

EXPLORE

SEARCH

SUBSCRIBE TO OUR NEWSLETTER



Research ▾

Methodology

About

TREND ANALYSIS JULY 7, 2026 UPDATED AUGUST 6, 2026

What Happened to the Gap Between Israeli and Palestinian Birth Rates?

The Israeli-Palestinian fertility gap fell from nearly four children per woman to under half a child between 1990 and 2024. The data, and the debate over why.

Demography

Fertility

Israel

Palestinian Territories

Population Growth



Few demographic numbers are cited more often than how many children Israelis and Palestinians have. Measured across the same series for both, the gap between

the two fertility rates fell from about four children per woman to under half a child in a single generation: from a **3.99-child difference in 1990 to 0.38 in 2024**, a roughly 90% convergence, as Palestinian fertility fell from 6.81 to 3.25 while Israeli fertility held near 3 (World Bank, 2024). The World Bank and the United Nations Population Division track the series in close agreement, to a mean absolute difference of about 0.03 to 0.04 for Israel and 0.00 for the Palestinian territories.

Key Findings

- The Israeli and Palestinian total fertility gap narrowed from **3.99 children per woman in 1990 to 0.38 in 2024**, a roughly 90% convergence, measured identically for both populations (World Bank, 2024).
- Palestinian fertility fell from **6.81 to 3.25** children per woman between 1990 and 2024, a sustained decline that Khawaja (2000) dates to a demographic transition underway in the West Bank since about 1985.
- Israeli fertility barely moved over the same period, from **2.82 to 2.87**, staying near 3 (World Bank, 2024).
- Israel's sharpest population-growth years came from immigration, not births: annual growth reached **6.02% in 1991** during the post-Soviet wave (World Bank; Berthomière, 1995).
- Researchers disagree on the causes at almost every step, and this report carries those disagreements rather than resolving them (for example Okun, 2016, against Shenhav-Goldberg and colleagues, 2019, on Israel; Khawaja, 2000, against Fargues, 2000, on the Palestinian side).

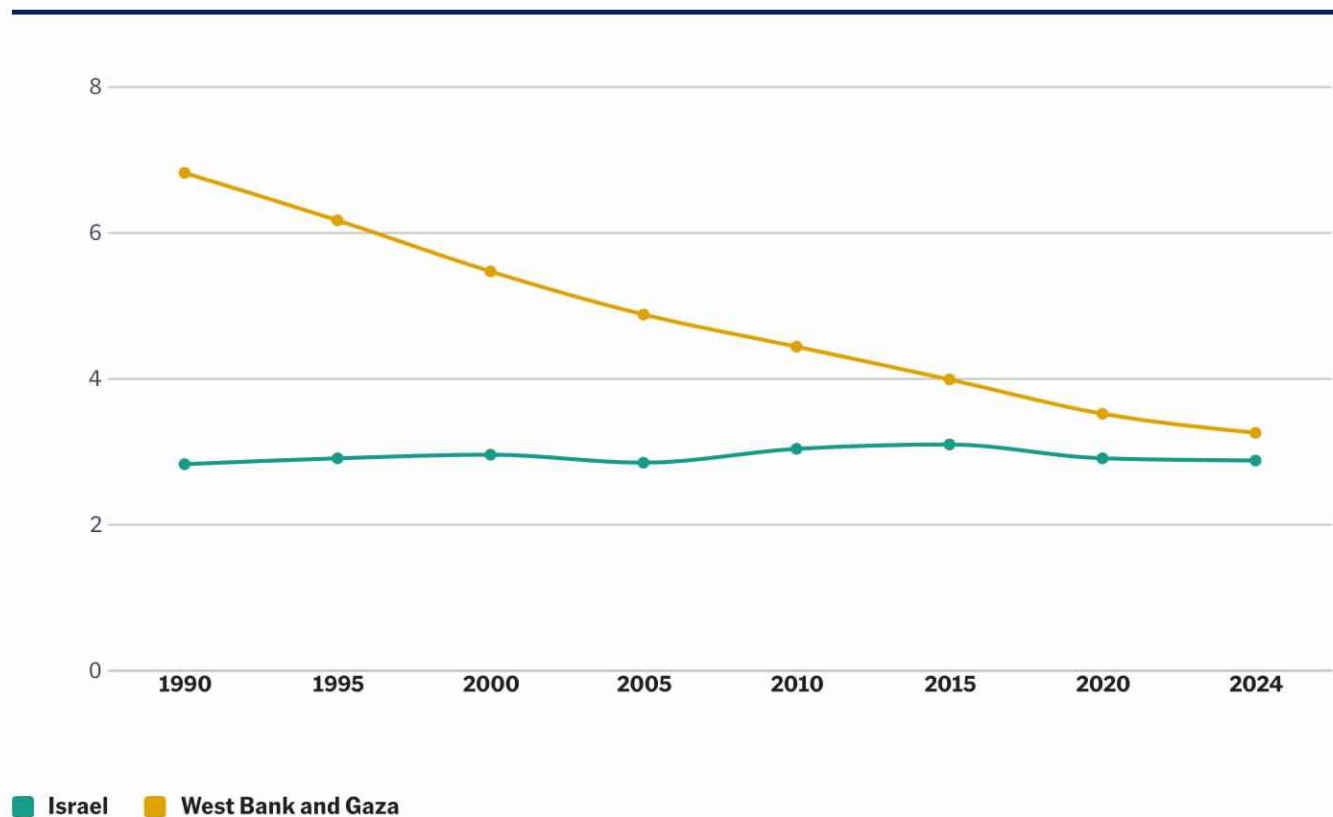
How large was the gap, and what happened to it?

