

PALESTINIAN CITIZENS OF ISRAEL: A PRIMER

History

- **Pre-1948:** Palestinians have had a presence throughout Palestine and modern-day Israel **for centuries**. Under the British Mandate, Jewish immigration began the process of displacing Palestinians. In 1914, Palestinians comprised about 92% of the population.
- **1948:** During the Nakba (“Catastrophe”), over 750,000 Palestinians fled or were forced to flee from their homes and **500 Palestinian villages were demolished**. Despite this, **150,000 Palestinians remained in their homeland** – today’s Palestinian citizens of Israel (“PCI”).
- **1948-1966:** The Israeli government imposed military rule on PCI, **severely limiting their freedom of movement, livelihoods, and expression**. Simultaneously, Israel passed numerous laws to transfer Palestinian land to state ownership or control; overall Israel took 73% of Palestinian land.
- **1967:** Following the War, Israel occupied the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Golan Heights and Sinai. This, paired with the lifting of military rule over PCI in 1966, led to increased political activism. While protesting the occupations, PCI also **fought for their national survival** within the State.
- **1976:** In response to a wave of land expropriations as part of Israel’s plan to “Judaize” the Galilee, on March 30th a general strike was called and protests erupted in the Galilee. Israeli security forces killed 6 PCI and wounded and arrested many more. This event – **“Land Day”** – represents one of many important instances of the national collective struggle of PCI against land confiscation. This day is still commemorated every year.
- **1980s & 1990s:** As PCI began to rebuild their national institutions, they also protested with Palestinians in the oPt during the first Intifada (1987-1993). The Oslo Accords signed in 1993 and 1995 offered hope for the establishment of a Palestinian state. Out of these events, PCI asserted their identity as Palestinians and at the same time, as a national and ethnic minority in Israel. They demanded that Israel become **a “state for all its citizens”**.
- **2000:** During street demonstrations in early October at the beginning of the second Intifada, Israeli police killed 12 unarmed PCI and one Palestinian and injured hundreds more throughout the country. Since then, Israeli police forces have killed over 51 PCI, as the police treat PCI essentially as enemies, **rather than citizens**, of the State.
- **2009-Present:** Right-wing governments, led by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, have initiated **widespread campaigns of incitement** against PCI and have passed a wave of discriminatory laws targeting the rights of PCI.





Key Facts & Figures

- **1.5 million people (20% of Israel's population)**
- A **national, ethnic, linguistic, and religious minority** under international human rights law
- Include **Bedouin citizens of Israel**, who predominantly live in the Naqab desert in the South – around 70,000 of whom live in unrecognized villages; Israel is seeking to demolish these villages and move their residents to government-planned, poor, segregated towns
- Part of **the Palestinian people** who live in Israel, the Occupied Palestinian Territory (oPt), refugee camps in Lebanon, and many other countries all over the world
- Are **Muslim** (83%), **Christian** (9%), and **Druze** (8%), and speak **Arabic** as their native language
- Reside primarily in towns and villages located **in three main areas in Israel**: The Galilee in the North; the “Little Triangle” in the Center; and the Naqab desert region in the South

Institutionalized Discrimination

Demography: Maintaining a Jewish majority is a critical component of **Israel's self-identity as a Jewish state**

Economic & Social Rights: The State has **perpetuated wide gaps between Palestinian and Jewish citizens** and communities in the distribution of state resources

Land: The State of Israel has continually **confiscated their land, demolished homes, and enforced their segregation**

Identity: The State has made repeated **attempts to erase Palestinian identity & collective memory**

Political Persecution: The State has put substantial limitations on **freedom of expression and has ideological tests to restrict PCI political participation**

Key Discriminatory Laws

The Law of Return (1950) gives every Jewish person in the world the right to obtain citizenship in Israel; there is no Right of Return for Palestinians

The Citizenship and Entry Law (2003) bans family unification in Israel between Palestinian citizens of Israel and their spouses from the oPt, Iran, Syria, Lebanon or Iraq

The Economic Efficiency Law (2009) gives the government sweeping discretion in allocating state resources, despite a Supreme Court decision in 2006 ruling as unconstitutional a government classification scheme that afforded 553 Jewish towns and only 4 small Arab villages enormous funds

The Admissions Committees Law (2011) allows hundreds of small towns built on state land to select applicants based criteria of "social suitability," in practice filtering out PCI families and others from marginalized groups

The Nakba Law (2011) strips state funding from any public entity (including educational institutions) that commemorates the Nakba

The Expulsion Law (2016) allows for the expulsion of Arab Knesset Members who make remarks or undertake actions that the majority claims incite to racism or support terror