

PALESTINIAN CITIZENS OF ISRAEL: A PRIMER

History

- **Pre-1948:** Palestinians lived in their **ancestral homeland of historical Palestine**, which includes modern-day Israel. In 1914, Palestinians comprised about 92% of the population. Jewish immigration to Palestine began in significant and increasing numbers under the British Mandate (1923-1948).
- **1948:** During the Nakba (“Catastrophe”), over 750,000 Palestinians fled or were forced to flee from their homes and **500 Palestinian villages were destroyed** by Zionist military forces. Just **150,000 Palestinians remained in their homeland**, becoming Palestinian citizens of Israel (PCI) and an involuntary minority.
- **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; in total, Israel appropriated of 73% of Palestinian land.
- **1967:** Following the war, Israel occupied the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Golan Heights and Sinai. These events, paired with the lifting of military rule over PCI in 1966, led to increased political activism. While protesting the occupation, 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 announced and protests erupted in the Galilee. Israeli security forces killed six PCI and wounded and arrested many more. This event, known as “**Land Day**”, is a milestone in the national collective struggle of PCI against land confiscation and is commemorated annually.
- **1980s & 1990s:** As PCI began to rebuild their national institutions, they also protested with Palestinians in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) during the First Intifada (1987-1993). The Oslo Accords, signed in 1993 and 1995, offered hope for the establishment of a Palestinian state. PCI reacted by asserting their identity both as Palestinians and as a national and ethnic minority in Israel. They began to voice the demand that Israel become a “**state for all its citizens**”.
- **2000:** During street demonstrations in early October at the outset of the second Intifada, Israeli police killed 12 unarmed PCI and one Palestinian from Gaza with live bullets, and injured hundreds more throughout the country. Since then, over 51 PCI have been killed in instances of police brutality.
- **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 that restrict the rights of PCI.



Institutionalized Discrimination

- **Demography:** Maintaining a Jewish majority is a central component of **Israel's self-definition as a Jewish state**
- **Economic and social rights:** The state has **perpetuated wide gaps** in the distribution of state resources, further disadvantaging the Palestinian minority in Israel
- **Land:** The State of Israel has consistently pursued policies of **confiscating Palestinians' land, demolishing their homes, and enforcing segregation**
- **Identity:** The state has made concerted attempts to **erase Palestinian identity and collective memory**
- **Political persecution:** The state limits **freedom of expression rights and has ideologically-biased tests to restrict political participation** by PCI



PCI: Key Facts & Figures

- Number **1.5 million people (20% of Israel's population)**
- Are a **national, ethnic, linguistic, and religious minority** under international human rights law
- Include **Bedouin citizens of Israel**, over 70,000 of whom live in unrecognized villages in the Naqab desert in the south
- Are **Muslim** (83%), **Christian** (9%), and **Druze** (8%), and speak **Arabic** as their native language
- Reside primarily in the **Galilee** in the north; the **"Little Triangle"** in the center; and in the **Naqab**

Key Discriminatory Laws

The Law of Return (1950) grants every Jewish person in the world the right to obtain citizenship in Israel; by contrast, Israel denies the Right of Return to the Palestinian refugees.

The Absentees' Property Law (1950) defines all Palestinians who were expelled or fled in 1947 as absentees and their property as absentee property. The law was used to confiscate millions of dunams of land later used for Jewish settlement.

The Citizenship and Entry Law (2003) bans family unification in Israel between PCI and their spouses from the OPT, Iran, Syria, Lebanon or Iraq.

The Benefits for Discharged Soldiers Law (2008) allows all institutions of higher education to consider military service – from which PCI are exempt for historical and political reasons – when determining applicants' eligibility for financial assistance.

The Economic Efficiency Law (2009) gives the government sweeping discretion to designate "National Priority Areas" and to allocate vast resources for their development, which it does so in a way that systematically excludes Arab communities.

The Admissions Committees Law (2011) allows hundreds of small towns built on state land to select applicants based on their "social suitability". The law is used in practice to filter out PCI and members of other 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 by their peers on ideological grounds, based on majority claims that they incite racism or support terror.

The Kaminitz Law (2017) increases enforcement and penalization of planning and building offenses. The law has a disparate impact on PCI, many of whom are forced to build illegally due to decades of discrimination by the planning and building system.

The Jewish Nation-State Law (2018) guarantees the ethnic-religious character of Israel as exclusively Jewish, denies the right to self-determination of PCI, and entrenches the privileges enjoyed by Jewish citizens, while simultaneously anchoring systemic inequality, discrimination and racism against PCI.