed to him by soldiers and because Raphaeli himself did not divulge this information to them. He preferred that the respondents assume that the interview was a necessary part of the departure process. In his research report, Raphaeli claimed that the demographic characteristics of the interviewees were similar to the demographic characteristics of the emigrants from the West Bank during the Jordanian period. 79% of them were young people, aged 16-40, 87% were male, 41% had over nine years of education (a relatively high figure compared to the population of other Arab countries, according to Raphaeli), 65% were urban, and 78% were unemployed. In addition, 85% of Raphaeli's interviewees believed that their emigration was temporary, and that in the future they would return to their homes in the West Bank.

His conclusion was that despite the war and the Israeli occupation regime, work emigration continued to be the main reason residents left. However, Raphaeli also pointed out two important differences between the two periods. After the Six Day War, 42.5% of the interviewees declared that they were on their way to reunite with family members. These family members were in many cases temporary migrant workers who had left during the Jordanian period and would send money to their families, but following the war the connection with them was lost and they were prohibited from returning to the West Bank. Thus Israeli rule made their temporary emigration from the West Bank during the Jordanian period into permanent emigration. In addition, Raphaeli's assessment was that after the war "fear of Jewish rule" was a central push factor for leaving, but he

assumed that his interviewees were not eager to reveal this information to him (*Emigration to Jordan* 1967).

While Raphaeli interviewed residents who were on their way out of the West Bank, other field studies focused on residents who remained in their places of residence in towns, villages, and refugee camps. The Israeli researchers took an interest in the question of why there were Palestinians who did not choose to emigrate. When they were asked about this in a survey of the sociologist Yohanan Peres, 90% of respondents answered that they were not at all interested in emigration, and when they were asked why, 67% of them answered "this is my homeland" or "this is where I was born." The sociologist Aharon Ben-Ami found that young people in the village of Sinjil had adopted modern characteristics such as getting an education and looking for a "different future" than that of their agricultural ancestors, and thereby fit the profile of potential migrant workers. But these young people were also reluctant about the idea of completely disconnecting from the rural lifestyle and from the values of traditional society. Ben-Ami noticed that they were interested at most in temporary emigration, after which they would return to their families in the village (Ben-Ami 1968, 6-9, 24-25).

The best case scenario in the eyes of the researchers Peres and Ben-Ami, was for young people from the territories to leave for the purpose of work and study that would seem to them to be only temporary, but in practice many of them would settle in their new countries and prefer to remain in them, and that over time their family members who had stayed behind would also join them.

Yohanan Peres and Aharon Ben-Ami concluded that the strong connection that the residents of the West Bank had with their land and society made the possibility of permanent mass emigration unlikely (Peres 1968, 18-19). In their opinion, Israel could encourage at most temporary emigration, and the best way to do so would be to allow anyone interested to leave and return. The best case scenario in the eyes of the researchers Peres and Ben-Ami, was for young people from the territories to leave for the purpose of work and study that would seem to them to be only temporary, but in practice many of them would settle in their new countries and prefer to remain in them, and that over time their family members who had stayed behind would also join them. Thus, they believed, like the economists of the Bruno Report, the departure of one temporary migrant worker could in the long term end with the permanent departure of an entire family (*The Committee's Conclusions Regarding the Report* 1967; *The Committee's Conclusions Regarding the Survey* 1967; *Survey of the Social Problems* 1967).

Conclusion: Israel, Science, and Demography

After the end of the Six Day War, the Israeli government faced a dilemma between a desire for territory that was part of the homeland and a lack of desire for the people that lived in the conquered territories. The Israeli leadership related to the demographic situation between Jews and Arabs in the whole territory of the Land of Israel/Palestine as a dynamic situation. The first initiative by the Israeli government was to gather demographic, economic, and social data in order to analyze its options for bringing about change in the numerical balance between Jews and Arabs in the state. The two most pressing demographic issues were settling the 1948 refugee problem and incentivizing the emigration of Palestinians to other countries.

As we have seen, professionals from the Israeli CBS carried out a census of the residents of the West Bank and Gaza Strip as early as September 1967. The planning of the census began a few days after the end of the Six Day War. The counting method selected by the CBS staff aimed to fulfill a political Zionist objective: to

minimize the number of Arabs who would remain under Israeli rule, and in this way to ensure as large a Jewish majority as possible within the area of the Land of Israel. The CBS's method of counting considered the 200,000 Palestinians who had fled the West Bank between June and September 1967 "emigrants," even though they had just fled from a war zone. There should not have been any doubt that this population had fled the West Bank due to the state of war, that is, due to uncertainty regarding its fate and security, and not out of free choice. The CBS also considered all of the 200,000 Palestinians who had left the West Bank from 1949 to 1967 as "emigrants." While this group was indeed composed of people who had left of their own free will, it did not seem important to the CBS census-takers whether these were people with links to family members or to their original place of residence, which were expressed, for example, in frequent visits, or whether such links could indicate that they had only left temporarily, for example for the purpose of study. Furthermore, 80% of that group continued to live in the East Bank, meaning continued to live in the same country—Jordan—and not in another country. They had no reason to consider themselves emigrants from one country to another country, but rather as people who had changed their place of residence within the same country, and they had no reason to believe that they would not be able to return to their original area of residence. But what the CBS census-takers had in mind was not to establish the most accurate number of residents of the West Bank, but how, without losing scientific credibility, to minimize the number of Palestinian residents under Israeli rule.

The demographic picture that was produced by the CBS census methodology looked good to Israeli eyes: the number of Palestinians was lower than what they thought, including the number of refugees. Nevertheless, the figures were still not low enough to support a government decision of annexation, without creating a "demographic problem." Israeli researchers from the social sciences analyzed the government's options to reduce the Arab population. The team of economists recommended a policy that combined industrialization of the West Bank with labor-intensive industry, while providing incentives to those who sought to leave for other countries. The industrialization of the West Bank aimed primarily to attract refugees without a profession from the Gaza Strip, as part of an attempt to eliminate the refugee problem there, while the incentives aimed to push members of the educated class among residents of the West Bank towards emigration. The team of researchers from the social sciences identified that a natural process of modernization leads to negative net migration from the territories, even without providing incentives. They also pointed out a connection between that process of modernization and the rise in ideological awareness and a tendency to oppose Israel for political reasons.

The demographic study headed by Prof. Roberto Bachi, the economic study led by Prof. Michael Bruno, and the social studies under the supervision of Prof. Shmuel Noah Eisenstadt, were at first kept secret. The reason was similar in all three cases: if the Palestinian population knew about Israeli plans, it would stop cooperating with its Israeli rulers and initiate steps to deliberately disrupt them.

To the extent that it is possible to discern from archival sources, encouraging emigration from the territories with a clear aim of reducing the residents of the territories, was an Israeli policy for only a short period of time. During this period, the policy of encouraging emigration relied mainly on the high level of unemployment and low standard of living as the main push factors for emigration from the territories. According to CBS figures, between September 1967 (when the census was conducted) and December 1968, 28,000 people permanently left the West Bank, and 44,600 permanently left the Gaza Strip.

The number of people leaving started to decline considerably in 1969, due to the new Israeli policy of raising the standard of living of

the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, and reducing unemployment. Israel's main method of doing so was by allowing unemployed people from the territories to work in the Israeli economy. Thus it consciously put an end to its original demographic aspirations.

While from 1969 to 1974 there continued to be a negative balance of migration from the territories, the average number of people leaving the West Bank each year was 2,650, and 2,133 for the Gaza Strip. Due to a considerable increase in demand for workers in the oil industry in the Arab countries following the global oil crisis in the 1970s, and the shortage of employment for Palestinians who were not manual laborers in agricultural fields and construction sites in Israel, the average annual number of people leaving increased to 12,340 from the West Bank and 4,020 from the Gaza Strip in the second half of the 1970s.

The main characteristic of those who left was a relatively high level of education and a profession (Abu-Lughod 1984, 262-263; Gabriel & Sabatello 1986). As the economist Michael Bruno foresaw as early as 1967, those who left were characterized as professionals, while those without professions remained in the country in blue-collar jobs. While Bruno predicted that Israel would industrialize the West Bank, the government chose to resolve the shortage of work in the territories by permitting them to work in Israel, giving up on the proactive industrialization of the West Bank (Shafer-Raviv 2021, 9-33).

Israeli government and military personnel drew great value from the information that the social science researchers had produced for them in their social and demographic studies. In 1971, 25 social studies were completed or were in various stages of implementation. These figures show that academic studies about Palestinian society in the territories became a routine practice under Israeli rule during those years (*List of Studies on the Territories* 1971). However, the social scientists themselves, in particular most of those who had participated in studies of Palestinian society in 1967, tended to be identified as holding dovish positions that opposed prolonged control of the territories ("Their Path Is Not Our Path" 1980).

Even though the policy of encouraging emigration was never fully adopted, this initial period of rule in the territories was critical in terms of how the Israeli leadership discovered the parameters that influenced Palestinian demography. Lowering the standard of living and raising the level of unemployment led masses to emigrate, but also raised the potential for resistance to Israel in the territories. Thus the Israeli leadership needed to make a difficult choice between pacifying the masses and demographic aspirations.

Educated young people were the most likely population to emigrate, hence encouraging education was equivalent to encouraging emigration. But educated young people also tended to join political movements. Hence the expansion of education was also equivalent to increasing the level of resistance. UNRWA was found to have made efforts to present a larger number of 1948 refugees than the actual number, thus creating political difficulties for Israel. However, the organization also granted the refugees a high level of education, thus becoming a body that in practice encouraged their emigration. This complex system of parameters was revealed to decision-makers as early as the end of the 1960s, and it remained relevant for Israeli decision-makers in the following decades.

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1 Another substantive demographic analysis conducted by the CBS was on mortality and birth rates. Roberto Bachi expected that the mortality rate among the residents of the territories would decline over the years due to processes of modernization, and therefore the pace of growth of the Palestinian population would increase. However, both Bachi and Prime Minister Levi Eshkol preferred not to develop policy in this area, unlike with emigration. A proposal raised by Eshkol—to encourage education among Arab women in the territories in order to lower the birthrate—was rejected immediately, as it was not expected to lead to any results in the foreseeable future (*Meeting on the Topic of the Refugees with Bachi and Dvoretzky*, 1967).

Proposals Versus Reality: Addressing West Bank Demography in Israel—1967-1977

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The sense of victory after the Six Day War of June 1967, was quickly replaced by concern over the demographic challenge of approximately one million additional local Arab residents, and especially the governing of extensive territories in the West Bank. The government, headed by Levi Eshkol, made a decision to settle Israeli citizens in the West Bank as soon as possible, to create facts on the ground through territorially contiguous settlement and demographic change, and to ensure strategic depth and maximum security on the country's new borders. Connecting the mountain ridge and the Jordan Valley in the West Bank to the narrow coastal strip, which was an important yet vulnerable part of Israel before the war, could provide secure borders. In effect, the new reality on the ground dictated a demand for immediate state action. Four proposals for addressing the newly-added territory and its local Arab population were submitted to the government. Three of them were instigated by government ministers: Yigal Allon, Israel Galili, and Moshe Dayan. But none of the proposals was implemented. The fourth proposal came from the palace of King Hussein in Jordan—a federation plan. His proposal was rejected, and a decade later the king announced a unilateral separation of the West Bank from Jordan. Since the end of the war, Israel has administered the held territories and their local population, whose national and religious identity differs to Israel's. The administration of the territories has led to geopolitical changes and also to shifts within Israel's military, social, and economic spheres.

Keywords: Israel, Jordan, West Bank, demography, Allon Plan, Galili Document, Federation Plan, King Hussein

Introduction

The reality of controlling the West Bank territories after the Six Day War led to many dilemmas among decision-makers in Israel. The need to cope with about a million Arab residents and to attend to all of their needs, including military, diplomatic, legal, political, civil, economic, and humanitarian issues, led to the establishment of a military governorate in the territories. During the two decades after the war, dozens of Jewish settlements, most of them agricultural, were established in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. They created a new geopolitical, topographical, and strategic reality

in Israel and in the West Bank. Three main motives shaped Jewish settlement in the West Bank. One was security—a security concept that advocated defensible borders and control of the Jordan Valley and the mountain ridge above it, which provides strategic maneuverability. The second motive was demographic and emphasized the Zionist vision of settling all of the Land of Israel, creating territorially contiguous settlement, creating a Jewish demographic reality, and agricultural work. The third motive was economic and sought to integrate the population of the held territories as cheap labor in the Israeli market on one hand, while ensuring their livelihood and agricultural production as well as developing their economic independence on the other hand.

Coping with the territories and their residents led to disagreements in the government and directly affected public opinion in Israel, the West Bank including its local residents, Jordan, and around the globe. At the beginning of July 1967, Prime Minister Levi Eshkol and Defense Minister Moshe Dayan established professional government committees to propose plans for the development and management of the local population in the held territories (ISA, 18/7309). Many professional committees were established, including the directors-general committee, which included the directors-general of all of the government ministries and representatives of the army, in order to join forces and comprehensively address all relevant areas of life. Another committee discussed plans for the development of the held territories, which quickly received the name "the professors' committee," after its scholarly members. The committee was in charge of preparing concrete plans to deal with the local population in the held territories (Brown 1997; Gazit 1985).

These new government committees tackled issues concerning the West Bank and focused in particular on many demographic questions (ISA, 18/7309). All areas of life came up for discussion, including the movement of residents and agricultural goods from the West Bank to the East Bank, the employment of local residents throughout the West Bank and by various bodies in Israel, education and health, rehabilitating villages, refugees, and family reunifications. After the unification of Jerusalem two weeks after the end of the Six Day War, at the end of June 1967, the Israeli government decided to grant permanent residency to East Jerusalem residents and to enable them to continue to simultaneously hold Jordanian citizenship (Ramon and Ronen 2017). This decision applied only to the residents of East Jerusalem and not to those of the rest of the West Bank.

The government, headed by Levi Eshkol, made a decision to settle Israeli citizens in the West Bank as soon as possible, to create facts on the ground through territorially contiguous settlement and demographic change, and to ensure strategic depth and maximum security on the country's new borders.

This article limits its scope to the first decade after the war, to focus on events in Israel during this period and on the demographic changes that occurred. In the census that was submitted to the government in November 1967, about a million residents were counted in the West Bank territories. The Israeli government was not presented with a demographic forecast regarding the growth of the population in the held territories in the future. The decision-makers in this decade believed that they should focus on strategic and security aspects and ignored the future consequences of the demographic dimension. The census conducted at the end of 1977 showed that the number of residents in the held territories in the West Bank had grown by 20%, to about 1.2 million people (ISA, 3/12055). The number of people from the territories employed within pre-1967 lines that year was estimated at about 120,000. These figures indicate the growth of the local

population and its integration in employment in the Israeli economy.

This article shines a spotlight on the first decade after the Six Day War, during which several proposals for addressing the West Bank territories and their local residents were submitted to the government by ministers. The article also presents King Hussein of Jordan's counter-proposal for administering the West Bank as a Jordanian federation, a kind of "mirror proposal" that emphasizes the differences between each side's considerations regarding the territories and their residents. The innovation in this article is in examining why such a large number of proposals were made, what characterizes them, and whether the proposals were accepted and carried out, in part or in full. The main question that stems from the various proposals and the new demographic reality concerns whether, in the first decade after the Six Day War, Israel's governments even formulated a policy on the country's borders and the population that would be included in them? The article's primary concern is to examine and compare the four proposals, and to consider their uniqueness and trajectories with an emphasis on the demographic issue.

When a country experiences demographic changes that stem from population transitions and involve military rule, it produces complex challenges. For the sake of this discussion, the article contains a comparison table that examines the proposals based on their similarities and differences and points out the implications that arise from this analysis. The purpose of the comparison is to create a clear distinction between the various proposals and to discuss their nature. The importance of the comparison is in shining a spotlight on the various possibilities that were presented to Israel's government to address the demographic dimension in the West Bank territories from 1967 to 1977. Given the proposals that were submitted to Israel's governments, the article answers the questions: Why did the decision-makers refrain from officially adopting at least one of the proposals, and was a policy even formulated on the country's borders and the population that would be included within it?

In the table, a special emphasis was placed on the demographic dimension of the four proposals, in particular in the three Israeli proposals that were submitted to the government. None of the proposals looks at the future demographic growth of the Jewish and local Arab population. It is clear that Israel's governments decided not to decide on the issue of control of the West Bank territories. Control of the territory and its Palestinian residents blinded the eyes of the leadership in Israel, which saw control of the West Bank and the mountain ridge as a strategic objective for ensuring and expanding Israel's defensive borders. The government saw holding onto the land and creating facts on the ground as a national objective and an incentive for quick Jewish settlement in the West Bank, while ignoring the local Palestinian demography there. In the decade discussed, Israel's governments ignored the demographic dimension and its consequences for the future reality of the West Bank in terms of the demographic growth of the Jewish and local Arab population. They refrained from making decisive decisions regarding the proposed plans, as detailed in the article. In the eyes of Israel's governments, the only way to cope with the demographic dimension was Jewish presence throughout the West Bank. By creating territorially contiguous Jewish settlement and ensuring a hold on the land, a new reality emerged of Jewish settlement throughout the West Bank. Decision-makers in Israel believed that this was the only way to control the territory and to ensure a "human shield" for the state's borders.

The Allon Plan

In the days after the Six Day War, a census was conducted that aimed to estimate the local population in the held territories, in order to improve the government's ability to manage the demographic challenges in the wake of the war.

A document from the 1967 population census shows that the distribution of local residents in the held territories immediately after the war was as follows: the Golan Heights—6,400; in the Gaza Strip the number of residents was about half a million as detailed below: northern Sinai—33,000; Gaza—119,000; Jabalia—44,000; Deir al-Balah—18,000; Khan Yunis—53,000; Rafah—50,000; in the refugee camps there were about 175,000 residents. In the West Bank there were about 600,000 people as detailed below: the Nablus and Jenin district—226,000; the Tulkarm district—79,000; the Ramallah district—94,000; the Jericho district—9,000; the Jerusalem district—27,000; the Bethlehem and Hebron district—162,000. The census estimated a total of about one million local residents throughout the West Bank and Gaza Strip (ISA, 2608/7).

In order to cope with the demographics of the territories, on June 26, 1967, Labor Minister Yigal Allon submitted a document to Prime Minister Eshkol titled, "The Future of the Territories and Ways to Handle the Refugees" (ISA, 7309/16, 7309/20; Yad Tabenkin, division 41, container 9, file 5; Mileer-Katav 2012). The document includes a peace plan and arrangements regarding the West Bank and Gaza, with an emphasis on finding political, security, employment, and demographic solutions in the Golan Heights and Sinai too. The plan was named the "Allon Plan," after its initiator. Revised versions from other dates, including February 27, 1968, December 10, 1968, January 29, 1969, and September 23, 1970, and the final version, from July 17, 1972, which was brought to the government for discussion, were presented to the government of Israel (ISA 7022/13, 7022/14; Yad Tabenkin, division 41). On September 15, 1970, on the eve of Prime Minister Golda Meir's trip to the United States, Allon submitted a revised version of his plan.

The uniqueness of the Allon Plan was that its principles were implemented on the ground, and it was discussed in political forums inside and outside of Israel with foreign bodies, namely, official representatives of the United States, foreign governments, and King Hussein of Jordan. The plan itself, despite its numerous incarnations, was not accepted as an official program by the government of Israel due to internal and foreign policy issues. Yigal Allon honored Prime Minister Eshkol's requests not to put his proposal to vote in the government, out of concern that it would arouse strong opposition. So Allon only presented it in meetings of the Alignment Party, where the plan was accepted as a possible proposal for action and included in the party's platform for the Knesset elections.

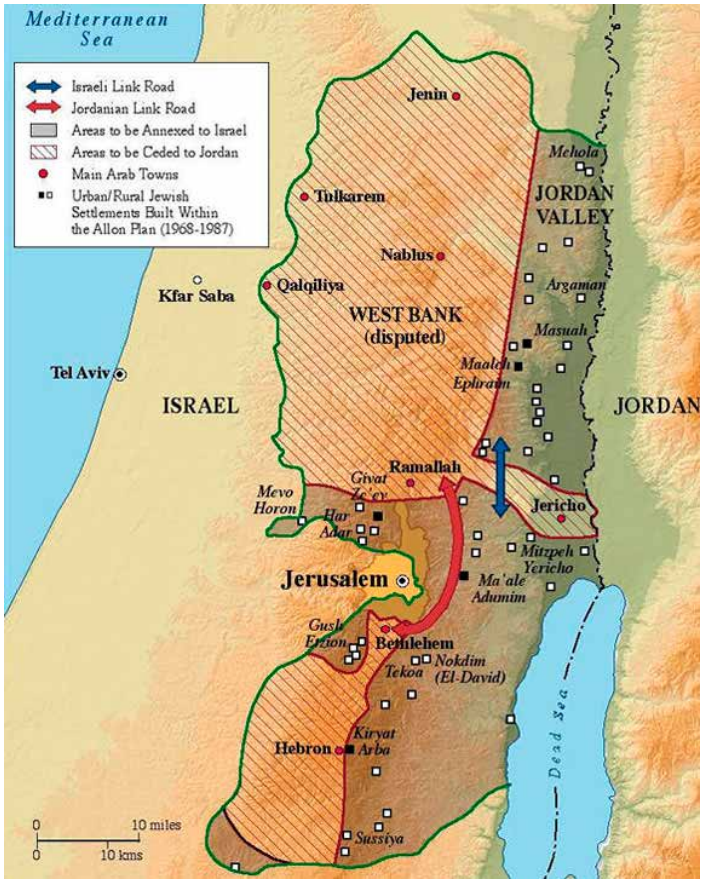
This separation, as Allon presented in his plan, was supposed to ensure the independent existence of the Palestinians on one hand, and Israel's broad security control of the Jordan Valley and the mountain ridge on the other hand, while strengthening Israel's hold on the land and implementing the principle of settlement.

The plan's weakness was that it only took into account Israel's position on the held territories, but did not examine whether the local population wanted to be under Israeli or Jordanian sovereignty. Allon also did not examine Jordan's position and its attitude towards bringing the Arab population in the held territories under Israeli sovereignty. Only after the publication of his plan did Allon try to convince the Jordanians to accept Israel's position on the issue, but he did not succeed. In effect, Allon foresaw the demographic changes that would take place in the territory over the course of several decades; that as time went by, the population would grow, the demography would transform, and Israel would face a fundamental issue of ruling over millions of Palestinians within its borders. In his vision, Allon wanted to create a complete separation between the local Palestinian population and the Israeli population. This separation, as Allon presented in his plan, was supposed to ensure

the independent existence of the Palestinians on one hand, and Israel's broad security control of the Jordan Valley and the mountain ridge on the other hand, while strengthening Israel's hold on the land and implementing the principle of settlement. The plan as presented in each of the drafts was not accepted as the government's official policy, though Allon implemented the main aspects of his plan in practice via Jewish settlement in the held territories.

The main aspects of the plan are based on the idea of territorial compromise. At the center was the need to hold onto the areas that were militarily important to Israel, such as the Jordan Valley and the mountain ridge above the valley. Furthermore, the plan proposed restoring Arab rule over regions that were conquered during the war and were densely populated by local Arab residents, because these territories were not militarily essential to the country and could even be a demographic stumbling block to future Israeli sovereignty. The plan's basic assumptions were, firstly, that peace agreements with the neighboring Arab countries and the Palestinians were possible and necessary; and that it was essential for Israel to make an immediate decision on the political future of the territories conquered in the Six Day War. Second, that maintaining the geostrategic integrity of the Land of Israel would enable defensible borders and avoid war in the future. Third, that maintaining a Jewish majority in the State of Israel would ensure the existence of a democratic Jewish state according to the Zionist vision. Fourth, that the Palestinian people could achieve an independent national life without harming the State of Israel's security. They would be able to choose political relations with Jordan or with Israel. Regarding the refugee problem, the Plan suggested the pursuance of an Israeli initiative to resolve the problem as both a humanitarian and a political issue, and an Israeli need no less than an Arab need.

Map of the Allon Plan



Source: Center for Israeli Education, http://tinyurl.com/tp5bn3wc

The plan presented border arrangements based on the Green Line: Israel's eastern border would be the Jordan River and the line going through the center of the Dead Sea from north to south, and continuing with the British Mandate[1] border through the Arava. West of the Jordan river, a 15-kilometer-wide strip would be added to the State of Israel and become a part of it. "In the area of the Judean Dessert, including Kiryat Arba, the width of the strip will reach 25 kilometers, and will serve as a link connecting the Negev and the Jordan Valley. In the area of Jericho there will be a corridor for passage from the East Bank of the Jordan to the West Bank. There will be a strip for passage between the West Bank and the Gaza region, and it will enable a connection between the population of the West Bank and the population of Gaza and free passage to a port in Gaza. The entire Jerusalem region was to be added to the State of Israel (Yad Tabenkin, division 8-15). In the areas densely populated by Arabs in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, negotiations would be

held between the State of Israel, the residents, and the Arab countries, in which an agreed government would be established. Regarding the remaining borders, it was determined that only necessary border adjustments would be made (Yad Tabenkin, division 8-15).

Allon was determined to prove to the government and the public in Israel, to the refugees, and to the watching eyes of the world, that it was possible to resolve the demographic problem and the refugee problem. He proposed starting with the planning of one model Arab refugee village, in the West Bank or Sinai. The construction was supposed to be at the expense of the State of Israel without requests for economic assistance from other countries. However, according to Allon's plan, responsibility for the livelihood and rehabilitation of the refugees would fall on UNRWA's shoulders.[2] Allon also included another important proposal—to establish "a single national authority that would coordinate all of the research and activities in the territories" (ISA 7309/16, 7309/20, 7032/10; Yad Tabenkin, division 8-15).

The government of Israel did not officially approve Allon's suggestion, but in the ensuing years acted according to it nevertheless. From 1968 to 1977, 76 settlements were established according to the outline of the Allon Plan, throughout the new territories added to the State of Israel following the war. Yigal Allon submitted another amended proposal to the government in February 1968, in which he specified the need to immediately settle the Jordan Valley in order to create the presence of Israeli civilian settlements in addition to the military presence there. He believed that by establishing a few security settlements in the Jordan Valley, Israel would have territorial contiguity and military strength. At the same time, the Jewish demographic reality throughout the West Bank would completely change the map of the territory and all future reference to it. In his words, "an Israeli civilian and military presence in the Jordan Valley is a kind of border adjustment that has no replacement. And the location of the settlements needs to be planned such that all options will remain open for various solutions" (ISA, 7309/16).

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As for Jerusalem, Allon sought to place the need to expand construction there on the government's agenda. In May 1969, he wrote another proposal for the government in which he sought to immediately expand the municipal construction area of the united Jerusalem.[3] The minister also demanded the application of Israeli law and municipal jurisdiction to the areas added after 1967. Allon's explanation of the importance of his proposal was the attractive charm of the city in the eyes of Israelis and new immigrants wishing to make their homes there. In his words, "Hence the city's master plan should be based on suitable land in terms of size, and we must immediately start to locate new projects in the city of Jerusalem" (ISA, 7309/16, 7032/10).

As for the Golan Heights, Allon wrote that Israel should hold a position on the border with Syria. The country's main water sources are located in the Golan Heights, providing water to southern Israel too. Hence the Golan, the Upper and Lower Galilee, and the Jordan Valley should be protected. Allon planned a line of topographical outposts that would block paths of advancement towards Israeli territory and provide cover for offensive deployment when needed. The line was also supposed to provide early warning of the advancement of enemy aircraft from a great distance (Kipnis 2009, 116-129).

On the eve of Prime Minister Golda Meir's trip to the United States to meet with President Nixon in September 1970, Allon submitted

another document to Meir that included maps. In the document's introduction he wrote: "The proposed border lines, along most of their length, are the red line that we must not give up on, and I see them as the only alternative to the Rogers Plan"[4] (ISA, 16/7309, 10/7032).

Allon again specified what in his opinion were the principles of the future map of Israel and of the country's borders, which would be required in any peace agreement. First, the border lines must be strategically defensible. Second, a demographic aspect should determine and secure national borders whose scope are enshrined in the historic moral right of the People of Israel to the Land of Israel. The third principle explained that the border lines must ensure the Jewish character of the State of Israel, and be politically realistic. Allon emphasized that any border must take into account strategic requirements as a first priority. He also added that as long as there was no peace agreement between Israel and its neighbors, Israel would continue to hold the ceasefire lines. These principles recur in various formulations, but the core elements remain.

Allon also discussed the issue of instability in the territories, the danger of influence of a hostile power, and explained that the Plan might not allow for Israel to maintain military bases or patrols in the territories within the area of Arab sovereignty. For this reason, he did not see these as permanent status agreements. The fourth principle addressed the controlled demilitarization of strategically vital territories and was supposed to serve as one of the foundations of the security arrangements. But demilitarization of such territories was not to serve as a replacement for real defensible borders, which would remain under Israeli control in terms of both legal sovereignty and military control. The fifth and most important principle from Allon's perspective was that the borders must be based on a topographical system that was supposed to be a permanent barrier for defensive deployment against mechanized ground forces and a base for Israel forces' control of the territory. The borders were supposed to provide the country with reasonable strategic depth and to ensure a warning system that would warn of the approach of enemy aircraft as early as possible. Allon also noted the problem of terrorism and sabotage and added that the possibility that guerrilla warfare and even acts of terrorism and sabotage could develop, should be taken into account (ISA 16/7309, 20/7309, 10/7302, 14/7022, 13/7022).

Ten years after he formulated the plan, Allon was asked if he still believed in it as a suitable solution to the reality in Israel (Yad Tabenkin, division 15). His response was resolute that it stood the test of time (Zak 1996, 21-29; Yad Tabenkin, division 15, container

The Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza, 1967-1977 (partial list)

Source: Shaul Arieli

4). Even a decade later, Allon was convinced that his proposal was an opportunity not to be missed. It would grant Israel the security it needed, would enable talks and negotiations with the neighboring countries to the point of understandings and agreements to bring about regional peace, and would give the developing Jewish settlements a demographic advantage over the existing Arab settlements and those that would be established in the future. The plan, as he laid it out in the media, was entirely rational and based on three basic facts: topography, demography, and strategy. According to Allon, there had been no change in the three components since he submitted the plan in June 1967.

In Allon's opinion, the geography remained as it had been since biblical times, the demography had changed for the worse, and the technological development of weapons strengthened the strategic thesis. The plan was relevant because it displayed an understanding of the territorial interests of the Arab countries, presented a constructive response to Palestinian calls for self-government and of course to the security needs of Israel. Allon did not see any alternative to the plan, unless Israel decided to rely on foreign guarantees for its security and as a replacement for self-defense. He warned against this in every possible way. Allon also emphasized that he supported negotiations without preconditions with the representatives of the Arab countries and local residents, knowing in advance that each side could put forward proposals that were unacceptable to the other side, and that whoever recognized Israel's right to defend itself would sooner or later come to terms with border adjustments to enable this. Allon added that Israel did not conquer the West Bank from the Palestinians but from the Kingdom of Jordan, which attacked us. "During the 19 years of rule by Arab countries in the West Bank and Gaza, they did not fulfill the Palestinian idea. Therefore, let us not be holier than the pope," Allon said (Yad Tabenkin, division 15).

Minister Israel Galili's Plan for Action in the Held Territories: The Galili Initiative

On March 27, 1972, Minister without portfolio Israel Galili wrote a letter to Prime Minister Golda Meir in which he compiled several proposals for the administration and management of the held territories and their population. In this letter, as in previous letters and in many written after it, Galili laid out the dilemmas facing the State of Israel in handling the new territories and their demographic challenge. When he wrote the letter, there was not yet an established, organized procedure for governing the territories. This document, together with other documents that Galili drafted and submitted to the government, were the basis for the official document that he wrote more than a year later, prior to the elections to the Eighth Knesset in December 1973, which was called the Galili Document after its author. This document comprehensively details in fifteen points how to handle the population and the held territories. Galili drafted the final document as a compromise formula between his original document and the proposal of government minister Dayan and the rest of the members of the government, because there was a need to approve the Labor Party's platform prior to the elections. The Galili Document presents a compromise without "winners and losers."

In March 1972 Galili approached Prime Minister Golda Meir and said that it is essential in his view that representatives of the State of Israel—ambassadors and other diplomats—be sent an authorized policy briefing on the issue of borders. The briefing should emphasize first and foremost the need for defensible borders. This entails Israel's demand for new, permanent borders, which would be defensible, recognized and enshrined in peace agreements. Galili also stated that Israel would not return to the 1948 ceasefire lines and to the international border of the British Mandate. The demand for changes applied to the borders with Egypt, Jordan,

and Syria and Israel's aspiration was that they could be achieved in negotiations. Later Galili clarified his intent and said that Israel does not only mean to have a "presence" or "lease" the land beyond the previous borders, but exert sovereignty there (Traube 2017, 407-431; Kipnis 2009, 129-133).

Galili emphasized that a united Jerusalem is the capital of the State of Israel and that the rights of members of all religions with respect to the holy places would be recognized. He also added that the Jordan River would be the security border and the Jordanian army would not cross into the West Bank.

Galili also emphasized that in addition to determining new borders, Israel would demand various security arrangements, such as demilitarization of certain regions. The minister noted that as is written in the founding guidelines of the State of Israel, Israel aspires to peace agreements with the neighboring Arab countries. However, without peace, "the State of Israel will continue to fully maintain the situation determined by the ceasefire agreements following the Six Day War. Israel will fortify its standing in every ceasefire region as demanded by its security needs and the development of the country" (ISA, 8/7067).

