



# The Index for Shared Society Progress in Youth 2021

## Executive Summary

aChord: Social Psychology for Social Change is a social-academic organization working to promote equal, tolerant, and respectful relations between different groups in Israeli society based on cutting-edge research and theory in social psychology of intergroup relations. In this context, aChord has compiled, for the fourth year running, its Index for Shared Society Progress in Youth (ISSPY). The ISSPY provides an annually updated map of the perceptions, feelings, attitudes, and behaviors of youth that serve as barriers or as catalysts in improving intergroup relations in Israel. Such systematic annual mapping enables the investigation of trends and changes in intergroup perceptions and attitudes among young people in Israel.

This year's research was conducted not long after a series of violent events between Jews and Arabs that occurred during May of 2021 (referred to as "the escalation" or "the May events"). These events exacerbated tensions and deepened rifts in the fabric of relations between Jews and Arabs in Israel. The country's young people experienced the full force of these events, whether directly in the public space, via the experience of close relatives and friends, or via mainstream and social media. With this in mind, we decided that this year's ISSPY should focus on the attitudes and feelings of young people concerning relations between Jews and Arabs in Israel. Our goal is to provide educators and policy makers with knowledge and insights that can help them work toward healing the damage in relations among youth in Israel.

## Main findings

The current ISSPY report is based on a survey conducted during July and August of 2021 among more than 1,000 young people of high school age in four national samples – Arabs, secular Jews, religious Jews, and ultra-Orthodox Jews – based on the four main education sectors in Israel. The findings as presented in this report are organized around three key questions:

### 1. What do young people feel with regard to the May events and about other groups in Israel?

The findings show that less than a third of all youth in Israel (28%) report being indifferent to the situation, suggesting that what happened in May 2021 is of great concern to young people. And yet, many also report despair regarding the situation (74%) and anger at members of the other group. This feeling is particularly salient among religious and ultra-Orthodox Jewish youth, the vast majority of whom (89% of ultra-Orthodox Jews and 94% of religious Jews) report feeling anger at Arabs following the violent events (compared with 63% and 67% of secular Jews and of Arabs, respectively).

Moreover, the findings show that compared to prior years, the levels of hatred and fear that Arab youth feel toward Jews have risen significantly and that their willingness to associate with Jews has decreased. In contrast, among Jewish youth (secular, religious and ultra-Orthodox), there have been no great changes in levels of hatred, fear, or willingness to associate with Arabs. However, the hatred and fear of Arabs expressed by religious and ultra-Orthodox Jewish youth is much higher than the level of such feelings toward Arabs among secular Jewish youth. It is also much higher than the extent to which Arab young people experience such feelings about religious and ultra-Orthodox Jews.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Among Jewish young people, 16% of secular youth reported hatred of Arabs as compared with 43% of religious Jews and 63% of the ultra-Orthodox. Among Arab young people 19%, 34% and 47% reported hatred toward secular, religious and ultra-Orthodox Jews (respectively).

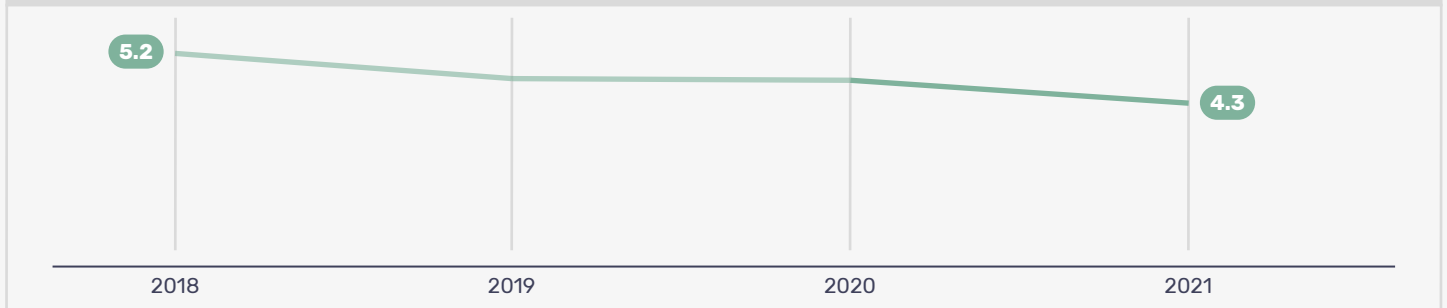
## 2. How do young people think we should act in the context of Jewish-Arab relations?

