Arabs in Israel: Political Tolerance and Ethnic Conflict*

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It has been argued frequently that democracies can survive if their citizens are committed to constitutional procedures and remain willing to grant civil liberties to minority groups. In ethnically and/or racially diverse democracies, maintenance of minority rights frequently has been problematical. This paper examines the commitment of Israeli Jews to the political rights of the Israeli Arab minority. The study is based upon a survey of 490 adult, urban Jewish citizens. It is found that younger, better educated, more affluent, and less religious Jews in Israel express higher levels of general tolerance and are more tolerant toward the political rights of Israeli Arabs.

Sharply defined ethnic cleavages create some of the most intractable problems that polities the world over ever face. Most systems exhibiting such cleavages are confronted with an undercurrent of tension and hostility; more often than not, open conflict emerges. Indeed, in some cases ethnic cleavages make unified government impossible, and civil war results.

Democratic polities face particularly severe problems in coping with sharp ethnic cleavages for two major reasons. First, a fundamental procedural norm of democratic

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systems is majority rule and minority rights (Dahl, 1971).[1] Hence, on issues involving ethnic conflict, the numerically superior ethnic group often has its way while the numerically inferior group often loses. Repeated, protracted frustration of minority wishes is commonplace in ethnically diverse democratic polities. Second, frustration often boils over into protest and civil disobedience, and coercive measures are applied. Under these circumstances, the fiber of democratic rule is weakened, threatening to be superceded by some form of authoritarianism (Linz & Stepan, 1978). Therefore, in an effort to maintain one procedural norm of democracy (majority rule) in the context of ethnic conflict, other norms are often violated, and the very existence of democratic rule is jeopardized.

In some ethnically pluralist democracies, a third problem is added to these two. In these polities, internal ethnic conflict is linked to international conflict. In Israel, the subject of this paper, the conflict between Israeli Arabs and Israeli Jews is exacerbated by the wider international conflict between Israel and its Arab neighbors in the Middle East. Maintenance of the rights of the Arab minority when many among the Jewish majority question the loyalty of that minority, especially during periods of regional war, severely challenges the survival of democratic norms.

Taken together, these three factors do not bode well for the maintenence of democratic stability in Israel. Indeed, the "law of contradiction" posited by Rabushka and Shepsle (1972, p. 28) in their study of conflict in democratic polities, would predict the ultimate nonviability of pluralist democracy among Arabs and Jews in Israel. In their theory of democratic instability, they argue that in culturally diverse societies in which the opposing ethnic groups are clearly defined, a situation of intracommunal consensus and intercommunal conflict will emerge. As a result, in the context of intensely held ethnic preferences, polity-wide consensus is virtually unattainable, and civil strife will emerge.

Surprisingly, however, the prediction to be made from the "law of contradiction" has, thus far, not been fulfilled in Israel. While there is a long history of tension between the two groups (Smooha, 1978; Lustick, 1980) open conflict has been the exception rather than the rule.[2] How, then, can the Israeli case be explained?

Researchers who have attempted to understand how it is that polities can survive as democracies in the context of intense ethnic conflict have repeatedly suggested that the belief system of the populace is crucial (Dahl, 1971, p. 124-188).[3] The recent empirical research on the subject has centered on political tolerance as the crucial belief needed to sustain democratic systems.

Many theorists have argued that although a democratic regime may be divided by fierce conflicts, it can remain stable if citizens remain attached to democratic or constitutional procedures and maintain a willingness to apply such procedures—the right to speak, to publish, to run for office—on an equal basis to all, even to those who challenge its way of life. In this instrumental sense, tolerance is understood as valuable because it helps to maintain stable democratic regimes (Sullivan, Piereson & Marcus, 1979, p. 781). Translated in terms of the Israeli case, this argument suggests that the survival of democratic rule in Israel depends heavily upon the maintenance of political tolerance, especially among the majority ethnic group (i.e., the Jews). To the extent that this tolerance falters, one can anticipate the rapid erosion of minority rights.

