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Freedom in the World 2024 - West Bank*

NOT FREE

22

/ 100

[Political Rights](#) 4 / 40

[Civil Liberties](#) 18 / 60

LAST YEAR'S SCORE & STATUS

22 / 100 Not Free

Global freedom statuses are calculated on a weighted scale. [See the methodology.](#)

* Indicates a territory as opposed to an independent country.

Note

Freedom in the World reports assess the level of political rights and civil liberties in a given geographical area, regardless of whether they are affected by the state, nonstate actors, or foreign powers. Disputed or occupied territories are sometimes assessed separately if they meet certain criteria, including boundaries that are sufficiently stable to allow year-on-year comparisons. For more information, see the report [methodology](#) and [FAQ](#).

Overview

Israel's military occupation of the West Bank entails onerous physical barriers and constraints on movement, demolition of homes and other physical infrastructure, restrictions on political rights and civil liberties, and expanding Jewish settlements that are widely considered to constitute a violation of international law. Jewish settlers in the West Bank are Israeli citizens and enjoy the same rights and liberties as other Jewish Israelis. They also enjoy relative impunity for violence against Palestinians. Most of the West Bank's Palestinian residents fall under the administrative jurisdiction of the Palestinian Authority (PA), which operates under an

expired presidential mandate and has no functioning legislature. The PA governs in an authoritarian manner, engaging in repression against journalists and activists who present critical views on its rule. East Jerusalem Palestinians are governed directly by Israeli civilian authorities; while a small minority of them have Israeli citizenship, most have a special residency status that denotes a restricted set of rights compared with those of Israeli citizens.

Key Developments in 2023

- Violence between Israelis and Palestinians in the West Bank increased significantly during the year. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA) reported that more than 500 Palestinians were killed by Israeli forces or settlers, more than triple the figure from 2022. About 30 Israelis were also killed, and thousands of Palestinians were displaced amid ongoing land seizures and housing demolitions.
- Israeli detentions of Palestinians and attacks by armed Jewish Israeli settlers both intensified after the Palestinian militant group Hamas launched a massive terrorist assault on Israeli territory from the Gaza Strip on October 7, setting off a major Israeli military campaign in Gaza. As part of its broader crackdown, the Israeli military established a number of new physical barriers to internal travel in the West Bank.
- There was no progress during the year toward a renewal of the PA leadership or the holding of Palestinian presidential or legislative elections, which have been overdue since 2009 and 2010, respectively.

Political Rights

A Electoral Process

A1 0-4 pts

Was the current head of government or other chief national authority elected through free and fair elections? 0 / 4

The PA has not held a presidential election since 2005. The four-year term of Mahmoud Abbas, who won that year with 62 percent of the vote, expired in 2009, but he has continued to rule with the support of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO)—of which he is the chairman and which is led by his Fatah party. The rift between the West Bank-based, Fatah-controlled PA government and the de facto Hamas government in the Gaza Strip, in addition to rifts within Fatah itself, have impeded the resumption of regular elections. Hamas seized control of the Gaza Strip in 2007, following its victory in the 2006 legislative elections and a period of armed clashes with Fatah. Successive rounds of Palestinian reconciliation

talks, efforts to form unity governments, and plans to hold fresh elections have failed to gain traction.

Under PA laws, the prime minister is nominated by the president and requires the support of the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC). However, the PLC elected in 2006 was unable to function due to the Fatah-Hamas division and Israel's detention of many lawmakers. Abbas has since appointed prime ministers and cabinets without legislative approval. Over Hamas's objections, Fatah's Mohammad Shtayyeh was appointed and sworn in as prime minister along with a new Fatah-led cabinet in 2019. He remained in office as of 2023.

Jewish Israelis living in West Bank settlements are able to participate in generally free and fair elections for the Israeli Knesset (parliament), which selects the Israeli government.

A2 0-4 pts

Were the current national legislative representatives elected 0 / through free and fair elections? 4

Palestinians in the West Bank do not have a functioning legislative body. Elections for the 132-seat PLC have not been held since 2006, when Hamas won 74 seats and Fatah took 45. The Israeli military's suppression of Hamas and subsequent fighting between Fatah and Hamas in 2007 left the PLC unable to operate. Israeli forces have repeatedly detained elected PLC members since 2006, and the legislature's electoral mandate expired in 2010. In 2018, President Abbas ordered the formal dissolution of the PLC, backed by a Supreme Constitutional Court ruling. Hamas rejected the decision, and the court's stipulation that elections be held within six months was not implemented.