The second element of the briefing concerned the peacetime border between Israel and Egypt. The previous border line, meaning the international border of the British Mandate, would be moved south into Sinai. The Gaza Strip would be an inseparable part of the State of Israel, and Israeli control of Sharm El Sheikh would continue. In addition, territorial contiguity would be created between Sharm El Sheikh and the State of Israel, to a certain point on the Mediterranean coast. Galili noted in the document that the width of the strip had not yet been determined, and it also discussed the demilitarization of certain Egyptian areas in the Sinai region. Galili mentioned that Israel did not intend to hold onto all of Sinai, nor even the majority of it. The third aspect addressed Israel's border with Jordan. Galili's communication with Prime Minister Meir clarified that the government had not yet decided on a cohesive territorial plan; it had not adopted the Allon Plan, but neither had it chosen any other plan.

In effect, the government had not yet decided its stance on the political border with Jordan, and in practice it intended considerable changes and not only minor adjustments. Galili emphasized that a united Jerusalem is the capital of the State of Israel and that the rights of members of all religions with respect to the holy places would be recognized. He also added that the Jordan River would be the security border and the Jordanian army would not cross into the West Bank. As for the demographic aspect in the Jordan Valley and settlements up to the area of Ein Gedi, aside from the corridor connecting Jordan to the Arab population centers in the West Bank, the settlements would be an inseparable part of the State of Israel. The minister stated this in front of the prime minister, who publicly revealed that she did not seek to add the 600,000 West Bank Arabs to the State of Israel and to change the country's internal demography. Galili rejected the establishment of a Palestinian state alongside Israel on the West Bank of the Jordan (ISA, 8/7067).

As for Israel's border with Syria, Galili said that a change to the international boundary was needed. As far as he was concerned, the State of Israel needed to protect its northern territory and would not therefore leave the Golan Heights nor return to the British Mandate border. The settlements in the Golan Heights demonstrated the Israeli government's intentions regarding the border with Syria in this region. As for Lebanon, Galili presented the Israeli government's position that it was willing to sign a peace treaty according to the border at that time, as was determined at the end of the War of Independence. In general, Galili's

stance was that all territorial issues and borders should be discussed as part of negotiations with the relevant Arab countries.

The minister mentioned that negotiations must take place without preconditions: "The government of Israel will not give a UN envoy or the Arab countries any prior territorial commitment demanded of it as a condition for negotiations. The government will not demand of the Arab countries to give it any prior commitment on the territorial issue. The borders will be determined by negotiation, by agreement, and not through coercion by other bodies" (ISA, 8/7067). Moreover, the following sections of Galili's letter state that in order not to hinder the opening of negotiations, the government preferred to refrain from detailing its ultimate demands on the territorial issue. The minister demanded that this be done only under concrete circumstances during negotiations. He also stated that Israel absolutely rejected the understanding of Security Council Resolution 242 as withdrawal from all of the territories to the previous borders, and that Israel's February 26, 1971 response to UN Ambassador Gunnar Jarring remained in force.[5]

Galili justified his position to the prime minister and said that the government of Israel rejects claims that its policy is one of "expansion" or "annexation." Israel aspires to defensible borders that require considerable changes to the previous boundaries. According to him, while avoiding the term annexation, Israel should be careful not to mislead others into thinking that it intends to accept the previous borders (neither of the British Mandate nor those that preceded the Six Day War). On the topic of demilitarization of the territories (following border changes) Israel's position was not that of "mutual demilitarization," as Israel rejected demilitarization of areas in its territory and rejected the stationing of an "international force" within its borders. According to Galili, Israel was willing to hold negotiations with each of its neighbors separately, and even to sign a separate peace agreement with each of its neighbors (ISA, 8/7067). In Labor Party meetings and in government discussions, this action plan for the territories came up for discussion many times. Many opposed Galili's proposed plan, and they expressed their concern about determining a position regarding the future of the territories (Bloch 1973).

Moshe Dayan's Proposal Regarding the Territories

Following the Galili and Allon proposals that were submitted to the government, on August 14, 1973, Defense Minister Moshe Dayan submitted his proposal for addressing the territories, the local population, and the changing demography—"Policy in the Territories in the Next Four Years" (ISA 13/7022, 14/7022). In his proposal, Dayan listed ten demands for advancing the needs of the local population and the settlement concept in the held territories. The first demand was regarding the refugees. Optimal handling of this issue required a budget increase of about 100 million Israeli pounds per year for the existing refugee camps. The second demand discussed the issue of industrial development to foster commerce and the economy in Gaza and the West Bank, and the third focused on urban and industrial centers. Regarding Jerusalem, this meant expanding urban and industrial occupancy to the south, north, and east, beyond the Green Line. The proposal included planning the town of Yamit in the Sinai Peninsula and its expedited development so that it would become a regional urban center for the area south of Gaza known as the Rafah Salient. Dayan elaborated on the need to establish a deep-water port south of Gaza irrespective of the development of the Haifa and Ashdod ports. The settlement of Kiryat Arba was mentioned in the context of the plan to rapidly develop industry and population centers, including establishing an urban settlement in Nebi Samuel. As for the areas where a Palestinian Arab population resided in the towns of Qalqilya and Tulkarm, the need to establish an industrial zone in Kfar Saba was emphasized,

for the employment of the entire population of the region—Jewish and Palestinian—and to drive Jewish entrepreneurship of industrial and residential enterprises in the area. The industrial zone was to be established on 1,200 dunams of absentee property.[6] The Golan Heights was also mentioned as a region in which to establish an urban industrial center that would be able to provide employment for all sectors of the population there.

Settlement was the fourth demand in Dayan's proposal—the establishment of additional Jewish settlements throughout the West Bank, in order to consolidate the Jewish demography there.

Settlement was the fourth demand in Dayan's proposal—the establishment of additional Jewish settlements throughout the West Bank, in order to consolidate the Jewish demography there. The fifth was encouraging the establishment of industrial zones with factories in the West Bank. Dayan planned to establish urban settlements that would attract a large population and would become employment and residential centers. The sixth demand discussed rural settlement and the establishment of industrial factories; the seventh discussed the acquisition of land. The Israel Land Administration needed to acquire land in the territories for the purpose of settlement, establishing private and public factories and for the sake of future land exchanges. The acquisition of companies, private lands, and property were considered part of a political and security initiative. The eighth demand in the document discussed the employment of the Palestinian residents of the territories. Their work in the territories was to be monitored and supervised to ensure that their conditions and pay reflected those prevailing inside Israel. The ninth demand referred to relations with Jordan. Dayan believed that Israel should encourage and strengthen the territories' residents' ties and connections to the Kingdom of Jordan. The tenth demand stated that it was important to promote local workers in the territories to management positions, including senior positions in the government offices dealing with civil matters. According to Dayan, these positions should be passed on to the local Arabs in order to encourage them to integrate into society and industry and to improve their economic situation (ISA 13/7022, 14/7022; Mileer-Katav 2012; Kipnis 2009, 134-135).

Combining the Dayan and Galili proposals into the "Galili Document"

As mentioned above, both the Galili and Dayan proposals, which were put to vote separately, were rejected by the ministers of the Labor Party. Galili then set about merging the two proposals into a single, organized, binding document. Galili's suggested merger provoked prolonged discussions in the party over the course of four meetings,[7] at the end of which the final draft of the joint summary was accepted. It addressed the action plan for the held territories, discussed the demographic issue at length, and, among other things, made proposals to address the issue. The final draft of the agreement between the ministers Pinchas Sapir, Moshe Dayan, and Israel Galili was submitted to Prime Minister Meir on August 14, 1973. On September 3, 1973, Galili submitted the draft—"Agreements and Recommendations on an Action Plan for the Next Four Years"—for discussion and government approval, and it was referred to as the Galili Document. The document was discussed twice within the party—first at the beginning of September and again after the Yom Kippur War, on December 5, 1973 (Dayan 1976, 553-560).

The introduction to the proposal stated that the agreement did not reflect party policy of either the Labor Party or the Alignment, but rather recommendations of two Labor Party ministers.[8] The prime minister was mentioned as the person who would bring the agreement forward for approval by the

authorized institutions, meaning the party and the government. The agreement expressed the Alignment's election platform and was included as part of the government's overall action plan. After receiving government approval for the essence of the plan, operational details were to be outlined, and the implementation budgets were included in the government's annual budgets. The action plan for the next four years starting in 1973 did not involve changing the political status of the territories and the civil status of the residents and refugees (Mileer-Katav 2012).

The proposal's principles focused on the demographic aspect of consolidating Jewish settlement in the West Bank on one hand, and addressing the demographic aspects of the local Palestinian population on the other hand. Dayan and Galili's joint proposal and their individual proposals do not contain a plan for the demographic separation of the Palestinian population from the Israeli settlements that expanded throughout the West Bank and the Jordan Valley. The proposals emphasized large-scale Jewish settlement and creating facts on the ground to maintain claim to and control of the land, while completely ignoring the demographic future of the territories in the coming decades. The plan's main focus, as detailed below, was to consolidate Israeli control of the territories while considering the civil needs of the local residents. As government representatives, their document was supposed to set out guidelines for administering and managing the local Palestinian population, but this was also rejected by the government.

15 principles were included in the joint proposal: the first addressed the responsibility of the incoming government. The document stated that the next government should continue to operate in the territories based on the policies pursued by the current government, with an emphasis on the local population. These encompass development of the territories in terms of housing, transportation, agriculture, employment and services; economic relations, open bridges, autonomous activity and the renewal of municipal representation, decrees by the military governorate, rural and urban settlement, rehabilitating the refugee camps, and monitored and regulated employment for the territories' Arab residents in Israel. The second principle focused on the Gaza Strip. The document stated that an emphasis would be placed on rehabilitating refugees and developing the Gaza Strip for the purposes of residence, agriculture, and industry for the benefit of the local residents. In addition, a four-year action plan was proposed, with allocations for the necessary funding for its implementation. The main aspects of the action plan focused on improving the condition of the local residents in the held territories with an emphasis on housing conditions, that is, establishing residential neighborhoods for the refugees next to the camps, rehabilitating the camps and including them in the municipal responsibility of the adjacent towns. Other areas included professional training, advancing health and education services, creating sources of livelihood in crafts and industry, and encouraging the individual initiative of residents to raise their standard of living.

The third principle in the document related to developing infrastructure in the West Bank. The proposal included a four-year action plan that would ensure the necessary funding for developing the economic infrastructure and advancing essential services, such as health and education, improving the water system according to the needs of the population, advancing professional and post-secondary education, improving electricity and contact services—meaning communication and transportation—, renovating roads and access routes, developing crafts and industry as sources of employment for residents, improving housing for the refugees, and assistance for the municipal authorities. The fourth principle in the document presents the understanding that was reached between the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Defense, concerning funding

for the action plans in the Gaza Strip and West Bank. It noted that efforts would be made to attain economic means from foreign sources to fund the rehabilitation of refugees and to develop the territories.

The sixth principle in the document stated that concessions and benefits would be offered to encourage Israeli entrepreneurs to invest in establishing industrial factories in the territories (according to the Minister of Trade and Industry's proposal to the Ministerial Committee on Economic Affairs from August 1, 1973). The seventh principle addressed the autonomous activity of West Bank residents in which they would advance and develop business, agricultural, and economic initiatives in their areas of residence in the held territories. The eighth principle discussed the provision of aid to support the population's autonomous activity in the areas of education, religion, and services, and the cultivation of democratic values and practices in social and municipal life. The goal was to encourage the local residents to fill senior civil positions in the machinery of local government, in order to integrate them in the day-to-day administration. It also stated that the open bridge policy between the two sides of the Jordan river would continue, to allow trade to continue as before. The ninth principle specified the integration of residents of the territories in various kinds of work inside the State of Israel. It stated that such residents' work in Israel and in Jewish enterprises in the territories would be numerically and regionally controlled, and measures would be enacted to ensure comparable pay and working conditions to those prevalent in Israel (Pattir 1973).

The tenth principle advocated for the establishment of new settlements and the strengthening of the settlement system. The government of Israel was to encourage Jewish settlement in the West Bank by developing crafts, industry, and tourism catering. When setting the government's budgets, the necessary funds for new settlements would be determined each year, according to the settlement department's recommendations and approval of the ministerial committee on settlement. The aim over the subsequent four years was to establish additional settlements in the Rafah Salient, in the Jordan Valley, and in the Golan Heights; an industrial urban settlement in the Golan Heights, and a regional center in the Jordan Valley; to develop the northeast of the Sea of Galilee and the northwest of the Dead Sea, and to establish the planned water works. Public and private non-governmental bodies were to join forces in the regional development of settlement in the territories as part of the approved plans. As for the regional center near Rafah Salient, it was to encompass 800 housing units by 1977-1978 and industrial development and settlers willing to settle there through private means would be encouraged. The eleventh principle focused on acquiring and zoning land in the territories. The document states that efforts to designate lands for the needs of existing and planned settlement were to increase (including acquisitions, government lands, absentee lands, land exchanges, and agreements with residents). It also stated that the Israel Land Administration would operate to increase the acquisition of land and properties in the territories for the needs of settlement, land development, and land exchanges. And that it would lease land to companies and individuals for the purpose of implementing approved development plans. The Administration would also act to acquire land in any effective way, including through companies and individuals, in coordination with and on behalf of the administration. Companies and individuals would be permitted to acquire lands and properties only in cases in which it was clear that the administration could not acquire the land and be its owner, or was not interested in doing so. The twelfth principle stated that the body authorized to provide these approvals would be the ministerial committee. Approvals would be provided on the condition that the acquisitions were intended for constructive enterprises and not for speculation, and not

as part of the government's policy. The Israel Lands Administration would also act to acquire and be the owner of lands acquired by Jews.

The thirteenth principle mentioned in the document concerned Jerusalem and its surroundings. It declared the state's intention to populate and industrially develop the capital and its surroundings with the purpose of consolidation beyond the more immediate area addressed by Decree No. 1 (IDF Archives, 117/1970).[9] To this end, an effort would be made to acquire more land, and those state lands east and south of Jerusalem that the government had closed, would be utilized. The fourteenth principle stated that the government decision from September 13, 1970 on the settlement of Nebi Samuel should be implemented. With respect to a port south of Gaza, it stated that following the expedited development of the Rafah Salient, within two or three years the basic data of the proposal to establish a deep-water seaport south of Gaza would be examined, including physical aspects, economic feasibility, and political considerations. After the compilation of the findings and the submission of a concrete plan, the government would decide on the issue. The fifteenth principle in the document is the establishment of an industrial center for Kfar Saba and its surrounding area beyond the Green Line, and the development of Israeli industry in the areas of Qalqilya and Tulkarm.

The text of Dayan and Galili's proposal presents the complexity of the demographic dimension as expressed in Jewish settlement in the West Bank vis-à-vis the existing Palestinian population there. The document's principles lay out the government demands for the consolidation of Jewish settlement in order to create territorial contiguity that would ensure Israel's hold on the land and encourage private Jewish investment in developing the territory. On the other hand, there was an intention to find practical solutions for the local population in order to enable them to earn a living and develop industry, practice agriculture, pursue an education, maintain a connection with the East Bank, and travel between the two banks, as well as throughout the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The demographic changes created by the incoming local Arab population forced the government to find immediate solutions and formulate a long-term plan for future implementation. Meanwhile, the government's decision to urgently establish Jewish settlements was the result of the need to create a Jewish demographic reality on the ground.

King Hussein's Federation Plan

The fourth proposal came from the East side of the river, from the palace of King Hussein of Jordan. It differed from the previous proposals in three important ways—first in originating in an Arab country and at the initiative of King Hussein. Second, the proposal revealed the king's aspiration to maintain the continuity of his rule and his patronage of the Palestinian population in the West Bank. Third, it was a kind of "mirror proposal" in contrast with the considerations behind the three Israeli proposals. The essence of the proposal was to maintain Jordanian territorial contiguity in the West Bank and administrative hegemony over the territory and to preserve Jordanian rather than Israeli patronage of the population. Hussein rejected Allon's proposal and believed that his proposal would be acceptable to the local Arab residents and to the Israeli government. On March 15, 1972, Radio Jordan broadcast King Hussein's plan to reorganize the Hashemite monarchy and render it the united Arab monarchy. At the center of the proposal were several principles. First, it proposed a common point of reference for the Palestinians, especially the local residents in the West Bank, which would maintain Palestinian identity in the framework of an Arab country and demographic continuity with the Kingdom of Jordan. It seems that the king believed that the residents would prefer to live in an autonomous federal Arab regime rather than under Israeli rule. Second, Hussein sought to represent the Palestinians, rather than the militant voices of

the *fedayeen* leaders in the West Bank, who had formerly attempted to oppose his rule. Third, the king sought to strive for a solution to the question of the West Bank in a way that would return the territory to him, thus ensuring the return of the land to the members of his people and rule over Jerusalem and the holy places in it. Fourth, Hussein believed that this action would present him as an Arab leader of stature in the eyes of the moderate Arab community. In this way he hoped to regain the faith of the Arab countries in him and economic support for Jordan, which suffered following his suppression of the sabotage operations of the terrorist organizations in the kingdom. Hussein saw the plan as an opportunity to maintain Arab demographic unity on both sides of the Jordan and his standing as the only leader of the territory.

Meir attacked the king's plan because it did not mention the term peace even once and was not based on an agreement. She was furious "about the king's presumptuousness in defining Jerusalem—Israel's eternal capital—as the capital of Palestine

The plan suggested the creation of two main autonomous provinces: Palestine and Jordan. According to the plan, these provinces were to operate as a federation under a central government with a national assembly located in Amman. Amman would be the capital of the Jordanian provinces and Jerusalem would be the capital of the Palestinian provinces, and each province would have a governor general for internal administration, a government, and a council elected by the people. The government in Jordan was to be the supreme authority on foreign relations and security, and there would be one central army headed by the king. The main judicial branch would be under the authority of the central supreme court, though there would be an independent authority in each province. The plan did not relate to the Jewish settlements that proliferated in the West Bank and the Jordan Valley, nor to the presence of Israeli military and security forces in the territory by virtue of this. In addition, the plan lacked a strategy or political intention for negotiations with Israel, including peace. The king prepared the plan covertly and did not share it with Israel or the United States or even with other Arab countries. When Hussein announced it, the responses were not long in coming, and he was thoroughly denounced by all sides. Israel flatly refused to give up the territories in the West Bank and Jerusalem, and did not agree to Jordanian administrative intervention in its territories.

The day after Hussein's announcement, on March 16, 1972, Golda Meir gave a scathing speech in the Knesset. She said that the king was purporting to administer a territory that was no longer in his possession, and if he wished to reach any agreements, he must do so with her through negotiations. Meir attacked the king's plan because it did not mention the term peace even once and was not based on an agreement. She was furious "about the king's presumptuousness in defining Jerusalem—Israel's eternal capital—as the capital of Palestine" (ISA, 6/7033). The rest of the Arab countries believed that the plan was impossible, as the territory was under Israeli military control. Palestinian protest movements even called Hussein a traitor for having spoken in their name and having tried to "sell" them to the Israelis. The Council of the Presidency of the Arab Federation, which was held in Cairo from March 11 to 14, 1971, published a condemnation of King Hussein's unilateral declaration and said that it was a plot against the Arab nation. U.S. Secretary of State, Williams Rogers made clear to the king that the United States would not take a public stance with respect to his plan because it sees it as an internal Jordanian matter, while Egyptian President Anwar Sadat severed diplomatic relations with Jordan in response to Hussein's declaration (Elpeleg, 1977; ISA 6/7033, 10/7245).

For 21 years King Hussein tried to return the territories of the West Bank and their residents to his kingdom. The king saw the loss of Jerusalem and the West Bank and their Arab population to Israel as an artificial demographic division. According to his shelved plan, the Kingdom of Jordan was to rule the territory and its Arab population in order to give full expression to Arab hegemony there, but when he did not succeed in fulfilling his intentions, he felt betrayed and abandoned by the members of his nation. Observing the fast Israeli construction and settlement throughout the West Bank, Hussein came to understand that the situation could not be undone, and expressed his bitter disappointment in the Palestinian uprising that led the public to support the PLO (IDFA, 021/843). In July 1988 the king announced a unilateral separation from the West Bank and declared that while Jordan was detaching itself from the West Bank, it would always be committed to the Palestinian people and the Palestinian struggle, and that he was turning towards regional peace. (Nevo, 2005).

Comparison of the Proposals to Administer the West Bank, 1967-1977

The four proposals presented different ways of administering and addressing the West Bank territories. Each proposal represents the opinion and stance of its initiator: Yigal Allon, Israel Galili, Moshe Dayan, and King Hussein. Compiling the data from the four proposals in one table reveals their similarities and differences The table shows the government response to each of the proposals: rejection.

Who submitted the proposal:	Yigal Allon	Israel Galili	Moshe Dayan	King Hussein
	Israeli	Israeli	Israeli	Jordanian
Date of submission	June 26, 1967	March 27, 1972	August 14, 1973	March 15, 1972
Official name	The Future of the Territories and Treatment of Refugees	Handling the New Territories Added to the State of Israel	Agreements and Recommendations on the Action Plan for the Next Four Years	The Unified Arab Kingdom of Jordan
Informal name	The Allon Plan	The Galili Document	Policy in the Territories in the Next Four Years	The Federation Plan
Submitted to:	Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir	Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir	Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir	The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and the public
Presented in:	Labor Party conventions	Labor Party meetings and government meetings	Labor Party meetings and government meetings	Radio Jordan
Number of drafts	6	1	2	1
Submission dates of the additional drafts	February 27, 1968 December 10, 1968 January 29, 1969 September 23, 1970 July 17, 1972	September 3, 1973, joint proposal with Dayan	September 3, 1973, joint proposal with Galili	
Control of the West Bank	Territorial compromise: Israeli control of security areas; Arab control of areas with Arab population centers	Israeli control	Israeli control	Full Jordanian control
Control of Jerusalem	Full Israeli control	Israeli	Israeli	Capital of the Palestinian provinces under Jordanian control

Who submitted the proposal:	Yigal Allon	Israel Galili	Moshe Dayan	King Hussein
Employment of local Arab residents	Yes, only in their places of residence	Yes, also in Jewish industrial zones and integrating them into the Israeli economy	Yes, also in Jewish industrial zones and integrating them in the Israeli economy	Yes
Demographic dimension: settlement of local Arab residents	Yes, in concentrations of Arab settlement	Yes, in concentrations of Arab settlement	Yes, in concentrations of Arab settlement	Yes
Demographic dimension: Jewish settlement	Yes, in the Jordan valley and on the mountain ridge	Yes, throughout the West Bank	Yes, throughout the West Bank	No
Demographic dimension: calculations of future population	None	None	None	None
Borders	Israeli control of the Jordan Valley and the mountain ridge with the Jordan River as the eastern border. Areas populated with Palestinian residents to remain under Palestinian control. Corridor at Jericho for the Arab population's passage to Jordan	The Jordan River	The Jordan River	The entire West Bank as an autonomous province
Administrative control / sovereignty	The mountain ridge + Jordan Valley + Jerusalem under Israeli control. Concentrations of Palestinian settlements in the West Bank under Arab control.	Israeli	Israeli	Jordanian federal control
Outcome of the proposal	Rejected	Rejected	Rejected	Rejected

Discussion: Comparative Analysis of the Proposals, With an Emphasis on the Israeli Proposals

The similarities between the three Israeli proposals rest on three main motives: security, demography, and economy. In all three proposals the issue of security is the foundation for future thinking about control of the West Bank territories, with an emphasis on defensible borders and control of the Jordan Valley and the mountain ridge for the sake of control over the region and strategic maneuvering. Moreover, in all three proposals, Jerusalem is the capital of Israel under Israeli sovereignty and the Jordan River is the eastern border of the State of Israel. The demographic motive in the three proposals strengthens the Zionist vision of Jewish settlement in the Jordan Valley combined with agricultural work there, while creating territorial contiguity between all parts of the land. In addition, all of the proposals lack a future calculation of the dimensions of demographic growth among the local Arab and Jewish population. The economic motive encourages the integration of the population of local Arab residents into employment in Israeli factories throughout the West Bank and even within the State of Israel. The authors of these

proposals were motivated on the one hand by the importance of developing the independence of the local residents in local employment, and to help them advance agriculture, commerce, and industry for the benefit of their continued livelihood. On the other hand, the residents of the West Bank were seen as cheap labor for Israeli industry. The authors believed that employment in the Israeli market would lead to an increase in the income of local Arab residents and thereby also their quality of life and economic welfare.

The differences between the three proposals also relate to the three main motives: security, demography, and economy. The discrepancies are evident mainly between Allon's proposal and those of Galili and Dayan. Allon submitted his proposal six times on various dates between 1967 and 1973. Galili's proposal was submitted once on March 27, 1972, and Dayan's proposal was also submitted once, on August 14, 1973. The latter two were ultimately unified into a joint proposal that was submitted under the title "The Galili document" on September 3, 1973. On the security issue, Allon proposed a territorial compromise that included a separation of areas under sovereign Israeli control and areas with concentrations of local Arab population. In Allon's opinion, Israel needed to establish Jewish settlements in the Jordan Valley and the mountain ridge, in order to strengthen these areas and to ensure a strategic Israeli hold there. Regarding the areas settled by locals, Allon proposed that they would continue to administer their lives there autonomously, and Israel would also create a corridor to Jordan for them—the Jericho corridor. Allon saw territorial compromise and separation of the different populations as a solution, and in the name of the settlement vision, proposed the Jordan Valley and the mountain ridge as extensive areas for settlement and agriculture. In contrast, Galili and Dayan's proposal did not allow local residents to have autonomous control of areas with concentrations of Arab population; rather, they saw all areas of the West Bank as areas in which to apply Israeli control and sovereignty.

The demographic issue in Allon's proposal relates to Jewish settlement only on the mountain ridge and in the Jordan Valley, and to providing administrative and settlement autonomy to the local Arab residents in their existing concentrations of settlement. This differentiates Allon's proposal from the other proposals in the demographic dimension. Allon saw a need to separate the populations by means of clear borders, while allocating territories for Jewish settlement in areas in which no local Arab population was settled. While his proposal lacks a future demographic calculation of the growth of the Jewish and Arab population, he apparently understood that natural demographic growth would lead to conflicts over borders. According to Galili and Dayan's proposal, both of them saw Jewish settlement throughout the West Bank as an immediate need, in order to create a settlement reality on the ground and territorial contiguity. The economic aspect in Allon's proposal concerns the need for separation between Israel's territories and the territories of the local residents. Allon argued that there should be a separate economy and separate employment, but with collaborations. In contrast, in Galili and Dayan's proposal it seems that there is an intention to encourage local employment but also a desire to integrate them into employment in the Israeli market, based on the authors' view that employing the locals as cheap labor would benefit the Israeli economy and also improve their quality of life.

An examination of the implications shows that the three Israeli proposals attribute great importance to the issue of security and Jewish settlement in the West Bank territories, with an emphasis on the Jordan Valley and the mountain ridge. The three proposals emphasize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel under Israeli sovereignty and the Jordan River as the eastern border. If these erudite proposals are the product of the

serious thought of such veteran ministers in the government of Israel as Allon, Galili, and Dayan, who saw the strategic and security issue as an essential guideline for the continued existence of the State of Israel and presented them to the Labor Party and Prime Minister Meir based on their best judgement and consideration, then this raises a question: Why did the governments of Israel refrain from officially adopting one, all, or some aspects of the proposals?

After an in-depth examination of the various proposals, I believe that the government of Israel was blinded by the extensive territory of the West Bank that was conquered in the Six Day War, faced constant military tension, and decided not to decide. Postponing a decisive decision on the future of the territories and their Palestinian population met the needs of Israel's governments from 1967 to 1977. The governments that served during this decade faced three wars and preferred to focus on what they *had* and not on what they *had to give up*.[10] Israel's governments were preoccupied by the military tension and they preferred to retain territory and control it militarily rather than any other proposed alternative. In practice, the policy was to unify Jerusalem and to apply Israeli sovereignty there, and to settle the mountain ridge and the Jordan Valley to provide strategic depth and as an agricultural settlement area. The government also began to establish Jewish settlements throughout the West Bank in order to create demographic and military-strategic territorial contiguity. Economically, Israel encouraged local Arab employment and industrial development to improve livelihoods, and also promoted the integration of Arab workers in the Israeli market as cheap labor to nurture the Israeli economy. In practice, the government of Israel selectively implemented aspects of the three Israeli proposals, without adopting them. The postponement of a decision on the future of the territories and their population since 1967 has continued to the present time and passes from one government to the next.

Conclusion

Three proposals by Israeli government ministers on the demographic, military, and economic administration of the West Bank territories were submitted to the government in the decade after the Six Day War, but none of them was fully implemented. A fourth proposal came from the palace of King Hussein of Jordan, who proposed to administer the two banks of the Jordan and their Arab population by means of a federal administration under the auspices of the Kingdom of Jordan. His proposal was rejected outright because the government demanded that decisions be made through negotiations and mutual dialogue between the two countries, and not as a unilateral act by the king. One main reason for the rejection of the king's proposal was that it did not discuss the possibility of peace or negotiations towards peace agreements, and because it stated that the capital of the federation would be Jerusalem, something that Israel saw as impossible. Also, the federation plan gave no expression to the complex local Arab and Jewish demographic reality that had existed for some time in the West Bank and Jerusalem.

But the proposals of Allon, Galili, and Dayan were also not implemented in full. The government chose to adopt only some of the work methods of parts of the plans, according to considerations of time and place. The territory's artificial division according to demography and settlement areas forced the government to make operative decisions for which the sides were not yet ready to tackle politically. The government of Israel saw holding onto the West Bank as a commitment to preserve the security of the country's borders and as a basis for any possible future negotiations. The demographic dimension was and remains the heart of the geopolitical conflict on the ground and yet the Six Day War and its predecessors and successors proved again and again that Israel must hold on to the West Bank for strategic depth.

Settling the territory with Jewish population immediately after the war was a kind of national

mission and vision. The territories of the West Bank and the Jordan Valley expanded the narrow coastal plain, which was all Israel had until the war, and the determination of the border line itself stemmed from a vision of settling the Land of Israel. The essence of the vision was consolidating Jewish settlement in the area of the mountain ridge and the Jordan Valley, creating a demographic reality of Jewish control of the territory, and unifying the Land of Israel as a single unit. The government gave many grants and royalties to the new settlers and ensured the cultivation of agricultural farms along the entire length of the eastern border line in the Jordan Valley. Meanwhile, the government also started to give expression to the demographic change that had begun in the held territories due to the growth of the local population, and attended to its needs in terms of building infrastructure for transportation, education, employment, and agriculture.

Israel's decision-makers from 1967 to 1977 were not ready for far-reaching changes in the form of handing over territories to enemy countries and giving up control of the land, which they saw as giving up on security and at that time was certainly too early to consider. The Allon Plan foresaw what was going to happen in the future, in terms of the natural increase of the population—both Palestinian and Jewish—throughout the West Bank. What was innovative about Yigal Allon's proposal was the demographic separation that would ensure autonomous existence for the Palestinians, and settlement and land control in the Jordan Valley and the mountain ridge for Israel, such that demographic separation would be maintained. In his vision, Allon foresaw what we know became the reality—Jewish settlement alongside Palestinian settlement throughout the West Bank, and a demographic problem that requires decisive and far-reaching decisions.

With respect to the research question—did the governments of Israel during the first decade after the Six Day War formulate a policy on the borders of the country and the population that would be included in it—the answer is that the governments of Israel did not produce any plan to address the demographic dimension, because they were preoccupied by strategic and military matters. In addition, no forward-looking plan was submitted to the government that related to the consequences of the demographic dimension in the West Bank. In practice, the governments of Israel implemented various parts of the proposals, as reality dictated the need. There was no organized action plan for addressing the demographic dimension, and the only principle that guided decision-makers in Israel was creating territorial contiguity of Jewish settlement throughout the West Bank, in order to ensure a border line made of a Jewish "human shield" adjacent to local Arab settlements.

Six decades after the Six Day War, the West Bank and its Palestinian and Jewish populations is still on the political agenda in Israel. While the proposals of Yigal Allon, Israel Galili, Moshe Dayan, and King Hussein belong to the past, various approaches from these proposals were already operating in the first decade after the war, as described. For example, Allon's proposal to separate between the Palestinian and Jewish populations and to create a buffer between the two nations, to allow passage via the Jericho corridor to Jordan, and a separate and independent existence within the West Bank and the Jordan Valley along with encouraging Jewish settlement there. Surveys of the Israeli and Palestinian Authority central bureaus of statistics describe the large-scale population growth since 1967. Looking to the future, by 2050 the forecast is for significant further growth, reaching about five million Palestinians in the West Bank. Some aspects of the proposals from the '70s are also implemented today in some way—for example, the Oslo Accords, the employment of Palestinians in Israel, agricultural

collaborations—and the proposals created a conceptual basis for new plans. In the face of future demographic forecasts and in learning from the lessons of Israel's wars in the past and present, the State of Israel will need to address the burning demographic question of millions of Palestinians throughout the West Bank, and make firm decisions that will ensure its independence as a Jewish and democratic country.

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Notes

1 The British Mandate borderline was determined and agreed over the years in three sectors: the southern, northern, and eastern borders.

2 UNRWA: the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East.

3 Basic Law: Jerusalem the Capital of Israel.

4 William Rogers was the U.S. Secretary of State who came to the region in order to promote dialogue and a peace agreement between Israel and Egypt. Rogers submitted three proposals to the government of Israel though all of them were rejected, due to the atmosphere of war that prevailed in the region and threatened to harm the country's security.

5 Dr. Gunnar Jarring was a Swedish diplomat who was appointed as a mediator on behalf of the UN in the Middle East between Israel and its neighbors following the Six Day War. The purpose of his mission was to reach negotiations for regional peace.

6 Absentee property according to the Absentee Property Law 1950, which states that absentees who have abandoned their lands and moved to an enemy country do not maintain rights to the land.

7 At Labor Party meetings, many discussions were held on the question of how to shape the party's platform prior to the upcoming elections, with an emphasis on addressing the new territories and the local Arab population.