This paper examines the belief system of Israeli Jews, focusing on attitudes of political tolerance. While there has been considerable research on ethnic conflict in Israel, most of the attitudinal studies have

focused on the conflict between the two major subgroups of the Jewish population, namely Western and Oriental Jews.[4] The research that has directly examined Jewish-Arab relations generally has not focused systematically on attitudes toward political tolerance, tending instead to concern itself more with sociologically oriented questions (e.g., residential integration, intermarriage, job discrimination).[5] This paper proceeds by providing a brief introduction regarding the nature of Arab-Jewish relations in Israel and then draws on survey data that measure the level of political tolerance toward Israeli Arabs expressed by Israeli Jews. The paper then examines the factors that help explain differences in the levels of tolerance held by various subgroups of the Jewish population. The paper concludes by placing the findings of the survey within the context of alternative explanations of the survival of Israeli democracy.

JEWISH-ARAB RELATIONS

The population of the State of Israel, excluding the administered territories captured in the 1967 war, numbers 3.8 million, 16% of whom are Arabs.[6] The relations between Arabs and Jews, including their ratio within the population, were established over 30 years ago and have seen little change since. With the establishment of the State of Israel, a "reversal of status" occurred between the two peoples (Smooha, 1978, p. 68). The Arabs, who constituted two-thirds of the population of Palestine in 1947, became a small minority in the new state of Israel. At the same time, the Jews, for the first time after centuries of migration throughout the world, achieved an overwhelming majority within a sovereign entity of their own.

The status inversion had a dramatic effect on the Arab population. Coexistence of Arabs and Jews in the new state was accompanied by opposing interests and deep nationalistic desires. Israel was established as a modern, Western, and democratic state (Etzioni-Halevy, 1977); the cultural and national orientations of the Jewish majority guided the political process of nation building. The state's central objectives and challenges, particularly the encouragement of Jewish immigration, were anathema to the national spirit and interests of the Arab minority.

The character of the new state and the status inversion described above relegated the Arab residents to the lower strata of the socio-economic pyramid, such that at least one observer believes that they form a "quasi-caste" (Smooha, 1978, p. 45, 74-75). The needs of a modern state and, some argue, a conscious policy of discrimination, accorded overwhelming preference to technological abilities, and these were more prevalent within the Jewish population. Thus, in the 1970s, 55% of the non-Jewish (primarily Arab) work force, as opposed to 30% of the Jewish work force, are employed in blue-collar jobs in industry, building, and transportation. In contrast, 26% of the Jews and only 10% of the non-Jewish labor force are employed in scientific, professional, and managerial positions. The employment structure of the two societies, Jewish and Arab, adds to the fostering and perpetuating of stereotyped relations (Peres & Levy, 1969).

The policy of economic intergration with the administered territories (i.e., the West Bank and Gaza) also contributed to the perpetuation of the already-existing hierarchical relations. That policy, which sought to provide jobs in Israel proper for Arabs of the administered territories, resulted in a substantial flow of low-paid, unskilled Arab labor into the Israeli economy. This policy only served to deepen the stereotyped division between the "Jewish manager" and the "Arab laborer."

Today, social contacts between the two

peoples are forced and frozen, specific and instrumental. Most of the contacts take place within the framework of work and trade, virtually the only areas in which the two peoples meet. While 85% of the Arab employees come into contact with Jews in the course of their work, the two peoples live apart: 90% of the Arab residents of Israel are concentrated in three geographical centers—the Galilee, 57%; the "Little Triangle," 21%; and the Negev, 9%. The avoidance of significant social contact is mutual. In two surveys it was found that only 15% of Jews (Adi & Froilich, 1970) and 30% of Arabs (Peres, 1971) would agree to joint residence. When it became apparent that Arab male students were living in the coed dormitories of Ben-Gurion University together with Jewish female students, Student Union leaders protested this practice and demanded that it be stopped. Insofar as social contact as intimate as marriage is concerned, according to one estimate (Smooha, 1976a), there are only 400 cases of intermarriage between Jews and Arabs, and these frequently serve as examples of undesirable behavior (Cohen, 1969).

The existing patterns of social contact to some extent contradict the legal status of Arabs in Israel. Israeli democracy provides legal guarantees of equality of social and political rights for all citizens, regardless of race, religion, or sex. The Arab minority exercises some of the basic political rights granted to it. For example, voter turnout of the Arab population has never dropped below three-quarters of those having the right to vote, and, in the elections to the Third Knesset, it reached 91%. Some seven Arabs regularly sit in the Israeli parliament, mostly representatives of the anti-Zionist Communist Party. Several Zionist parties are active in the Arab sector and have included Arab candidates on their electoral lists.