More than half of secular Jewish and Arab young people support steps associated with the promotion of shared society in Israel: 62% of secular Jewish youth support creating shared spaces allowing open dialogue between Jews and Arabs; 78% of Arab youth and 59% of secular Jewish youth support promoting equality between the groups. In comparison, actions promoting boycotts of the other group or its exclusion from public spaces were deemed less desirable among all the young people surveyed. However, these actions were supported at a relatively higher level among ultra-Orthodox and religious Jewish youth as compared to Arab and secular Jewish youth (for example, 30% of ultra-Orthodox and 20% of religious Jewish youth supported segregation between Jews and Arabs in public spaces as compared with only 7% among secular Jewish or Arab youth).

Additionally, we found that, over the years, Arab youth feel less confident in their group's ability to influence their reality and society in Israel. This is alarming because a group that does not believe itself capable of influencing wider society may not even try to do so, and the absence of the group's voice from the public space may further damage its position in society.

**Figure 1: A 4-year decline in the belief among Arab youth that their group can affect change in Israeli society**

The belief among Arab youth that joint action by members of their group can influence the future of the country and of the society (Scale: 1=not at all, 6=very much; Mean participants response)



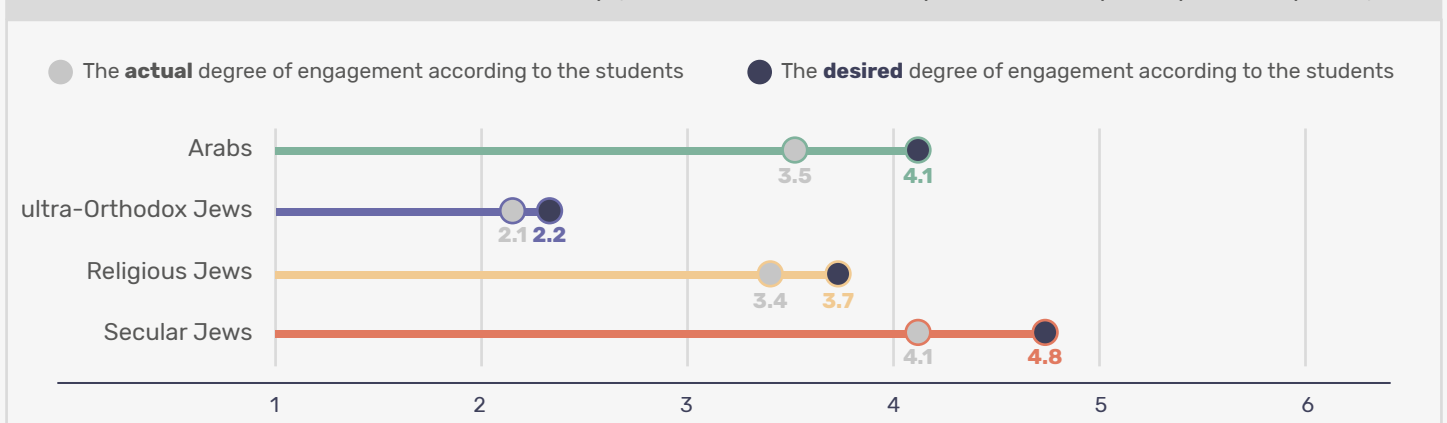
## 3. What is the role of education for shared society in the schools?