Jewish Israelis living in West Bank settlements are able to participate in elections for the Knesset, the most recent of which took place in November 2022 and were considered generally free and fair. The majority of Palestinian residents in East Jerusalem, which Israel claims to have annexed and considers to be part of its Jerusalem municipality, do not hold Israeli citizenship and thus do not have the right to vote in Knesset elections; while noncitizen Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem are permitted to vote in Israeli-run Jerusalem municipal council elections, most have historically boycotted them.

A3 0-4 pts

Are the electoral laws and framework fair, and are they 1 / implemented impartially by the relevant election management 4 bodies?

PA laws provide a credible framework for elections. The Palestinian Central Elections Commission is tasked with overseeing elections in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. While its nine commissioners are appointed by the president, the law requires them to be experienced and politically

impartial judges, academics, or lawyers. Despite the existence of this framework, it has not been implemented for presidential and legislative elections since they were last held in 2005 and 2006, respectively. Relatively uncompetitive municipal elections have been held, most recently in 2021–22; they were boycotted by Hamas and left Fatah as the dominant party.

Israel's Central Elections Committee oversees Knesset elections, and its Interior Ministry manages Israeli municipal elections, including in Jerusalem. These elections are generally free and fair, but unlike Jewish Israeli settlers, Palestinians in the West Bank are generally unable to access Israeli citizenship and thus excluded from participating.

B Political Pluralism and Participation

B1 0-4 pts

Do the people have the right to organize in different political parties or other competitive political groupings of their choice, 1 / and is the system free of undue obstacles to the rise and fall of 4 these competing parties or groupings?

In addition to Fatah, a number of small Palestinian parties with ties to the PA leadership operate relatively freely in the West Bank. However, the PA deals harshly with political supporters of Hamas and rivals of President Abbas within Fatah. The Israeli military occupation authorities ban parties, disrupt political gatherings, and detain and arrest political activists if they are deemed to be threats to Israeli security and the stability of the PA infrastructure.

Since 2007, the PA and Israeli forces in the West Bank have collaborated in surveillance and repression of Hamas, the leftist Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), and other political factions with armed wings, periodically engaging in mass arrests and closures of affiliated institutions.

East Jerusalem Palestinians can form party lists to run in the city's Israeli municipal elections, but doing so may lead to increased scrutiny by Israeli authorities, as well as harassment from Palestinians who oppose participation on the grounds that it signals acceptance of Israel's annexation of East Jerusalem, which is not internationally recognized and is widely considered a violation of international law.

B2 0-4 pts

Is there a realistic opportunity for the opposition to increase its 0 / support or gain power through elections? 4

The repeated and indefinite postponements of Palestinian presidential and legislative elections have prevented any rotation of power in the West Bank. The PA leadership has been accused of avoiding contests that could lead to victory for Hamas or Fatah factions that are not loyal to Abbas.

Hamas's boycott of 2021 and 2022 local elections again left it formally unrepresented in West Bank municipal councils. In recent years, a number of youth groups have attempted to broaden political participation and encourage generational change, but Abbas continues to appoint loyalists to senior positions in the PA and PLO, marginalizing or dismissing figures who might challenge his leadership.

B3 0-4 pts

Are the people's political choices free from domination by forces that are external to the political sphere, or by political forces that employ extrapolitical means? 1 / 4

Armed groups—including the Israeli military, Jewish Israeli settlers, PA security forces, and the militias associated with Palestinian political factions—have largely eclipsed Palestinian voters and civilian political actors in shaping the conditions experienced by West Bank residents.

Israeli military authorities regularly surveil, detain, and harass individuals with explicit or suspected links to the PFLP, Hamas, and other factions that Israel has designated as terrorist groups, in addition to members of Fatah who are suspected of militant activity. Such individuals are sometimes targeted arbitrarily or based on secret or circumstantial evidence, effectively impeding political activity by civilians who may have no actual involvement in armed violence. In December 2023, for example, Israeli forces arrested former PLC lawmaker Khalida Jarrar and several other members of the PFLP.