8 The Alignment was a joint list and faction in the Knesset, comprising the Labor Party and Mapam.

9 Decree No. 1 was an IDF proclamation on the application of Israeli security legislation in the held territories.

10 The Six Day War—June 1967; the War of Attrition—March 1969 to August 1970; the Yom Kippur War—October 1973. Meanwhile, the terrorist attacks of the Black September organization occurred at the beginning of the 1970s.

The Palestinian Authority's Settlement Effort According to the Demographic Campaign Theory, and its Expression in Firing Zone 918

Alon Madanes

Independent researcher

The article presents a new theory for analyzing ethno-nationalist settlement from a perspective that has not yet been studied, which I term a "demographic campaign." This refers to a phenomenon of geopolitical strategic settlement that is evidenced by historical case studies. These cases form the basis for a model, which will then be applied to Palestinian settlement in Firing Zone 918, which is situated in Area C in the South Hebron Hills. To establish the theory, I will employ the complex systems model alongside settlement models used by many Israel studies researchers. This theory helps understand how non-violent ethnic and nationalist struggles to shape future borders are waged, and how frontier settlement occurs in disputed areas, along with analyzing the Palestinian Authority's struggle to shape its future borders by settling Area C. The concept of the demographic campaign could create an opening for future researchers to analyze settlement enterprises from a geographical and demographic perspective, but also and primarily, from a systemic and strategic perspective.

Keywords: Campaign, demography, demographic campaign, Palestinian Authority, IDF, Area C, firing zone, illegal construction

Introduction

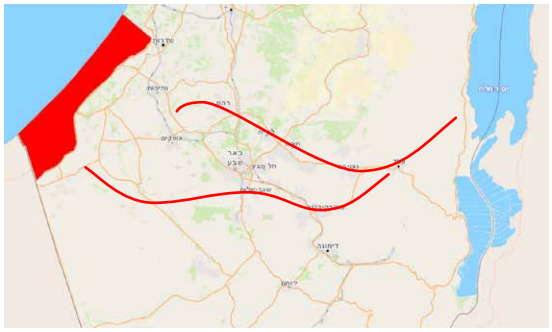
The set of strategic threats that Israel is facing include demographic challenges and the geographical expansion of the Palestinians and Bedouins in the Jordan Valley, South Hebron Hills, and northern Negev regions. It seems that these complex challenges are not adequately addressed by the country's leaders, who are preoccupied, to some extent justifiably, with military, political, economic, and social challenges that pose more imminent and tangible threats at this time.

In June 1967, Israel captured the West Bank, but refrained from annexing it and maintained the status of the region as a conquered territory under military administration. In the framework of the Oslo Accords (Oslo II, which determined the administration of the West Bank, was signed in Washington on September 28, 1995), the West Bank was divided into three

types of territories: Area A, in which security and civilian responsibility was transferred to the Palestinians; Area B, in which only civilian control was transferred to the Palestinian Authority; and Area C, in which security and civilian control remained in the hands of Israel. Area C included blocs of Israeli settlement and areas of strategic and military importance, including the Jordan Valley and the desert frontier region.

During the 30 years that have passed since the signing of the Oslo Accords, the map of settlement in the West Bank has changed beyond recognition. Bedouin and Palestinian expansion have created an almost continuous "settlement belt" between the Gaza Strip and the Jordan River, via the South Hebron Hills and the unrecognized Bedouin villages in the northern Negev (Bystrov and Soffer 2010).

Map 1. Demarcation of contiguous areas of Palestinian and Bedouin settlement in the southern Jordan Valley and northern Negev, towards the Gaza Strip



Source: The government website Govmap

This development could drive an ethnic wedge between southern and central Israel, which could deteriorate into a military wedge; that is, the failed attempt to detach the Negev from the Jewish state in 1948, could be achieved in the future through demography. Firing Zone 918 in the South Hebron Hills is one of the last links needed to complete a "chain of ethnic detachment."

This article focuses on three issues. The first is a proposed theoretical model for describing the phenomenon that we will call a **demographic campaign**. This is explained and then demonstrated deductively through historical case studies. The second issue focuses on examining Palestinian settlement in Firing Zone 918 via the model of the demographic campaign and explaining why this settlement is revolutionary and not evolutionary. The third issue analyzes the unique characteristics of the Palestinian demographic campaign as a whole, via inductive analysis of the settlement in Firing Zone 918.

Conceptual framework

The theory of the demographic campaign is based mainly on three concepts: campaign, demography, and a third concept that is a hybridization of the first two, which is one of the innovations and contributions of this study—the demographic campaign. The study also relies on geographical models that sketch out the development of settlement in the area, as well as the theory of complex systems.

Campaign

A campaign contains several characteristics that distinguish it from the strategic level above it and from the tactical level below it. We can identify five main elements that appear in most campaigns: First, the element of conflict or competition; second, the campaign level aims to mediate between abstract strategy and mechanical tactics, which requires integrativeness (Saint 1990); third, the campaign is composed of several interrelated components that create something holistic together; fourth, despite its holistic nature, it forms only one component of something bigger than it (Naveh 2001), for example a campaign as a component of a war on one front, or a diplomatic, economic, or cognitive campaign. The role of the campaign is defined by the strategic level through defining a strategic objective and national political objectives (FM 100-5 Operations 1993). The fifth component: the campaign is defined as an art because it demands great creativity and non-linear thinking, as part of recognizing the

factor of randomness and the chaotic dimension that stems from the encounter with adversarial systems (Franz 1983). The theory of complex systems (Razi and Yehezkeally 2006) provides explanations about the development of seemingly anomalous phenomena that are byproducts of complex systems, due to the absence of linear development. With the help of this theory we can explain certain elements of the campaign, which is also a complex system.

Demography

Demography involves the study of population, including its distribution and the changes that occur in it over time, as well as the analysis of different populations in territorial contexts. Politics is known to have great influence on demographic changes in several ways. First, politics influences the production of demographic information and biases it in its favor—for example the dispute surrounding the number of Palestinians living between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea (Zimmerman et al. 2006). Another substantive influence is expressed in natalist policy (Barrett 1995), whose purpose is to encourage or to suppress childbirth—for example Chinese childbirth policy (Friedman 2010). Another substantive aspect, which the study also focuses on, is expressed in a policy that encourages migration.

Demographic campaign

The term demographic campaign is an oxymoron. On the one hand, a campaign is the product of comprehensive planning and mainly deals with the relations between man and man, for example rivalry between groups (Naveh 2001). On the other hand, demography follows unplanned natural patterns and deals with the relations between man and place (geography)—childbirth with respect to territory (Khamaisi 2011). However, in this paradox lies the importance of the concept, which seeks to describe a phenomenon that seems to be influenced by the laws of nature, but national interests channel it towards their needs.

The process of shaping countries and borders in the service of nations and rulers has taken various shapes throughout history. For example, a strategy of "divide and conquer," which originated in ancient times, or population transfers such as the Indian-Pakistani population transfer. But the term demographic campaign aims to describe a completely different settlement strategy.

The Palestinians have often addressed the demographic aspects of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Many believed and still believe that its resolution will be determined by demography. Consequently, granting the right of return to the 1948 refugees is a basic Palestinian demand in all negotiations, not only out of considerations of justice and conscience but also as a means of countering Zionism and cancelling the achievements of the demographic revolution that it brought about through the waves of Jewish immigration (Zilbershats and Goren-Amitai 2010).

The Palestinian leadership recognized the need to formulate a "demographic policy" as a counterweight to the Israeli policy, which it called "settler colonialism." The PLO leadership maintained that demography would support the advancement of Palestinian interests and serve as a bargaining chip. Yasser Arafat was quoted as saying "we know the importance of the demographic factor as one of our weapons," and even called the Palestinian woman "a biological bomb threatening to blow up Israel" (Steinberg 1995).

But the collapse of the Soviet Union and the arrival in Israel of about a million new immigrants in the 1990s, were seen by the PLO as a fatal blow to the Palestinian demographic effort, which was set back a generation in one fell swoop (Galili and Bronfman 2013). At this point of crisis, land became of crucial importance for the Palestinians, who changed their focus from a passive demographic effort based on childbirth to an active demographic effort that included taking over land. The element of land in the Palestinian campaign, which is called

"steadfastness and clinging to the land," is an important part of the Palestinian struggle to shape their future state.

We can deduce that we are facing a national effort to shape the borders of a state in the making. This effort is not new, is not a Palestinian invention, and so far has not been seen as a campaign or as a classic demographic policy. This is the place to try to define it as a demographic campaign.

A demographic campaign is a **geopolitical effort** that seeks to **shape future borders** and to shape the territory by driving a population wedge within contiguous sovereign territory and disrupting the exercise of this sovereignty in areas of territorial dispute between different national groups through a strategy of settlement that aims to take over territories without the use of armed force, sovereign legislation, or political agreements. Consequently, the demographic campaign is waged in a cunning, creative, secret, and undeclared manner,[1] while taking the initiative in the conflict, including taking unilateral action on the ground.

This definition will be tested below, but first it is important to understand the development of Arab settlement in the Land of Israel as a basis for analyzing the case study of Firing Zone 918.

The Development of Palestinian Settlement

Studying the characteristics of traditional Palestinian settlement in the Land of Israel and examining the geographical and demographic prism will help with understanding the settlement in Firing Zone 918. Is it a geographical expression of natural growth or an unconventional development that is difficult to explain using existing geographical models, but can be explained using the demographic campaign theory?

Demography has had a great impact on the development of the Arab village. The expanding clans led to crowding and physical expansion. Starting in the middle of the nineteenth century, there was a constant trend of growth among the Arab population in the Land of Israel, which stemmed in part from immigration (Marom 2008, 102-103), including among the Hauranis, the Circassians, and the Mughrabis.

Certain regulations also hastened the growth and development of the villages. For example, an Ottoman law that required the establishment of a mosque in each village created an economic burden and increased the desirability of merging clan complexes into a single village. Some of the current names of villages bear witness to these mergers. For example, the village of Tarqumiyah evolved from "Tricomia," which means three villages, while the village Al Fandaqumiyah developed from "Pentakomia," which means five villages (Grossman 1994). Security considerations also promoted population density and the concentration of settlement (Bar-Gal and Soffer 1976).

As the population grew, the need arose to create new living spaces and additional sources of livelihood and food, hence the need also arose to cultivate areas distant from the village (Ben-Artzi 1988). This need brought about the development of "villagettes"—small villages that were "daughter villages."

The daughter villages had many names such as *khirba* (Arabic for ruined or abandoned place) as they were established on the ruins of ancient settlements; the farms were called "mizraot" (מזרעות) from the root z-r-ayin meaning seed; and "izbot" (תוזבע) from the root meaning leave or evacuate, because they were abandoned for periods of time during the year. As long as there were no conflicts over land, the "izbot" remained seasonal. Over time, the "mother villages" spread until they swallowed up parts of the daughter villages, while more distant daughter villages developed as independent villages. This signaled a significant change in the settlement layout (Biger and Grossman 1992).

Another kind of temporary settlement that was characteristic of the Judea region is called *marah* (Arabic for "to rest"). The marah was used

by shepherds as a rest stop and also included sheep pens and proximity to water sources. In the desert frontier region, due to the dry climate, the marahs usually comprised caves and tents. In Samaria this type of settlement was called *nazla* from the root n-z-l, which hints at a descent from the hills to the lowlands. In the Sharon region, the pastures of nearby villages were called ע׳אבות (Marom 2008). It seems that the large number of terms stemmed not only from differences between dialects but also from substantive differences in their purpose.

Throughout history, physical and climatic difficulties kept the South Hebron Hills as an area sparsely populated by cave dwellers, alongside very limited above-ground construction. The towns of Yatta, As Samu', and Ad-Dhahiriya, which delineated the boundary of settlement in the South Hebron Hills, were also cave settlements with a few huts until about 70 years ago. Even in the modern era, the phenomenon of cave-dwellers continued to flourish alongside the marahs, and until the end of the 1990s, there was almost no permanent above-ground construction in the desert frontier region. Research from about 40 years ago estimated the amount of settlement in the Hebron district caves as around 120 families—a figure that was characterized by constant regression (Havakook 1985).

Arab seasonal settlement, which can be compared to a work trip, did not require the development of infrastructure such as electricity, water, schools, and mosques. Furthermore, the shepherds used to leave their families behind at the mother villages, and only those who were needed for shepherding moved to the caves (Havakook 1985).

During the past three decades, many deviations from the traditional settlement model can be identified in the expansion of Palestinian settlement in the South Hebron Hills, including expansion towards arid areas; a transition to irrigated agriculture; increasing political involvement in the region and more. All of these and more make one wonder whether the "invisible hand" has been replaced by one that is pulling the strings.

Déjà vu?

Before examining Palestinian settlement in Firing Zone 918 by means of the demographic campaign theory, this theory is demonstrated deductively using two case studies—Tower and Stockade and the Alon Plan—, which have a broad common denominator with Palestinian settlement in the topic of the study, based on five dominant components: **the actors** —Israelis and Palestinians; **the location** —the Land of Israel; **the goal** —taking over territories as part of shaping future state borders; **the method** —settlement; **characteristics and principles** —based on Clausewitz's famous expression that the demographic campaign is the continuation of war by other means.

All three cases refer to an organized strategy, even if it is not officially declared. All three cases involve a zero-sum game between Israel and the Palestinians. In all three cases, the sides took extra care while hiding their true intentions, in order not to provoke the anger of their adversaries and other international actors. In all three cases new areas of settlement were chosen in order to increase living spaces, and all three involve an ethnic nationalist struggle.

The similarities mentioned make Tower and Stockade and the Alon Plan suitable case studies for the issue at hand. These campaigns, which ended long ago, could indicate the future strategic consequences of Palestinian settlement in Area C.

Tower and Stockade 1936-1939

The Tower and Stockade period is an important chapter in the history of the protracted campaign over the Land of Israel that has taken place between the Jews and the Arabs, which has been characterized by many "settlement conquests." The Tower and Stockade plan had several strategic objectives. First, strengthening the "N of settlement"[2] in the sense of strengthening a settlement and expanding it in order to broaden

the chain of settlements and strengthen the Jewish presence in the connecting corridors (Orren 1987); second, conquering new living spaces that would enable absorption of future Jewish immigration and the exercise of property rights in the lands under Jewish ownership; and third, shaping the borders of the state-in-the-making by taking over new areas while the Peel Commission (1936) was operating in the background and considering the partition of the country, and there was a need to hurry and create demographic facts on the ground.

Along with the settlement operation in 1946 in which 11 new settlements were established in the Negev in response to the Morrison–Grady Plan, it can be said that Tower and Stockade contributed more than any other military effort to the conquest of the Land of Israel.

Judging by the results, there is no doubt that this strategy faithfully served the Zionist enterprise, bringing about a three-year settlement boom against all the odds, in which the weaker side on paper initiated a campaign and expanded Jewish settlement in an unprecedented manner. Along with the settlement operation in 1946 in which 11 new settlements were established in the Negev in response to the Morrison–Grady Plan, it can be said that Tower and Stockade contributed more than any other military effort to the conquest of the Land of Israel. The official proof of the success of this strategy came on November 29, 1947, when the UN adopted the partition plan according to which most of the areas of the "settlement conquest" were included within the territory of the Jewish state.

Thus, Tower and Stockade constitutes a historic example of waging a successful settlement strategy that led to bigger achievements than the Jewish community could have achieved using the military means at its disposal at that time, and the series of local settlement actions shaped international decisions on borders despite its military and political inferiority.

The Alon Plan

Yigal Alon frequently discussed the idea of conquest through settlement (Alon 1968). After the Six Day War, Alon served as chairman of the ministerial committees on Jerusalem and Hebron and as chairman of the settlement committee, and thus was very involved in settlement. After the end of the war, Alon devised a plan for shaping new borders for the State of Israel known as the Alon Plan. The plan was never officially adopted by Israel's governments but was implemented by them, at least partially, by settling the Jordan Valley (Arieli 2013).

In Alon's assessment, retaining the conquered territories in their entirety would lead to continued hostilities between Israel and the Arabs. On the other hand, he was concerned that a withdrawal to the 1949 lines would also encourage continued Arab aggression (indeed, withdrawals for the purpose of conciliation were more than once interpreted as weakness, for example the IDF's withdrawal from the security zone in Lebanon). Alon concluded that it was necessary to forge a middle path and shape optimal borders to fortify Israel's security and its future (Gelber 2018).

Alon wove the essence of his conception into his political and settlement plan, which was based on two main principles: secure borders and a minimal Palestinian population within them. These principles aimed to maintain Israel as a Jewish and democratic state thanks to a Jewish majority, while refraining from harming the rights of the Arab minority (Gilead 1980).

The essence of the plan that related to the West Bank included five main principles (Alon 1980): the Jordan River as Israel's eastern border; creating strategic depth by annexing a 10-25 kilometer wide strip and opening corridors to Jerusalem, including minimal annexation of Palestinians; annexing parts of the Hebron Hills and the Judean desert; establishing outposts

in the territories that were to be annexed; and enlisting the international community, including Arab countries and the Palestinians, in the proposed solution, meaning pushing for peace negotiations while carrying out unilateral Israeli actions, out of a belief that the potential opponents would feel that time and recalcitrance were working against them.

Yigal Alon noticed that the natural drainage divide in the Judean Mountains and Samaria is a kind of settlement divide for the Palestinians: 90% of the population of the West Bank lived west of the line, towards the lowlands and the coastal plain, areas with considerable precipitation. East of the line the population was sparse. Consequently, in a cost-benefit calculation, annexation of the Jordan Valley would add much territory to the state and serve as an eastern security strip while the demographic consequences of annexing it seemed marginal, amounting to the annexation of about 15,000 Palestinians (Cohen 1973).

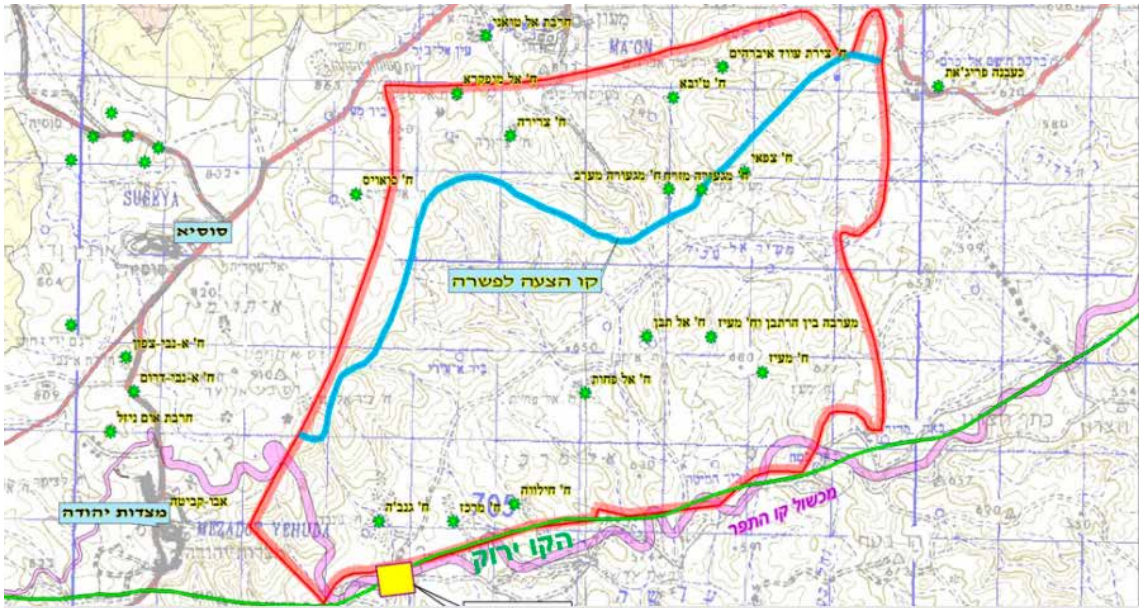
Alon believed that only the work of the plow would shape the borders of the country and indeed, within a decade, 16 new settlements were established just within the area of the Jordan Valley, and by the time of Alon's death in 1980, six more settlements had been established. Today there are 28 Israeli settlements in the Jordan Valley (in the part conquered in 1967). In addition, the Alon Road was cleared, physically and conceptually delineating the plan's boundaries in the Jordan Valley region.[3]

15 out of the 28 settlements began as Nahal settlements, meaning that the army, as emissary and agent of the political leadership, was active in implementing the plan. Later the kibbutz movements, Beitar, and other civilian bodies helped civilianize the settlements. Many government ministries, including the Ministries of Energy, Construction and Housing, Transport, and others helped implement the plan with the investment of billions of shekels that included paving hundreds of kilometers of roads and laying infrastructure.

Alon aspired to shape the borders through a settlement strategy that was expressed in the establishment of settlements that aimed to create facts on the ground.

The elements of the demographic campaign are evident in the Alon Plan and in the way it was implemented: in the background was the conflict over land between Israel and the Arabs and its main purpose was to reshape Israel's borders. While Israel conquered the territories, Yigal Alon maintained that conquest is a temporary situation and permanent borders should not be shaped by the force of arms. Yet prior to international intervention and entering peace negotiations, Alon aspired to shape the borders through legislation and annexation—an ambition that went unfulfilled. Consequently, the basis of defining the demographic campaign as "not by force of arms, not by virtue of legislation, and not by virtue of international agreements" applies. Instead, Alon aspired to shape the borders through a settlement strategy that was expressed in the establishment of settlements that aimed to create facts on the ground. It can be claimed that the plan, at least partially, was successfully implemented without causing much of an uproar and without intensifying the internal debate surrounding construction in the territories. The reason probably lies in the fact that the plan did not receive official Israeli approval, thus it was "covert and undeclared" according to the definition of the demographic campaign. The elements of creativity, cunning, and initiative in the definition of the demographic campaign are inherent in the method of military settlements that were later civilianized. This process streamlined the physical development of settlements and the public psychological process of getting used to the idea of settlement in this area of land, while weakening political and diplomatic opposition, as it was outsourced

Map 2. Firing Zone 918



Source: Civil Administration presentation at Central Command, March 7, 2017.

to the IDF, which was at the heart of the Israeli consensus then as now (Gelber 2018).

New Palestinian Settlement in Firing Zone 918

The IDF uses Firing Zone 918 for training, and it has been defined by law as a closed military area since 1980. This means that any entry and activity inside it requires the army's approval (Order Regarding Security Instructions, 2009). However, today there are 14 points of Palestinian settlement inside the area.

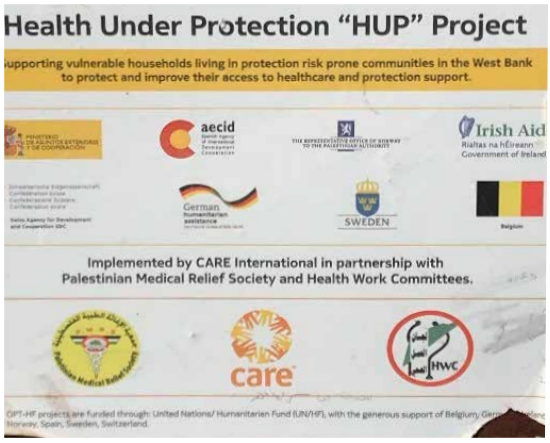
It is a 25-square-kilometer polygon that stretches from the southeastern slopes of the Hebron Hills to the Arad Valley and the Negev. It has a desert climate, and the average annual precipitation is below 200 mm (Israel Meteorological Service n.d.). The Palestinians call the area Masafer Yatta.

Even after the signing of the Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement on the West Bank and Gaza Strip in 1995, Israel made sure to maintain its control of Firing Zone 918 as Area C. But the towns of Yatta, As Samu', and Ad-Dhahiriya became Area A under full Palestinian control, and as a result, the Palestinian Authority unofficially and covertly became a dominant governmental body in the region, in violation of the agreements with Israel. This claim is supported by a solid evidentiary basis that is partly backed by Palestinian sources, and the IDF is also aware of the problem. Below are several examples collected during field research in Firing Zone 918 and in IDF archives.

At **Khirbet al-Fakheit**, which is in the center of the area, no above-ground structures were seen until the middle of the 1990s. The first above-ground structure was identified in a photographic survey in 1999, while 39 structures were revealed in a photographic survey in 2018. This is a steep rise in the amount of illegal construction.

The number of Palestinians staying at the khirba during a tour conducted as part of the study totaled 15—a negligible number compared to the number of structures there, and given that there is a school located there. The Palestinians staying at the khirba were residents of Yatta, according to their testimony and their documents (see below, personal interview, February 1, 2019). According to them, the khirba is only a source of livelihood for them.

The water cisterns have been replaced by water towers, which are connected to plumbing



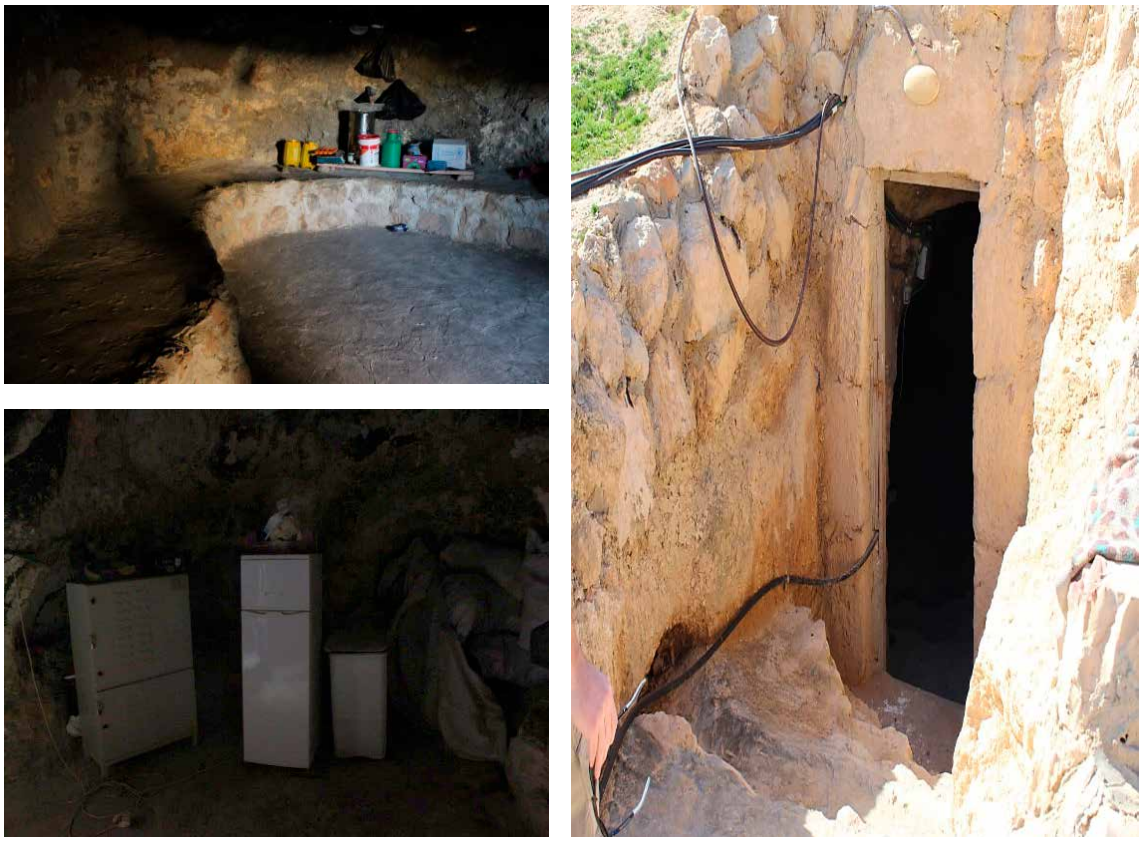
Picture 1: top right – the new medical clinic building at Khirbet al-Fakheit. Photo credit: the author, February 1, 2019
Picture 2: top left – European Union donor sign on the door of the medical clinic. Photo credit: the author, February 1, 2019
Picture 3: bottom left – donor sign of CARE and other European organizations. Photo credit: the author, February 1, 2019
Picture 4: bottom right – the old medical clinic at Khirbet al-Fakheit as documented in 2010. Photo credit: OCHA.

and to systems for filtering and pressurizing water. A large number of solar systems provide electricity to the buildings, to a tent and to a livestock pen. Satellite dishes are also widely distributed at the khirba. Dirt roads to the khirba have been cleared and leveled, their quality and maintenance allowing every kind of vehicle to drive on them, and drainage pipes have been laid underneath them, allowing water to flow through ravine channels in the winter without blocking roads.

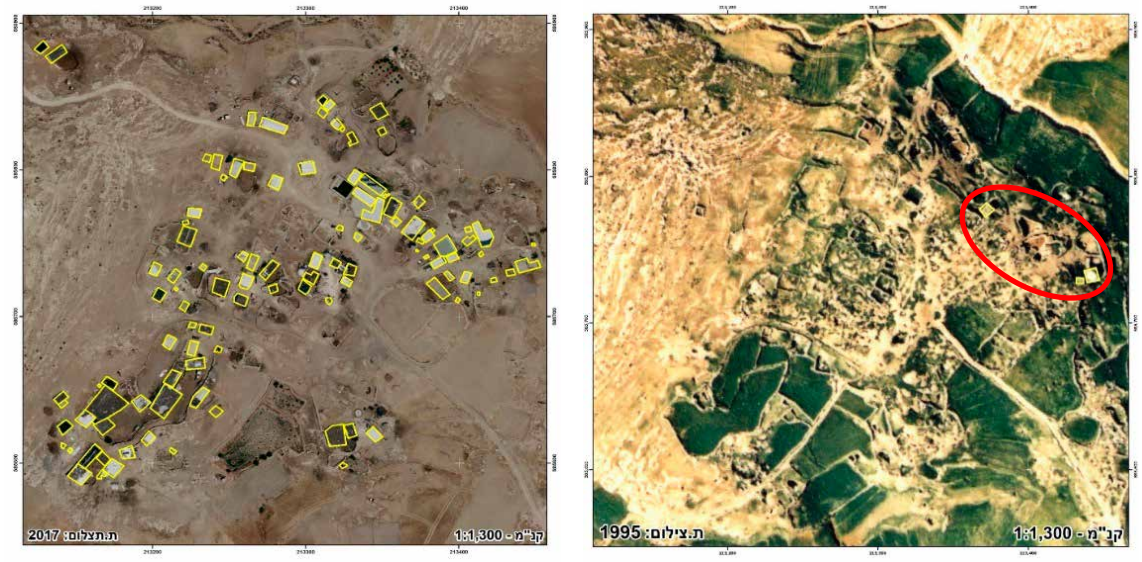
In a 2013 report by OCHA (the UN Office for Coordinating Humanitarian Affairs in the region) there is a picture of a white tent. The writing underneath it states that it is the medical clinic of Khirbet al-Fakheit, and on its side it states that the picture was taken by the organization in April 2010 (OCHA 2013). But in 2015 a stone building used as a medical clinic was established in the khirba through foreign donations. The school and the medical clinic seem abandoned, without basic equipment such as books or medical supplies, which would indicate their proper functioning. Olives are grown at the khirba—new agriculture that didn't exist in the region in the past, as attested by aerial photos.

At **Khirbet al-Markaz** one notices ancient caves that have been converted into seasonal dwellings and many archeological findings that are scattered in the area. A number of caves are still used as dwellings and enclosures for flocks. In recent years these have been connected to electricity produced using solar panels that look like modern foreign import among the antiquities.

As of February 2019, a single six-member family lived at the khirba—parents in their 30s and their children, as attested by the father



Picture 5: right – ancient cave that was connected to electricity at Khirbet al-Markaz
Picture 6: left top – cave dwelling at Khirbet al-Markaz
Picture 7: left bottom – old beside new, electrical appliances inside the cave
Photo credit: the author, February 2, 2019



Picture 8: right – deciphering a 1995 aerial photo of Khirbet Jinba, three structures identified (marked in yellow and circled in red)
Picture 9: left – deciphering a 2017 aerial photo of the khirba, dozens of structures identified

Picture 10: The school at Khirbet Jinba. A sign on the wall of the building states that this project from 2011 was established by the Palestinian Ministry of Education with the help of donations from Islamic associations from the United States and from the West Bank.
Photo credit: Supervision unit of the civilian administration, January 24, 2018

Picture 11: Illegal construction on both sides of the green line. In an aerial photo of Khirbet al-Hilweh, to which the Green Line was added, structures south of the line can be seen (photographed on January 19, 2019).

of the family (see below, personal interview, February 2, 2019). According to the father, his family is poor and raises livestock and produces various products from it. This is in total contrast with the amount of new construction at the khirba and the amount of infrastructure laid there in recent years. In a photographic survey conducted in 1999, no above-ground structures were identified in the area, but a photographic survey in 2019 revealed 42 structures in the area.

Khirbet Jinba is the largest settlement in Firing Zone 918. A comparison of the aerial photos taken over the years shows that more than 100 structures have been built at the khirba in less than 20 years, which can house hundreds of people and thousands of sheep and goats. The structures and the infrastructure at the khirba have similar characteristics to those identified at the two khirbas surveyed above. Only about 15 Palestinians were found there during the study, and they too were registered as and stated that they were residents of Yatta.

Agricultural lands near the khirba are cultivated and irrigated, leading to large-scale consumption of two basic resources: land and water. In 2011, a school was established at Jinba

Picture 12: right – the school at Khirbet al-Majaz
Picture 13: top left – sign recognizing the Palestinian Authority's contribution to the establishment of the school
Picture 14: bottom left – recognition of the European Union's contribution to its establishment
Photo credit: the author, January 26, 2019

too, with the help of the Palestinian Authority and other organizations, as attested by the sign hung on the front of the building (see Picture 10).