Another troubling finding of this year's ISSPY was that, notwithstanding the centrality of the May events in the public's awareness as well as their long-term social consequences, a quarter of the respondents reported that their school did nothing to address the events. Another finding, attesting to the potential power of education for shared society in times of crisis, reveals that students who reported that their school promoted tolerance and respect for the other group during the crisis also reported higher empathy toward members of the other group, more desire to take action to improve hostile relations, and greater support for actions promoting a shared life.

Moreover, the findings of the ISSPY show that young people want their school to teach and engage with topics related to education for shared society. Indeed, our participants reported that they were interested in having their school address the subject more than it had done thus far<sup>2</sup>.

**Figure 2: Young people want more education for shared society included in the curriculum**

The degree to which youth think their school already educates for shared society and the degree to which they want their school to educate for shared society (Scale: 1=not at all, 6=very much; Mean participants response)



## Principle recommendations for education policy and practice

Against the backdrop of the findings of the 2021 ISSPY, aChord's recommendations offer useful tools and practical insights for the effective promotion of a shared society throughout the school system in Israel.

### **Foster hope about the future of relations between Jews and Arabs in Israel:**

Feelings of fear, hatred, and especially of despair that the research revealed among young people in Israel attest to the great difficulty most youth have in imagining positive relations between Jews and Arabs. This difficulty presents a significant barrier to their ability to aspire to change – and motivation to do so. **Thus, it is critically important that the education system, including everyone from policymakers to classroom teachers, redouble their efforts to instill and cultivate hope among Jewish and Arab students** to help them imagine and believe in a better future and act to improve relations between the groups.

### **Push for education for shared society in schools within the religious and ultra-Orthodox sectors:**

The findings of the ISSPY reveal very negative perceptions and feelings toward Arabs among religious and ultra-Orthodox Jewish youth. These findings reinforce the already acute need for building and assimilating programs for education for shared society into the schools from these sectors, which mostly do not address the relations between Jews and Arabs at all. **We recommend creating and integrating programs that promote tolerance toward and equality of the Arab population for use in ultra-Orthodox and religious schools.** Importantly, such programs must take into account the identity and instructional principles of these systems.

### **Increase the sense of group efficacy among Arab young people:**

The ISSPY reveals a continuing decrease over the last four years in Arab youth's sense of group efficacy; the belief that they have the power to influence the Israeli state and society. The data attests to a growing feeling of isolation and a weakened sense of agency among the young generation of Arabs in Israel. **This must be seen as an urgent warning sign regarding the need to nurture a sense of competence and efficacy among Arab youth and cultivate their connection to Israeli society.** As part of that effort, we recommend developing and implementing educational programs to encourage active participation of Arab youth in Israeli society in a way that integrates their identity and their voice in the educational, cultural, and social spaces.

### **Pursue education for shared society and for positive relations between Jews and Arabs – both during routine times and in times of crisis:**

The ISSPY findings point to the significant contribution that education for shared society in Israeli schools can make during times of crisis alongside the widespread desire on the part of Israeli youth to have more exposure to education for shared society during ordinary times. **These findings reinforce the importance of a structured and systematic practice of education for shared society and for positive relations between Jews and Arabs through all possible avenues of the education system in Israel.** To get there, a broad budgetary and systemic effort is required, including establishing an organizational infrastructure and development of content that can support the ongoing and effective instruction of this subject in all educational sectors. aChord will continue to assist all those engaged in this important work and provide them with knowledge-based pedagogic and measurement tools from the realm of social psychology of intergroup relations.

## Conclusion

The picture presented by the 2021 Index for Shared Society Progress in Youth is complex, but it also offers important opportunities at the psychological and educational level in terms of promoting tolerant, equal, and respectful relations among young people in Israel. The net effect is a resounding call to educators and to everyone in positions of educational leadership to do their utmost to promote education for shared society both every day and in times of crisis.