The gap all but disappeared. In 1990 an Israeli woman had 2.82 children on average and a woman in the West Bank and Gaza had **6.81**, a difference of 3.99; by 2024 the two figures were 2.87 and **3.25**, a difference of 0.38 (World Bank, 2024). These World Bank figures combine the West Bank and Gaza, which are separate populations, and the Gaza figure after October

2023 is an adjusted estimate rather than a measurement, since displacement and elevated mortality after late 2023 put normal enumeration out of reach. Read across the longer arc, the shape is a Palestinian rate that sat above 6.8 for the four decades after 1950 and then fell steeply, meeting a largely flat Israeli rate that never dropped below replacement (United Nations Population Division, 2024). It is a steep decline on one side toward a level the other side held throughout.

A four-child gap closed in a generation

TOTAL FERTILITY RATE, CHILDREN PER WOMAN



Source: World Bank, 2024. West Bank and Gaza combined; the 2024 point is provisional and the Gaza component is an adjusted estimate.

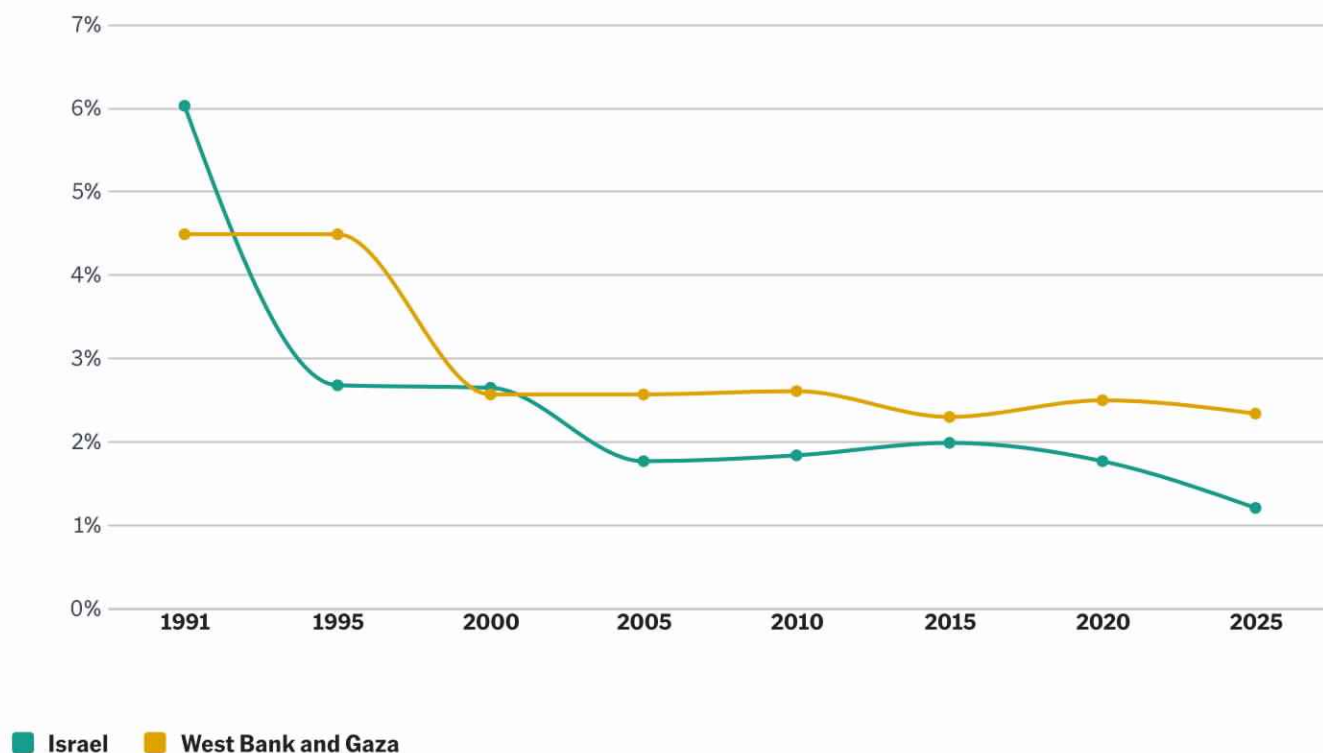
Is Israel's population growth births or immigration?

Mostly births now, but its fastest growth was immigration. Israel's annual population growth reached **6.02% in 1991**, a rate no birth rate could produce, during the wave of more than 500,000 arrivals from the former Soviet Union that began in 1989 and raised the population by about 10% in four years (Berthomière, 1995; Factor and Habib, 1993). Growth then settled

to roughly 1.2% to 2.7%, closer to what a high birth rate sustains on its own. The Palestinian territories show a different composition: little in-migration, a growth rate that tracks the falling birth rate down from about 4.5% to 2.33% (World Bank, 2024). Population growth and fertility are not the same signal, and the 1991 spike is the clearest reason not to read one as the other.