However, *de jure* and *de facto* political discrimination against the Arab population is a fact of life in Israel. For almost 20 years, until 1966, the Arab residents of the state were subject to military administration. The laws by which military rule was established in Arab communities have not, however, been rescinded. The Law of Return defines the State of Israel as a national home for every Jew in the Diaspora. As such, it grants automatic citizenship to Jews, a privilege not enjoyed by any other group. Moreover, Arab land has on a number of occasions been expropriated for Jewish settlement, resulting in major tensions between Arab and Jew. In the context of these factors, how is stability maintained?

DATA

The findings in this paper are based on data collected by the Continuing Survey of the Israeli Institute of Applied Social Research and the Communications Institute of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. The survey encompasses a probability sample of 490 respondents representing the adult Jewish urban population of Israel, 20 years and over.[7] The accuracy of the sample is attested to by the data displayed in Table 1, in which it is shown that the age and sex distributions in the sample do not differ significantly from the comparable population data.

The subjects were presented with five questions measuring tolerance for the civil rights of the Arab minority. Four of the five questions we used in the survey dealt directly with key civil liberties normally guaranteed in democratic regimes: the right to vote, the right to public assembly, freedom of speech, and the right to hold public office.

As the survey instrument was being pretested, leaders of the Arab student committee of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem sent a telegram of support for

Table 1
Comparison of the Sample and Jewish Population Distribution by Sex and Age

	Sample	*Population*
	Sex	
Male	47%	50%
Female	53	50
	100%	100%
$\chi^2 = 1.82$; DF = 1; sig. = ns.		
	Age	
20-24	16%	16%
25-29	13	11
30-34	10	8
35-39	7	8
40-44	7	8
45-49	7	8
50-54	6	7
55-64	16	15
65 +	17	19
	100%	100%
$\chi^2 = 10.6$; DF = 8; sig. = ns.		

Note. From *Statistical Abstract of Israel*, 1975, No.26, Jerusalem, Central Bureau of Statistics, Tables ii/15, ii/18, and ii/21.

the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) to the Palestinian Council meeting in Damascus. In response, Sela, a group of Jewish students—most of them from right-wing parties—launched a campaign to expel these students from the university. In the wake of these events, we also sought to examine to what extent the Israeli public is opposed to Arabs attending Israeli institutions of higher learning. Although attending a university is not a civil liberty guaranteed under Israeli law, nondiscrimination against minorities is a fundamental principle in Israel, and some 1,200 Arabs attend universities there (0.2% of all students). Hence, denying Israeli Arabs admission to a university would constitute a violation of this principle.

FINDINGS

Levels of tolerance

The data reported in Table 2 report the responses to the five separate questions measuring tolerance toward the civil liberties of Arab Israelis. The respondents were asked, "To what extent would you approve of the government prohibiting Israeli Arabs from. . . voting; holding public demonstrations; seeking public office; appearing on radio and TV; attending

Table 2
Tolerance Toward Israeli Arabs

Question: To what extent would you approve of the government prohibiting Israeli Arabs from.....

		Voting	*Holding public demonstrations*	*Seeking public office*	*Appearing on radio and TV*	*Attending university*
Strongly disapprove (highly tolerant)	1.	40.4%	33.5%	33.7%	33.1%	39.4%
	2.	9.6	10.4	8.8	9.6	9.2
	3.	4.5	7.3	8.4	8.4	5.5
	4.	3.9	4.3	4.5	4.9	2.7
	5.	8.2	8.4	11.0	11.6	9.4
	6.	4.3	4.3	4.7	5.1	4.3
	7.	7.8	8.0	5.9	5.9	6.1
	8.	5.3	7.6	8.4	5.9	6.5
Strongly approve (highly intolerant)	9.	13.5	13.7	12.0	13.3	14.7
Don't know		2.7	2.7	2.7	2.2	2.2
Total		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Mean		3.8	4.1	4.1	4.0	3.9
Standard deviation		3.1	3.1	3.0	3.0	3.1

Note. *N* is 490 for all items.

university." The answers were given with reference to a 9-point scale that ranged from strongly disapprove of the prohibition (interpreted as highly tolerant) to strongly approve of the prohibition (interpreted as highly intolerant). The mid-point on the scale (code 5) was interpreted as a neutral response (neither tolerant nor intolerant).

