

Topic: **Religion – Druze**

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- The Druze community in Israel consists of Arabic speakers from an 11th Century off-shoot of Ismaili Shiite theology. The religion is considered heretical by orthodox Islam.²
- Members of the Druze community predominantly reside in mountainous areas in Israel, Lebanon, and Syria.³
- At the end of 2011, the Druze population in Israel numbered 133,000 inhabitants and constituted 8.0% of the Arab and Druze population, or 1.7% of the total population in Israel.⁴
- The Druze population resides in 19 localities located in the Northern District (81% of the Druze population, excluding the Golan Heights) and Haifa District (19%). There are seven localities which are exclusively Druze: Yanuh-Jat, Sajur, Beit Jann, Majdal Shams, Buq'ata, Mas'ade, and Julis.⁵
- In eight other localities, Druze constitute an overwhelming majority of more than 75% of the population: Yarka, Ein al-Assad, Ein Qiniyye, Daliyat al-Karmel, Hurfeish, Kisra-Samia, Peki'in and Isfiya. In the village of Maghar, Druze constitute an almost 60% majority. Finally, in three localities, Druze account for less than a third of the population: Rama, Abu Snan and Shfar'am.⁶
- The Druze in Israel were officially recognized in 1957 by the government as a distinct ethnic group and an autonomous religious community, independent of Muslim religious courts. They have their own religious courts, with jurisdiction in matters of personal status and spiritual leadership, headed by Sheikh Muwaffak Tarif.

¹ Compiled by Prof. Elie Rekhess, Associate Director, Crown Center for Jewish and Israel Studies, Northwestern University

² Naim Araidi, *The Druze in Israel*, Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, December 22, 2002, <http://www.mfa.gov.il>; Gabriel Ben Dor, "The Druze Minority in Israel in the mid-1990s", *Jerusalem Letters*, 315, June 1, 1995, Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs.

³ CBS, "The Druze Population of Israel", <http://www.cbs.gov.il>, April 17, 2008.

⁴ CBS, *Statistical Abstract of Israel*, 2011, tables 2.1, 2.2; CBS, *The Druze Population in Israel—Data on the Occasion of the Holiday of the Prophet Shu'ayb*, 2013.

⁵ CBS, *The Druze Population in Israel—Data on the Occasion of the Holiday of the Prophet Shu'ayb*, 2013.

⁶ Nurit Yaffe (editor), *The Arab Population in Israel 2008*, Statistilite no. 102 (CBS, March 2010), p. 8. See:

http://www.cbs.gov.il/www/statistical/arab_pop08e.pdf.

Shulamit Maksimof, *Local Authorities in Israel 2007* (Jerusalem: Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics, publication no. 1358, May 2009); CBS, *The Druze Population in Israel—Data on the Occasion of the Holiday of the Prophet Shu'ayb*, 2013.

- Druze are Arabic speakers and their culture is, to a large extent, Arab. However, some community members consider themselves to be not only religiously, but also ethnically and nationally distinct from the Arab nation.
- On the other hand, some Druze leaders and individuals consider themselves first and foremost to be Arab, and reject the notion of a separate "Israeli Druze" identity.
- The Druze who live in the Golan Heights, an area occupied by Israel in the Six Day War in 1967, became permanent Israeli residents with the 1981 law annexing the Golan Heights.
- Unlike Muslims and Christians, who are exempt from military service, Druze have had to do compulsory military service from the age of 18, like their Jewish counterparts, since 1956.
- Druze officers have attained high ranks in the Israeli security forces, particularly within the IDF, and many Druze soldiers have died in Israel's wars.
- Traditionally, Druze political figures have been active in Zionist parties and have been elected to the Knesset on the left wing Labor and right wing Likud party lists. The Likud party has been particularly popular among the Druze. In recent years the Druze have also been affiliated with the newly established Zionist central and right-wing parties such as Kadima and Avigdor Lieberman's Yisrael Beitenu
- Nevertheless, about one fifth of the Druze electorate has been traditionally affiliated with Arab and Jewish-Arab parties, particularly with BALAD – (NDA, National Democratic Alliance), which represents the national-secular trend in Arab politics in Israel and espouses an anti-Zionist program.
- Only one Druze Member of Knesset (MK) served in the 19th Knesset (2013): MK Hamad Amar (Likud Yisrael Beitenu)
- In recent years, members of the Druze Community have increasingly protested against official discrimination and government neglect of their interests. The growing frustration and discontent is rooted in a feeling that Jews enjoy a higher socio-economic status. They point to the limited availability of housing and land, particularly for young couples and discharged soldiers.⁷ This has actually led to a growing hesitance, and in some cases refusal, on the part of Druze men to comply with the 1956 agreement to serve in the IDF.⁸
- In March 2008, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert acknowledged the growing unrest within the Druze community and called for "a meaningful improvement of the relations between the State and the Druze."⁹ In March 2009, following warnings from Druze community leaders of possible disturbances in the Druze sector, Ayoub Kara, a Druze MK, was appointed Deputy Minister of the Development of the Negev and Galilee.¹⁰

⁷ For example, Eddy Gal, "Reminded of Discrimination: The Druze Raise their Head", *Makor Rishon*, May 27, 2008 [Hebrew]; Jacky Khoury, "Druze and Circassian heads of local councils: The Prime Minister deceived us." *Ha'aretz*, June 30, 2009 [Hebrew].

⁸ Abir Kopty, "Omar Saad, A Druze-Palestinian Musician from the Galilee, refuses Israeli military service," *Mondoweiss*, October 27, 2012. See:

<http://mondoweiss.net/2012/10/druze-palestinian-musician-refuses-israeli-military-service.html>.

⁹ *Ma'ariv*, March 5, 2008.

¹⁰ Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs. "Ayoub Kara". See:

http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/AboutIsrael/State/Personalities/Pages/Ayoub_Kara.aspx.