Khirbet al-Hilweh touches the Green Line, and there too the same developmental characteristics as at the other khirbas mentioned can be found. But at this khirba, the settlement development has already crossed south of the Green Line. According to the Palestinians present there, the European Union funded the construction and the infrastructure in return for them being willing to live there. European Union stickers on the windows of the buildings and other infrastructure in the area also indicate the funding sources. In a photographic survey conducted in 1999, no above-ground structures were seen at Hilweh, while a photographic survey in 2018 revealed 46 structures and many trees planted at the khirba.

Khirbet a-Taban – when passing nearby the khirba, the arid desert landscape is replaced by flourishing green, symbolizing an abundance of water. Dozens of dunams of olive trees have been planted near the khirba in recent years. This is a new phenomenon in the desert frontier region, as we can learn from history and from IDF aerial photos from 1999-2018. Crops were seen in many of the khirbas in the firing zone.

At **Khirbet al-Majaz** we again encounter the involvement of the Palestinian Authority and the European Union in funding projects, such as the school built in 2014.

Maintenance of roadways – On January 31, 2019, as part of the Civil Administration's enforcement operations, roadways illegally cleared in Firing Zone 918 were blocked. The following day, as part of a field tour that was carried out, it was found that all of the blockades had been broken through. The achievements of IDF activity that had been planned for several weeks and in which considerable resources had been enlisted, were erased within a day. The fact that the activity was kept secret and its implementation required the use of heavy engineering equipment, indicates a quick and effective response by those who broke through the blockades, in an attempt to enable daily life in the firing zone.

Law and enforcement

During the past 25 years, Firing Zone 918 has become a focal point of legal wrangling at

the High Court of Justice (HCJ) between the Palestinians and the IDF. As stated above, this area was declared a firing zone in 1980 and was chosen for this purpose given the fact that there were no permanent settlements there. This is supported by the archive of the Civil Administration's supervision unit and was presented to the HCJ by representatives of the administration and in the affidavit by Professor Moshe Sharon, who, in his role as advisor for Arab affairs in the Office of the Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories, conducted comprehensive tours of the area before the declaration (HCJ 413/13 and 1039/13, 2018.

In 1985, the Civil Administration and the region's *mukhtars* (Arab village chiefs) came to an understanding that twice a year for one month, an entry permit to the area would be provided for the purpose of pasturing, on the condition of a prohibition against staying in the area overnight. This procedure was generally respected, until in 1994 the Palestinians decided to withdraw from the understanding. From 1983 to 2000, dozens of enforcement actions were taken in the area against trespassing, which included evicting encampments, seizing trespassing vehicles, and expelling or seizing flocks (HCJ 413/13 and 1039/13, 2018).

In 1997 the Palestinians submitted three petitions to the HCJ against the eviction: 6754/97, 6798/97 and 2356/97. The HCJ rejected the petitions and instructed the sides to readopt the 1985 pasturing and cultivation agreement. In light of the HCJ's decision, forced eviction of the area began in 1999, and by the end of February 2000, the eviction of several khirbas was achieved and the area was cleared of construction and infrastructure violations.

In March 2000, the Palestinians again petitioned the HCJ (517/00). Unlike the previous time, the HCJ issued an interim order to freeze the situation until the petition could be clarified. Consequently, the Civil Administration was forced to freeze enforcement actions including eviction and demolition, while the Palestinians were required to refrain from entering without coordination, and, a fortiori, to refrain from construction in the area. After the publication of the order, dozens of families invaded the firing zone. The supervision unit began an eviction proceeding that was blocked due to another petition to the HCJ (1199/00), which led to another interim order in the spirit of the previous order. In the years afterwards, the Palestinians erected hundreds of structures with the help of the Palestinian Authority and international bodies, while exploiting the interim orders to protect them from enforcement.

During the past 25 years, Firing Zone 918 has become a focal point of legal wrangling at the High Court of Justice (HCJ) between the Palestinians and the IDF. As stated above, this area was declared a firing zone in 1980 and was chosen for this purpose given the fact that there were no permanent settlements there.

From 2004 to 2006 the supervision unit tried to conduct limited enforcement to demolish illegal construction, but these attempts were thwarted via the submission of additional petitions (HCJ 805/05 and 5183/05). In 2002, by recommendation of the HCJ and with the agreement of the sides, a mediation process began, during which several compromise proposals were raised, all of which were rejected by the Palestinians. In retrospect, their opposition to compromise turned out to be right from their perspective, as in the following years hundreds of structures and other infrastructure were built, as described.

In 2012 the HCJ decided to dismiss the petitions and to give the petitioners a three-month extension to submit a new petition. And indeed, in January 2013, the Palestinians submitted two new petitions (413/13 and 1039/13) following which the HCJ issued a new interim order, and construction in the region continued.

In light of the HCJ's proposal and with the sides' agreement, another mediation

process took place in 2014-2015, headed by retired justice Yitzhak Zamir. In the meantime, the construction in the area continued, and numerous public structures were erected. According to the signs on them, at least some of them were erected during the years 2014-2015, during the mediation process which prohibited this.

This population is of low socioeconomic status even among the Palestinians. Poverty, alongside the wealth of real estate projects, creates a paradox, that can only be explained via significant economic involvement by wealthy external bodies.

In 2016 the mediation reached an impasse, and the supervision unit started to demolish illegal structures in the firing zone. In response, the Palestinians petitioned the HCJ (857/16) requesting an interim order to stop the demolitions. Such an order was indeed issued, and the Palestinians continued to set up infrastructure and numerous structures. This legal saga, only samples of which have been presented, still continues today. Aside from illegal entry into an IDF firing zone, there is another criminal offense, which is damaging archeological sites. As early as 1944 during the British Mandate, Khirbet Jinba and Khirbet al-Markaz were legally recognized as archeological sites. This means that these khirbas cannot be used for residence or agriculture. Both the Jordanian Antiquities Law and the order regarding the Antiquities Law (Judea and Samaria) include these prohibitions. The archeological sites in the firing zone are currently suffering serious damage and neglect, while the relevant laws are being trampled.

The Anomalies of Settlement in Firing Zone 918

An analysis of the findings in the area reveals 15 anomalies regarding the characteristics of the new Palestinian settlement, that are difficult to explain using normal geographical and demographic models.

Traditional versus modern—As a rule, attributing the changes that traditional settlement has undergone to modernization is reasonable, but while most of the new structures stand abandoned, the caves are still used as living spaces. Moreover, most of the structures lack basic furniture and sanitary infrastructure, as do the public buildings, such as the schools without books. Has the process of real estate modernization omitted interior design and equipment for the buildings?

Supply and demand—It should have been expected that the level of construction would correspond with the natural increase of the population. These variables usually correlate closely, as new construction aims to serve new populations, and the latter is supposed to fund this construction. In Firing Zone 918, the amount of construction, which grew by thousands of percent during the past 20 years, is dozens of times higher than the rate of natural increase, which is estimated at about 65% during this time period (PCBS 2018).

Low socioeconomic status versus construction boom—The population of Firing Zone 918 is considered poor and barely makes a living from manual labor. This is attested by studies as well as by the region's residents. This population is of low socioeconomic status even among the Palestinians. Poverty, alongside the wealth of real estate projects, creates a paradox, that can only be explained via significant economic involvement by wealthy external bodies.

Permanent construction for temporary dwelling—One of the reasons that for hundreds of years no permanent settlement developed in the region is that the desert frontier is also a military frontier. In addition, the climatic conditions in the desert only enabled pasturing during limited periods of the year. Consequently, economic investment in real estate in the region was not only unaffordable, but was also not worthwhile.

Picture 15: neglected antiquities at Khirbet al-Markaz
Photo credit: the author, February 2, 2019

Water consumption compared to what the region provides—Life in the region was made even less attractive given the low average precipitation during the past 20 years and the northward motion of the desert line, but the amounts of construction and agriculture has actually increased sharply, through the construction of infrastructure for supplying water, mainly from external sources. It is difficult to believe in the ability of peasants and shepherds in Firing Zone 918 to plan, fund, and operate an infrastructure operation on this scale. Moreover, the Water Authority and Mekorot would not supply water to illegal settlements in the firing zone. During the last two years, the Water Authority and the supervision unit conducted raids in Firing Zone 918 and dismantled illegal water infrastructure, which included pipes dozens of kilometers long for supplying stolen water to the region.

Field crops in the desert are not culturally or economically characteristic of the region's residents, whose main livelihood for generations has been based on sheep and goats. In recent years, not only has there been an increase in field crops, but they are also based mainly on irrigated agriculture, which is not characteristic of desert regions.

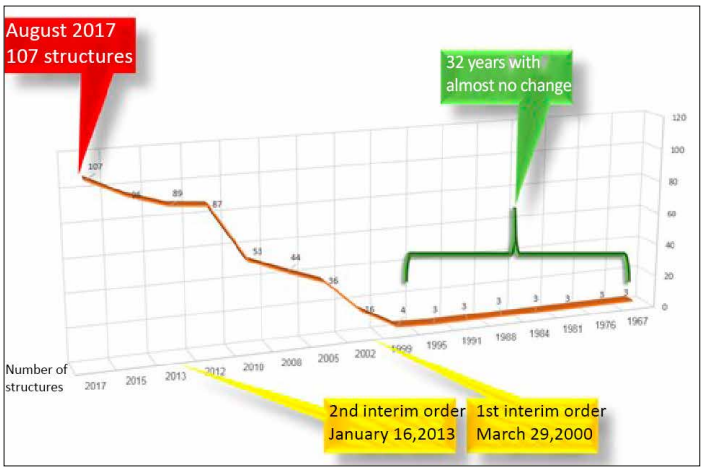
A society without seniors—As a rule, there are two situations in which there are no seniors in a settlement. The first is in pioneering settlements such as Nahal settlements. The second is temporary settlement for work purposes, for example the oil cities in the arctic circle. In the communities in Firing Zone 918 there are almost no seniors to be seen. Out of about 100 Palestinians observed in the khirbas surveyed, the age of the oldest person approached 40. Whether pioneering settlement or settlement for work purposes, the two possibilities contradict the Palestinians' claim to the HCJ that this is permanent settlement that has existed for generations.

The enforcement paradox—"But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and the more they spread abroad" (Exodus 1:12). In Firing Zone 918 the construction spreads in inverse proportion to the authorities' effort to curb it. It seems that legal involvement is identified as an accelerating factor and not as one that inhibits illegal construction.

Legal costs—The petitions to the HCJ and their management over the course of years, the production of affidavits and the management of mediation proceedings—all of these involve high costs that could be burdensome for the average person, all the more so for a poor desert dwellers.

The urbanization trend has also affected Arab society (Khamaisi 2000). In the South Hebron Hills we can see how Yatta developed from a small village into a large urban area in Firing Zone 918. It seems as if there is an opposite trend here of leaving the city for

Figure 1. Jump in construction in Khirbet Jinba in accordance with HCJ interim orders



Source: Supervision Unit of the Civil Administration, 2018

It is difficult to explain the interest and willingness of the international community to invest considerable sums in Firing Zone 918, unless we understand the motives of this philanthropy as political involvement with the purpose of helping shape the region for the benefit of the Palestinians

the desert, but this is just the way it seems, as most of those present in the area actually attest that they are residents of Yatta and have homes in that town. This is a relatively "weak" anomaly and explanations and examples of opposite trends in the world can be provided, but it joins the other strange characteristics of these settlements.

Disproportionate foreign contributions—It is difficult to explain the interest and willingness of the international community to invest considerable sums in Firing Zone 918, unless we understand the motives of this philanthropy as political involvement with the purpose of helping shape the region for the benefit of the Palestinians and against Israel and the occupation. It's important to note that European governments see Israeli presence as an expression of colonialism, which they bear as their original sin and thus are motivated by anti-colonialist conceptions that overshadow objective consideration. This is a region lacking important historical or holy sites and natural resources. However, in recent years, the firing zone has become a focal point for European philanthropy estimated in the tens of millions, which is considered quite generous compared to the limited population that lives in the region.

Ghost buildings—Most of the buildings built in the area stand empty, as there are more buildings than people, let alone families, living in the region.

The innovation of public buildings—Until about a decade ago, there were no public buildings in the region, given the fact that residence in the area was for short periods of time during the year—which made the investment unnecessary. In addition, such investment was not within the means of the shepherds and peasants, most of whose money was used for basic existential needs (Havakook 1985). Moreover, the Israeli authorities refrained from building in the firing zone, while the local Palestinian municipalities such as Yatta and As Samu' preferred to invest their money within their areas and not in the desert frontier region.

Deviation from the Green Line—Even if the Palestinians' claims regarding their links to Firing Zone 918 are accepted, this cannot explain how the European-funded construction has crossed the Green Line, especially in cases where the issue was brought before the HCJ, which prevented enforcement.

Construction in the firing zone—As stated above, the law prohibits unauthorized entry into the firing zone, a fortiori, living and building in it. In the past the law was fully enforced, but today the HCJ often prevents enforcement of this state law in many parts of Area C.

Findings

This study has presented three case studies of settlement enterprises in the Land of Israel that are deeply related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and are maybe even at the core of it. The first two, Tower and Stockade and the Alon Plan, provide a deeper perspective on the

phenomenon of the demographic campaign, while the Palestinian settlement in Firing Zone 918 was brought as a current case study, which raises a reasonable suspicion of the waging of a Palestinian demographic campaign in Area C. As part of researching the area, numerous khirbas were examined as well as aerial and satellite photos from the last few decades, in order to carefully "peel back" the physical changes that have occurred in the area in order to make it possible to understand the developmental dynamic over the years. The main conclusions are presented below.

There is Indeed a Demographic Campaign

The case studies surveyed prove and demonstrate the demographic campaign theory. Despite its complexity, the definition succeeds in providing an explanation for these active, non-violent struggles to shape borders.

As stated above, a demographic campaign is a **geopolitical effort** that aspires to **shape future borders in areas of territorial dispute** between **different national groups** via a **settlement strategy, which aims to take over territories without the use of armed force, sovereign legislation, or political agreements.** Consequently, it is managed in a **cunning, creative, secret, and undeclared** manner, while **taking the initiative in the conflict**, including taking **unilateral actions** on the ground.

All Indications Point to a Palestinian Demographic Campaign

The anomalies that relate to the construction in Firing Zone 918 indicate non-linear settlement development. While some of the anomalies can be explained as settlement "evolution" lacking political involvement, under the proviso of being unlikely, some of them have no plausible explanation other than the demographic campaign theory. The poor economic situation of the firing zone's "residents," which would not enable them to develop the region in the way it has developed, the extreme discrepancy between the number of structures and the number of settlers, and the impressive pace of construction, which is dozens of times the rate of natural increase—all of these and more leave no room for doubt that this is a demographic campaign that the Palestinian Authority has been waging against the State of Israel in the region since the middle of the 1990s.

In addition, the lifestyle adopted by the firing zone's residents is relatively modern and deviates from what is customary among the desert-dwelling shepherds. Another even more extreme deviation can be seen in the supposedly private monetary investments in construction and infrastructure projects that are incompatible with the limited capital at the disposal of the peasants and shepherds in the region.

There is large-scale investment in the establishment of "sensitive" buildings (a term taken from the laws of war; this category includes schools, medical clinics and more, which public opinion has difficulty tolerating harm to). The lack of basic equipment in the school and the clinic poses a big question mark: were these built for the public benefit or were they intended for creating monumental facts on the ground, which would prevent or at least make it difficult for those seeking to remove them? It seems that these public buildings are a win-win situation, as leaving them in place is a territorial achievement, while their demolition would lead to considerable criticism of Israel, serve the Palestinian narrative, and constitute a psychological achievement for them.

The field work at the various locations, along with the documents surveyed, with an emphasis on the aerial photos, affidavits submitted to the HCJ by the two sides, and the research work of Yaakov Havakook compiled in his book (1985) all point to the conclusion that the settlement in Firing Zone 918 is not a process of "natural" development of Palestinian settlement in the region, in breaking every reasonable logical and linear line of development. Consequently, this

settlement can be seen as a clear expression of a Palestinian demographic campaign taking place in the region in question, and proof can be found of the existence of all eight elements in the definition of the demographic campaign:

Effort: A series of actions intended for one purpose. The settlement effort in Firing Zone 918 includes a collection of actions from different fields, such as mechanisms of funding, law, advocacy, and of course construction. This effort requires considerable time, manpower and money.

Geopolitics: This is a geographical region in which political wrangling is taking place between Israel and the Palestinians, with the involvement of other countries.

An aspiration to shape future borders in areas of territorial dispute: The Palestinian focus on this arid area that lacks resources stems from the understanding that settling the frontier is a powerful tool in shaping borders (Turner 1893). Their assumption is that the Jewish settlement enterprise in the West Bank is "a little annexation enterprise with about half a million workers" which, if it continues linearly, will lead to a significant increase in the Jewish population and the seizure of additional areas in order to create more significant territorial contiguity.

Between different national groups: the Israeli Jews and the Palestinians.

Via a settlement strategy that aims to take over territories: The settlement enterprise in the firing zone aims to ensure the seizure of the open territory by the Palestinians.

Without the use of armed force, sovereign legislation, or political agreements: The Palestinians do not have the power to take over the land by war, and Israeli legislative channels and political channels are currently closed to them.

Cunning, creative, secret, and undeclared: We will expand on this element below. But the very fact of settlement being an ostensibly basic need that does not pose too much of a tangible threat, is in itself cunning, and does not lead to strong opposition from the other side. Another example of cunning and creativity is the exploitation of the HCJ to paralyze the systemic threat and to continue the construction under its auspices. The question of "why" is an important question that will be left to future studies. This study focuses on the question of whether—whether there is a demographic campaign, whether legal tools are used as part of it, and whether the legal tools were effective.

While taking the initiative in the conflict, including taking unilateral actions on the ground: The Palestinians are initiating the construction, vis-à-vis the sovereign that is trying to thwart it. The sovereign's response is not expressed in the establishment of Israeli settlements, because it is a firing zone. Consequently, the act of Palestinian settlement is done unilaterally.

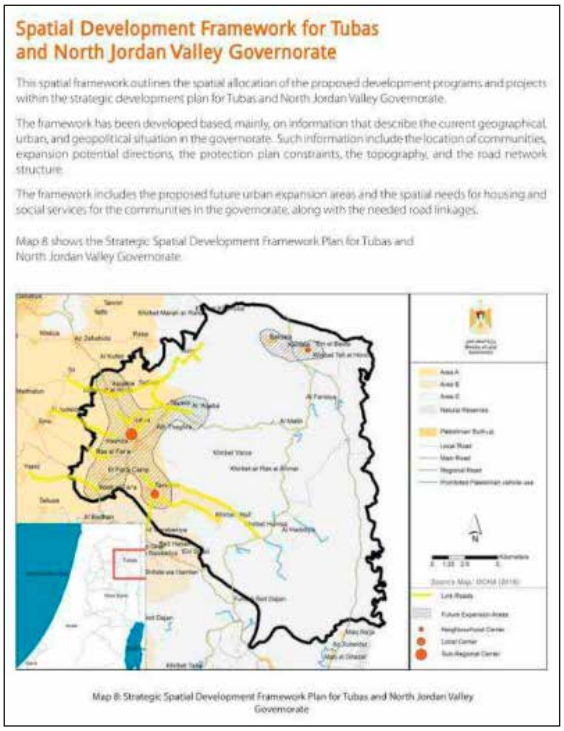
Characteristics of the Palestinian Demographic Campaign

As stated above, secrecy has a central role in preserving demographic campaigns. Consequently, there is no declared Palestinian policy regarding construction in Area C, but no fewer than ten main principles and patterns of action can be identified that distinguish the Palestinian demographic campaign.

Planning: The Palestinian Authority invests its time and money in planning the demographic campaign and makes sure to put it in writing, while attempting to avoid its publication. This planning is meticulous and does not omit any detail. The regional development plan includes the provision of electricity and water, the construction of educational and medical systems, and economic development to create sources of income for settlers.

Funding: The funding for the Palestinian campaign takes several paths, in order to disguise it and decentralize risk. The Palestinian Authority's funding is transferred through a body called the MDLF (Municipal Development and Lending Fund of Palestine). Officially, this is a fund for assistance and loans for

Picture 16. Booklet published by the Palestinian Authority on the topic of regional development (written on the cover page is: "Spatial Development Strategic Framework for Tubas and North Jordan Valley Governorate." The plans and maps in the booklet also include Area C)



municipalities. In practice, it is an external body that helps promote construction in Area C, while circumventing the Oslo Accords, which prohibit the Palestinian Authority from doing so. On the website of the fund we can learn about its funding sources (mainly foreign contributions) and the amount of funding, which totals tens of millions of euros, and about the projects that it has funded, such as the establishment of the school at Khirbet Jinba (MDLF 2016).

Aside from the MDLF, other international organizations fund projects in Area C. A third source of funding is money received directly from donor countries to fund specific projects, with an emphasis on European Union countries or the European Union itself.

However, the official beneficiaries themselves, the region's residents, are not partners in the funding. It should be emphasized that the information on funding sources is based only on Palestinians sources, on the signs proudly hung, and on official websites.

Law: Judging by the results, as long as the legal process at the HCJ continues, the Palestinian construction continues. With the help of millions of dollars worth of legal guidance over the course of over a decade, the Palestinians are using the HCJ to circumvent the law on firing zones, and the HCJ is unwillingly and unintentionally supporting the developing Palestinian campaign. Former President of the Supreme Court Moshe Landau said that democracy has a right to defend itself even if it must use tools that the law does not explicitly provide it with (HCJ 65/1, 1965). In the case in question, it seems that the situation has been reversed, and in effect the HCJ is preventing democracy from defending itself despite explicit provisions in the law. This is a unique case in which the wager of the campaign is making overt and intentional use of an institutional organ of the rival side in order to advance the campaign that it initiated. The article's writer asked for the president of the Supreme Court's

response to these claims, but she preferred to remain silent on this matter.

Construction without occupancy: The demographic campaign is based on settlement. Consequently, the construction in the frontier region continues even without demand, similar to a defensive line that is to be taken up when the order is given.

Infrastructure and the theft of resources: The settlement enterprise is fed by water and electricity infrastructure and roadways. This expensive infrastructure is built in violation of the law, and with regard to water, involves the theft of state resources.

The demographic campaign connects two legal points: Three main aims guide the location of the illegal construction in Area C. The first aims to create contiguous Palestinian settlement between polygons of Palestinian settlement in Areas A and B. Connecting these polygons, which are separated by Area C, creates a continuous Palestinian urban area and makes Area C lands in the region into de facto Area B.

The second aim is to encircle and cut off Jewish blocs of settlement, in order to make life difficult for the Jewish settlers in the region and to pressure Israel to give up on these settlements in future negotiations. In addition, the encirclement prevents the continued expansion of Jewish settlement, for example the construction surrounding the settlement of Nokdim.

The third aim is construction that touches on the green line, which has the power to perpetuate this line as a future border. This trend is prominent in Firing Zone 918 and in many regions in the West Bank and in the Jerusalem area.

The humanitarian argument—the "queen of the campaign" The Palestinians use the humanitarian argument as a fig leaf for illegal activity, and it is supposed to increase the legitimacy of their activity while negating that of Israel. The establishment of "sensitive" institutions such as schools, mosques, and medical clinics, even if they stand empty, provides the ultimate "insurance policy" for preventing their demolition. In the struggle between Israel and the Palestinians, the issues of good and bad, just and wrong, correct and mistaken are not relevant, and their strength in the realm of legitimacy is negligible. On the other hand, the narrative of "David against Goliath" characterizes the heart of the issue and is fully utilized by the Palestinians and their supporters in the demographic campaign.

Internationalization of the conflict: Aside from the issue of legitimacy, the Palestinians have a clear advantage over Israel in the international arena. One example of this is the Bedouin village of Khan al-Ahmar, which only few in Israel and abroad had heard about until a decade ago. This is an illegal settlement on state lands. This conclusion was reached by the justices of the HCJ, who, in an unusual move, approved its eviction (HCJ 17/2242, 2018).

At the center of the village, a school whose walls are built out of used tires covered in mud was built by an Italian aid organization. This marginal donation transformed discussion of this remote settlement into an international saga. Many European countries began a vocal campaign against Israel's intention to carry out the eviction and threatened that this would lead to response measures against Israel. 76 American members of Congress also appealed to the prime minister demanding that he stop the demolition of the village (Dagoni 2018). Later, the European Parliament made a decision stating that the eviction of the village would be considered a violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention. Meanwhile, the PLO petitioned the International Criminal Court in The Hague claiming that the eviction constitutes a war crime (Levy 2018). In response, the then chief prosecutor, Fatou Bensouda, claimed that it may indeed be a war crime. The international pressure had its effect, and the Security Cabinet has again and again decided to postpone the eviction.

Recruiting support from within Israeli society ("from among the Zionist enemy")

for activity in the territories. Even under left-wing governments, opposition to implementation of restraints on the Palestinian demographic campaign arises that weakens the Israeli system from the inside. The harm can be physical or in the form of propaganda. Israeli factionalism serves the Palestinian demographic campaign in Area C well and is fully exploited by them. For example, when searching for the term Firing Zone 918 on Google, the first website that comes up (as of March 2019) is "Firing Zone 918 | B'Tselem," which unsurprisingly contains an information page in Hebrew with slogans that perpetuate the Palestinian narrative (B'Tselem 2017). In the list of petitioners against the eviction of Palestinians, one can find the Association for Civil Rights in Israel (but not when it comes to the eviction of Jews) and several Israeli activists with a very specific agenda.

A supportive cognitive and propaganda campaign: The last three principles mentioned (the humanitarian argument, internationalization of the conflict, and recruiting support from within Israeli society) maintain symbiotic relations between them and together synergistically create something greater than them, which can be defined as a "Palestinian propaganda campaign." The propaganda surrounding the humanitarian narrative helps enlist public opinion in many countries in the world and in parts of Israeli society. This enlistment increases their motivation to be increasingly involved in the conflict. Israeli enforcement actions against this involvement and its consequences leads to diplomatic and political indignation, which translates to an intensification of media resonance in praise of Palestinian construction and in denunciation of Israel. That is, a reactionary cycle emerges that is based on propaganda and continually feeds it, like a dynamo.

The Palestinians Have the Upper Hand

The supreme effort carried out by the Civil Administration's supervision unit has had quite a few local successes. Without the dedicated work of the supervisors, the state of illegal construction in Firing Zone 918 would have been much worse. But this technical effort is a drop in the ocean compared to the systemic effort carried out by the Palestinians. The budgets of the Palestinian campaign are dozens of times larger than the enforcement budgets of the IDF and the State of Israel with respect to construction in Area C.

The legal effort that supports the Palestinian campaign outweighs the legal effort of the Military Advocate General. The Palestinian cognitive effort that perpetuates the narrative of "humanitarian construction" outweighs the Israeli cognitive effort, which is trying to claim illegal construction. These conclusions, which are unpleasant for Israeli ears to hear, are based more than anything on facts on the ground and judging from the results.

Conclusion

In the first part of the article the demographic campaign was conceptualized. Then two case studies were presented—Tower and Stockade and the Alon Plan—and they demonstrated how demographic campaigns take place in practice. Afterwards the new Palestinian settlement in Firing Zone 918 was studied, and a deductive examination was conducted to locate the foundations of the demographic campaign in this case too. After it was proven that this is indeed a demographic campaign, an inductive process was conducted in an attempt to apply the case of Firing Zone 918 to the entire Palestinian demographic campaign, while emphasizing its unique elements.

Finally, the conclusions of the study were presented. They can be summarized in four main points:

1. In border conflicts between countries and nations, demographic efforts are conducted that are waged in an organized fashion as a campaign.
2. The new Palestinian construction in Firing Zone 918 is not unplanned chaotic expansion

that stems from natural increase, but rather an organized and planned demographic campaign that the Palestinian Authority is waging against Israel.

3. The Palestinian demographic campaign has unique characteristics that aim to adapt it to the unique geopolitical reality of this time and place, while attempting to circumvent barriers and maximize opportunities.
4. The Palestinians have the upper hand in this campaign. Israel is not waging an organized counter-campaign, and it seems that its response is made up of a collection of technical and local actions that are not coherently managed and lack synergy.

The State of Israel has a clear interest in defeating this campaign, out of a future aspiration to annex Firing Zone 918 or out of a desire to maintain this piece of territory as a bargaining chip in future negotiations, and in the meantime enabling the IDF to use the region for training exercises.

Addressing the Palestinian campaign is a challenge and requires the investment of considerable resources and attention. It is difficult to predict how the IDF will successfully address this campaign, given past experience and the fact that it is facing many important challenges that will always be prioritized over the challenge in question.

The systemic helplessness that Israel suffers in the demographic campaign in Area C requires a conceptual change. Perhaps the solution to this will be the establishment of a special administration for dealing with the issue, within or outside of the IDF. Perhaps the state will need to pass laws to neutralize the "HCJ breach" that the Palestinians have identified, and in any case, it seems that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs would do well to display a bit more fighting spirit vis-à-vis the blatant and unilateral European intervention in the region.

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The article is based on research that the author conducted in the framework of the College of National Security at the University of Haifa, under the direction of Prof. Yossi Ben-Artzi.

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List of aerial photos and satellite photos

Aerial photo gid://SHF_181199_S09025_01_130314_097

Aerial photo gid://SHF_181199_S09025_02_130510_155

Aerial photo gid://SHF_181199_S09025_02_130512_156

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Notes

1 The secrecy relates to the systemic intention, as its physical translation into acts on the ground is visible. In other words, making an overt and declared plan in which the side waging the campaign establishes a widespread settlement enterprise without the consent of the sovereign on the ground and/or contrary to international agreements, could be a double-edged sword and lead to the failure of the campaign and even encourage the opposing side to begin a corresponding campaign.

2 The Jewish settlement during the British mandate period, which, due to its distribution throughout the Galilee, the valleys, and the coastal plain was called "the N of settlement."

3 In addition to the Jordan Valley settlements, dozens more settlements were established in the Jerusalem corridor, in Gush Etzion, and in the Hebron Hills as part of the Alon plan.

The Palestinian Refugee Problem and the Demand for a "Right of Return": Using Demography to Fight the Jewish State

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The Palestinian-Arab war against the pre-state Jewish community in the land of Israel, and afterwards in the State of Israel, can be divided into a number of stages. Until May 1948 it was primarily a war of militias in the territory of the British Mandate. In the quarter-century after the declaration of the establishment of the State of Israel, it was a total Arab war, in which the Arab world hoped to defeat Israel by conquering the territory. After the failure of the Yom Kippur War, the Palestinian struggle changed its form and transitioned to a combination of terrorism inside and outside Israel, a diplomatic struggle in the international arena and a public relations effort to weaken Israel. In all of these stages, the Arab-Palestinian aspiration remained identical: to foil the establishment of the State of Israel; and after it was established, to oppose its existence within any borders. This article will deal with one facet of the Palestinian struggle against Israel, and that is the use of the Palestinian refugee problem as a demographic tool to eliminate the Jewish state. It will present the Palestinian position on the refugee question during negotiations that took place between the PLO and the PA and Israel, and will clarify the status of the Palestinian demand for massive return of refugees to within Israel (what is known as "the right of return"). This position, and the use of demography as a tool to fight Israel, will be demonstrated via internal documents of the Palestinian negotiation team. Together they present a clear picture of the use of millions of Palestinians, some of whom are fourth and fifth generation descendants of Palestinian displaced persons and refugees from the War of Independence in 1948, as a tool for turning Israel from a state with a clear Jewish majority into a state with an Arab majority, thereby rendering it an additional Arab state in the Middle East.

Keywords: The Israeli-Palestinian conflict; the Palestinian refugee problem; demography; the right of return.

Foreword

> "We will make the Jews' lives unbearable using psychological warfare and **a population bomb**."
> (Yasser Arafat, quoted in Ben-Ami 2016, 214)

The hundred-year Palestinian-Arab war against the pre-state Jewish community in the land of Israel, and afterwards in the State of Israel, can be divided into stages. Until May 1948 it was primarily a war of militias in the territory of the British Mandate. Semi-organized Arab forces tried, and many times succeeded in harming Jewish settlements and their access roads. The declared aim of these actions was to stop the spread of Jewish settlement and immigration (aliyah) to the land of Israel, in order to block the Zionist project and the spread of Jewish presence then taking place in the land (Elpeleg 1989; Kessler 2023; Wasserstein 1991).

In the quarter-century after the declaration of the establishment of the State of Israel it was a total Arab war, in which the Palestinian-Arabs, along with the rest of the Arab world, hoped to achieve their aim of defeating Israel using Arab armies to invade and conquer the territory. The clearest examples of this approach from that period are the Six Day War and the Yom Kippur War, during both of which Arab states used their armies to try to vanquish Israel by physically eradicating it (Oren 2002; Morris 2010a; Schiff 1974).

After the failure of the attempts by Arab armies to conquer extensive territories from Israel in October 1973, the Palestinian struggle changed its character again. It shifted to a combination of terrorism inside and outside Israel (Merari and Elad 1986), a diplomatic struggle in the international arena (Heller 2004), and a PR struggle to weaken Israel, for example through economic boycotts and legal struggles in international courts (Herzog 2018). Noteworthy examples of terror attacks during this period were the murder of Israeli athletes at the Munich Olympics (1972) and the Coastal Road Massacre (1978), followed by the suicide bombings of the 1990s and the first decade of the 2000s. Indeed, terror attacks of various sorts are ongoing until today.

During each of these stages, the Arab-Palestinian aspiration was identical: to thwart the establishment of the nation-state of the Jewish people, the State of Israel, and after it was established, to oppose its existence within any borders. From the initial principled rejection of the Balfour Declaration in 1917 on the establishment of a national home for the Jewish people in the land of Israel, by way of their rejection of various partition plans for the land of Israel prior to the establishment of the state (such as the Peel Commission in 1937 and the UN Partition Plan in 1947, for example), and up until the refusal to accept concrete Israeli peace proposals in the last two decades (Ehud Barak in 2000 and Ehud Olmert in 2008, for example), the Palestinian-Arabs have consistently refused to agree to any initiative in which Israel remains the nation-state of the Jewish people (Porat 1976, 1979; Morris 2010b).