Among other impediments, the Israeli military's restrictions on freedom of movement—including checkpoints, permit systems, and the continuous barrier it has constructed along the West Bank side of the pre-1967 border—can obstruct Palestinian political activity.

Foreign government donors regularly exert influence over the PA, which is heavily dependent on international aid, to promote or marginalize certain politicians or political factions.

B4 0-4 pts

Do various segments of the population (including ethnic, racial, religious, gender, LGBT+, and other relevant groups) have full political rights and electoral opportunities? 2 / 4

Women and members of religious and ethnic minority groups are formally granted equal political rights under PA laws. While women and Christians have held PLC seats and cabinet positions, PA politics remain dominated by Arab and Muslim men. There are legal gender quotas for candidate lists in legislative elections and for seats on local councils, which tend to result in approximately 20 percent of candidates and elected officeholders being women. This pattern persisted in the most recent municipal elections, but the lack of genuine competition in many localities has limited the extent to which women can independently advance their

political interests in practice. Seats are also set aside for Christian candidates in Ramallah and Bethlehem. LGBT+ people continue to face bias and threats that seriously obstruct their political participation in addition to compromising their physical safety.

The roughly 350,000 Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem formally have the option to apply for Israeli citizenship, though most decline for political reasons; those who have applied face significant delays and are rejected in a majority of cases. While such noncitizens are entitled to vote in municipal as well as PA elections, they have traditionally boycotted Israeli municipal balloting, and Israel has restricted PA election activity in the city. A Palestinian Jerusalem resident who is not an Israeli citizen cannot become mayor of the Israeli municipality under current law.

There are more than 700,000 Jewish settlers in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, all of whom are Israeli citizens with full political rights in Israel.

C Functioning of Government

C1 0-4 pts

Do the freely elected head of government and national legislative representatives determine the policies of the government? 0 / 4

The PA has no executive or legislature with an electoral mandate, and its leaders' lack of democratic legitimacy is reflected in public opinion polls. Because the legislature has not functioned since 2007, new laws are introduced via presidential decree. The ability of the PA president and ministries to implement policy decisions is limited in practice by Israeli control over key aspects of governance. Israeli authorities periodically withhold the transfer of tax revenues to the PA, which affects salary payments and basic operations.

The Israeli military exerts direct administrative control over Area C—a largely rural area that makes up more than 60 percent of West Bank territory. Most Jewish Israeli settlements are located in Area C. Areas A and B, which include major Palestinian cities and are highly fragmented geographically, fall under varying degrees of PA control, though the Israeli military asserts the right to operate throughout the territory as needed.

C2 0-4 pts

Are safeguards against official corruption strong and effective? 1 / 4

Official corruption remains a major problem that is widely recognized by the public. The PA's Anti-Corruption Commission is responsible for implementing an anticorruption strategy, but reports by the PA's State Audit and Administrative Control Bureau have pointed to long-standing irregularities in the commission's management of its own funding. The Coalition for Accountability and Integrity (AMAN), a civil society group, has identified nepotism and other forms of favoritism in hiring and

appointments as an ongoing threat to public institutions. Among other problems, AMAN has noted that a system regulating gifts to officials features vague guidelines and is not actively enforced.

C3 0-4 pts

Does the government operate with openness and transparency? 1 / 4

Government transparency is generally lacking in the PA, and in the absence of basic accountability mechanisms including regular elections and legislative oversight, the administration has little incentive to make substantive improvements. Journalists, activists, and others who attempt to scrutinize PA policies or internal operations are subject to intimidation and harassment.

The operations of Israeli military authorities in the West Bank are opaque, and the Israeli military and civil administrations are not accountable to Palestinians.

Add Q

Is the government or occupying power deliberately changing the ethnic composition of a country or territory so as to destroy a -3 culture or tip the political balance in favor of another group?

The Israeli state and associated institutions continued to preside over and promote the growth of Jewish Israeli settlements, seizures of Palestinian land, and the demolition of Palestinian homes in the West Bank in 2023. Under the pretext of unlawful construction, Israeli authorities demolished more than 1,000 Palestinian structures and housing units in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, during the year; this left over 3,300 people homeless, according to statistics compiled by UN OCHA. The pace of demolitions has increased dramatically over the past several years, rising from fewer than 500 per year in 2017 and 2018. The Israeli Civil Administration in the West Bank, which is overseen by the military, employs occupation policies that deny Palestinians opportunities to challenge demolition orders and allow the confiscation of portable buildings without due process.