Three important conclusions emerge from the examination of Table 2. First, levels of tolerance do not vary substantially from one civil liberty to the other.[8] This finding helps justify the creation of an overall index of tolerance, based on all five items, as presented in the following section. Second, and more important, respondents were more likely to support the civil liberties of Israeli Arabs than they were to oppose them. This can be seen both from the mean scores on each item, which are always less than 5 (the neutral point), and from the percentages. Indeed, between one-third and two-fifths of the respondents selected code 1, the most highly tolerant response. Third, a strong minority of Israeli Jews are intolerant of the rights of their fellow citizens. Specifically, approximately one-third of the respondents were intolerant of Arab rights, approving actions by the government that would prohibit them from enjoying their civil liberties. Moreover, between 12 and 15% of the respondents expressed extreme intolerance (code 9).

The data presented above make clear that there is wide variation in tolerance toward Arabs in Israel. What factors can account for these differences? To answer that question, we turn to an exploration of the determinants of tolerance.

Predictors of tolerance

In the past few years, our understanding of the factors that produce attitudes of political tolerance has been greatly enhanced by the work of Sullivan and his colleagues (Sullivan, et al., 1978-79; 1979; 1981).[9] That research has determined that three

sets of variables are the primary determinants of tolerance: social, psychological, and political. The principal social determinants (which are viewed as exogenous variables in their path analysis), are age, social status, education, and secular religious detachment. The principal psychological determinant is security. Finally, the main political determinants (viewed as endogenous variables) are conservatism, belief in general democratic norms (i.e., general tolerance), and perceived threat.

In the Israeli case we were able to include most, but not all, of these predictors, while also adding one predictor not employed in the United States-based work, namely, ethnic background. Our study did not include measures of psychological security, even though it has been known at least since the publication of Sniderman's (1975) study of self-esteem that such variables are important for the prediction of tolerance, because we were unsure that adequate measures had been developed and fully tested in the Israeli context. We also had no direct measure of social status and relied instead upon income as a surrogate. Finally, we did not have a direct measure of political conservatism, but used instead party affiliation since, in Israel, the multiparty system provides a reasonable approximation of a left-right dimension.

Ethnic background has long been considered an important determinant of social attitudes and behavior in Israel. Robins (1972), for example, reports that Israelis born in Islamic countries (i.e., Oriental Jews) are more hostile to Arabs than are Western Jews and explains this as a social and historical need to "revenge themselves" for all that they suffered in their countries of origin. Peres's (1970) work supports this contention with empirical data. Inbar and Adler (1977) maintain that those born in Islamic countries with limited democratic traditions have not yet sufficiently internalized democratic norms. Israelis of Oriental background, therefore, are hypothesized as being more intolerant than are those of Western background. For the purposes of this paper, we define Oriental Jews as those whose origin is in the "Near East and North Africa, including descendants of Jews from Spain" (Smooha, 1978, p. 3). Today, approximately 55% of the Jewish population is Oriental and the rest Western (Smooha, 1978, p. 280).

The analysis of the predictors of tolerance toward Israeli Arabs is assisted by our earlier effort to test the Sullivan model in the Israeli context (Caspi & Seligson, in press). We have shown that tolerance toward the unpopular radical political groups is a function of the respondent's level of general tolerance[10], which in turn is a function of demographic and socio-economic factors. We found that younger, less religious, better educated, and more affluent Israeli Jews express higher levels of general tolerance, and those with higher levels of general tolerance are more tolerant toward radical groups.

In this paper we follow the model of tolerance previously elaborated. In order to explore all of the factors that we have hypothesized as being related to tolerance toward Arabs, however, we include in this analysis ethnic background (Oriental *vs.* Western) and perceived threat.[11]

Since we have already demonstrated that levels of tolerance toward Arabs are consistent across each of the rights that we explored, we felt that an analysis of the predictors of each right would add unnecessary redundancy to the analysis. This feeling was reinforced by the finding, shown in Table 3, that the five items that measure tolerance toward Israeli Arabs are strongly intercorrelated ($r = .67$). We concluded, therefore, that a more parsimonious approach is to employ a scale of the five items. We subjected those items to a test of reliability, shown in Table 3, and found them to form a very reliable scale

Table 3
Reliability of Respondents' Tolerance Toward Israeli Arabs

Item	*Inter-item r* [a]	*Alpha if item deleted* [b]
Denial of right to vote	.78	.89
Denial of right to peaceful assembly	.69	.90
Denial of right to seek public office	.84	.87
Denial of right to radio and TV appearances	.78	.89
Denial of right to attend the university	.76	.89

Note. $N = 490$
[a] mean inter-item r = .67
[b] Standardized item Alpha = .91

(alpha = .91). Seeing these results, we did not hesitate to compute a summated scale of tolerance toward Arabs and use that scale for the regression analysis. Since each of the nine items ranged from a score of 1 to 9, the resultant scale ranged from 5 at the low end of tolerance to 45 at the high end, with an overall mean of 30.0 and a standard deviation of 13.0.