Growth rates converged after an early spike

ANNUAL POPULATION GROWTH, %

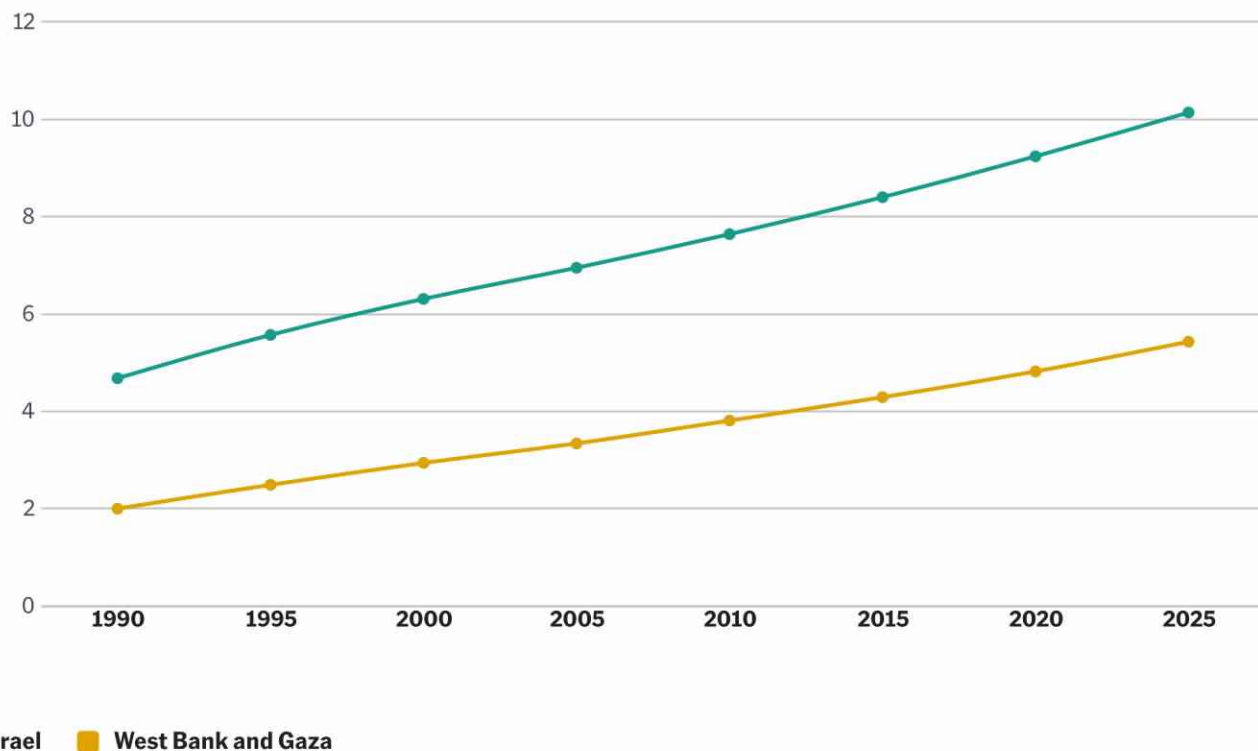


Source: World Bank, 2024. Some early West Bank and Gaza values are constant intercensal estimates.

In absolute terms both populations grew. Israel rose from 4.66 million in 1990 to 10.12 million in 2025; the West Bank and Gaza rose from 1.98 million to 5.41 million over the same period (World Bank, 2024).

Total population, both series, 1990 to 2025

TOTAL POPULATION, MILLIONS



Source: World Bank, 2024. The 2025 points are provisional.

What drove Israel's unusually high fertility?

No single driver is agreed: researchers split between an account crediting religious and nationalist sentiment reinforced by state pro-natal policy, including extensive public funding of in vitro fertilization (Shenhav-Goldberg and colleagues, 2019), and one crediting a broad constellation of family and institutional support (Okun, 2016). Israel's rate near 3 is the highest in the OECD, and the ultra-Orthodox Haredi subgroup has a total fertility rate near 7.7 (Birenbaum-Carmeli, 2008). Whether the elevated national rate is essentially a Haredi phenomenon is itself debated: Friedlander and Feldmann (1993) attributed the pattern substantially to the orthodox population, while Okun (2016) finds that secular, native-born Jewish women also stay above replacement. A durable religiosity gradient runs underneath both accounts, with fertility rising by level of observance (Okun, 2017).

What happened to Palestinian fertility?