This work will deal with one aspect of the Palestinian struggle against Israel, which is the use of the Palestinian refugee problem as a **demographic** tool to eliminate the Jewish state. It will present the Palestinian position as it was asserted in negotiations conducted between the PLO and the Palestinian Authority with Israel over the past three decades, and will clarify the status of the Palestinian demand for massive return of refugees to within Israel (also known as "the right of return"). This position and the use of demography as a tool to fight Israel are demonstrated via internal documents of the Palestinian negotiation team. Together these present a clear picture of the use of millions of Palestinians, some of whom are fourth and fifth generation descendants of Palestinian displaced persons and refugees from the War of Independence in 1948, as a tool for turning Israel from a state with a clear Jewish majority into a state with an Arab majority, and therefore an additional Arab state in the Middle East.

The article will open by describing the Palestinian Arabs in conflict with the pre-state Jewish community and with the State of Israel, and will describe the rhetorical—not fundamental—change in statements by Palestinian leaders from the mid-1980s onwards. Afterwards it will explain the close connection between the demand for the return of Palestinian refugees into the State of Israel and the political aspiration to bring about the end of the existence of the state—a connection that has existed since the end of the 1949 War of Independence. It will then clarify that the demand for return is not an innocent humanitarian demand, but a political act. It will describe one of the ways in which PLO chairman Yasser Arafat misled the international community and caused it to believe that he sought to establish a Palestinian state alongside Israel, rather than in its place. Finally, it will present a description of the considerations and demographic components that tie all the parts of the research together, showing how the Palestinian demand for the return for millions of people aims to influence the character and identity of the state of the Jews, and that this demand is one tool in the Palestinian toolbox in its struggle against Israel.

The article will make use of both the terms "Palestinians" and "Palestinian Arabs." This is because until the 1960s the Arab residents of the land of Israel were not referred to as Palestinians, but rather as Arabs of Palestine. Today it is almost exclusively acceptable to use the term Palestinians, but that term is anachronistic in relation to the period prior to the 1960s.

Literature review

Until the 1980s historical research on the War of Independence tended to describe the Palestinian Arab departure from the land as the fault of the Arab side, which first rejected the UN Partition Plan and then attacked Israel (Lorch 1958; Slutsky 1972). Calls by Arab leaders to the Palestinian Arab population to abandon their places of settlement, the distribution of false propaganda about atrocities by Jewish soldiers and the flight of the Palestinian Arab population's leadership—all of these were described as central, if not exclusive, causes for the Palestinian exodus.

The exceptions during this period were the essays by Aharon Cohen (1964), an activist of Mapam (the United Workers Party) and Arab affairs specialist, who also related to actions by forces of the pre-state Jewish community and afterwards by the IDF. An even more critical approach was taken by Rony Gabbay (Gabbay 1959), who first claimed that the responsibility for the creation of the Palestinian refugee problem belonged not only to the Arab side but also to the Jewish one. The opinion that the responsibility for the Palestinian Arab exodus from the land was divided between the Arabs and the Jews was also expressed in other Western works, including the book by Don Peretz (Peretz 1969).

An additional point of reference occurred in the 1980s, when archival files from the War of Independence were revealed. The book by journalist and historian Tom Segev (1984) was the first to relate explicitly to expulsion of Palestinian Arabs by the IDF during the war. There is no doubt that the most important of the research works published during this period was that of historian Benny Morris (1991), who pointed an accusatory finger equally at both sides.

An even more critical stance regarding Israel's responsibility for the creation of the refugee problem was voiced by Ilan Pappé (Pappé 1992) and by radical leftist activist Simcha Flapan (Flapan 1987), who claimed that the Jewish side was responsible for the absolute majority of departures by Palestinian Arabs. Research works were published in the early 2000s that sought to engage with the critical approach towards Israel, including that of Yoav Gelber (Gelber 2001) and Mordechai Lahav (2000). They both claimed that Israeli expulsion actions were relatively limited, and were not the central

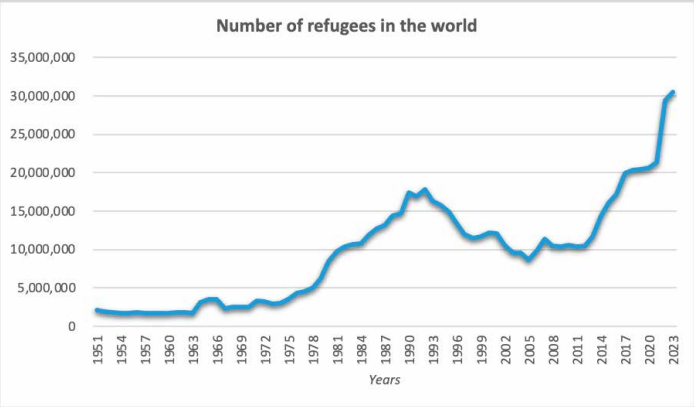
and defining reason for the exodus of masses of Palestinian Arabs.

All of these works examined the reasons for the departure of Arabs from the land during the War of Independence and dealt only with the period of the war itself. Later works tried to expand upon the Palestinian refugee problem after the end of the war as well. Jacob Toby (2008) dealt with Israeli policy on the refugee issue during the years 1948-1956, Arik Leibovitz (2015) expanded the discussion up until 1967, and Adi Schwartz and Einat Wilf (2018) analyzed the entire Israeli-Palestinian conflict until the second decade of the twenty-first century through the point of view of the Palestinian refugee problem. They claimed that whatever the circumstances of the departure of the Arabs from the land, they were not fundamentally different from the circumstances in other conflicts around the world, and do not explain the continued Palestinian refugee status so many years after the 1948 war.

The total number of refugees in the world correlates directly with events in the international arena. As a result, it tends to go up and down in accordance with circumstances. For example, Figure 1 shows that in the 1980s and early 1990s there was a continual increase in the number of refugees around the world, which reached a peak with the collapse of the former Soviet Union and the Communist bloc. Afterwards, from the mid-1990s until the 2000s, there was a decrease in the number of refugees. In the past decade there has been a marked increase in the number of refugees, primarily due to the civil war in Syria and the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Instead of using the terminology of anti-Western guerillas, as they did in the 1960s and 1970s, PLO Chairman Arafat began to cultivate an image within the international community as a moderate statesman with whom negotiations are possible.

Figure 1. Number of Refugees in the World



Source: UNHCR

The Palestinian Arab Stance in the Conflict

The stance of the Palestinian Arabs in the conflict with Zionism over the fate of the land of Israel was always very clear. Since the time that the representatives of the Arab public clarified their position to the leadership of the British Mandate in the 1920s (Morris 2003, 72-120), via the statements of Hajj Amin al-Husseini and the heads of the Arab Higher Committee in the 1930s and 1940s (Morris 2003, 121-145), until the foundational texts of the most important representative bodies in Palestinian society—the PLO (Harkabi 1977) and Hamas (Litvak 1998)—this stance has been presented unequivocally. Its core is a complete rejection of Jewish sovereign statehood in the land of Israel within any border, and the belief that the entire land of Israel is destined to be ruled by Muslim Arabs. The PLO charter even explicitly determined that the method to achieve this aim is military.

Since the mid-1980s a certain rhetorical change may be discerned among the leadership of the PLO, primarily when they speak English, and they began to include diplomatic expressions in their speeches and formulate their positions more vaguely. Instead of using the terminology of anti-Western guerillas, as they did in the 1960s and 1970s, PLO Chairman Arafat began to cultivate an image within the international community as a moderate statesman with whom negotiations are possible.

This reached its peak with the establishment of diplomatic relations between the PLO and the United States in 1988, within which Arafat undertook to refrain from terrorism and to seek a peaceful resolution to the conflict with Israel (Gresh 1988).

This tactical change in the PLO stance derived from several developments in the local, regional and international arenas. At the local level, the First Intifada was directed and executed by local actors in Judea and Samaria and in the Gaza Strip, not by the PLO leadership who then resided in Tunis. The peace agreement signed between Israel and Egypt in 1979 weakened the determined and unequivocal support of the Arab world for the Palestinian struggle against Israel. And the isolation of the PLO only worsened with their committed support for the leader of Iraq, Saddam Hussein, after his invasion of Kuwait, in opposition to the almost unified stance of the Arab world.

Even more important was the perpetual weakening of the USSR, until its collapse in 1989, which took away the Palestinians' most important diplomatic, economic and even military support. The disappearance of the PLO's most significant patron, with the fall of the Iron Curtain and the dismantling of the Soviet bloc, required the Palestinians to rethink their tactics. This strategic weakness, which was noticeable from the mid-1980s, lead the Palestinians to search for new patrons, whom they found in Western Europe and the United States.

However, to win the trust of these new patrons and to enjoy their economic and diplomatic support, the leadership of the PLO understood the need to modify their combative and uncompromising rhetoric against Israel. It was clear to Arafat and the Palestinian leadership that they could not continue to declare publicly that they intended to wipe out the State of Israel and expel its residents. Such rhetoric was an obstacle to the PLO leadership's ingratiation into the lounges of foreign ministries in European capitals and Washington.

As a result, a sophisticated narrative was crafted involving declarations of commitment to reaching a peaceful resolution with Israel, without abandoning the ultimate goal of turning all of the territory between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea into an Arab-ruled region. In a paraphrase of the statement by military strategist Carl von Clausewitz that war is simply policy by other means, the Palestinians chose to conduct a diplomatic process as a continuation of their hundred-year war with the State of Israel.

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In parallel to these supposedly moderate statements and to opening direct negotiations with Israel in 1993, which supposedly demonstrated recognition of the Jewish state and a desire to establish peaceful relations with it, the PLO continued to walk the tightrope of diplomatic legitimacy versus its ultimate goals. Some of its leaders, including Arafat himself, said in Arabic what they did not want to say in English. In September 1988 Nabil Shaath said that the establishment of a Palestinian state "in some of our homeland, not in all of it" is only an interim stage (Rubin and Rubin 2003, 113). An additional senior PLO figure, Abu Iyad, said in November 1988, immediately after the Palestinian declaration of independence, that "this is the state for the coming generations which is initially small, and if it is Allah's will—will be big and will expand east, west, north and south […] therefore I seek to liberate Palestine […] one step at a time" (Morris 2003, 565).

Three years later, after the Oslo Accords had been signed, Arafat also told an Arab audience in Stockholm in 1996 that "it is our intention to eliminate the State of Israel and to establish a pure Palestinian state. We will make the Jews'

Three years later, after the Oslo Accords had been signed, Arafat also told an Arab audience in Stockholm in 1996 that "it is our intention to eliminate the State of Israel and to establish a pure Palestinian state. We will make the Jews' lives unbearable via psychological warfare and a population bomb […] we, the Palestinians, will take over everything, including all of Jerusalem"

lives unbearable via psychological warfare and a **population bomb** […] we, the Palestinians, will take over everything, including all of Jerusalem" [my emphasis] (Stephens 2004). In this way, Arafat gave explicit expression to the use of the Palestinian population and the demographic dimension of Israeli-Palestinian relations as a tool for struggle against Israel.

Even earlier, during a visit to South Africa in May 1994, Arafat gave a speech in a Johannesburg mosque in which he compared the Oslo Accords to the 628 C.E. Treaty of al-Hudaybiya. The reference is to a ten-year peace agreement that the Prophet Muhammad signed with members of the Quraysh tribe, only to build strength and violate the treaty two years later; he then defeated the members of that tribe (Pipes 1999). In an interview with Egyptian television in 1998, Arafat repeated the same idea and explained that a temporary respite from battle is a respected Islamic strategy (McCarthy 2004).

The Palestinian Refugee Problem

At the end of the War of Independence some 600,000-760,000 Palestinian Arabs found themselves outside the lines within which the State of Israel had been established. They were in the Gaza Strip under Egyptian sovereignty, in Judea and Samaria under Jordanian sovereignty, and in the Kingdom of Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria (Morris 1991). In December 1949, the United Nations General Assembly voted to establish the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), in order to rehabilitate Palestinian refugees and integrate them into the economies of the states they had reached (Schwarz and Wilf 2018).

The establishment of UNRWA and the use of the term "Palestinian refugees" predated the adoption of the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and the establishment of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, as well as the acceptance of the formal definition of who is a refugee. As a result, the status of the "Palestinian refugees" is different from that of refugees everywhere else in the world; they are counted separately and the criteria that apply to all other refugees in the world do not apply to this population. Arab states refused to include the Palestinian refugees in the UN High Commissioner for Refugees.

From the beginning the Palestinian Arabs related to the refugee problem as a political issue, and saw it as fundamentally linked to the rejection of the existence of the State of Israel. The refugee problem was never a humanitarian issue of the individual desire of one Palestinian or another to return to his or her home, but rather part of a collective effort to reverse the results of the War of Independence. In the first months after the State of Israel was established, the heads of the Arab Higher Committee saw the return of refugees to Israel as recognition of the existence of the state, and therefore fundamentally opposed it (Schwartz and Wilf 2018, 48). Already in March 1949, the Arab League resolved that "a just and lasting solution to the problem of the refugees will be their return [to their land]." Palestinian representatives who met Israeli diplomats that same year claimed that the problem must be solved by returning them to Israel, and that the refugees retained the right to choose whether to return to Israel or to be rehabilitated in Arab states. In an internal report that the Secretary-General of the Arab League submitted to the League Council in March 1950 the Arab stance was formulated as follows: "The Arab states firmly insist on the return of all refugees who wish to return." (Schwartz and Wilf 2018, 50)

Certain politicians, and the Arab press, sometimes drew a direct link between the demand for return and the elimination of the State of Israel. In October 1949, Egypt's foreign minister Muhammad Salah al-Din said: "It is known and understood that the Arabs in their demand for the return of the refugees to Palestine intend to return as the lords of the homeland and not as slaves. To be perfectly clear, they intend to eliminate the State of Israel" (Harkaby 1968). The Lebanese newspaper, Assayad, wrote in February 1949: "We cannot send the refugees back while maintaining our dignity. We must therefore turn them into a fifth column in the battle that still lies ahead of us." About a year later in the same paper, it was written that the refugees will return "in order to create a large Arab majority, which can serve as a most effective means of reviving the Arab character of Palestine, while creating a powerful fifth column for a day of vengeance and settling accounts" (Schechtman 1952, 24, 31).

Return was therefore not only a geographic return to abandoned homes that remained 20 or 30 kilometers away, but also a return to the time before the Arab defeat in war and the establishment of the State of Israel. Return was not only a physical movement in space but also an erasure of the events that had taken place. Because the Palestinian refugees symbolized the Arab defeat and the victory of Israel, their return was interpreted as an erasure of the defeat and of the victory by the Jewish state. The Palestinian historian Rashid Khalidi analyzed Arab sentiment and wrote that the demand for return "began from the assumption of the liberation of Palestine, or in other words the elimination of Israel" (Khalidi 1992, 36). The strategic aim was to return the land to the Arabs, and not just the Arabs to the land.

The Demand for a "Right of Return"

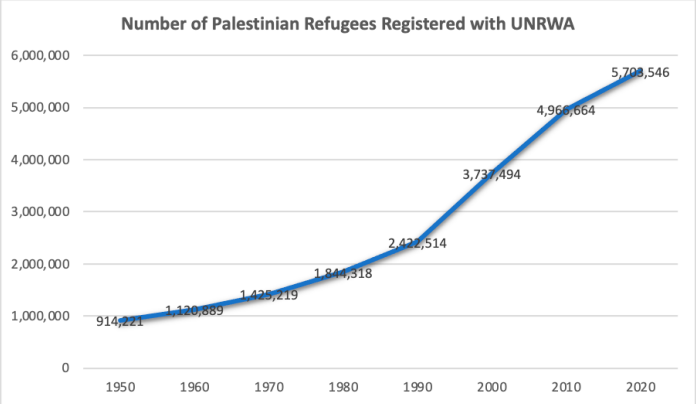
One of the tools Arafat used to fool the international community into believing that he was a real partner for peace was separating the Palestinians' right to self-determination and their demand for the return of refugees and their descendants. Since the Six Day War, and with the strengthening of the Palestinian national movement, the demand for separate self-determination for the Palestinian people has increased. This is the central reason that the PLO rejected Resolution 242, which did not relate to the Palestinians as a party to the conflict but rather only spoke of the principle of "land for peace." The Palestinians are not just a group of refugees, Arafat declared at that time, but rather a nation demanding its right to self-determination. During the 1970s and 1980s, Arafat repeated this demand many times (Howley 1975, 73-74).

This right can, in principle, coexist with the parallel right of the Jewish people to self-determination, because if the ultimate aim of the Palestinian people was in fact independence, it could have this alongside the State of Israel and not necessarily in its place.

The refugee problem was never a humanitarian issue of the individual desire of one Palestinian or another to return to his or her home, but rather part of a collective effort to reverse the results of the War of Independence.

Figure 2. The Number of Palestinian Refugees Registered with UNRWA. Source: UNRWA

(In contrast to Figure 1, where the number of refugees fluctuates according to circumstances, note that the number of Palestinian refugees grows continually.)



Arafat's repeated insistence on the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination was understood by many audiences as a retreat from the maximalist aspiration to wipe out the State of Israel. Arafat's change of image from a terrorist to a statesman, leading his people towards independence, therefore went hand in hand with the emphasis he placed on the right to self-determination (Gresh 1988, 179).

Throughout this period, the refugee question continued to be the most important litmus test for understanding the true Palestinian position, because the demand for the right of mass refugee return cannot be reconciled with the right of the Jewish people to self-definition in its land. Whoever continued to demand that a massive number of refugees should enter the State of Israel was essentially declaring that they do not accept the existence of the State of Israel in the Middle East. Whoever demanded sovereignty in the West Bank and Gaza without giving up on aspirations to return to Haifa, Akko and Jaffa was essentially saying that the change was merely cosmetic, a tactical statement aimed to cleanse Arafat and his organization for Western public opinion, but one that did not encompass a strategic decision to recognize the right of the Jews to a state of their own.

Negotiations with Israel

Direct negotiations between Israel and the PLO, and later the Palestinian Authority, reached a critical point at the Camp David Summit in 2000, during which US President Bill Clinton presented parameters for a solution to the conflict. These parameters included the establishment of a Palestinian state on 97% of the entire territory of Judea and Samaria (the West Bank) and Gaza; the evacuation of most Israeli settlements; the division of Jerusalem according to demographic concentrations; and the division of sovereignty over the Temple Mount. Clinton proposed that Palestinian refugees would be able to return to the Palestinian state and Israel would accept a limited number of refugees, only if it wished to do so (Morris 2001, 671-672).

The Palestinians rejected the proposal. An internal Palestinian document written shortly after the failure of the summit explained the reasons for the rejection of Clinton's proposals, with the most extensive discussion dedicated to the refugee problem. The document states that "the Palestinians will not be the first people in history to give up on their right of return." It is also written that the Palestinians demand to return to Israel and not to the future Palestinian state. The document also clarifies the broader context of the Palestinian insistence on return and explains that the Palestinians are unwilling to accept the definition of Israel as the "homeland of the Jewish people" and Palestine as the "homeland of the Palestinian people" because doing so would harm the demand for return. This admission stands in opposition to international community efforts for peace based on the principle of "two states for two peoples" (PNSU 2001).

In the first week of January 2001 the official organ of the Fatah movement published a detailed explanation for the rejection of Clinton's proposals. "We compromised on territory," the article states, "but the sacred right of return cannot be given up on. The refugee issue is the heart of the Israeli-Arab conflict." Refugees have rights, the article also states, and they refuse to resettle in Arab countries. It was also claimed that the refugees will not give up on their right to return to Israel, and that the fact that the Clinton parameters do not include this possibility prevents their acceptance. In order to make it clear that the Palestinians do in fact expect massive return of refugees into the State of Israel, the article refers to Israel absorbing one million new immigrants from the former Soviet Union in the 1990s, and claims that if Israel has the ability to take in so many immigrants, it can also take in the Palestinians (Rubin and Rubin 2003, 326).

In order to remove any doubt, the article explains that "the meaning of non-recognition of the right of return is the continuation of the struggle forever and the blocking of any

possibility of coexistence" between Israelis and Palestinians. In the most blatant and clear proof that the aim of the fulfillment of the "right of return" is not humanitarian but political, and that it serves as a cover for the Arab desire to eliminate the State of Israel, the article determines that "the right of return is intended to help Jews get rid of racist Zionism, which forces them to disconnect from the rest of the world." In other words, the fulfilment of the "right of return" would change the character of the State of Israel, and it would cease to be the nation-state of the Jewish people (Rubin and Rubin 2003, 326).

Demographic Considerations

Around a year after the failure of the Taba talks between Israel and the PA, Arafat published an article in the New York Times in which he presented his vision for an agreement with Israel. "Now is the time for the Palestinians to state clearly … the Palestinian vision," he writes. At the heart of the article are two central demands—the establishment of a Palestinian state and the return of refugees to Israel. The status of Jerusalem is only mentioned in one sentence (Arafat 2002).

Arafat asks in his article for a "fair" and "just" resolution to the suffering of the refugees, who, in his words, have been forbidden for decades "to return to their homes." There can be no peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians, he warned, if the legitimate rights of these innocent civilians are not taken into account. Arafat also claimed that the return of refugees is a right guaranteed by international law, but added caveats to this claim and determined that the Palestinians understand the "**demographic concerns**" [my emphasis] of Israel and know that the fulfillment of return "must be implemented in a way that takes into account such concerns." The Palestinians, he explained, must be realistic about the **demographic desires** of Israel (Arafat 2002).

The use of these terms and the explicit reference to demographic "concerns" and "desires" were interpreted in certain circles in Israel and in the world as an elegant way for Arafat to withdraw from the demand for massive return of refugees. According to this interpretation, the fact that Arafat noted that Palestinians understand "the demographic concerns" of Israel shows that they understand that there will not be a mass return. But those who interpreted these statements as giving up on the demand for return ignored the centrality that Arafat ascribed to the refugee problem and its resolution by giving the choice to each refugee and their descendants to return to Israel.

In fact, internal documents of the Palestinian Negotiation Support Unit (PNSU) published in 2011 in the international media revealed that the Palestinian goal was completely different. These are some 1,700 internal Palestinian documents in the English language, which documented a decade of negotiation with Israel and were published by the British newspaper the Guardian and by the Qatari network Al Jazeera in early 2011. The documents were leaked from the office of the chief Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat, who was compelled to resign in light of their publication. Palestinian officials have never questioned the authenticity of the documents nor tried to claim that they were forged or faked (Zayani 2013).

In order to deal with Israel's claim that it is not capable of taking in so many Palestinian refugees, as doing so would threaten its demographic character, the Palestinians commissioned an independent study that examined Israel's capacity of absorption. The very fact that the study was commissioned shows that the Palestinians were interested in mass refugee return, as anyone not interested in such return would not try to prove that its implementation is possible. In a confidential document from April 2008 it was written that the aim of the study was to "give scientific backing to the stance of the Palestinian leadership on return to Israel. The study aimed to provide a rational analysis that would support **the Palestinian approach of return to Israel**,

Graph 1 (Screenshot from the Document. A scenario in which 41,000 Palestinian refugees would be permitted to return to Israel every year for 15 years (between 2008-2013).

1- Without Jewish migration, converging fertility at "European level", return of 41 000 refugees per year, from 2013-2028												
	2008	**2009**	**2013**	**2018**	**2023**	**2028**	**2033**	**2038**	**2043**	**2048**	**2053**	**2058**
Jews (extended)	5839	5909	6179	6494	6783	7044	7277	7492	7683	7837	7942	7995
Palestinians	1174	1202	1294	1622	1965	2319	2463	2585	2686	2772	2844	2901
TOTAL	7013	7111	7473	8116	8748	9363	9740	10077	10369	10609	10786	10896
% Palestinians	16,7	16,9	17,3	20,0	22,5	24,8	25,3	25,7	25,9	26,1	26,4	26,6

Graph 2 (Screenshot from the Document). A scenario in which 38,000 Palestinian refugees would be permitted to return to Israel every year for 15 years (between 2008-2013).

2. Without Jewish migration, converging fertility at "European level", return of 38 000 refugees per year, from 2013-2028

	2008	**2009**	**2013**	**2018**	**2023**	**2028**	**2033**	**2038**	**2043**	**2048**	**2053**	**2058**
Jews (extended)	5839	5909	6179	6494	6783	7044	7277	7492	7683	7837	7942	7995
Palestinians	1174	1202	1294	1607	1934	2273	2417	2538	2640	2725	2798	2885
TOTAL	7013	7111	7473	8101	8717	9317	9694	10030	10323	10562	10740	10880
% Palestinians	16,7	16,9	17,3	19,8	22,2	24,4	24,9	25,3	25,6	25,8	26,1	26,5

Graph 3 (Screenshot from the Document. A scenario in which two million Palestinian refugees would be permitted to return to Israel between 2013 and 2058.

3- Without Jewish migration, converging fertility at "European level", selective return of part of the refugees, from 2013-2058												
	2008	**2009**	**2013**	**2018**	**2023**	**2028**	**2033**	**2038**	**2043**	**2048**	**2053**	**2058**
Jews (extended)	5839	5909	6179	6494	6783	7044	7277	7492	7683	7837	7942	7995
Palestinians	1174	1202	1297	1645	2012	2391	2770	3135	3485	3821	4145	4438
TOTAL	7013	7111	7476	8139	8795	9435	10047	10627	11168	11658	12087	12433
% Palestinians	16,7	16,9	17,3	20,2	22,9	25,3	27,6	29,5	31,2	32,8	34,3	35,7

while taking into account Israel's capabilities for absorption and migration in the past" [emphasis is mine] (PNSU 2008a).

The research was carried out in 2008 by Youssef Courbage, an expert from the French National Institute for Demographic Studies. It examined three scenarios of return to Israel, ranging from several hundred thousand returnees to up to two million, and sought to show that under each of them, Jews would remain the majority within the borders of the State of Israel. In the first scenario (Graph 1), 41,000 refugees would be permitted to return every year for 15 years (between 2013 and 2028)

up to a total of 600,000 refugees. In the second scenario (Graph 2), 38,000 refugees would be permitted to return every year for that same period, to a total of 570,000 refugees. In the third scenario, some two million refugees would want to return to Israel (PNSU 2008a).

According to the scenario described in Graph 1, 41,000 Palestinian refugees would be permitted to return to Israel every year for 15 years. Their number would reach 1.6 million in 2018, in comparison to 6.5 million Jews in that year; 2.3 million in 2028, in comparison to 7 million Jews that year; and 2.9 million in 2058, in comparison to 8 million Jews in that year, or some 27 percent.

According to the scenario described in Graph 2, 38,000 Palestinian refugees would be permitted to return to Israel every year for 15 years. Their number would reach 1.6 million in 2018, in comparison to 6.5 million Jews in that year; 2.3 million in 2028, in comparison to 7 million Jews that year; and 2.9 million in 2058, in comparison to 8 million Jews in that year, corresponding to 27 percent.

According to the scenario described in Graph 3, two million Palestinian refugees would be permitted to return to Israel. Their number would reach 1.6 million in 2018, in comparison to 6.5 million Jews in that year; 2.4 million in 2028, in comparison to 7 million Jews that year; and 4.4 million in 2058, in comparison to 8 million Jews in that year, some 36 percent.

The aim of the study was to show that even if hundreds of thousands of Palestinians come to Israel, they would not have the power to threaten the Jewish character of Israel. The research claimed that even in the scenario of two million refugees, the Palestinian population within Israel would amount to a mere 36 percent, and Jews would continue to be the majority. the number of refugees that would come in the first and second scenarios was determined according to the average number of olim (new immigrants) that Israel took in during various periods—the first scenario was based on the average number of immigrants Israel absorbed during the years 1948-2007 (41,000) and the second scenario was based on the average number of immigrants during the years 1996-2007 (38,000). During these years Israel absorbed many immigrants, and the Palestinians tried to claim that if Israel could absorb so many immigrants, it could absorb a similar number of Palestinian refugees.

The fact that the Palestinians related to the absorption of Jewish immigrants from the former Soviet Union as an indicator of the State of Israel's capacity for absorption is highly significant, as they ignored the fact that the population absorbed was primarily Jewish (and that the minority who did not identify as Jewish usually had Jewish family members and no desire to challenge the Jewish nature of the state). Ignoring the national identity of those absorbed by the State of Israel demonstrates a blurring of the national character of Israel—because according to the Palestinian approach it supposedly makes no difference whether the population being absorbed is Jewish or Muslim Arab.

The great significance of the study lies in it being the most detailed indicator of the true desires of Palestinians according to their internal discussions about the possibility of refugees returning to Israel, and that the scale of returnees they were discussing were very large. The number two million is the Palestinian estimate of the number of refugees who would want to return to Israel if they were given the opportunity to do so.

The great significance of the study lies in it being the most detailed indicator of the true desires of Palestinians according to their internal discussions about the possibility of refugees returning to Israel, and that the scale of returnees they were discussing were very large. The number two million is the Palestinian estimate of the number of refugees who would want to return to Israel if they were given the

opportunity to do so. From the PNSU documents it is also clear that the estimates in this study were the basis for Arab demands during negotiations with Israel (PNSU 2008b).

In this manner, the veil is lifted on the supposedly comforting phrase "consideration of Israel's demographic concerns" coined by Arafat in his article, and interpreted since then as Palestinian willingness to accept a symbolic gesture by Israel that would amount to only a few thousand refugees. That was not the case: when the Palestinians say "consideration of demographic concerns," they mean the return of hundreds of thousands or millions. Indeed, a 2008 document proposes the return of one million refugees (PNSU 2008c).

In parallel to the Palestinian attempt to scientifically support their demand for mass return of refugees, there is evidence in other documents of the rejection of the Israeli demand to accept the Jewish majority in the State of Israel as an established fact. Thus for example, a document from November 2007 states that "if Israel insists on recognition of **the demographic character** of its state, then the Palestinian team can demand that the status of the entire territory of mandatory Palestine be reopened, because the demand to base the [Israeli-Palestinian] agreement on two ethnically defined national entities undermines the accepted parameters" [my emphasis] (PNSU 2007).

According to the Palestinians, the proposed approach of two nation states brings the discussion back to UNGA Resolution 181 (the partition plan). This plan, in their words, set a boundary while taking demographic considerations into account (for example, where the majority of Jews lived at that time); that boundary was substantially different from the border being considered today. In other words, if Israel demands recognition of its national character, then that means going back to the borders from the 1947 partition plan.

In that same document it was written that it is not acceptable in the international arena to recognize the demographic character of states, and that this Israeli demand does not suit the manner in which states typically conduct themselves. The Palestinians claim that Israel was accepted to the United Nations as a state and not as a "Jewish state," just as China was accepted as a state and not as a Communist state, and as Pakistan was accepted as a state and not as a Muslim state. The United States and other countries recognized the State of Israel, not the state of the Jews.

The Palestinians understood the Israeli demand to be recognized as a "Jewish state" in its demographic context, because according to the document, such recognition could be interpreted as Palestinians waiving the demand for return. Here the Palestinians also affirmed, in plain English, that their demand for return and their opposition to the existence to the State of Israel as the nation-state of the Jewish people are dependent on one another.

Summary

There are many ways to wage war on an enemy. The most common and easily identifiable is the use of violence and weapons to defeat the other side. But there are also more sophisticated and surprising techniques, such as using negotiation channels that may serve to continue warfare. An example of the latter can be seen in the Palestinian negotiations with Israel since the 1990s.

Over the years international mediators and Israeli negotiators believed that the Palestinian refugee problem would be solved by allowing those who wish to return the possibility of settling in the Palestinian state that was supposed to be established. The PLO, on the other hand, insisted that every one of millions of refugees and their descendants would be recognized as having a legal right to settle in Israel. Taking into account the demography of Israel, such a massive flow of millions of Palestinians would turn the state of the Jews into a state with an Arab majority. The demand for massive refugee return was therefore opposed to the logic of the two-state solution,

which sought to create two nation-states—one for Jews and one for Palestinians.

The demand presented by the Palestinians during the negotiations, for recognition of the "right of return" and the possibility of mass refugee return into the State of Israel, were perceived by certain circles in Israel and the world as a mere bargaining chip, which the Palestinians understood could not be carried out in practice. The underlying assumption in those circles was that the Palestinian commitment to finding a peace deal was real. From there they derived the understanding that the Palestinians did not seriously intend for millions of Palestinians to settle in Israel.

Two axioms led to the adoption of this perspective. The first was correct; it was that the return of refugees is contradictory to a peaceful resolution, as it would negate the Jewish character of Israel. But the second axiom was mistaken—that the Palestinians had in fact abandoned the path of war. The conclusion from these two axioms was that the Palestinians couldn't possibly seriously intend to insist on the "right of return," and that they therefore were only using it as a bargaining chip in order to gain other concessions in negotiations. After they achieved such concessions, the Palestinians would relinquish this demand as if they had never made it in the first place.

The findings presented in this work contradict this conclusion. Based on statements by the Palestinians themselves it becomes clear that they relate to the possibility of mass return of refugees into Israel—hundreds of thousands and even millions—as **a very realistic possibility**. To that end, and in order to strengthen their claims, they commissioned a scientific demographic study that showed that Israel is in fact capable of absorbing such large numbers of refugees.

It is also clear from the documents presented here, how the Palestinians link the demographic and the political components. In other words, there is a direct connection between the demand for return of refugees and the existence of Israel as the nation-state of the Jewish people. The Palestinians' refusal to recognize Israel as a Jewish state, together with the insistence on Israeli recognition of the Palestinians' right to return to the homes that they left during the War of Independence, express the long-running Palestinian position in the conflict with Israel: war against the early Zionist endeavor and non-recognition of the state of the Jews after it was established.