In 2018, the Knesset passed a law limiting Palestinians' direct access to the Israeli Supreme Court for petitions against the construction of Jewish Israeli settlements. According to Peace Now, in the first half of 2023, the Israeli government promoted more than 12,000 housing units in West Bank settlements, exceeding all previous full-year records in terms of units approved. In the three months following Hamas's October 7 attack on Israel, Peace Now reported a sharp increase in settlement activities, including the establishment of new outposts, roads, fences, and roadblocks. These efforts were evidently initiated by settlers themselves, in some cases in defiance of military or court orders.

Civil Liberties

D Freedom of Expression and Belief

D1 0-4 pts

Are there free and independent media? 1 / 4

The news media are generally not free in the West Bank; journalists are surveilled and repressed by both Palestinian and Israeli authorities. Under PA law, journalists can be fined and jailed and outlets closed for publishing information that might harm national unity, contradict national responsibility, or incite violence.

The PA's 2017 Electronic Crimes Law (ECL) prescribes heavy fines and lengthy prison terms for vaguely defined offenses including the publication or dissemination of material that is critical of the state, disturbs public order or national unity, or harms family and religious values. The ECL has been invoked in practice, partly to order the blocking of news sites.

Common violations of media freedom by Palestinian and Israeli authorities in the West Bank include the summons, interrogation, and arrest of journalists; confiscation of equipment; and restrictions on reporting. In 2023, the Palestinian Journalists Syndicate documented more than 800 crimes and media freedom violations committed against Palestinian journalists by Israeli forces in the West Bank. These included arrests, physical assaults, attacks by settlers, and obstruction of coverage. The Palestinian Center for Development and Media Freedoms similarly recorded scores of violations by Israeli and Palestinian authorities, as well as others in which social media companies suspended or closed journalists' accounts or restricted their content for allegedly violating platform rules on issues like incitement to violence.

D2 0-4 pts

Are individuals free to practice and express their religious faith or nonbelief in public and private? 2 / 4

The PA Basic Law declares Islam to be the official religion of Palestine and states that "respect and sanctity of all other heavenly religions (Judaism and Christianity) shall be maintained." Blasphemy is a criminal offense. The ECL criminalizes expression aimed at harming religious values without defining those values, allowing for arbitrary enforcement.

Security-related restrictions on movement, and vandalism or physical assaults against worshippers or places of worship, affect the religious freedom of Jewish, Muslim, and Christian residents of the West Bank to varying degrees.

The Israeli authorities regularly prevent Palestinian Muslims in the West Bank from reaching Jerusalem to pray, and generally restrict access for young adult males to the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif compound on Fridays. Other limits are adjusted periodically depending on perceived

security risks. Protests, clashes with Israeli security personnel, and mass arrests at the site are not uncommon. In recent years, Israeli authorities have eased security-related restrictions on Jewish prayer without openly announcing a change in policy, and the number of Jewish worshippers ascending to the upper part of the compound has increased. Related tensions contributed to violence between security forces and Muslim worshippers in April 2023. Controls on Muslim access to the site were intensified after Hamas's October 7 attack.

D3 0-4 pts

**Is there academic freedom, and is the educational system free 2 /
from extensive political indoctrination? 4**

The PA generally has administrative authority over Palestinian education. Political activism is common on university campuses, and student council elections generally proceed freely; an Islamist bloc sympathetic to Hamas won the largest share of seats on Birzeit University's student council in May 2023. However, student activists affiliated with the bloc have been detained by Israeli and Palestinian authorities, who allege links to Hamas or planned attacks. Israeli forces periodically enter university campuses to conduct raids and arrests. Primary and secondary schools in the West Bank are also sometimes subjected to Israeli raids, during which soldiers interrogate teachers and students or search for suspected militants. Reports of raids and arrests at schools and universities increased sharply after Hamas's October 2023 attack on Israel.

According to the Association for Civil Rights in Israel, East Jerusalem's schools are underfunded compared with schools in West Jerusalem, and East Jerusalem suffers from a severe shortage of classrooms. Israeli authorities prohibit East Jerusalem schools from following the PA curriculum and have confiscated the associated textbooks.