The results of the path analysis are displayed in Figure 1 and the correlation coefficients in Table 4. The model shows that the exogenous variables of education, income, age, and religiosity are all background factors that predict general tolerance. General tolerance, in turn, is shown to have a close relationship to tolerance toward Israeli Arabs. In addition, it is shown that religiosity is positively correlated with perceived threat, which, in turn, also predicts tolerance toward Arabs. Finally, ethnic origin has a direct path to tolerance toward Israeli Arabs and also has an indirect path mediated through perceived threat.

In sum, we found that younger, better educated, more affluent, and less religious Jews in Israel express higher levels of general tolerance, and those with higher levels of general tolerance are more tolerant toward Israeli Arabs. In addition, we found that Oriental Jews feel more threatened by Israeli Arabs and are less tolerant of them. Finally, the path analysis reveals that more religious Jews are likely to feel more threatened by Israeli Arabs.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In Israel the conditions that promote violations of the civil liberties of ethnic minorities are plainly in evidence: since 1949 Israeli Arabs have constituted an easily identifiable, educationally inferior, religiously and culturally distinct ethnic minority. In addition, the fact that Israeli Jews have fought four bloody wars against nations peopled by individuals of essentially the same ethnic background as Israel's Arab minority cannot help but color the sentiments of the majority toward that minority. Finally, the fact that approximately half of the Israeli population is Oriental Jews, many of whom have lived as an ethnic minority in Arab countries, and have been expelled from those countries after the formation of the Zionist state, must add additional fuel to the fires. The combination of all of these factors would appear to make ideal conditions for the violation of civil liberties in Israel.

The surprising fact is that despite these ideal conditions, overt civil liberties violations are the exception rather than the rule. The evidence presented in this paper

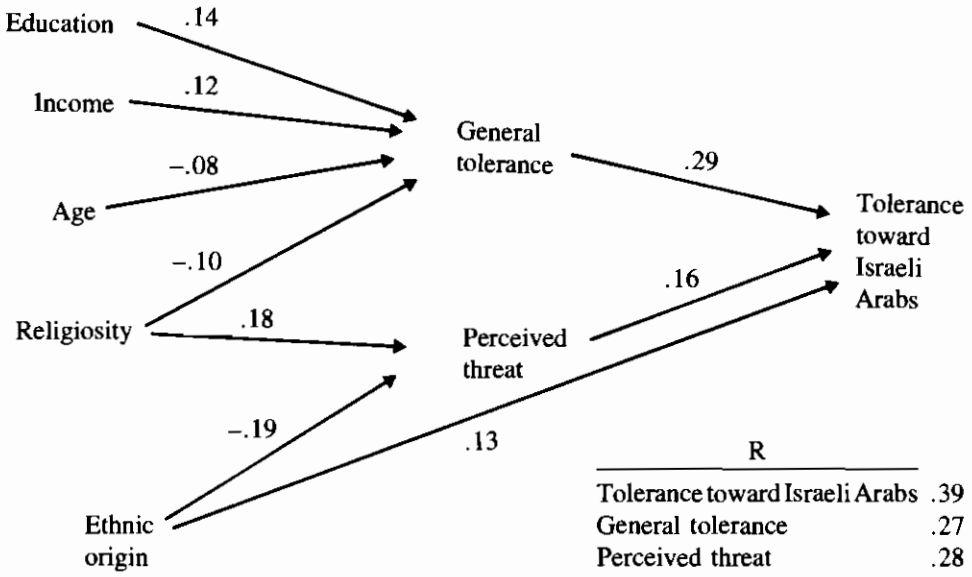

Figure 1. Path analysis of tolerance toward Israeli Arabs.

Note. Arrows indicate paths. All coefficients are beta weights and are significant at .05 or better. Unanalyzed correlations between exogenous variables are not shown.

suggests that high levels of political tolerance help explain the survival of democratic rule in the context of ethnic conflict. We found that two-thirds of Israeli Jews would oppose the government's suppressing the civil liberties of the Arab minority. The fact that Western Jews, who control the overwhelming number of elected and judicial positions in Israel, have been found in this study to be more tolerant than the Jewish population as a whole, suggests that tolerant attitudes may translate into tolerant public policy. The level of tolerance toward Israeli Arabs expressed by Western Jews with 13 or more years of education averages 34 on our scale as compared to the overall mean of 30.