The demand for return is not therefore an innocent humanitarian demand but rather an additional tool—**a demographic tool**—in the Palestinian toolbox for their hundred-year struggle against Israel.

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Perpetual War: The Syrian Refugee Crisis and its Consequences for the Middle East

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The civil war in Syria, which has been ongoing for more than a decade, is considered the greatest humanitarian catastrophe of the twenty-first century. President Bashar al-Assad remains in power, but Syria is far from a functioning or stable country. Out of a population of about 22 million people, the war has taken the lives of more than half a million residents and left about 15 million in need of humanitarian aid. The war has also led to the worst refugee crisis since World War II. More than six million Syrian refugees who were forced to leave their homes moved to live in neighboring countries—mainly Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, and European countries. About 90% of them do not receive basic living necessities in the host countries and are seen as an economic and political burden. So far about 750,000 refugees have returned to Syria since 2016, but despite the regime's declared policy that they should be repatriated, the return of millions of refugees to Syria is far from the reality. The reasons for this are related to the refugees' fear of the regime taking revenge on them or of forced conscription, and to the perception that there is no future for them given the dismal situation in Syria, which has been devastated by the war. With the end of the battles, refugee flight is being replaced by emigration, and many Syrians are interested in leaving the country for a better future. This article discusses the Syrian refugee issue from the perspective of a war that has continued for more than a decade and the implications of the refugees for the host countries, including for their geopolitical environment. The study examines the refugees' degree of integration in the host countries and also discusses the question of their return to Syria and its potential rehabilitation.

Keywords: Refugees, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, Iraq, Turkey, Europe, rehabilitation

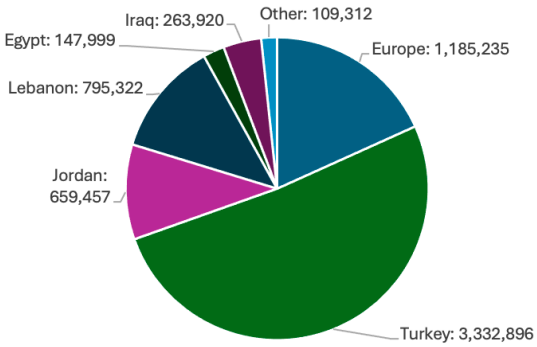
Introduction

The civil war in Syria that broke out in March 2011 is considered the greatest humanitarian catastrophe of the twenty-first century and has caused masses of Syrians to flee their country since it began. The war has taken the lives of over half a million residents (SOHR 2023). President Bashar al-Assad remains in power, but Syria is far from a functioning or stable country.

Despite the lull in the fighting compared to previous years, the humanitarian situation in Syria is worsening: more than 90% of residents live below the poverty line, including those in areas under Assad's control. Out of a population of about 18 million people, 15.3 million are in need of humanitarian aid; the Syrian pound continues to fall, and at the beginning of 2024 it dropped to a new low of over 14,000 pounds to the dollar (Khan 2023); despite the average monthly salary increasing to 12.5 dollars, this is still insufficient to cover the basic needs of the population in the face of increasing inflation, when the estimated cost of a basket of basic goods is 90 dollars (World Food Programme 2023); in the past three years 70% of households in Syria experienced a decline in living conditions and in their ability to obtain basic goods; in 2023 fuel prices increased more than 150% due to a decision by the regime, which led to the renewal of protests by residents, especially in southern Syria. The electricity supply is irregular throughout the country, and some report days without any electricity (Dadouch 2023; William 2023). Given these trends, the COVID-19 and cholera epidemics that broke out in recent years worsened the humanitarian crisis; about half of the medical institutions in Syria are non- or only partly functional. Meanwhile, disastrous climate trends are being felt in Syria—the worsening of the water crisis given the ongoing drought, the spread of a cholera epidemic, and the earthquake that occurred in February 2023 and led to tens of thousands of deaths and large-scale destruction (OCHA 2021, 2022b; United Nations Security Council 2023).

The ongoing bloody conflict in Syria, with an estimated population of 24 million residents as of 2024 (compared to 22 million in 2011), has displaced about 6.8 million residents (Syrian citizens who fled their homes because of the war but remained inside Syria) and created another 5.5 million refugees[1] who fled Syria and are not included in population estimates. The refugees have found asylum in Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Egypt, and other countries in Europe and North Africa (UNHCR n.d.-g, n.d.-h).

Figure 1. Number of refugees by Country of Asylum



Source: UNHCR Data for 2023

Background

This article discusses the Syrian refugee issue from the perspective of a war that has continued for more than a decade and the implications of the refugees' presence for the host countries, including for the geopolitical environment in the Middle East and in the international arena. The study examines the refugees' degree of integration in the host countries while focusing on their humanitarian and social situation, and the attitudes of local communities and authorities towards them, and finally discusses the question of their repatriation to Syria and its potential rehabilitation.

According to international law on refugees, enshrined in the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, which came into effect in April 1954, refugees have several rights, chiefly including a prohibition against deportation or repatriation. This means that signatory

countries are prohibited from repatriating refugees to the territory of the country where their lives or freedom are endangered. In addition, the convention protects asylum seekers even in cases where the refugees have entered a country illegally and without the approval of the host country. According to the convention, in this case too, the country is prohibited from deporting the refugees, on the condition that they came directly from the territory of the country where they are in danger. The convention also discusses the assimilation of the refugee population within the country of asylum. In particular, it states that the host country must allow the refugees to work as well as protect their rights to education and welfare, and ensure social security rights that are equal to those granted to citizens of that country. However, the convention does allow the receiving country to deport the refugees due to considerations of "national security and public order" (UNHCR 2010). And the many limitations in the convention—including countries' ability to "choose" to relate to refugees as immigrants and thus not to apply the rights of refugees that they deserve by virtue of the convention, combined with the lack of an effective UN enforcement mechanism—allow countries to violate refugees' rights (Kirişci 2021).

Most of the aid to the refugees in the countries studied comes from humanitarian organizations and UN agencies. Each year, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) provides aid including medication, food, drinking water, fuel and heaters, tents, thermal blankets, and winter clothing to refugees in Turkey, Iraq, Jordan, and Egypt. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the agency provided aid to local hospitals and established temporary medical clinics in refugee camps. The aid was provided as part of the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP) (UNHCR n.d.-f), which was founded by the UNHCR and the UN Development Programme (UNDP) as part of a concerted effort surrounding the Syrian crisis. In 2022 the budget required to execute this plan was about 6.1 billion dollars. The budget required for the activity of the Humanitarian Response Plan for Syria was 4.4 billion dollars that year. Thus the total sum needed to aid the residents of Syria is about 10.5 billion dollars per year—an amount that reflects the severity of humanitarian needs in Syria and the region following more than a decade of this crisis (OCHA 2022a). However, it seems that despite the growing humanitarian needs, funding under the auspices of the UN is actually decreasing from year to year and is insufficient to meet all the needs (Hickson & Wilder 2023).

According to international law on refugees, enshrined in the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, which came into effect in April 1954, refugees have several rights, chiefly including a prohibition against deportation or repatriation. This means that signatory countries are prohibited from repatriating refugees to the territory of the country where their lives or freedom are endangered.

Between Refugees and the Security and Economic Situation in the Host Country

Theoretical literature on the links between the presence of refugees and the security and economic situation in the host country reveals that in both developed and developing countries, the host communities (citizens and authorities) tend to perceive refugees as a threat to their security and draw a link between refugees and violence and crime. They are also perceived as a threat to social unity and employment in the country. As studies indicate, waves of refugees can indeed undermine security and be a source of regional conflicts, armed resistance, terrorist activity, and foreign intervention in neighboring countries. In addition, the economic and social consequences of the long-term presence of refugees can accelerate and increase internal tensions in the host countries, especially in

developing countries where there are already ethnic tensions. This is also true in countries with precarious economic or social foundations and in countries surrounded by hostile neighbors. Similarly, studies show that politicians receive greater popularity when they express xenophobia and blame refugees for a lack of housing and employment, for undermining national and cultural homogeneity, and for emphasizing ethnic tensions (Loescher 2002).

While in 2024 Syria is still not considered a safe country for the refugees to return to—due to their persecution by the Syrian regime and the continued existence of combat zones in certain areas—, in countries such as Jordan, Turkey and Lebanon, significant efforts are being made to deport and repatriate the Syrian refugees.

The arrival of refugees in host countries involves economic consequences, chiefly competition between the refugee and local communities over resources such as food, water, housing, and medical services. The presence of refugees in the host countries increases demand for education and for public, social, medical, and sanitary services, which can increase the burden on the host country (Barman 2020). However, studies indicate that the immigrants or refugees that are added to the labor market of a country have little to no impact on the wages and employment of local citizens. Furthermore, immigrants and refugees can bring skills, knowledge, and innovation to the host communities that can drive economic growth, though these are often not well-utilized. In cases in which the host countries, the private sector, or the international community work to create opportunities to integrate refugees into the labor market, they have made a positive impact on the economy of the host community (Bahar and Dooley 2020; Taylor et al. 2016).

In countries in which the economy is in decline or there is political instability, the presence of many refugees can contribute to the general sense of crisis, attitudes towards the refugees may deteriorate, and they are sometimes even blamed for the situation as a kind of scapegoat (Ragnhild and Karadawi 1991). This description fits with our findings from analyzing the local destination countries for the Syrian refugees—Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon.

While in 2024 Syria is still not considered a safe country for the refugees to return to—due to their persecution by the Syrian regime and the continued existence of combat zones in certain areas—, in countries such as Jordan, Turkey and Lebanon, significant efforts are being made to deport and repatriate the Syrian refugees. This trend was accelerated following the process of regional normalization with the Assad regime, which began at the end of 2021. The most prominent of them is the Jordanian initiative, which, among other things, makes the normalization of relations with the regime conditional upon the provision of general amnesty, which would allow the refugees a safe return to Syria (Ersan 2023). During these years, the economic crisis in these countries has deepened, which has directed public frustration towards the refugees, which are a social and economic burden on the host countries.

Syrian Refugees in Turkey

Turkey is the country that grants asylum to the largest number of refugees in the world—about four million refugees, 3.6 million of whom are Syrian.

Over the years, most of the refugees have lived in urban and semi-urban areas of Turkey. During the years 2012-2013 the Syrian refugees mainly settled in camps, but as of May 2014 the camps could no longer contain the massive stream of refugees, so many dispersed throughout Turkey in accordance with their preferences and abilities. At first, they preferred to live close to the border with Syria, but they later moved to other cities where they could find work or from which they could relatively easily move to European countries (Boluk and

Erdem 2016). In 2016 more than 270,000 Syrian refugees lived in 26 camps in ten provinces close to the border with Syria (compared to 100,000 in 2020). The camps were run mainly with the aid of UN agencies. Turkey's Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency is the main body ensuring the relatively proper functioning of the camps (Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency 2017).

Since 2015, Syrian refugees have been seen as a burden on the Turkish economy and society and as responsible for the rise in food and housing prices. The entry of cheap manpower into the labor market has raised the unemployment rate throughout Turkey, especially in the country's south. The main claim against the refugees is that they are taking over jobs formerly held by Turkish citizens, especially low level jobs that do not require education, special skills or knowledge of the language.

Turkey's Policy Towards the Refugees

Since President Recep Erdogan came to power, Turkey has had an Islamist administration that promotes a political and religious agenda that is identified with the Sunni branch of the Muslim Brotherhood. Turkish policy towards Syria in general and the Sunni refugees in particular has undergone several upheavals and changes. At the beginning of the civil war in Syria, Turkey became an ardent supporter of the Syrian opposition and a critic of the regime. Turkey was the political and military base of the Syrian opposition and directly provided weapons and military aid to the armed opposition. When the war became more intense and Sunni civilians started to flee, many of them crossed the border to Turkey, which over time became home to about 3.5 million Syrian refugees.

Throughout the war in Syria, Erdogan has stated that Turkey sees the Syrians as part of the Muslim Brotherhood, and in the first few years he encouraged their migration to Turkey. In his view, this was a religious obligation originating in Ottoman history and heritage, to provide a "brother" with comfort and a sense of home during his stay (Cumhuriyet 2016; Karaçizmeli 2015). In April 2011, Syrian refugees in Turkey received the official status of "guests," and about half a year later, they received the status of "entitled to temporary asylum." In April 2013, the Turkish parliament adopted the Law on Foreigners and International Protection, which was a milestone in Turkish immigration policy. Its expansion in October 2014 granted the refugees "temporary protection," enabling them to remain within Turkey's borders until deciding to return to Syria, and providing them with access to basic services and rights including access to emergency treatment, shelter, food, water, medical care, education, housing, the labor market, and security (Petillo 2022). However, contrary to the conventional refugee status in Turkey, the "temporary protection" law restricts the Syrian refugees' ability to settle in a third country. By providing this status, in practice Turkey is circumventing the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (Güney 2022), despite being a party to it (UNHCR n.d.-d).

However, over the years and in light of developments in Syria, Turkey has softened its policy towards the Syrian regime and became less tolerant towards the Syrian refugees. During the years 2015-2016, it became clear that the success of the Kurdish minority in establishing independent autonomy within Syria constituted a real threat to Turkish sovereignty, as it could spark a national uprising among the Kurds in Turkey. Turkey, which was disappointed in American support for the Kurdish organization, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), decided to increase its cooperation with Russia and Iran. During those years it became clear that Assad, who had succeeded in achieving an advantage over the rebels and had retaken captured areas, did not intend to give up the presidency. Turkish understanding that Syria was not going to follow in Turkey's Islamist direction, combined with internal pressure applied by the Turkish opposition and especially by the public over the burden that the millions

of Syrian refugees had become, led to increasing difficulties in the refugees' integration in the country and to more hostile public opinion (Rabinovich and Valensi 2020).

According to the Turkish Employment Agency's figures, only about 140,000 Syrian refugees received legal work visas—a very small number compared to the number of working-age refugees. This figure does not include the approximately 200,000 refugees who received Turkish citizenship and do not need a work permit. All the rest, including teens and even children, work in odd jobs without permits and without social benefits and rights. It is estimated that a million Syrians are working unofficially in Turkey, usually for low pay in jobs that tend to be very exploitative and physical (DRC 2021). Moreover, studies show that Turks are uncomfortable around people from Syria, who they see as criminals and as a threat to their personal security (Akyuz et al. 2021).

Following the Turkish regime's actions against the Syrian refugees and their increased migration to the European Union, the EU-Turkey Joint Action Plan was signed in November 2015, with the intention of increasing cooperation to support the Syrian refugees under temporary protection in the host communities in Turkey and preventing irregular flows of migration to the European Union. The plan was updated in March 2016 and included clauses such as: every refugee who crosses from Turkey to Greece in an irregular manner will be returned to Turkey; for each Syrian refugee that is returned, a different Syrian refugee will be settled in Europe; Turkey will help as much as necessary in preventing illegal migration by sea or land from Turkey to European Union countries. In order to implement the plan, Turkey received six billion euros of funding from the European Union in two installments (European Commission 2016).

Since 2020, the combination of a large number of Syrian refugees living in the cities (about 98% as of 2021) (Güney 2022) and the prolonged nature of the crisis in Syria, as well as a challenging economic crisis in Turkey that intensified due to the COVID-19 pandemic, increased the internal pressure on the Turkish government to toughen its policy towards the Syrian refugees. In addition, the involvement of some of the refugees in incidents of robbery and theft increased the locals' opposition to their presence (Akyuz et al. 2021). All of these together led to a change in Turkish policy from accepting to opposing the assimilation of the Syrian refugees into the population. Thus, the Turkish government started to take steps to differentiate the Syrian refugees from the country's population, segregating the refugees and settling them in refugee camps and temporary housing. In recent years, a change in public discourse towards Syrian refugees can be clearly identified—from empathy to rejection (Mencütek 2021).

Ülkü Güney's 2021 study analyzed the attitudes of Turks towards the Syrian refugees in their country. It reveals that the Turks sees the Syrians as "disloyal" for leaving Syria and believe that they are not entitled to Turkish citizenship. Many Turks see the Turkish refugees as "guests" only. They support a policy of concentrating them in defined areas in order to reduce their integration and assimilation into Turkish society. Meanwhile, they believe that only their basic needs should be addressed, while settling them in isolated temporary camps outside of residential areas. Especially prominent is the Turkish concern that the welfare of the Syrians in their country will be at their expense, against the backdrop of economic hardship, which is expressed in considerable and determined opposition to providing financial aid to the Syrian refugees (Güney 2022). Another survey from 2021 found that 82% of Turks wanted the Syrians to be deported, compared to 49% in 2017, and Syrian refugees in the country are now reporting widespread and increasing discrimination (Hickson and Wilder 2023).

The negative attitudes have also been accompanied by a rise in racist attacks against Syrians in Turkey. In August 2021, groups of Turkish residents attacked work sites and

homes of Syrians in a neighborhood in Ankara, a day after a young Syrian stabbed a Turk in a fight (Human Rights Watch 2022). In August 2022, activists from the Turkish Victory Party, which is known for its hostility towards the Syrian refugees, put up placards in the streets and neighborhoods of Istanbul province that included racist statements against the refugees. It was also reported that the party's leader toured the streets of various Turkish cities and threatened to send the Syrians away. The rise in racist incidents in the past year, as well as the toughening of Turkish policy, increased concerns among the refugees, and according to reports, a significant portion of them are considering returning to Syria or emigrating to Europe (Al-Najar 2022).

These attitudes greatly influenced the government's policy and led it to restrict the registration arrangements for refugees who continued to arrive from Syria. In some provinces, registration was cancelled entirely and the refugees who arrived were left without status or rights. Moreover, Turkey started to restrict the number of Syrians permitted to live in specific neighborhoods, which forced many to leave provinces with better employment opportunities (Tokyay 2022). These measures aimed to encourage refugees to return to Syria, and in many cases the authorities even forced refugees to leave the country. It is not known how many of them left Turkey and returned to their home country. According to government figures it may be over half a million people, but research institutes and press reports provide much lower estimates. The gaps in figures are well-utilized in the political struggle between Erdogan—who is trying to prove that the refugee problem is shrinking—and his rivals, who claim that the president is not succeeding in curbing the refugee's takeover of the labor market, and thus increasing the unemployment of Turkish citizens (Ridgwell 2022).

Despite the criticism of the economic burden that the refugees supposedly constitute for the host country, it is worth mentioning their contribution to the Turkish economy. Their investments in the Turkish economy, which are estimated at over ten billion dollars during the ten years that they have been flowing into the country, and the thousands of small and medium-sized businesses that they have established, and in which thousands more Syrian refugees are employed—all of these are downplayed in this political conflict, as are analyses that indicate the damage that will be caused to Turkey's economy if all of the Syrian refugees leave the country (Bar'el 2023).

Since the end of 2022 there have been increasing reports of the deportation in practice of hundreds of Syrian refugees from Turkey, contrary to international law, even though the military operation was not carried out.

In 2022 the European Union decided to transfer another three billion euros to Turkey to supply humanitarian aid to refugees until the end of 2024, with an emphasis on health and education, in order to help the refugees' assimilation in Turkey (supposedly temporarily) (European Commission 2021a, 2021b). In practice, it seems that the effectiveness of the European plan is limited. While it contributed to a significant reduction in the number of refugees risking the dangerous journey from Turkey to Greece and improved their situation in Turkey, those who reached the European Union are suffering from the status of "inadmissible," without rights or legal status, while the number of refugees sent back to Turkey as part of the agreement is negligible (International Rescue Committee 2022).

In 2022, Erdogan announced his intention to embark on another military operation in Syria, in order to establish a security strip that aims both to keep the Syrian Kurds away from the border with Turkey and to serve as a region in northern Syria to resettle around a million refugees currently in Turkey (Stewart 2022). Since the end of 2022 there have been

increasing reports of the deportation in practice of hundreds of Syrian refugees from Turkey, contrary to international law, even though the military operation was not carried out (Wilgenburg 2023).

The issue of the Syrian refugees in Turkey is a case study in the volatility of the problem, the international community's weakness in coping with it, and its potential for regional fallout as well as significant progress in Syrian-Turkish cooperation to repatriate the refugees. As a result, in May 2023 Turkey unveiled a "road map" for repatriating the Syrian refugees, which was formulated in cooperation with the Syrian regime, Russia, and Iran. According to the plan, the refugees would be "voluntarily and safely" repatriated to their country of origin, with housing in northern Syria (Middle East Monitor 2023). As of the time of writing, Syrian refugees are periodically being deported from Turkey, and according to unofficial reports, tens of thousands have been deported so far, without any progress in the plan to repatriate refugees that the leaders of the countries announced (The New Arab Staff 2023; SOHR 2024a; Wilgenburg 2023).

Syrian Refugees in Lebanon

Lebanon is the country with the largest number of refugees with respect to the size of its population. There are about 1.5 million Syrian refugees there, about half of them registered and documented by the UN refugee agency (UNHCR 2023a). They are concentrated in the Beqaa region (39%), northern Lebanon (28%), Beirut (22%), and southern Lebanon (11%) (UNHCR n.d.-g.). The wave of Syrian refugees, most of them Sunnis, led to an increase in the demographic weight of Sunnis in Lebanon. Thus, Sunnis (unofficially) became the third largest religious group in Lebanon. Over the years, drastic changes in Lebanese demography have exacerbated the already prominent ethnic tension between Muslims and Christians and between Shiites and Sunnis, and the political and economic crisis in Lebanon (Thibos, 2014).

The limited number of refugee camps stems from the Lebanese state's bitter experience with Palestinian refugees, who have remained with the status of citizenship-less residents of the country and constitute a burden on Lebanon. About 80% of them live in rented apartments, abandoned homes, tents, and temporary structures. According to the latest UN estimates, about 60% of the refugees in Lebanon live in shelters that are not safe and expose them to danger (Hansford 2015; UNHCR n.d.-e). The dire humanitarian situation of the refugees in Lebanon has led to independent emigration, mainly via unsafe ships. In 2022, the UNHCR indicated a rise in emigration by ship from Lebanon and estimated that about 4,600 people, refugees and Lebanese, had done so for lack of any other option. As a result, several lethal incidents occurred that year. The most prominent of them was the sinking of the migrant ship from Lebanon in September 2022, which led to the deaths of about 100 people, most of them Syrian and Palestinian refugees (Antonios 2023).

Despite efforts by the European Union, chiefly funding the plan for the Advancement of Growth and Employment Opportunities in Lebanon, which was established in 2016 and was supposed to have advanced measures to improve the employment situation of the Syrian refugees, the employment rate among the refugees remained high and increased over the years (Baroud and Zeidan 2021). In 2023, 45% of the refugees of working age were employed primarily in agriculture and construction, but the low wages do not enable a basic standard of living. The dire economic situation of the refugees has a considerable impact on women, whose labor market participation rate is only 19%. Women refugees in Lebanon are largely dependent on men and on their relatives when it comes to their livelihood (Government of Lebanon and United Nations 2023). The limited employment options for the refugees have led to a situation where 90% of them are living in extreme poverty, and only a few can afford

to send their children to school. One of the consequences of this situation is the emergence of an uneducated generation and the occurrence of teen marriage, as a way to ease economic hardship (UNHCR 2023a).

Lebanon's Policy Towards the Refugees

Over the years, Lebanon has pursued a vague policy towards its refugee population, with regard to arranging their status and rights. It is not a signatory to the UN convention on refugees and has not advanced significant internal legislation on this matter. The difficult political and economic situation in Lebanon, including 30 years of the presence of the Syrian army and challenges in coping with the Palestinian refugees, have to a large degree shaped government policy towards the Syrian refugees in recent years (Janmyr 2016).

In the political arena, Hezbollah's opposition to the integration of the Syrian refugees in society, as Sunni Muslims and opponents of the Assad regime, has greatly influenced their level of assimilation. The increasing demographic weight of Sunnis in Lebanon could be translated into political power in Lebanese parliamentary democracy, in which each religious denomination is allocated a predefined number of representatives in each governorate, which reflects the size of the population. This concern threatens the political power of Hezbollah, which is Shiite. Hezbollah also supports the Assad regime and publicly assisted it during the war in Syria starting in 2013; thus most Syrian refugees oppose the organization and have even acted against it over the years (Thibos 2014).

Meanwhile, there was a change in Lebanese policy starting in late 2014 and early 2015, led by Hezbollah, with the refugee issue having become a central pillar in the country in a process called securitization —the conceptualization of the phenomenon as an existential threat in a way that creates a justification for using exceptional measures— (Wertman and Kaunert 2022). An attempt was made by Lebanon's political elite to keep the Syrian refugees away via strict policies, restrictions at border crossings and increasing the tension between the populations (Secen 2021). Thus, in October 2014, the Council of Ministers of Lebanon adopted a policy aiming to reduce the number of Syrian refugees in the country by limiting access to its territory and encouraging them to return to Syria. Starting in January 2015, the Lebanese regime enacted several measures to implement this policy. They included a requirement to present an official declaration from the authorities in Syria on the purpose of a person's entry to Lebanon when crossing the border, without the possibility of registering as refugees or receiving protection from the Lebanese state. According to this legislation, Syrian refugees who register with UNHCR are obligated to sign an agreement in which they commit not to work during their time in Lebanon. This is contrary to international law, which determines that refugees must be allowed to register as refugees and to receive protection, and also states that refugees must be granted the possibility of working in the country of asylum (Kheshen 2022).

The prohibition on registering the Syrians as refugees remains in force and has greatly affected their degree of integration in the Lebanese population. Without designated entry visas to Lebanon, Syrian refugees are considered illegal immigrants. Many of the refugees did not carry out the required process before entering Lebanon, and the majority of the refugees who did so cannot pay for the annual renewal of the visa, at a cost of hundreds of dollars (their alternative is to return to Syria and to re-enter at the border). As of 2022, about 83% of documented refugees were staying in Lebanon illegally (VASyR 2022). The lack of legal status renders the refugees extremely vulnerable. They are exposed to exploitation and to a lack of regular income and are at risk of imprisonment and deportation due to illegal employment. This also places severe limitations on their movement, as well as limitations on

access to services, especially medical care (NRC 2014). Given the prohibition on receiving work permits, the refugees can register as migrant workers via sponsors or through an employment contract. In this framework, they can only work legally in the environmental, agricultural, and construction industries, which greatly limits their ability to find employment and to earn a living (Baroud and Zeidan 2021). A study by the aid organization Oxfam reveals that Syrian refugees working in the framework of a sponsor permit will work for wages below minimum wage, and below the wages of Syrian refugees employed illegally (Leaders for Sustainable Livelihoods 2019).

The unemployment rate in Lebanon has more than doubled, from 11.4% in 2018-2019 to about 30% in 2022. This situation has increased the tension between the Lebanese and the Syrian refugees, who are blamed for the situation.

The Effect of Economic Collapse on the Perception of Refugees as a Burden

Since 2020, Lebanon's situation has deteriorated due to an economic crisis and failed leadership, which suffers from political disfunction. The lethal explosion at the Beirut port and the COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated the crisis, followed by the war in Ukraine, which rocked the global economy. As of 2024, Lebanon is a bankrupt country, in which 80% of the population live below the poverty line, there is a severe shortage of basic goods and electricity, and the country's infrastructure—with respect to water reservoirs, the health system, social assistance, and sanitation—is greatly strained. The unemployment rate in Lebanon has more than doubled, from 11.4% in 2018-2019 to about 30% in 2022. This situation has increased the tension between the Lebanese and the Syrian refugees, who are blamed for the situation. Serious conflicts have developed between the local population and the refugees due to competition for employment, with an emphasis on jobs that do not require employment experience (Government of Lebanon and United Nations 2023).

The result is a rise in racist attitudes towards the refugees, which reached the point of physical violence. UNRWA, the UN aid agency responsible for the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, expressed great concern at the discrimination and restrictions enacted against both the Syrian and Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. For example, in 2022, there were numerous reports that the shortage of wheat due to the war in Ukraine led to a situation where bakeries around Lebanon created two lines for buying bread—a line for Lebanese citizens, who received priority, and a separate line for the Syrian refugees, who were forced to wait for hours. Similar to the Turkish case, the economic and political challenges led official figures from throughout the Lebanese political spectrum to intensify their opposition to the refugees' presence in Lebanon, to more firmly call on the international community to help repatriate them to Syria, and to demand the advancement of restrictive measures on their lives in order to encourage them to leave (Barjawi 2022).

In July 2022, Nadim al-Jamil, a member of parliament representing the Phalanges Party, declared that repatriating the Syrian refugees is not a matter of choice but a national necessity. "If Syria is not safe for them, their presence here is not safe for the Lebanese, as indicated by recent events. Either they return or they will be returned" (Al-Mahmoud 2022). Prime Minister Najib Mikati threatened that if Western countries do not cooperate in repatriating the Syrian refugees in Lebanon, Lebanon would get them out through legal means. In August 2022, an official announcement was published by the government of Lebanon according to which the country's authorities could not host more than a million Syrian refugees and that the government intends to repatriate 15,000 refugees each month to Syria, in coordination

with the Syrian regime. This was based on the claim that, with the cessation of the battles, many areas in Syria had become safer to live in (Barjawi 2022). Issam Sharaf al-Din, Lebanese Minister of Displaced Persons, justified the policy by estimating the annual cost of keeping the Syrian refugees in Lebanon at approximately three billion dollars, and claiming that the country cannot afford this given its economic situation. As for the estimated tens of thousands of political refugees, Sharaf al-Din said that the UNHCR should ensure their transfer to a safe country, in accordance with international laws and conventions (Barjawi 2022).

UN figures warned that if Lebanon repatriated the Syrian refugees against their will, it could be subject to international sanctions, including the termination of all aid originating from the UN and other international institutions (Al-Dahibi 2023; Bouloss 2022). Nevertheless, as early as 2013, Hezbollah held negotiations with the Assad regime regarding the deportation of the refugees back to Syria, and in 2017 it deported the first wave of tens of thousands of Syrian refugees to northern Syria, apparently as a result of negotiations that it held with opponents of the Syrian regime (Estriani 2019). Starting in April 2023, after years of pressure from Hezbollah, unofficial sources have reported the forced deportation of tens of thousands of Syrians by the regime in Lebanon. According to the reports, the Lebanese army carries out raids in unofficial camps where refugees live and arbitrarily deports them (European Union 2023). Official accounts claim that all of the repatriations were voluntary, but testimony received by Human Rights Watch contradicts this claim. In addition, Human Rights Watch emphasizes that the Syrians that have remained in Lebanon live in fear of arbitrary deportation, and it has been revealed that the government of Lebanon does not individually examine their situation before deporting them, contrary to international law. An example of this is the report on the deportation of former Syrian army officers, who were reportedly exposed to torture and abuse after their return to Syria due to having deserted the army (Human Rights Watch 2023). Lebanese Prime Minister Najib Mikati declared in September 2023 that thousands of Syrian refugees were trying to "illegally" enter Lebanon each month. In his statement, Mikati emphasized the severe economic damage and the threat to Lebanese demography resulting from the Syrian refugee crisis. Thus he justified his government's policy of not allowing additional refugees to enter the country and deporting the refugees living in it (AP 2023).

Syrian Refugees in Jordan

After the onset of the civil war in Syria, Jordan helped the moderate opposition organizations, in particular the Free Syrian Army. In this way Jordan contributed to the rebels' struggle in southern Syria, while providing supporters of the opposition with access to Syrian territory via the border between the countries. However, compared to the other Sunni countries (chiefly Turkey, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia), Jordan was less dominant in its support for the struggle against Assad, apparently out of caution regarding the regime and its supporters. Once the momentum of the war reversed in favor of Assad, Jordan reverted to recognizing the regime and abandoned its efforts to support its opponents, in order to avoid direct conflict between the countries (Rabinovich and Valensi 2020).

Alongside the aid to the rebels, Jordan opened its gates to thousands of refugees who fled from the combat zones in Syria. According to Jordanian government estimates, about 1.3 million Syrian refugees who arrived since the outbreak of the crisis in 2011, are living in the kingdom (The Jordan Response Platform n.d.), of which about 660,000 are registered with the UNHCR. About half of the Syrian refugees in Jordan are from the Daraa Governorate, in southern Syria, which borders northern Jordan. Most of the Syrian refugees in Jordan live in towns and villages among local communities.

About 17% live in the two main refugee camps, Zaatari and Azraq. The Syrian refugees prefer to find asylum in the local communities rather than the refugee camps, partly due to better employment opportunities.

The Zaatari refugee camp was established in July 2012 and serves as the temporary home of about 80,000 people. Many of the camp's residents suffer from poverty and instability, child labor and child marriage is rife, and there is no guaranteed access to education. The children live in unsanitary conditions, generally in mobile homes (25,000 caravans), in a crowded desert region located about 20 kilometers from the Syrian border.

Humanitarian support for the refugees in Zaatari is under the joint responsibility of the Jordanian government and the UNHCR, with about 1,200 employees from 32 different international and Jordanian organizations operating in the camp. However, the humanitarian aid is not continuous, and in 2022 the UNHCR did not receive the 40.9 million dollars of funding intended for aid for 391,400 Syrian refugees (106,622 families). The UNHCR warned of a humanitarian crisis among the Syrian refugees in Jordan due to funding problems, and noted that as a result, there was a decline in the food security of the refugees and an increase in children dropping out of school. Aside from the nutritional issue, housing conditions are also not adequately addressed. After the camp was established, thousands of caravans were provided to house the refugees, to replace initial supplies of tents. According to the UNHCR, the lifespan of these caravans is six years, but they have been there for over eight years (Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs 2022).