Israeli authorities have more actively restricted visas for foreign academics attempting to visit Palestinian universities in the West Bank since 2016, according to the Right to Enter Campaign.

D4 0-4 pts

**Are individuals free to express their personal views on political or 1 /
other sensitive topics without fear of surveillance or retribution? 4**

Residents have some freedom to engage in open private discussion, though Israeli and PA security forces are known to monitor online activity and arrest individuals for alleged incitement of violence or criticism of Palestinian authorities, respectively.

The PA has been accused of engaging in extensive electronic surveillance of lawyers, activists, political figures, and others, which could have a deterrent effect on expression more broadly. It has also reportedly monitored social media posts and detained users for harsh questioning over their comments. In recent years, individuals have been detained over

posts that discussed plans for protests, denounced the government's policies, allegedly defamed the authorities, or criticized the PA's relations with Israel. Nizar Banat, a civic activist known for criticizing the PA and alleging corruption within Fatah on social media, died in custody in 2021 after being violently detained and physically abused by PA security forces.

In the wake of Hamas's October 2023 attack on Israel, Israeli forces in the West Bank reportedly searched Palestinians' phones and detained them based on social media activity that suggested opposition to the Israeli military campaign in Gaza or sympathy with Hamas. An Israeli police unit conducted social media monitoring and related arrests in East Jerusalem. These practices were part of a broader crackdown in which thousands of Palestinians were arrested by year's end.

E Associational and Organizational Rights

E1 0-4 pts

Is there freedom of assembly? 1 / 4

The PA requires permits for demonstrations, and those organized to protest against the PA or its policies are generally prohibited and often violently dispersed by security forces. PA security forces have also disrupted prisoner-release celebrations and funeral processions by supporters of Hamas and other Palestinian factions that oppose Fatah.

Israel's Military Order 101 (1967) requires a permit for all political demonstrations of more than 10 people, and these permits are rarely granted in practice. Military Order 1651 (2009) is used to prosecute and sentence those accused of harming public order or engaging in alleged incitement. Such orders may be applied even in nominally PA-controlled areas. Israeli authorities frequently restrict and disperse demonstrations in practice, some of which become violent, and certain protest areas are designated as closed military zones. Protesters are at risk of injury by tear-gas canisters, rubber-coated bullets, or live ammunition, and clashes between demonstrators and Israeli troops periodically result in fatalities. A number of confrontations in recent years have been prompted by threatened eviction of Palestinian families in East Jerusalem, settler attacks or marches, or Israeli military raids seeking suspected militants in Palestinian-populated areas.

E2 0-4 pts

Is there freedom for nongovernmental organizations, particularly those that are engaged in human rights- and governance-related work? 1 / 4

A broad range of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) operate in the West Bank. However, Israeli restrictions on movement can impede civil society activity, Islamist groups have been periodically shut down by Israeli or PA officials over purported links to militancy, and activists who criticize the PA leadership can face harassment and abuse by security

services. A 2017 Israeli law bars entry for any foreign individual who publicly supports a boycott of Israel or its West Bank settlements, including representatives of international NGOs.

In 2021, the Israeli government designated six Palestinian NGOs and human rights organizations as “terrorist organizations.” It provided no evidence that the groups, some of which received funding from European governments, had links to militant activity, and the move was criticized by international human rights organizations and UN experts. In 2022, Israeli forces raided and sealed the West Bank offices of those organizations as well as a seventh, the Union of Health Work Committees. Following Hamas’s October 2023 attack, key international donors suspended or withdrew funding for Palestinian NGOs, citing the need for reviews to ensure that they were not inadvertently supporting terrorist activity. Amnesty International and 95 other organizations warned that the measures could have a serious impact on human rights work.

Separately in 2023, Palestinian NGOs continued to criticize a PA Bylaw on Nonprofit Companies that was issued without consultation in 2022. It included key provisions of a 2021 measure that had been withdrawn amid controversy, imposing onerous reporting requirements and intrusive financial controls. NGO representatives argued that the rules could effectively subordinate the civil society sector to PA government ministries.