It fell, and researchers disagree on whether the fall is a clean transition. The Palestinian rate dropped from about 6.8 in 1990 toward 3.25 in 2024, a decline Khawaja (2000) reads as a

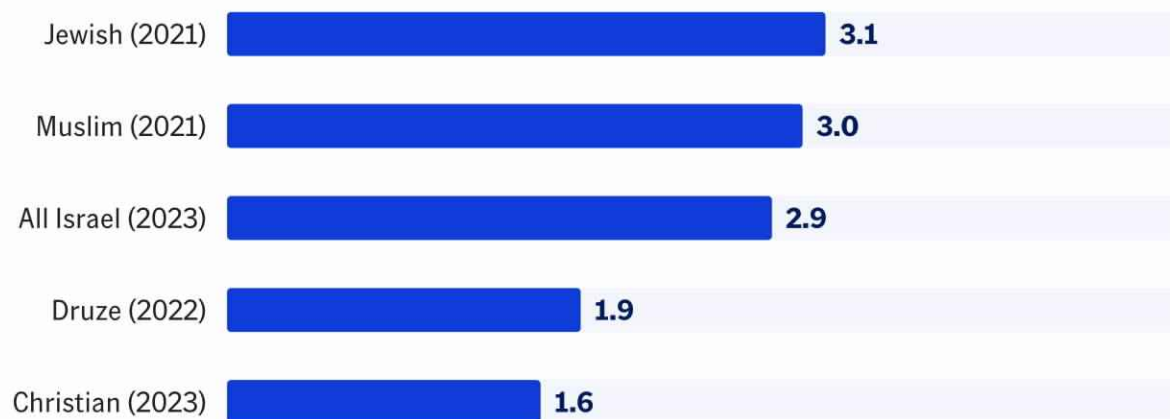
standard demographic transition underway in the West Bank since about 1985, and which a preprint reporting official Palestinian figures also documents (Sumour and colleagues, 2007). Fargues (2000) reads the earlier high and irregular level differently, as fertility bound up with national conflict rather than a smooth modernization curve. The West Bank and Gaza did not move together: Gaza's rate ran higher and fell later, so the 1985 transition is West-Bank-specific within the combined series. The correlates are unusual by the textbook: modern contraceptive use is high among Palestine refugees attending clinics (Hababeh and colleagues, 2018), yet Pell (2017) documents relatively high fertility coexisting with high female education in the West Bank, a pairing that does not follow the standard education-lowers-fertility gradient. Among Palestinians, refugees were somewhat better educated with only slightly higher fertility than non-refugees (Al-Qudsi, 2000).

A parallel convergence sits inside Israel

Inside Israel, the Jewish and Muslim fertility rates have all but converged, to **3.13 and 3.01** by 2021, closing a gap that stood at more than a child and a half in the mid-1980s (Israel Central Bureau of Statistics). Muslim citizens of Israel had a total fertility rate near 10 in the mid-1960s; it fell to about 4.5 and then stalled for roughly two decades (Staetsky, 2019). Where a 1985 measurement found Israeli Jewish fertility at 3.12 and Israeli Arab fertility at 4.86 (Nigem and Nagi, 1988), the two are now within a tenth of a child. The Christian and Druze rates sit below replacement, at 1.64 and 1.85.

Fertility rate within Israel, by group

TOTAL FERTILITY RATE, LATEST YEAR PER GROUP



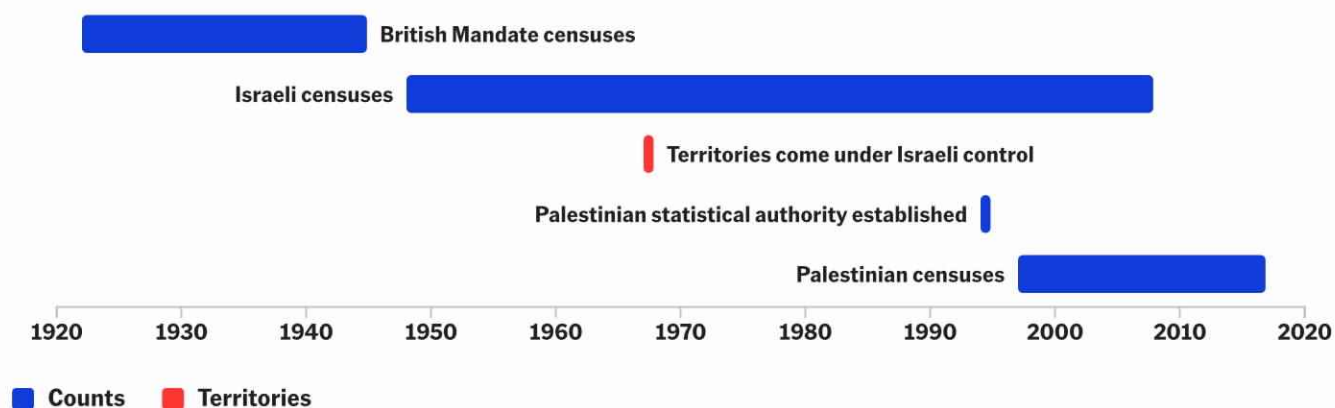
Source: Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, latest available year shown per group.