The Azraq refugee camp, which was established in 2014, houses about 40,000 refugees, about 60% of them children. In a survey conducted by the UNHCR in the camps at the end of 2021, 83% of families in the Azraq camp reported being in debt (70% of them stated that the main reason for this was loans to buy food), and about 50% of the population that was surveyed at the camp reported at least one chronic illness among their family members. Moreover, about 60% stated that they were experiencing a certain level of depression (compared to about 40% who reported this at Zaatari) (UNHCR 2022b). However, it seems that the living conditions at Azraq are slightly more reasonable than at the Zaatari camp, perhaps because it houses fewer refugees. The camp's residents reported about 11 hours of electricity per day (compared to slightly under 10 hours per day reported at Zaatari). At the Zaatari refugee camp, during the second quarter of 2023 there was a sharp decline of 30% in the number of families whose water supplies met their needs.

When it comes to employment possibilities, most of the residents of Azraq work in the camp, while at Zaatari more work outside of the camp, where they consequently face greater workplace hazards. While child labor at Azraq was reported at twice the rate of Zaatari, children at Zaatari had much greater exposure to dangerous jobs and incidence of school absence due to work. In addition, child marriage was reported as more common at Zaatari than at Azraq (UNHCR 2022b). A 2023 survey conducted by the UNHCR among registered Syrian refugees reveals that 90% of the refugee families at both camps are in debt, and the majority of the sources of income of these families came from humanitarian aid (UNHCR 2023d).

Among the refugees who live in local communities rather than in the refugee camps, poverty rates are very high. According to a 2018 UNICEF report, 85% of Syrian children in Jordan live below the poverty line. 94% of the children aged 5 and under do not have access to at least two of five groups of basic needs. About 40% of the families are coping with food insecurity, and another 26% of the families are at risk of this (UNICEF 2018).

A survey conducted by the UNHCR in February 2023 regarding perception of their situation in the host countries, found that 86% of Syrian refugees in Jordan had insufficient income to cover their basic needs and those

of their family members. The refugees stated that housing and basic goods were significant challenges. Furthermore, a high percentage of the respondents expressed an intention to move to a third country, especially in order to improve their living conditions, reunite with family members located in another country, or for studies (UNHCR 2023b).

Despite their difficult situation, Syrian refugees in Jordan do not display a desire to return to their home country under the current conditions. From 2019 to 2021, about 41,000 refugees voluntarily returned to Syria from Jordan, constituting only about 5% of the refugees registered with the UNHCR (Sharayri 2022). According to a survey conducted by the UNHCR in January 2023, 38% of the refugees are interested in returning within five years, but only 0.8% are interested in returning within a year (the lowest figure among the refugees surveyed in countries in the region, and a decrease from the figure of 2.4% that was recorded half a year earlier). However, it should be noted that 65% of Syrian refugees in Jordan still expressed hope to return to their home country in the future, whether in the next five years or afterwards. Among all the countries where the survey was conducted (Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt, and Iraq), the highest figures regarding this aspiration were recorded in Jordan.

Jordanian Policy Towards the Refugees

From the beginning of the crisis, the government of Jordan took on responsibility for absorbing the Syrian refugees and allowed them to integrate deeply in society compared to other countries in the region. In 2014, Jordan established the Syrian Refugees Affairs Directorate in the Ministry of Interior, which became the main governmental body responsible for coordinating and coping with the refugee issue in Jordan. Starting in 2015, the government has published the annual Jordan Response Plan—a strategy to cope with the refugees and strengthen the ability of the refugees and of the local population to cope with the situation (UNHCR 2017). According to the UNHCR, the Jordanian government dedicates greater attention and resources to Syrian refugees than to other refugees in the country.

Meanwhile, in the Jordanian case too, the authorities place pressure on the international community to help the Syrian refugees, so that Jordan will not be forced to cope with them on its own.

Unlike the aggressive and sometimes racist attitudes that emerged in other host countries, it seems that Jordan maintains a more moderate stance towards the refugees. Official figures have even declared that the kingdom is morally responsible for the refugees and that their departure should only be voluntary, on the condition of a political climate that can assure their safe return to Syria. Meanwhile, in the Jordanian case too, the authorities place pressure on the international community to help the Syrian refugees, so that Jordan will not be forced to cope with them on its own.

Similar to their government's attitude to the Syrian refugees, the Jordanian population also views them positively. Since October 2020, the UNHCR has conducted periodic surveys among the Jordanian population. The latest survey, which was conducted in June 2023, shows that the local population's support for the refugees in Jordan is still strong and stable, although there is some recognition of the consequences of their presence for the Jordanian economy (UNHCR 2023c): 96% of those surveyed expressed support for the refugees and 78% claimed that they support the refugees' integration in the community. These figures have remained stable in the surveys. About 90% of those surveyed claimed that there is coexistence between the Jordanian population and the refugees in the country.

At the same time, the Jordanians are aware of the implications of the refugee issue for the

country's economy and for their prospects: almost half of those surveyed claimed that the refugee's presence has an economic impact on their personal or family situation. 56% of them claimed that this influence was very negative (an 8% increase from the previous survey, which was conducted in November 2022), and another 39% claimed that this influence was somewhat negative. In light of this, 89% claimed that the government's response to the refugee issue was sufficient, 60% thought that the refugees receive more aid than the country's citizens, and 61% claimed that too much money is allocated to refugees in Jordan. Many believe that the refugees should return to their home country, but about 62% claimed that the decision on the refugees' return should be made by the refugees themselves—a slight increase compared to previous surveys.

The relatively positive approach adopted by Jordan towards the Syrian refugees is evidently related in part to ethno-demographic circumstances: most of the Syrian refugees who arrived in Jordan are Sunnis, like most residents of the kingdom. Furthermore, some of them are members of families or tribes that were located on both sides of the border (Musarea 2019). A considerable portion of the Syrian refugees in Jordan are from southern Syria, from areas close to the border with Jordan, and residents of northern Jordan are sometimes related to them by blood. With the onset of the war, many members of these tribes fled Syrian territory via the Jordanian border (Miettunen and Shunnaq 2020).

Despite the attitudes of the public and the leadership regarding the refugees, the hosting of the Syrian refugees has widespread economic consequences for the kingdom. In the first few years of the crisis, it was reported that about 160,000 Syrian refugees were working in Jordan, while the unemployment rate among Jordanians was about 20%. At the beginning of 2018, the government of Jordan estimated the cost of absorbing the refugees since 2011 at around ten billion dollars. That year the amount of international aid to Jordan stood at around 1.7 billion dollars (Eran 2018). The increasing number of refugees over the years has exacerbated the state of unemployment and poor infrastructure and the serious water crisis in Jordan, all of which were already precarious before the refugees arrived.

In this context, since 2022 there have been increasing complaints from government figures about the economic and social burden that the Syrian refugees constitute for Jordan. In May 2023, the government announced the "Jordanian initiative" to end the crisis in Syria, which includes a plan to voluntarily repatriate the refugees (Akour 2023). This initiative reflects a change in the Jordanian government's attitude towards the refugees and indicates its intention to encourage their repatriation or departure from the kingdom. Meanwhile, akin to the policy enacted in Turkey and Lebanon, the kingdom started to deport Syrians back to their country, contrary to the principle of non-refoulement in international law. So far there have been reports of the deportation of dozens of Syrian refugees, and this policy is expected to expand in the future with the warming of relations between Jordan and Syria (SOHR 2024b).

Syrian Refugees in Egypt

In Egypt about 150,000 Syrian refugees are registered with the UNHCR as of January 2024. The Syrian refugees first arrived in Egypt in 2012, with the intensification of the civil war in Syria. In response to the large stream of refugees, the UNHCR opened an office in Alexandria in December 2013. As of 2015, the number of unregistered Syrian refugees was estimated at about 170,000. According to the UNHCR, most of the refugees in Egypt live in urban areas, with an emphasis on the regions of Cairo, Alexandria, Damietta, and along the northern coastal strip (UNHCR n.d.-c).

Egyptian Policy Towards the Refugees

The Egyptian position on the war in Syria in general and towards the Syrian refugees in Egypt in particular has differed considerably between Mohamed Morsi's presidency and that of the current president, El-Sisi. Morsi, who was identified with the Muslim Brotherhood movement, clearly supported the opposition to the Assad regime and in particular the Islamist organizations. In 2013, this support even reached the point of threatening to send a volunteer military force to Syria, but Morsi was ousted from power not long afterwards. El-Sisi, who persecuted Muslim Brotherhood members upon coming to power, held a different position on the internal war in Syria and was much less opposed to the Assad regime (Rabinovich and Valensi 2020).

The shift in position on the war in Syria was also reflected in Egypt's attitude towards the Syrian refugees. At the beginning of the crisis, the Syrian refugees were permitted to enter Egypt without a visa. Former president Morsi declared during his presidency that Syrians in Egypt were not obligated to renew their residency status, but he did not issue a presidential order on the issue. Thus, when Morsi was ousted from power, those Syrians who did not renew their status found that their presence in Egypt became officially illegal. Moreover, the country's authorities linked the Muslim Brotherhood to the Syrian refugees (some of whom did identify with it) and began to perceive the refugees as a threat.

Since July 2013, hundreds of Syrians have been arrested and deported because they did not have suitable residency documents permitting them to remain in Egypt. Some of them were held in prisons under harsh conditions for an indefinite period. Moreover, even though many Syrians have succeeded in finding work in Egypt, this remains a major challenge for others, given the government's reservations about providing the refugees with access to the labor market. Many of them have integrated into the Egyptian black market and are working illegally, without rights or insurance. Many refugees claim that the Egyptian authorities' attitude towards them has changed substantially since they arrived in the country. In addition, Palestinian refugees arriving from Syria are also not authorized to register at the UNHCR, in light of a request by the government of Egypt at the beginning of the crisis in 2012 (Abaza 2015).

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Access to educational institutions is also limited for the refugees' children. In 2012 Egypt decided to allow the children of the Syrian refugees to access public schools and to register for universities without paying, but in 2016 it did not officially renew the decision, and many universities interpreted the non-renewal as a cancellation of the government subsidies for the Syrian refugees' tuition. In addition, many refugees complained that various bureaucratic issues make it difficult to register their children for public schools, and there were reports that certain schools rejected refugee children. At schools where Syrian refugees did attend, on more than one occasion there were reports of violence against them, including by teachers. There were also reports that students dropped out of school because of financial problems (ElNemr 2016).

There is evidently a gap between the actual living conditions of the refugees and the way they are perceived by international organizations, chiefly the UN, which tends to praise the attitude of the Egyptian government and population towards the refugees in Egypt (UNHCR 2020). According to the UNHCR, the Syrian refugees have access to the public education system like

Egyptian citizens (UNHCR 2023e). Furthermore, the UNHCR praised the government of Egypt for implementing strategies and plans for the digital transformation of the country's public schools, given the fact that these programs also include the children of refugees and asylum seekers in the country's public education system. When it comes to health services, according to the UNHCR, the refugees and asylum seekers in Egypt are entitled to public health services and are included in national health initiatives equally with citizens. During the COVID-19 crisis, despite a limited supply of vaccinations, the refugees had equal eligibility to citizens (Beshay 2021).

Egypt is an active partner in initiatives to resettle the refugees. In this framework, through the UNHCR, some are resettled in third countries such as European countries, Canada, Australia, and the United States. At the end of 2022 the UNHCR reported that during that year 3,234 refugees that had been in Egypt were resettled in several countries (UNHCR 2022a, 2022c).

Syrian Refugees in Iraq

The Syrian refugees are only one part of the problem of refugees and displaced persons in Iraq, which stems mainly from the war against ISIS over the past ten years, and from the conflicts and instability that have existed in the country for decades. According to UN figures, about 1.2 million people are still defined as internally displaced persons, while about 280,000 in Iraq are registered as refugees (UNHCR n.d.-b). Most of the refugees and displaced persons in Iraq are concentrated in the Kurdish autonomous region in northern Iraq —where more than a million Iraqis fled to escape ISIS (World Vision n.d.). In addition, out of the approximately 260,000 Syrian refugees in Iraq, the majority apparently come from the Kurdish areas in eastern Syria, and about 90% of them are located in the Kurdish region of Iraq where there are nine refugee camps (UNHCR n.d.-a). Nevertheless, most of the Syrian refugees live in urban areas.

In 2021, a decade after the start of the crisis in Syria, UN agencies reported about 250,000 Syrian refugees and asylum seekers in Iraq, with deteriorating humanitarian conditions. Like the Syrian refugees in other countries in the Middle East, in Iraq too there have been reports of increased incidents of child labor and child marriage. Moreover, about 60% of the refugee families in Iraq attested that they had reduced their overall consumption of food and that they were in debt. Almost a third of the families, according to UN figures from 2021, relied on humanitarian financial aid.

The accessibility of medical and educational services for the Syrian refugees was to a large extent undermined by the COVID-19 crisis, while the risk of food insecurity increased. Fewer than half of the Syrian refugee children who were registered in educational frameworks before the pandemic continued to participate in learning activities from home while schools were closed (UNICEF 2021).

According to UN figures from 2022, about 86% of the Syrian refugees living in refugee camps in Iraq were coping with food insecurity or at risk of it. In addition, according to the figures, the consequences of the COVID-19 crisis for the state of unemployment and for the Iraqi economy, as well as the consequences of the war in Ukraine on price increases, harm many refugees' access to basic food products. This situation causes many families to adopt problematic coping strategies such as increasing debts, selling assets, child labor, and children dropping out of school in order to support their family's livelihood (United Nations 2022).

Iraqi Policy Towards the Refugees

It seems that the Iraqi government's attitude towards the Syrian refugees and towards displaced persons in its country is sorely lacking (Oxfam Denmark n.d.). In the first few years of the civil war in Syria, it resisted the absorption and integration of the refugees in its territory. Iraq was subsequently subject to criticism for the number of Syrian refugees that it took in,

which was low compared to other countries neighboring Syria. In certain cases, there were also reports of the government's hostile attitude towards the refugees absorbed in Iraq, due to the concern that some of them belong to extreme Islamist organizations and concerns about their influence on the Sunni minority in Iraq and on the stability of the Iraqi government. In this context, reports revealed that while refugees were ostensibly housed in designated centers, in practice they were imprisoned in these centers (New York Times 2012).

It is worth mentioning that the Kurdish autonomous region in Iraq is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention, and its laws do not contain reference to the status of refugees who have fled from conflicts or from persecution and seek asylum within it. The autonomous government designated crossings for Syrians wishing to cross the border into its territory (Majed n.d.), but sometimes closed its borders when the volume of Syrian refugees peaked, especially during the first few years of the civil war. However, the Kurdish identity of most of the Syrian refugees in the region contributed to a sense of solidarity between the refugees and the local community (NRC and Institute on Statelessness and Inclusion n.d.). Following the Turkish invasion of the Kurdish areas in northeastern Syria in 2019, another wave of refugees of Kurdish origin arrived in the Kurdish region in Iraq (Intersos Humanitarian Aid n.d.).

Repatriation of Refugees to Syria

Questions of rehabilitation, political arrangements, and reconciliation in the era after the war in Syria are all interconnected. The Western position led by the United States stipulates three conditions for economic aid: political reform, the establishment of a legitimate regime in Syria, and the repatriation of the refugees. Assad's opposition to real political reform and his unwillingness to repatriate a large portion of the refugees impede the conditions for rehabilitation.

According to the then head of Syrian Air Force Intelligence Directorate, Jamil Hassan: "Syria with 10 million trustworthy people who comply with the leadership is preferable to Syria with 30 million vandals"

When it comes to the refugees, officially the regime expressed support for their repatriation, but in practice this offer lacks substance. Former Syrian foreign minister Walid Muallem declared as early as October 2018 at the UN General Assembly that "there is no longer a reason for the refugees to remain outside of Syria. The doors are open for all Syrians abroad to return voluntarily and safely" (Al Yafai 2018). This contrasts sentiments expressed by Syrians close to the regime, who made it clear that it would be better for the refugees to remain outside of Syria. In their view, the refugees are former rebels or have the potential to rebel against the regime. Assad's loyalists said that a limited population in Syria with a greater proportion of Alawites is preferable to the repatriation of the Syrian refugees. According to the then head of Syrian Air Force Intelligence Directorate, Jamil Hassan: "Syria with 10 million trustworthy people who comply with the leadership is preferable to Syria with 30 million vandals" (Al-Hassan 2018). And indeed in 2010 the Syrian population numbered about 21 million residents while in 2019 it numbered 17 million, while given the departure of the mostly Sunni refugees, the Alawite minority's portion of the population (to which President Assad belongs) increased from 10% to 17%. Assad himself related to the issue, although more moderately, and stated that "we have lost the best of our young people, and our infrastructure has been damaged [...] but in return we have earned a healthier and more harmonious society" (Al-Asad 2017).

Ironically, Russia, the regime's ally, has a position similar to that of the West regarding the repatriation of the refugees. In its view, the

refugees could be an important workforce in the process of rehabilitating Syria, a catalyst for humanitarian aid, investments, and encouraging normalization with other countries in the region.

Towards the end of 2017, when calm was achieved in large parts of Syria and it seemed that the war was approaching its end, tens of thousands of refugees began their return to Syria, mainly from Lebanon and Jordan. In both cases this stemmed from pressure applied by the government of Jordan and Hezbollah in Lebanon on the Syrian refugees to return home. After Hezbollah, alongside the Lebanese army, succeeded in taking control of the Arsal mountains on Lebanon's border with Syria, it started to push about 100,000 refugees from the region to return to Syria (Zisser 2020). That year media and political pressure also increased regarding the Syrian refugees' voluntary return to their home country. After 2022 and given the deepening of the economic crises, the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine, and basic hardships that intensified, the host countries were less able to cater for the refugees. Incidents of violence and intolerance towards the refugees increased and a small portion returned to their home country.

According to UN reports published over the years, about 750,000 refugees have returned to Syria since 2016. The majority of them (500,000) returned from Turkey to regions under the control of the opposition in northwestern Syria following the Turkish military operation against ISIS in 2016 and against the Kurds in 2018. From January to October 2022, 43,254 people returned to Syria. This is a small percentage of the total number of returnees since 2016, and a very tiny percentage of all Syrian refugees. According to UNHCR figures, 29,501 refugees returned from Turkey to northwestern Syria, while 7,087 refugees from Lebanon and 3,679 refugees from Jordan returned to areas controlled by the regime.

The figures indicate that Syrian refugees are not in a hurry to return to Syria, despite the fact that in most of the host countries they do not enjoy freedom of movement and have limited access to nutrition, education, and medical services. According to UN surveys, their non-return to Syria is due to several reasons: First and foremost, concerns about living conditions in Syria, which make it difficult to obtain employment security; a lack of personal security, including fearing for their lives and fearing acts of revenge by the Syrian regime, as they could be seen as a disloyal population (partly based on reports of imprisonment and torture of refugees who returned to Syria); a shortage of proper basic services, an inability to return to their homes because they have been completely destroyed, or if they lack proof that these are indeed their homes; and the destruction of the country's infrastructure.

A survey conducted in September 2023 that examined the refugees' positions regarding their intention to return to Syria shows that the majority of the refugees still hope to return to their home country sometime in the future: 93.5% of those surveyed claimed that they do not intend to return to Syria in the coming year. More than 50% are not interested in returning even in five years, and 43.5% are not interested in returning at all (compared to 40.6% who are interested in returning) (UNHCR 2023b).

Refugee Repatriation Mechanism

Despite the widespread reluctance of the refugees to return to Syria, some of them choose to return to their home country. Their choice does not stem from a real willingness but is mainly due to the harsh living conditions and their disgraceful treatment in the host countries. In most cases the returnees are elderly, women, and children, as young men fear for their fate if they are identified as opponents of the regime or as a disloyal population. Thus, many choose to remain in the neighboring countries or to risk their lives and try to flee illegally by sea.

Despite the desire to repatriate the refugees in order to reduce the burden on surrounding countries, the international community has not arranged for official guarantees from the

Syrian regime that would ensure the safe return of the refugees without the danger of being arrested, tortured, or forcibly conscripted. In practice, there is no orderly mechanism for this as Syria is not functioning as a unified state under one central government. While Turkey sends refugees who are interested in returning to their home country to territories controlled by the Syrian opposition in northwestern Syria, Lebanon sends them to areas controlled by the regime via official border crossings, as it does not border areas controlled by the opposition. Jordan has a similar policy aside from returning refugees to the Al-Tanf region in southeastern Syria, where American forces are present.

Despite the regime's agreement to repatriate some of the refugees, there is no supervision or control of their safe return to Syria, mainly due to lack of coordination between the agencies in Syria and those in the host countries. There are reports of arbitrary and illegal arrests and incidents of rape and sexual violence towards returnees. Amnesty International has defined the repatriation of the refugees to Syria as a death sentence (Amnesty International 2021).

The regime's official policy states that there are groups that it prioritizes for resettlement in Syria, so refugees who are interested in returning to rural areas, especially in the area of the Homs and Damascus suburbs, and not to urban centers, are welcomed. The prioritization is related to the regime's limited ability to provide basic services such as electricity, transportation, health, and education. Settling the refugees in cities would increase the strain that already exists on the infrastructure and minimal services that have been provided in recent years in Syria, due to the fuel crisis and the electricity shortage. The villages are less crowded, and there the refugees' integration in agricultural activity as a place of employment could actually contribute to the production of wheat, fruit, and vegetables, and thus improve the residents' food security.

Over the years the regime has adopted a series of laws intended to place pressure on the refugees. Some of them relate to ownership of real estate, such as Decree 66 from 2012 and Law Number 10 from 2018 (Human Rights Watch 2018). These laws apply in cities, and they aim to enable the expropriation of property from those who cannot prove their ownership of their property, especially in cases where the registered owners of the asset do not live in Syria. Moreover, the regime has the right to expropriate the property of a man and his family members if he has not fulfilled his obligatory military service before the age of 43. Consequently, men must pay an 8,000-dollar fee for exemption from military service or return and enlist before the specified age (AlMustafa 2023).

Furthermore, in the absence of owners, the Assad regime leases agricultural lands that belong to refugees or displaced persons in Syria through public tenders. This policy was adopted in 2019 and is implemented in the rural areas of Hama and Idlib, after the regime restored its control there. This illustrates how the regime exploits refugee assets, including confiscating or renting their property or indirectly forcing them to return, as part of a selective refugee repatriation policy that the regime is trying to implement.

Assad's policy towards Syrians who left the country before the civil war in 2011 is completely different, and actually encourages their return to Syria. This population, which is not seen as hostile to the regime, often receives offers from official figures to invest in regions controlled by Assad. The regime lures them through assistance with investment projects, especially in the services and tourism sectors, that constitute another source of income for the state, as they create new work opportunities and contribute somewhat to rehabilitating the country.

In the case of the return of certain refugees from Lebanon, Turkey, or Jordan, the regime exploits the opportunity to appear as though it welcomes their return, but in reality a selective repatriation policy pursues political interests

rather than reconciliation. Meanwhile, in denying the repatriation of many refugees, the regime places increasing pressure on the host countries, which are already suffering from political and economic crises and from various security threats.

Conclusion and Implications

The Syrian refugee crisis has weighty political, social, economic, and security consequences for the Middle East. In most cases, the refugees have not been optimally absorbed in the host countries and they suffer from a lack of personal security, economic hardship, and poor sanitary conditions. Aside from the economic difficulties that the Syrian refugees are experiencing, they are exposed to various forms of exploitation, from child labor to sexual violence and recruitment into armed organizations or criminal organizations. There are numerous reports of the operation of organized crime networks in refugee camps and in areas where refugees live, including Syrian refugees, in Jordan and Lebanon, as well as in Germany and the UK (AFP 2018; Miles 2013; Townsend 2023). The refusal of host countries to recognize refugee status causes major limitations on refugees' freedom of movement, raises difficulties and restricts access to state services, with an emphasis on medical services, assistance with food, and access to education, and exposes the refugees to exploitation and abuse (NRC 2014).

In Lebanon and Turkey in particular, Syrian refugees are coping with hostile government policy and negative public attitudes towards them. The opposition parties in Turkey long ago made the Syrian refugee issue a main component of their agendas, while encouraging anti-Syrian sentiment. President Erdogan abandoned his government's friendly rhetoric and in 2022 committed to sending a million refugees back to northern Syria. In Lebanon, the Syrian refugees have coped with a rise in arbitrary deportations, including Lebanese army raids of refugee camps. While the Syrian refugees in Jordan receive better treatment from the government and greater support from citizens, possibly due in part to the composition of the local population in the kingdom, which includes many Palestinian refugees, this does not ease the economic and humanitarian difficulties that the Syrian refugees face.

A decade of hosting refugees in countries in crisis and a limited willingness on their part to absorb the refugees properly have led to large-scale impacts on the resilience and stability of the host countries in the Middle East. While the depth of the economic crisis of the host country cannot be blamed on the presence of the refugees, especially in the case of failed states such as Iraq and Lebanon, this study has proven that the refugees are a convenient focus of blame for the economic difficulties and the social and political pressures in the host countries.

It is clear that in certain cases the mass flow of refugees placed an economic burden on countries with a precarious economy. Out of despair at their circumstances or an inability to obtain the appropriate work permits, the refugees generally agree to work for low wages, under difficult conditions, and with fewer rights than their counterparts in the host communities. The enormous wave of Syrian refugees intensified the strain on the labor market and led to a shortage of jobs, alongside the strain on state services and infrastructure that caused substantial harm to the country's ability to address the needs of the local residents. Furthermore, in countries such as Jordan and Lebanon, the increase in the cost of rent, especially in the districts neighboring Syria, is attributed to the wave of refugees (Khawaldah and Alzboun 2022). However, studies have proven that in many cases the refugees actually contributed to the local economies and attracted international support for local development, but this fact is usually ignored, both by the leaderships and by the public in the host countries.

The wave of Arab countries normalizing relations with the Assad regime, which began

in 2020, stemmed to a large extent from the desire that in return for renewed recognition and rehabilitation funding, Assad would permit the safe passage of the refugees to Syria, thus easing internal pressures in the host countries. However, the normalization process has not translated into voluntary return on a significant scale due to the ongoing violence, oppression and the economic crisis that has afflicted Syria for the past five years. Thus, the despair of the countries, chiefly Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan, of achieving a solution that would lead to the safe and agreed-upon repatriation of the Syria refugees, led to a massive wave of deportations of refugees back to Syria, contrary to the basic principles of international law and with the international community failing to address the issue.

The government of Syria itself seems unwilling to receive refugees posing possible threats to its authority. The nature of the Syrian regime, which is not willing to make concessions, compromises, or civil and liberal reforms that would benefit the country's citizens, reduces the chances of the voluntary repatriation of greater numbers of refugees in the coming years. Consequently, the pressure on the host countries, which are already suffering from political and economic crises and from various security threats, is expected to increase. While the refugees are not the ones creating the crises and are not their main cause, the public and political pressure placed on them is expected to increase. In addition, as the trend of deporting refugees grows, forced mass repatriation will lead many Syrians to try to reach Europe—which is contrary to the interests of Europe and the United States.

The international community's indifferent attitude towards the violations of refugees' human rights in the various countries and its inability to effectively influence the Syrian regime make it difficult to guarantee the safe repatriation of refugees and ensure continued pressure on the host countries. Despite the European Union and the UN's attempts to provide economic aid and to condemn violations of refugee rights in the host countries, it is evident that all attempts have failed due to the lack of sustainable mechanisms that would enable the reshaping of a complex political system that is leading to a deterioration in the refugees' condition.

This reality requires rethinking the current strategy: First, it is necessary to adopt long-term approaches and solutions while economically supporting and helping the host countries. This is different from the current aid programs, which rely on short-term funding cycles that are implemented by international non-governmental organizations that are not always coordinated with the host countries' systems. Second, it is necessary to put forward benefits and incentives that will encourage economic growth in the host countries and also enable the creation of new employment opportunities in essential professions, especially in sectors with high levels of refugee employment. Furthermore, a teaching and training framework is needed that will provide refugees with professional capabilities and skills that will enable them to go out into the labor market. Greater involvement of local bodies and civil society organizations, which are more familiar with the characteristics of the political and social system in the country, is needed in order to ease the refugees' integration in communities and to reduce hostility towards them. Finally, a significant effort is needed to improve the economic, security, and civil situation in northern Syria for the refugees that do want to return, in the format of an approach focused on rehabilitation and development in the area.

Without a new approach, the Syrian refugees, their children and subsequent generations will continue to be exposed to neglect and to various dangers. This reality will deepen political, economic, and security pressures on the host communities, which will spiral into continued hostile policy towards the refugees, in addition to the geopolitical consequences

that could affect the Middle East (and beyond) for many years.

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Notes

1 According to the UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, a refugee is a person who cannot or does not wish to return to his country of origin due to a well-founded fear of being persecuted on the basis of race, religion, nationality, belonging to a certain social group, or political views. According to the UN's *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement*, displaced persons are "persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized state border."

Population Growth in Egypt: Threats, Responses and Opportunities

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Egypt is the most populous Arab country in the Middle East. In 2020 its population passed the 100 million milestone and may reach 200 million by the year 2100. The dizzying rise in the Egyptian population embodies opportunities for the land of the Nile, but also complex problems. As the Egyptian President Abd al-Fattah al-Sisi has clarified more than once, reducing the birthrate tops national priorities and is perceived as a basic condition for securing a future of sustainable development, economic welfare and political stability in the country. This paper examines the weighty demographic challenges facing Egypt, surveys the strategies adopted by the Egyptian regime to deal with them, and analyzes their significance. At this point in time, it looks as if Egypt is managing to bring about gradual restraint in population growth, but it is still far from the ambitious targets it set itself. In every future scenario the demographic factor is expected to remain a central variable shaping Egypt's interests and its domestic and foreign policies. As for Israel, the high rate of natural growth in its southern neighbor could increase risks such as infiltration by refugees, but also reinforce the interests of both parties in the maintenance of peace and the expansion of bilateral and multilateral collaborations.

Keywords: Egypt, Demography, Population growth, Abd al-Fattah al-Sisi, Family Planning, Women, Israel

Introduction: Reducing the Egyptian Birthrate as an Ongoing Challenge

Egypt deserves the title "Mother of the World" (Umm al-Dunya) not only because of its rich cultural heritage but also thanks to its multitude of descendants: there are 5,599 births every day, 233 per hour, four every minute, and a birth every 15 seconds (Salih & Salah al-Din 2024).

A high rate of natural population increase is not exceptional in the Middle East, particularly among traditional and rural groups with poor education and socioeconomic status, but in Egypt it has become the fundamental issue shaping the present and future. Demography affects every country differently, according to its unique circumstances, and can lead to diverse and even contradictory outcomes: On the one hand it grants a "demographic dividend," that is, it leads to a rise in the proportion of the working population and a decline in the proportion of non-working dependent groups—the elderly and children. On the other hand, in the absence of suitable development and growth, it can create crises such as pressure on infrastructure

and resources, unemployment and poverty. Countries with high population growth must constantly expand public services such as education, health and welfare; create new jobs; provide food and welfare payments, and in some cases this naturally leads to efforts to reduce the birthrate (Rivlin 2009, 7-11, 36-37).

The first census in Egypt took place in 1882. At that time there were almost seven million residents in the Land of the Nile. Since the start of the twentieth century there have been sharp and rapid demographic changes. In 1900 there were about 10 million inhabitants, by 1950 about 20 million, in 1981 about 44 million, and in 2020 about 100 million. In the 1950s and 1960s the Egyptian birthrate stood at about seven children per woman on average, and since then it has shrunk gradually to 2.85.

However, the pace of population growth has not slowed because the trend to a lower birthrate was not constant or uniform in all parts of the country, and also due to the "demographic momentum" phenomenon, where the drop in birthrate coincided with improved levels of medical care, leading to a decline in infant mortality and a rise in life expectancy. In these circumstances the current balance between births and mortality—which could potentially reduce population growth in Egypt—is expected to continue for decades. Another factor delaying the decline in population growth is the increase in the number of women of child-bearing age, recorded simultaneously with the drop in births (Gal 2015, 15-28; UN News 2022; Winkler 2008, 84-88; Sofer & Gross-Lan 2008, 52-64).

The rapid population growth, which began in the second half of the twentieth century forced Egypt to face a number of challenges, including the provision of health services for women and small children, educational frameworks for children and youths, the creation of new jobs for a constantly growing young workforce and the supply of essential goods (Gal 2015, 15-28; Khalifa et al. 2001). The rapid population increase in rural areas coincided with a reduction in the average per capita allocation of agricultural land, meaning less demand for agricultural workers, and therefore more unemployment and poverty. These circumstances accelerated the process of urbanization (migration to towns), leading to overcrowding and greater stress on urban infrastructures such as transport, water, sewage and energy. The population explosion in Egypt created profound national dependence on food imports to meet the growing needs of its citizens. A further difficulty is the "brain drain" as educated Egyptians move to countries where they can expect a better standard of living (Winkler 2008, 115-123; Sofer & Gross-Lan 2008, 52-64). During the years 1980-2010 educated Egyptians accounted for 40%-60% of emigrants who left the country ('Imara 2013, 22-23).

According to the academic literature, in recent decades developing countries have tried to tackle population growth by encouraging family planning (Bergstrom et al. 2013, 153; Bongaarts & Hodgson 2022, 141-142). Past governments in Egypt also adopted similar actions to lower the birthrate, including the

Diagram. Population Growth in Egypt in the Last 200 years

Source: Akhbar al-Yawm

provision of family planning services, explaining the importance of contraception, making contraception accessible to the public, and encouraging women to enter the job market. At the same time, policies to reduce the birthrate were not always pursued with determination: they began during the rule of Gamal Abdel Nasser (1954-1970), lapsed during the rule of Anwar a-Sadat (1970-1981) and re-emerged during the rule of Hosni Mubarak (1981-2011). The latter recorded partial success in the matter, while struggling against religious perceptions that encouraged fertility, by explaining the negative socioeconomic significance of large families. But even he did not provide a satisfactory solution to the problem, which as described below still burdens Egypt and threatens its future (Rivlin 2003, 16; 2009, 95-100).