While the findings of the paper reveal high levels of tolerance toward Israeli Arabs, they do not indicate that such tolerance is boundless. In another paper (Caspi & Seligson, Note 1) we have found that while two-thirds of Israeli Jews are opposed to the suppression of the civil liberties of the Arab minority, over half would support the suppression of the civil liberties of anti-Zionist radical groups. These figures indicate that while Israeli Jews support the rights of the Arab minority, most do not support the right of radical groups to espouse the elimination of the Zionist state itself. These findings suggest that to the extent to which Israeli Arabs grow to identify themselves with anti-Zionist political positions such as that held by the PLO, the more the distinction between Arab ethnicity and anti-Zionism will become blurred in the minds of the Israeli Jewish public. Lustick's (1980, p. 237-252) evidence for an increasing polarization of Arab and Jew in Israel does not bode well for the maintenance of civil liberties in Israel. Whether Israel maintains its traditions of civil liberties or follows the unfortunate example of so many other nations in dealing with their minority "problem" depends heavily upon its willingness to adapt to new realities.

Table 4
Correlation Coefficients
(simple rs)

	Education	*Income*	*Age*	*Religiosity*	*Ethnic Origin (Oriental-Western)*	*Perceived threat*	*Tolerance Toward Israeli Arabs*	*General Tolerance*
Education	1.00							
Income	.24	1.00						
Age	−.18	.03	1.00					
Religiosity	.12	.26	.04	1.00				
Ethnic origin (Oriental-Western)	.26	.10	.35	−.17	1.00			
Perceived threat	−.12	−.10	−.06	.21	−.22	1.00		
Tolerance toward Israeli Arabs	.16	.03	.01	−.08	.20	−.21	1.00	
General tolerance	.20	.18	−.10	−.14	.11	−.08	.31	1.00

NOTES

1. There are many diverse definitions of democracy, and we wish to avoid the debate on that issue in this paper. For our purposes, we follow Dahl's (1971) definition of polyarchy.

2. Earlier studies tended to minimize the nature of these tensions (Eisenstadt, 1967).

3. Dahl places primary emphasis on the beliefs of political activists, but builds his empirical case on beliefs of the mass public.

4. A representative sample of this growing body of literature includes Peres (1971), Cohen (1972), Tamarin (1973), Smooha (1976a), Dutter (1977), and Seliktar and Dutter (in press).

5. Some of the empirical literature includes Peres and Levy (1969), Peres (1970), Khlief et al. (1971), and Smooha (1976, 1978).

6. The proportion of the Israeli population characterized as Arab is based upon the inclusion of all Arabs living within the 1949-50 armistice lines (about 503,000 Arabs) plus those living in East Jerusalem (about 110,000 Arabs). Until 1980, when East Jerusalem was annexed by Israel, some researchers did not count those Arabs living there as forming part of the Israeli population. Lustick (1980, p. 4), for example, cites a figure of "approximately 14%."

7. The Continuing Survey is conducted every two weeks under the direction of Professor Louis Gutmann and Professor Eliahu Katz.

8. Indeed, t-test comparison of the means do not reveal any significant differences except that the right to vote is significantly ($p = .05$) more tolerated than the right to hold public demonstrations.

9. The focus of the research has, thus far, been the United States, although comparative analysis is now being conducted. It should also be noted that the research has looked at determinants of intolerance toward unpopular political groups rather than ethnic groups. Nonetheless, the model is seen as having more general applicability.

10. General tolerance is measured following Caspi and Seligson (Note 1). Respondents were asked, "To what degree would you approve of the government prohibiting people who say bad things about Israeli democracy from. . . voting; holding public demonstrations; appearing on radio and TV; holding political office." Each of these four questions was rated on a 9-point scale identical to the one used to measure tolerance toward Arabs. An overall scale of general tolerance was computed yielding an alpha of .90.

11. Perceived threat was measured by an index based on two items: "In your opinion, to what extent do Israeli Arabs threaten you personally"; and "In your opinion, to what extent do Israeli Arabs threaten the existence of the Israeli form of government?" Both items were measured on a 9-point scale, the results being summed to form the threat index.

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