When did the changes happen?

The West Bank fertility transition dates to about 1985 and the territories came under Israeli control in 1967, with the only Palestinian censuses following in 1997, 2007, and 2017, dates the timeline places beside the series rather than reading as its cause. Those censuses followed the establishment of a Palestinian statistical authority after the Oslo Accords, while Israel and, earlier, the British Mandate ran their own censuses.

The events the data brackets

MARKERS PLACED BESIDE THE SERIES, NOT CAUSES OF IT



Source: Compiled from the sources listed; event dates are historical record.

Why are these numbers so contested?

Because they are produced differently and read differently. There was no Palestinian census before 1997, so earlier Palestinian figures are modeled or back-estimated rather than measured, and the national statistical offices, the World Bank, and the United Nations can report [different totals for the same year](#). The figures also carry political weight, and that weight has itself been studied: Fargues (2000) documents fertility framed as national strength by Palestinians and Israelis alike, Soffer (1989) examines population growth weighed against territorial policy in Israel, and Leibler (2014) traces how the categories used to count people were shaped by political demography in the pre-state period. The measurement and the meaning are different questions, and the second has more than one answer.

Methodology and limitations

The series are drawn from primary and official records, the World Bank World Development Indicators, the United Nations Population Prospects 2024, the Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, and the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, cross-checked against each other, with the World Bank and United Nations fertility series agreeing across 1990 to 2024 to a mean absolute difference of about 0.03 to 0.04 for Israel and 0.00 for the Palestinian territories. The peer-reviewed literature on drivers is correlational, the cited authors say so, and where a genuine scholarly disagreement exists it is shown, not resolved.

Several limits bound every figure. In this report “Palestinian” means the resident population of the West Bank and Gaza measured by the source series, not the global Palestinian population including the refugee diaspora. No Palestinian census existed before 1997, so pre-1997 and pre-1990 Palestinian values are modeled, not counted, and some early West Bank and Gaza growth rates are constant intercensal estimates that appear as flat segments. Israel’s population growth reflects net immigration, not births alone, so growth is not a fertility signal. The West Bank and Gaza are separate populations reported together in the headline World Bank series; the Palestinian statistical authority reports them separately, and the population of Gaza after October 2023 is uncertain and published as an adjusted estimate. United Nations values for 2024 and later are medium-variant projections, not

measurements, and are not presented here as measured data. No individual is named; every figure is an aggregate rate, count, or share.

Conclusion

The number that gets cited is usually a single year's comparison; the record underneath it is a generation of convergence. A fertility gap of nearly four children in 1990 narrowed to under half a child by 2024, Palestinian fertility fell by half while Israel's held near 3, and inside Israel the Jewish and Muslim rates that once differed by more than a child and a half now sit a tenth of a child apart. The one real divergence in the growth figures is a difference of composition rather than of pace: Israel's peak years came from an immigration wave that crested at 6.02% in 1991, the territories' growth from a birth rate that has been falling for a generation.