In this paper we examine the demographic challenges that Egypt faces at present and the steps that the authorities in Cairo are taking to address them. We propose an interim assessment of their effectiveness and their significance as well as their limitations, while taking account of the fact that these are historical processes that are still in progress. The paper is based on the study of a rich and varied corpus of sources in Arabic, English and Hebrew, including professional publications by thinktanks, press articles and official Egyptian government documents.

"A Ticking Bomb": The Demographic Situation Under al-Sisi

The social and political upheavals in Egypt at the start of the 2010s were an unexpected obstacle to the struggle to reduce the birthrate. The revolution of January 25, 2011, distracted public and government attention from the issue of population growth for some time, led to a temporary shortage of contraceptives in pharmacies in the shadow of the political anarchy and, in the years 2012-2013, brought to power the Muslim Brotherhood, which promoted a religious-conservative agenda. The result was a rise in the average number of children per family from three in 2008, towards the end of the Mubarak era, to 3.5 in 2014, the start of the al-Sisi era (Sabry 2023). The retreat from efforts to reduce the birthrate exacted a heavy price from Egypt, as shown by the rise of public expenditure on services such as education, health and housing (El-Saharty et al. 2022).

As stated, in 2020 Egypt officially crossed the threshold of 100 million inhabitants, and by the end of 2023 there were almost 106 million (51.6% of them male). In 2023 the population was growing by about 1.4 million people every year (calculated as 2.044 million births minus the number of deaths). The average number of children per woman stood at 2.85. The latest figures, although high, reflect a drop of 8% in the natural increase compared to 2022 (in which there were about 150,000 more births). This is the largest drop recorded since 2002 (Salih & Salah al-Din 2024). Not only that, but the rate of natural increase also fell from 1.6% in 2022 to 1.4% in 2023, the lowest rate of population growth recorded in Egypt for half a century (al-Qi'i 2024). The Egyptian population is very young, over a third are children under the age of 15, and almost half are under the age of 24. The forecast is that by 2050 the country will have 141-160 million inhabitants, based on various scenarios of reductions in the birth rate (Baraniya 2022; Zayn 2023).

The political and economic crises that struck Egypt over the past decade made it hard for the country to exploit its "demographic dividend," with over 60% of the population of working age. Economic growth in Egypt, which was around 4.2% on average throughout the decade, was not high enough to keep up with the rapid population growth, to create enough proper jobs for the new entrants to the job market, and to provide a suitable response to the rising needs of the economy (Zayn 2022). About a third of Egyptians live below the poverty line, population density in the capital Cairo is about 52,000 per square kilometer, there are an average of 1.56 beds in Egyptian hospitals for every 1,000 people (compared to a global

average of 1.9), and the average number of pupils in a class is 47.5, although in some schools the number rises to 90 (USAID 2023; Winter 2023, 15). Although unemployment has been somewhat curbed and fell below the 10% threshold, many of the available jobs are low paid, offer poor conditions, and are unsuitable for the educated younger generation (Zayn 2023).

In the first half of the last decade, the economic challenges led to an increase in emigration from Egypt, rising from about 300,000 in 2010 to about half a million in 2015 (Macrotrends n.d.-a). However, reinforcement of the Egyptian struggle against illegal migration reduced the scale of the phenomenon. In 2021-2023 the number of Egyptian migrants to Europe varied from 9,000 to 22,000, most of whom went through Turkey, Libya and Sudan. In 2022 a survey by The Arab Barometer found that 13% of Egyptians were considering emigration—the lowest rate among countries of the Middle East and North Africa (Abufalgha 2022; DTM n.d.; Macrotrends n.d.-b). According to a report published in 2019 by The Central Agency for Public Mobilization & Statistics in Egypt, the highest proportion of emigrants are aged 25-29, while the lowest rate is in the 65+ age group, mostly men. The report also showed that migration was more common from rural areas than urban areas, and that most migrants had a high school and higher education (Mohamed Farid Mahmoud 2020, 383-384). At the same time Egypt continues to suffer from a brain drain, and according to the Egyptian Medical Syndicate, in the years 2019-2022 over 11,500 doctors left the country (Farouk Mahfouz 2023), including to Britain (al-Sadat 2022).

The demographic challenges facing Egypt are exacerbated by the global ecological crisis: rising temperatures, climate changes, extreme weather events (such as heatwaves and dust storms), desertification and urbanization, and rising sea levels, which could flood coastal towns and damage agricultural land. To these must be added the serious shortage of water resources, centering mainly on the River Nile, which is threatened by the Renaissance Dam in Ethiopia. Egypt's water distress in turn affects the agricultural sector and food security. Moreover, Egypt is dependent for half its grains on imports, whose availability could be severely impacted by the effects of climate change on global wheat crops, and due to economic and geopolitical factors such as the war in Ukraine, leading to steep price increases. The effects of climate change are made more severe by the unique geographical profile of Egypt, a desert country where more than 90% of the population are crowded into the Nile valley and along the Mediterranean coast, creating pressures on rapidly dwindling basic natural resources, such as water and fertile agricultural land. In this situation there is a growing gap between the state's resources and its ability to supply the basic needs of its inhabitants, and this could lead to public protests and even threaten the regime's stability (Berkovsky and Sofer 2012, 40; Terdiman et al., 2022).

Al-Sisi has frequently defined the high birthrate as the greatest threat to Egyptian national security, as a danger to political stability, and as a source of other problems: the provision of employment and housing, developing decent education and health services, and making progress to a better future

It is therefore no wonder that the Egyptian leadership—from the President to his ministers—give highest priority to the issue of population growth, and see it as the key to easing Egypt's deep-rooted problems now and in the future. al-Sisi has frequently defined the high birthrate as the greatest threat to Egyptian national security, as a danger to political stability, and as a source of other problems: the provision of employment and housing, developing decent education and health services, and making progress to a better future (Tabikha 2023). The President even rebuked families who choose to have more than two children (O'Grady &

Farouk Mahfouz 2022). The Minister of Health & Population, Khaled Abdel Ghaffar, also cited natural population increase as the biggest obstacle to economic growth, and a source of poverty and hunger, due to the difficulty in providing the necessary resources, and as a factor that adversely affects the quality of public services in the fields of education and health, and the overall standard of living (Tabikha 2023). Muhammed al-Baz, chairman of the editorial board of the government-supporting al-Dustur newspaper, warned that a continuation of the current situation could lead Egypt to "collective suicide" (Jamal 2023).

On the other hand, Egyptian opposition figures have sometimes proposed a different point of view. For example, there were some who recalled that the experience of some other countries shows that natural increase can actually lead to economic growth; therefore the economic difficulties under al-Sisi should not be blamed on population growth but also—and perhaps mainly—on the government's failure to deal with challenges such as poverty, education, employment and health (al-Misri 2019).

In fact, while the average birthrate per woman was 2.85 in 2023 (an improvement compared to 3.4 in 2017), Egypt's actual target is to gradually reduce it to 1.6 by 2052 (al-Watan 2021). Another ambitious target defined by President al-Sisi is to reduce the annual number of births to 400,000 for two decades—a step that he estimates will restrain natural growth and lead to the necessary balance between the state's financial capabilities and population size (Arabic CNN 2023a). It should be noted that in 2023 there were 1.4 million births—very far from the President's target, but 6.8% less than in 2022. In any event, if Egypt meets its targets it will benefit from the overall age structure of a young population of working age, that could open a promising window of opportunity (El-Saharty et al. 2022).

Over the years a number of factors have contributed to the high birthrate in Egypt and placed difficult obstacles in the way of government attempts—past and present—to slow down the country's population growth:

a. Traditional social beliefs that high fertility is a religious precept. These are more widespread among rural communities and are supported by some clerics (or at least are not firmly refuted).
b. Low use of contraception by married Egyptian women (59% in 2014, rising to 66% in 2021), whether due to religious reasons (see the previous paragraph), lack of awareness, economic distress or lack of availability in pharmacies and clinics.
c. The common link between a woman's economic and social status and the number of her children, who are seen as "insurance" in case she is widowed or divorced. This combines with common beliefs among Egyptian women that having numerous children will stop a man from abandoning his wife or taking another wife. It should be noted that although polygamy is permitted in Islam, the actual incidence in Egypt is tiny, with less than one percent of men living with more than one wife.
d. Children are assigned an essential role in the economic support of the family. As of 2021 about 5% of children aged 5-17 were working, while this rate was double among poor and rural families whose children are usually employed in agriculture. At the same time there is a negative attitude to the birth of daughters, due to traditional attitudes that reject the idea of women going out into the public space to find work, and sometimes families continue having children until a son is born, who can help to support the family.
e. Early marriage of girls under the age of 18 (partly for reasons of poverty and the desire to obtain the bridal price) means many years of childbearing, numerous children and lack of education (Baraniya 2024a; Winkler 2008, 81-82; Zayn 2023; Sofer & Gross-Lan 2008, 52-64; UNICEF 2024; Kramer 2020).

Cartoon. The "Population Time Bomb" Threatens Egyptian "Development"

Source: Youm7

Strategies Adopted by the al-Sisi government in the face of Population Growth

The importance that Egypt attaches to the demographic challenge has already found expression in the constitution approved in 2014. Section 41 deals with the country's commitment to strive towards achieving the necessary balance between population growth and the resources available, to maximize the investment in human capital and improve skills in order to achieve sustainable development (Constitution of Egypt 2014; Ministry of Health & Population and National Population Council 2023, 12; Tawfiq 2022, 4). The constitutional declarations have been translated by the al-Sisi government into practical policy that is being implemented along two main dimensions. First are the actions taken to improve the standard of living in view of rapid natural population growth and the resulting pressures on state services and resources. The second dimension is the policy intended to bring about a significant reduction in the birth rate over the coming decades.

With respect to the first dimension, over the past decade Egypt has promoted economic, social and infrastructure programs that are designed to help the state and its citizens deal with the consequences of population growth (Ministry of Health & Population and National Population Council 2023, 9-11). In 2021 President al-Sisi announced the construction of a "New Republic"—the code name for a broad vision to raise the standard of living in Egypt in the areas of housing, health, education, employment and infrastructure. On the subject of housing, for example, Egypt embarked on a range of projects based on the understanding that it had to build 600,000 housing units each year to keep pace with the growing population. One of the most prominent projects is the new administrative center still under construction, which on completion should accommodate 6.5 million residents (Flat & Villa n.d.). Dozens of other towns have been built, most of which are in desert areas, with the aim of encouraging a more balanced geographical dispersion of the population, relieving the overcrowding in the towns between the Nile valley and the Delta, protecting agricultural land from urban sprawl, creating incentives to attract capital and investment in the desert regions, and deriving benefit from their natural resources. These towns are expected to provide homes for over 30 million people (Ministry of Health & Population and National Population Council 2023, 15-16; Salih 2023; Tabikha 2023).

Some of the housing projects are the subject of public controversy in Egypt, particularly the new administrative capital. Critics of this project—whose cost is estimated at some 45 billion dollars—argue that it is wasting state funds that should have been invested in more pressing matters, such as education and health (Tabikha 2023). In addition, there is criticism of the high cost of housing in the new capital, which is beyond the reach of the average family. In this sense the project is not realizing one of its declared objectives: the provision of affordable housing for all Egyptians (Arabi 21 2023). If that were not enough, the project is progressing more slowly than planned, and the target of a million residents living there by 2026 seems far from realistic at present (Abu Bakr 2024; Yunis 2022).

Another flagship project in the field of economic development and the struggle

against poverty is "Decent Life" (hayah karima), which was announced in 2019 and is intended to improve the lives of millions of Egyptians living in 4,700 villages that suffer from high rates of poverty, overcrowding and poor levels of housing, sewage, sanitation, education, medicine and employment. At the end of 2023 the project had been implemented in about 1,500 villages and some 18 million residents had benefited (Amin 2021; Hasan 2023; Tulan 2021). Another project is dedicated to the elimination of unplanned slums (al-ashwa'iyyat) and moving their residents to towns that can provide them with better housing and services. During the years 2014-2023 some 1.2 million people from 300 slum neighborhoods and 25 districts benefited from the construction of some 250,000 housing units (Hani 2023; Ministry of Health & Population and National Population Council 2023, 14-15; Nabil 2023).

In recent years Egypt has worked on the provision of free family planning assistance, which is given in public and mobile clinics operated by the Egyptian Ministry of Health & Population in all regions of the country.

In the field of education, Egypt has adopted reforms designed to prepare the younger generation for future integration in the local and global job market and to contribute to the development of the country. The reforms include modernization of schools, improvement of infrastructures and construction of new classrooms and schools, to ease the overcrowding in educational institutions (Winter 2023, 15). In the fields of food and water security, Egypt adopted a long term action plan including extending agricultural land from 9.7 million padans[1] in 2023 to 15 million padans in 2030, focusing on crops that require little water, reducing dependence on food imports, developing water resources and setting up dozens of water desalination and recycling plants. In the energy sector, Egypt is working strenuously to meet the soaring electricity needs of the economy, by developing domestic and external gas resources and sources of renewable energy (Terdiman et al. 2022; El-Din 2023).

With regard to the brain drain, the Ministry of Migration and the General Union of Egyptians Abroad are making efforts to bring Egyptian exiles back to their homeland and recruit them to the efforts to develop the New Republic, particularly in the case of highly educated emigrants in the fields of science (Ibrahim 2022).

As for the second dimension of reducing natural population growth, Egypt under al-Sisi has formulated a national population strategy for the period 2023-2030, whose purpose is to bring about a drastic drop in birthrates. The current target is a decline from 2.85 to 2.4 children per woman by 2030 (Baraniya 2024a). Even before that, in 2021 Egypt launched the National Project for the Development of the Egyptian Family, whose purpose was to improve the quality of life in the country by moderating population growth (Ministry of Health & Population and National Population Council 2023, 9, 13). In order to reduce the birthrate, a variety of strategies were employed: provision of family planning services, economic incentives, legislative intervention, educational activities, obtaining religious approval for the moves, and female empowerment.

Help in Family Planning

In recent years Egypt has worked on the provision of free family planning assistance, which is given in public and mobile clinics operated by the Egyptian Ministry of Health & Population in all regions of the country. Training was given to thousands of medical teams in health departments, as well as thousands of obstetricians, gynecologists and nurses, to provide medical services in maternity and gynecological departments. Since 2020, on the initiative of the Ministry for Social Solidarity, Egypt has also been offering a telephone hotline service called "We are with you" (ihna ma'aki), to respond to queries from women on matters

of family planning and fertility (‘Abd al-Salam 2022).

In addition, the Ministry of Health & Population supplies a range of effective contraceptives at subsidized prices, available at family planning clinics, community centers and hospitals all over Egypt. The purpose is to find the safest type of contraception for each woman based on her unique circumstances, such as contraceptive injections or pills of various kinds, including those suitable for nursing mothers. According to Ministry data for 2023, these steps have led to a rise of 66% in the use of family planning measures (‘Abd al-Salam 2023).

Incentives to Reduce the Birthrate

In the framework of the National Project for Development of the Egyptian Family, women are offered a financial incentive to limit births. In 2023 the Ministry of Planning and the Ministry of Economic & Financial Development announced that the Egyptian government would place at the disposal of married women aged 21-45, with no more than two children, an annual savings grant of 1,000 Egyptian pounds. The cumulative amount would be calculated according to the woman’s age when joining the project, and it would be redeemable when she reaches the age of 45, as long as she complies with the terms (Sabry 2023). Apart from limiting the number of children to two, the terms for receiving the money include periodic visits to family development clinics, intervals between births, provision of regular vaccinations for children, participation in frameworks for women’s education, and regular checkups for breast cancer and non-infectious diseases (Arabic CNN 2023b).

The move attracted wide criticism in Egypt. The central argument was that the amount was too low to encourage reduction in births (Sabry 2023). For example, women in their twenties and thirties stated that they would not decide how many children to have in return for an incentive they would only receive many years later. It was also argued that the value of the money could be lower at redemption because of Egypt’s high inflation rate, the constant devaluation of the Egyptian pound and taxation on the final sum (Mustafa 2023). Another argument was that the profit from children’s work for some families was larger than the grant, so they would continue to see numerous children as the preferred way of dealing with poverty (Hafiz 2023).

Legislative Activity

In recent years the Egyptian government has taken a series of legislative steps, which are still in various stages of legislation, with the aim of reinforcing state control of population growth and directly or indirectly reducing the birthrate. It is sometimes difficult to trace the exact timetable of the progress, approval and implementation of these legislative steps, but it is possible to draw conclusions regarding the general direction of government moves.

Firstly, since 2018 the Ministry of Justice, with the support of President al-Sisi, has been promoting a law to prevent the marriage of minors under the age of 18, with the possibility of prosecuting anyone involved in such a marriage: the father, guardian, husband, witnesses and lawyers. In 2023 a draft bill on this matter was published by the legislative committee of the Egyptian parliament, but as of early 2024 the law had not yet been approved and had still not formally come into force (Baraniya 2024b; Ministry of Health & Population and National Population Council 2023, 62-63; Radwan 2023).

Secondly, since the start of the decade, the Egyptian government has been promoting amendments to the Personal Status Law, with the aim of regulating inter alia the laws on marriage, and perhaps, although not openly stated, also to reduce the rate of marriage. According to the draft bill published in 2022, couples who wish to marry must meet various preconditions, including: the absence of legal obstacles (such as a criminal record); medical checks to discover non-infectious diseases (such as diabetes, hypertension and obesity) and

infectious diseases (such as HIV), plus genetic tests in cases of consanguineous marriage; bringing two witnesses; confirmation that the couple are of sound mind; and permission for a legal representative to validate the marriage. The law has not yet been finally approved, and in February 2024 President al-Sisi ordered the committee responsible for drafting it to complete the work without delay ('Ali 2024; State Information Service 2023a).

The assumption behind the bill is that educated and working women will marry later and have fewer children than uneducated and non-working women, and that there is a direct link between investment in education for girls and young women, and the desire for smaller families, which will slow down population growth

It should be noted that the bill aroused public protest from those who maintained that it amounted to excessive and improper state interference in personal matters, made the marriage process too complicated, and placed a further financial burden on couples. In response, al-Sisi stated that the purpose of the law was not to make marriage too difficult for couples, but to assure their parents that the marriage was suitable, and the state would be failing in its duty otherwise. Although the president avoided stating explicitly that the purpose of the law was to delay marriages or reduce the birthrate, he recommended that newlywed couples should wait one to three years in order to examine the state of their marriage before bringing children into the world (al-Khalij al-Jadid 2023; al-Hurra 2022). Not only that, but the bill also stipulates conditions for polygamy, including the husband's obligation to submit a request to the Family Matters Court and to obtain the approval of his first wife to marry another wife (Egypt Independent 2022). These demands, which are designed to restrict polygamy and therefore also fertility, are in addition to the objection to polygamy from Sheikh al-Azhar Ahmed al-Tayeb, who noted that this custom was harmful to women and children and only permitted by the religion in very limited circumstances (Egypt Today 2022).

Thirdly, in late 2023 the Egyptian People's Council debated an amendment to the Children's Law, including more serious penalties ranging from fines to actual imprisonment for failing to report births or delay in reporting births (Abu Talib 2023; 'Ali 2023). The amendment bill was intended to reduce the phenomenon of births occurring under the government radar, when information does not reach the Ministry of Health and the Population Registry Office. One of the reasons for failing to register births is the case of children born to couples who married in a traditional marriage with no official contract (zawaj urfi) (Awda 2022). According to figures from the Central Agency for Public Mobilization & Statistics, in 2015 the number of traditional marriages reached 88,000, representing some 9% of marriages in Egypt, while in 2018 the number jumped to over 100,000 and in 2020 it reached 113,000 (Abu al-Rus 2020; al-Saqar 2015; Daya' al-Din 2021).

Finally, Egypt has tried to promote a law imposing penalties and fines for dropping out of education, partly to encourage education of women, but the bill in its original format was not approved. The assumption behind the bill is that educated and working women will marry later and have fewer children than uneducated and non-working women, and that there is a direct link between investment in education for girls and young women, and the desire for smaller families, which will slow down population growth (Yusuf et al. 2014, 5; Ministry of Health & Population and National Population Council 2023, 62-63). As a rule, the rate of higher education in Egypt is lower for women than for men: In 2022 the rate of education for girls was 68.95%, compared to 79.99% for boys (referring to young people aged 15 and over who can read and write) (O'Neill 2024). In addition, the dropout rate from junior high school is slightly higher for girls than for boys,

but in the years 2018-2021 it was only between 1% and 2% (Draya Forum 2022). In an attempt to improve the state of education, in 2022 the government submitted a bill to impose a fine on the guardian of a boy or girl who was regularly absent from school without justification, but it was ultimately rejected with the argument that it would impose a heavy economic burden on families who could not manage the costs of education, such as uniforms, writing materials and books (Salama 2022). In early 2024 it was reported that the government had decided to change direction and offer financial grants to help needy families to meet the costs of sending dropouts back to school or keeping their children in school. However there is a concern that many of the families prioritize the children's immediate income potential over the benefits of education (Hafiz, 2024b).

Information Campaigns

The struggle to reduce the birthrate in Egypt is supported by a broad information campaign to encourage citizens to cooperate with government policy. The campaign makes use of the media, social networks, field work and activities in schools and institutions of higher education to spread its message. For example, the government's radio and tv channels broadcast public service messages encouraging the public to take advantage of family planning services. Social network influencers—including football players, movie stars and musicians—are recruited to act as government "ambassadors" to raise awareness of the overpopulation issue among the younger generation (ʻAbd al-Jalil 2020).

In order to reach other audiences and raise their awareness of family planning services, the government conducts seminars in all regions of the country, including in villages and distant provinces (ʻAbd al-Salam 2022). Hospitals have also held seminars for women, dealing with subjects such as the benefits of family planning, maintaining child health, and the risks of pregnancy at a young age (al-Shawki 2023). There was also a "Service to Your Door" campaign with home visits to selected target populations to raise awareness of family planning issues (ʻAbd al-Salam 2023).

Special efforts to provide information about limiting family size are aimed at the younger generation. For example, there are meetings with university students with discussions on the causes of population growth in Egypt, the challenges it poses and the actions required to tackle them (al-Qahira 2023 24; Saʻd 2023). Similar meetings are aimed at school pupils, including seminars on the importance of the population issue and its impact on the quality of life for individuals and society in general (Nafiʻ 2023).

The grade 10 textbook, "Geography of Egypt," teaches pupils about the negative consequences of overpopulation, including unemployment, overcrowding, drug problems, poverty and illiteracy.

Messages in this spirit also find expression in the school curriculum, subject to a decision by the Ministry of Health to introduce content relating to population and fertility issues (ʻAbd al-Latif 2022). For example, the grade 10 textbook, "Geography of Egypt," teaches pupils about the negative consequences of overpopulation, including unemployment, overcrowding, drug problems, poverty and illiteracy. It also describes various factors that can help to reduce the rate of increase, including economic depression, war and political instability. The book teaches pupils that a small family can ensure a better life, and that the conditions for reducing the birthrate include raising the level of education, bringing women into the workforce, planning family size in advance and using contraception. These solutions for reducing the birthrate are presented not only as a social need but also as permitted by religious laws. For example, "Dialogue Literature in Islam," a 12th grade textbook, quotes Islamic rulings that

permit—in certain circumstances—the use of contraceptives (Winter 2023, 75-76).

The Religious Stamp of Approval for Fertility Reduction

National religious institutions and religious leaders in Egypt have also joined the government campaign to provide information on reducing the birthrate. The government is keen to obtain religious approval for dealing with the problem, understanding the strong influence of religious considerations—which are as strong as cultural and social considerations—on the degree of public cooperation with the official policy on matters such as family planning and the use of contraceptives (Hafiz 2024a). Therefore, following al-Sisi's declaration regarding the dangers of overpopulation, in 2021 religious institutions began a campaign of information on social media, designed to persuade Egyptians that limiting childbirth is legitimate. On its Twitter account the Egyptian Religious Court launched the hashtag "Family planning is permitted" (tanzim al-nasl ja'iz) to clarify the religious view on the subject and to reply to questions from followers, stressing that the state is permitted to adopt the necessary measures. At the same time, the Egyptian Ministry of Awqaf launched an awareness campaign on the subject, which was promoted through joint seminars with the National Media Authority and the National Press Authority. A number of prominent religious scholars have also given their backing to government efforts to limit the birthrate in declarations that were broadcast on Egyptian tv ('Abd al-Latif 2021).

Senior scholars from al-Azhar, Egypt's most important religious institution, have also expressed support for the state's efforts to control population growth because of its negative effects on the economy, health and education services (Wahba 2021). They stress that there is no valid basis in religious practice for condemning family planning efforts, and the religion actually permits limiting births if this improves the standard of living and serves needs such as providing proper education to the younger generation (Midhat 2021). Sheikh al-Azhar Ahmed al-Tayeb called on Egyptian society to unite in the struggle against misguided perceptions that oppose family planning, and noted that overpopulation puts a strain on Egypt's resources and hinders its economic development (Karim 2021).

Moreover, in early 2022 the Egypt's Dar al-Ifta' published a book on family planning laws in Islam, which was distributed by the Ministry of Social Solidarity at special conferences on fertility reduction held all over the country (Shahin 2022). A religious ruling by Dar al-Ifta' states that Islam permits spacing pregnancies to protect the mother's health and to improve the education she gives her children, as long as her fertility is not irreversibly damaged ('Abd al-Rahman 2022). Finally, in January 2024 the Ministry of Awqaf and the Ministry of Health agreed that Friday sermons would be devoted to raising awareness of the dangers of excessive population growth and its negative consequences, and they would set up joint working teams of religious leaders and doctors to give lectures on the subject to citizens in hospitals, schools and universities and other places of assembly (Hafiz 2024a).

Empowering Women

The Egyptian government has adopted a variety of ways to empower women of child-bearing age (18-45), by encouraging them to study and find work, and to increase their financial independence. These actions, although not formally and directly aimed at reducing the birthrate, indirectly help the government efforts to achieve this goal.

The Egyptian National Council for Women makes a variety of efforts to encourage women to enter the job market, to bring productive women who own small businesses to the market and help them to grow as entrepreneurs. For example, the Council's Center for the Development of Women's Skills holds training courses for women interested in setting up small

businesses, to introduce them to the basics of management and marketing. Some of the courses include practical training. The Center also offers supplementary courses for new graduates of academic institutions to help them find employment. The courses cover essential skills such as basic and advanced computer skills, writing a resume and preparing for job interviews. The Center also provides courses for working women to further their achievements (50 Million African Women Speak n.d.).

The Council has also set up a program, "Female Entrepreneurs Move Forward," designed to encourage business development for women who wish to set up small businesses. The program is intended to help them to make a business plan and establish their business. It is designed for older and younger women who already have a business as well as those who would like to start one, and it helps them to improve their management skills and learn about market needs in order to succeed in business. The courses cover numerous subjects, including financial awareness, marketing the venture, pricing products and managing the business. There are about 100 training courses, and from 2016 to 2022 more than 2,000 women and girls were trained (Sa'id 2022; 'Abd al-Ghani 2023).

Another project in the years 2020-2022 was "She Trades Egypt," to support women who sell their handicrafts. The aim was to promote their businesses, help female entrepreneurs in this field, and enable them to expand into local and international markets. The project gave training workshops to dozens of small and medium sized businesses engaged in the art of designing and developing handmade products, including book-keeping and financial management, logistics, types of packaging and shipping, marketing and pricing, and compliance with quality standards (State Information Service 2023b; International Trade Centre n.d.; State Information Service 2022).

The National Council for Women also launched an internet platform, "My Strength is my Craft" (quwwati fi hirfati) to support women, particularly those engaged in handicrafts. The platform is a Facebook group whose purpose is to connect women with diverse skills who can provide a product or a service, with female entrepreneurs, in order to increase their exposure and chances of obtaining work (al-Habal 2020). The group was launched in 2020 and as of early 2024 had about 1200 members (My Strength is my Craft n.d.).

Another move in collaboration with the National Council for Women is the "Winner" program (rabiha), designed to expand employment opportunities for women. The program began in 2023 and has held a series of training courses on employment skills, for 1,000 women from various regions of Egypt. At the courses and at personal training sessions with experts on career development, the women learn about aspects such as teamwork, time management, dealing with stress, writing emails, conducting negotiations, composing a resume and preparing for job interviews. The training and assistance enable women to realize their potential in the job market and contribute to Egypt's socioeconomic development (UN Egypt 2023).

The messages of female empowerment are also found in school textbooks at all levels, which encourage gender equality and oppose discrimination and the oppression of women. For example, the book "Values and Respect for the Other" for grade 1 shows girls and boys playing football together.

As well as government initiatives there are also private initiatives to encourage women to join the labor market and increase their economic independence. One example is Mumm—an Egyptian platform that supplies home-cooked food. This online market enables users to purchase home-cooked meals at attractive prices based on geographical region. The founder of the platform, Walid Abd al-

Rahman, launched Mumm.com in 2015, and its benefit is that it enables women to work from their homes (Waya 'Arabi 2020; Tartrian, 2017).

Finally, the messages of female empowerment are also found in school textbooks at all levels, which encourage gender equality and oppose discrimination and the oppression of women. For example, the book "Values and Respect for the Other" for grade 1 shows girls and boys playing football together. A similar book for grade 5 has pictures of a female doctor, a girl playing tennis, and a man cleaning his house, illustrating a fair division of household tasks between all family members. The book "Arabic Language" for grade 3 describes a situation in which the husband and children do housework to enable the wife to relax after a hard day's work. Some of the books show important and influential women in Egypt and in the Arab world in general, including female leaders, scientists and intellectuals who can serve as role models for pupils, particularly girls. For example, the book "Civics & Human Rights" for grade 11 introduces Doria Shafik, a female Egyptian intellectual and important activist in the Egyptian feminist movement. "Arabic Language" for grade 9 asks pupils to compare the Polish French physicist Marie Curie and the Egyptian physicist Samira Moussa, and explain their contributions to human progress (Winter 2023, 85-89).

Moreover, many textbooks state that women are entitled to get an education, including higher education, just like men, to achieve economic independence and to play prominent roles in various fields in the job market. For example, a social sciences book for grade 8 teaches pupils to respect women's rights and recognize their important role in society, particularly in the education system and the job market, since they make up half of society. The grade 11 textbook "Civics & Human Rights" stresses that women can work in many fields, including medicine, engineering, teaching, services, and as ambassadors and state presidents, and that they play a fundamental role in the political, economic and social life of the country. The book also teaches that the progress of every society depends on the active participation of women. Although this is not stated explicitly, it can be assumed that the active encouragement of women's participation in the labor market derives from the understanding that women who work, study and have a career are likely to have fewer children (Winter 2023, 75-76, 90-91).

Summary and Significance

In the decade under President al-Sisi, the Egyptian government has invested a variety of efforts in the struggle against overpopulation and the reduction of birthrates. The moves are not yet complete and so far their success has been only partial. It appears that the problems and challenges of natural increase are building up faster than they can be resolved. Egypt's fight against population growth is expected to continue over the coming decades, and its outcome will have consequences for the country's political and economic future, as well as for its relations with its neighbors, including Israel.

On the domestic front, the continuation of the present birthrate could deepen the economic distress of Egyptians, increasing unemployment and poverty, and intensifying the pressure on services and resources. These circumstances will strengthen social and political volatility, encourage public unrest, and in certain scenarios could even undermine the political order. This is not just a theoretical threat: the events of the Arab Spring in the Middle East were partly due to economic and environmental factors. Vulnerability to climate change and its effects on the water supply, agriculture, tourism and energy could aggravate the internal threats Egypt faces. At the same time, if Egypt can balance its population growth with its limited resources, carry out essential economic and social reforms, and recruit external support for these moves, it will increase its chances of surviving the demographic challenge and even emerge stronger from it.

Demographic processes in Egypt also have regional and global impact, embodying both threats and opportunities. On the one hand, increasing economic distress will strengthen the motivation to migrate from Egypt to richer countries, mainly in Europe and the Gulf. On the other hand, it is often said that the Egyptian population makes it "too big to fail," and this helps it to enlist other countries to provide assistance. The generous aid provided to Egypt through grants, loans and investments from international financial institutions, from the European Union and from some Gulf states, is intended to prevent further deterioration of its economic situation, and help the government to promote the essential reforms required to tackle unchecked population growth and ensure the commitment of the Cairo regime to the struggle against illegal migration from Egypt.

The impact of Egypt's demographic processes does not bypass Israel. Further intensification of the economic and climate crises in Egypt could result in waves of refugees trying to cross its borders. Such circumstances could challenge the existing order in the Sinai Peninsula that is defined by the peace treaty between Egypt and Israel, and arouse political and security tensions between the countries. At the same time, Egypt's domestic challenges, derived partly from rapid population growth, and the extensive development efforts led by the al-Sisi government to tackle them, work against any retreat from the peace treaty which is a political, security and economic asset to both countries. On the contrary, in recent years there has been fruitful and growing cooperation between Israel and Egypt in the field of energy, and Egypt is dependent on Israeli gas for its growing domestic needs and also for export purposes. In addition, American aid to Egypt of 1.3 billion dollars annually and the QIZ agreements between Israel, Egypt and the US also encourage compliance with the peace treaty.

If Egypt can successfully tackle population growth and its associated problems, this will contribute to regional stability in general. To achieve this Egypt needs help and support from its friends worldwide. Israel, like other countries, has an interest in strengthening Egyptian stability, and both countries share an interest in extending their bilateral and multilateral collaborations in both existing and new fields, such as agriculture, water, tourism, renewable energy and the environment. We can only hope that the rising population in Egypt will promote a parallel process of growing cooperation between the two countries.

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Note

1 A padan is a unit of land of about three dunams.

Call for Papers for *Strategic Assessment*

The editorial board of the INSS journal *Strategic Assessment* invites authors to submit articles to be published in the journal's updated format. Proposals for special themed issues are also welcome.

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