Measured the same way for both populations, the gap that stood at nearly four children in 1990 stands at under half a child today. That is the record beneath the number.

Frequently Asked Questions

How do Israeli and Palestinian fertility rates compare now?

They are nearly the same. In 2024 a woman in the West Bank and Gaza had 3.25 children on average and a woman in Israel had 2.87, a gap of 0.38, down from 3.99 in 1990 (World Bank). The West Bank and Gaza figure is a combined series and the Gaza component after October 2023 is an adjusted estimate.

Why does Israel have such a high birth rate for a wealthy country?

Its rate near 3 is high for a wealthy country and reaches secular as well as religious Jewish women, not only the Haredi (Okun, 2016). The explanation is contested: accounts range from nationalism and state IVF funding (Shenhav-Goldberg and colleagues, 2019) to a broad constellation of family and institutional support (Okun, 2016), with a religiosity gradient running through both.

Is the Palestinian fertility decline real or temporary?

The measured decline from about 6.8 to 3.25 is sustained across three decades of data (World Bank). Whether it is a clean demographic transition (Khawaja, 2000) or a level long shaped by conflict now falling (Fargues, 2000) is debated in the peer-reviewed literature.

Why do different sources give different population numbers?

There was no Palestinian census before 1997, so earlier figures are modeled, and the World Bank, the United Nations, and the national statistical offices use different methods and can report different totals for the same year. The report cross-checks them and flags where they diverge rather than presenting one as consensus.

Did immigration or births drive Israel's growth?

Both, in different eras: the sharp peaks came from immigration, including the post-Soviet wave that pushed annual growth to 6.02% in 1991 (World Bank; Berthomière, 1995), while recent growth is closer to what a high birth rate sustains. Population growth and fertility are distinct measures and move for different reasons.

Has the fertility gap inside Israel between Jewish and Arab citizens closed?

Nearly: the Muslim citizens' rate fell from near 10 in the 1960s to 3.01 by 2021, against a Jewish rate of 3.13 (Israel Central Bureau of Statistics; Staetsky, 2019). Christian and Druze rates are below replacement, at 1.64 and 1.85.

Sources

- Al-Qudsi, S. S., 2000. Profiles of refugee and non-refugee Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza. *International Migration*, 38(4). DOI 10.1111/1468-2435.00121. Peer-reviewed.
- Berthomière, W., 1995. The migration of Jews from the former Soviet Union: a new challenge for Israel? *Revue Européenne des Migrations Internationales*. PMID 12347243. Peer-reviewed.
- Birenbaum-Carmeli, D., 2008. Your faith or mine: a pregnancy spacing intervention in an ultra-orthodox Jewish community in Israel. *Reproductive Health Matters*. DOI

10.1016/S0968-8080(08)32404-5. Peer-reviewed.

- Factor, H., and Habib, J., 1993. A model of the impact of immigration on health and social service expenditures for the elderly. PMID 12233616. Peer-reviewed.
- Fargues, P., 2000. Protracted national conflict and fertility change: Palestinians and Israelis in the twentieth century. *Population and Development Review*, 26(3). DOI 10.1111/j.1728-4457.2000.00441.x. Peer-reviewed.
- Friedlander, D., and Feldmann, C., 1993. The modern shift to below-replacement fertility: has Israel's population joined the process? *Population Studies*, 47(2). DOI 10.1080/0032472031000147026. Peer-reviewed.
- Hababeh, M., and colleagues, 2018. Contraceptive use by Palestine refugee mothers attending UNRWA clinics. *The Lancet*, 391. DOI 10.1016/S0140-6736(18)30392-1. Peer-reviewed.
- Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, 2024. Total fertility rate by population group; Israel in Figures 2024. cbs.gov.il. Primary and official record.
- Khawaja, M., 2000. The recent rise in Palestinian fertility: permanent or transient? *Population Studies*, 54(3). DOI 10.1080/713779091. Peer-reviewed.
- Leibler, A., 2014. Disciplining ethnicity: social sorting intersects with political demography in Israel's pre-state period. PMID 24941614. Peer-reviewed.
- Nigem, E. T., and Nagi, M. H., 1988. Fertility patterns and differentials in Israel. PMID 12341925. Peer-reviewed.
- Okun, B. S., 2016. An investigation of the unexpectedly high fertility of secular, native-born Jews in Israel. *Population Studies*, 70(2). DOI 10.1080/00324728.2016.1195913. Peer-reviewed.
- Okun, B. S., 2017. Religiosity and fertility: Jews in Israel. *European Journal of Population*, 33. DOI 10.1007/s10680-016-9409-x. Peer-reviewed.
- Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2018. Population, Housing and Establishments Census 2017 (and 1997, 2007). pcbs.gov.ps. Primary and official record.
- Pell, S., 2017. Reproductive decisions in the lives of West Bank Palestinian women: dimensions and contradictions. *Global Public Health*, 12(2). DOI 10.1080/17441692.2016.1151541. Peer-reviewed.

- Shenhav-Goldberg, R., Brym, R., and Lenton-Brym, T., 2019. Family welfare effort, total fertility, and in vitro fertilization: explaining the Israeli anomaly. *Canadian Review of Sociology*, 56(3). DOI 10.1111/cars.12255. Peer-reviewed.
- Soffer, A., 1989. Demography and the shaping of Israel's borders. *Contemporary Jewry*, 10. DOI 10.1007/BF02965574. Peer-reviewed.
- Staetsky, L. D., 2019. Stalling fertility decline of Israeli Muslims and the demographic transition theory. *Population Studies*, 73(3). DOI 10.1080/00324728.2019.1622765. Peer-reviewed.
- Sumour, M. A., El-Astal, A. H., Shabat, M. M., and Radwan, M. A., 2007. Simulation of demographic change in Palestinian territories. arXiv:0705.4427. Preprint.
- United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, 2024. *World Population Prospects 2024*. population.un.org. Primary and official record (estimates 1950 to 2023; projections 2024 onward).
- World Bank, 2024. *World Development Indicators* (total fertility rate, crude birth rate, population, population growth). data.worldbank.org. Primary and official record.

RELATED RESEARCH

DATA REPORT JUNE 30, 2026

Two National Counts of Antisemitism Differ Fivefold. What Explains the Gap?

The FBI logged 1,938 anti-Jewish hate crimes in 2024 and the ADL logged 9,354. Two national counts, five times apart, read category by category to find the gap.

EXPLAINER JUNE 25, 2026

What Is Zionism? How the Research Measures It

In the research, Zionism is measured as support for a Jewish state, reached through anti-Israel attitudes and denial of Jewish self-determination, its closest proxy.

DISCOURSE JUNE 25, 2026

Is Anti-Zionism Antisemitism? What the Evidence Measures

Research does not settle whether anti-Zionism is antisemitism; it measures the link. A mediation model explains over 55% of anti-Israel attitudes.



The Hanover Institute for Public Policy studies the inputs fueling antisemitism in the United States and publishes what the evidence shows. Its work is content analysis, computational social science, and other data-driven research, and its reports take no policy positions.

SUBSCRIBE TO OUR NEWSLETTER

SUBSCRIBE

RESEARCH

[Research](#)

[Methodology](#)

INSTITUTE

[About](#)

[Mission & Standards](#)

[Contact](#)

TOPICS

Online & Social Media
Narratives & Tropes
Media & Representation
Israel & Anti-Zionism
AI & Technology
Incidents & Trends
Drivers & Effects

FORMATS

Data Report
Explainer
Narrative Analysis
Method
Trend Analysis
Comparison
Discourse

This material is distributed by Piro, Inc. on behalf of Havas Media Germany GmbH on behalf of the Israel Government Advertising Agency (LaPam). Additional information is available at the Department of Justice, Washington, DC.