E3 0-4 pts

Is there freedom for trade unions and similar professional or labor organizations? 2 / 4

Workers may establish unions without PA government authorization, but labor protections in general are poorly enforced. The PA exerts pressure on unions with the aim of co-opting them or ensuring Fatah’s dominance in their leadership and composition. Palestinian workers seeking to strike must submit to arbitration by the PA Labor Ministry, and various other rules make it difficult to mount a legal strike. Palestinian workers in Jerusalem are subject to Israeli labor law.

During 2023, despite the legal obstacles, multiple labor and professional groups organized demonstrations over economic grievances or political harassment from the PA leadership. Palestinian teachers continued to strike amid government threats, and UNRWA staff shut down the agency’s services for months to protest funding shortages. Members of the Engineers Association have faced harassment and arrests over their criticism of the PA, the Doctors Association has mounted demonstrations to protest the poor conditions they face, and the Bar Association has held strikes and protests to oppose the government’s infringements on judicial independence and the rule of law.

F Rule of Law

F1 0-4 pts**Is there an independent judiciary? 1 / 4**

Palestinians in the West Bank are subject to the Israeli military court system, and most also live within the jurisdiction of the Palestinian judiciary, but neither is impartial or independent. In 2019, President Abbas issued decrees to replace the existing High Judicial Council with a transitional body and to lower the retirement age of judges. Abbas issued additional decrees in 2020 that further consolidated his control over key judicial bodies and the appointment, retirement, and dismissal of judges. In 2022, he issued a decree that created a new High Judicial Council made up of his appointees and headed by himself.

Enforcement of judicial decisions is impeded by PA noncompliance as well as lack of Palestinian court jurisdiction in Area C, where the Israeli military exerts exclusive control.

The Israeli civilian courts, which have jurisdiction over East Jerusalem and over Jewish Israeli settlers elsewhere in the West Bank, are generally independent of the Israeli government, though they came under growing political pressure during 2023.

F2 0-4 pts**Does due process prevail in civil and criminal matters? 1 / 4**

The opaque distinction between criminal and security-related offenses, the regular use of detention without trial by both Palestinian and Israeli security forces, and the Israeli state's use of martial law and a military court system that applies exclusively to Palestinians in the West Bank all violate the due process rights of Palestinians. Jewish Israeli settlers are tried in Israeli civilian courts, which generally provide due process protections.

Human rights groups regularly document allegations of arbitrary detention by PA security forces. Israeli military authorities also use administrative detention to hold Palestinians without trial for renewable six-month periods. The Israeli military frequently conducts home raids without a warrant.

According to the Addameer Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association, approximately 8,000 Palestinian security detainees and prisoners from the West Bank were held in Israeli prisons as of December 2023, including some 2,800 administrative detainees. The pace of detentions accelerated after Hamas's October attack. Those not in administrative detention were either awaiting trial or serving sentences issued by military courts. Detained minors are usually interrogated without a lawyer or parental guardian present and are tried by a special military court that has been criticized for a lack of due process.

protections. East Jerusalem Palestinian minors are tried in Israeli civilian juvenile courts.

F3 0-4 pts

Is there protection from the illegitimate use of physical force and freedom from war and insurgencies? 0 / 4

Physical abuse of detainees by PA authorities has been documented by human rights organizations, and the Independent Commission for Human Rights regularly receives complaints of torture and ill-treatment in West Bank prisons. There is also substantial evidence of the use of physical and psychological abuse by the Israeli military. According to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, arrests by Israeli forces during the last three months of 2023 were often accompanied by physical and psychological abuse, including sexual and gender-based violence against men and women, beatings, isolation, and denial of medical care. At least six Palestinians reportedly died while in Israeli detention in 2023.

Israeli soldiers accused of excessive force or abuse of Palestinian civilians are subject to Israeli military law, though convictions, which are very rare, typically result in light sentences. The Israeli human rights group B'Tselem has estimated that the chance of a complaint leading to an indictment is just 3 percent. UN OCHA reported that nearly 500 Palestinians were killed during Israeli security operations in the West Bank in 2023, compared with about 150 in 2022. The new figure was the highest since the office's data collection began in 2005.

Also during the year, some 30 Israelis were killed by Palestinians in the West Bank, up from 10 in 2022, and 15 Palestinians were killed in attacks by Jewish Israeli settlers. Settlers who attack Palestinian individuals, property, and agricultural resources generally enjoy impunity and de facto protection from the Israeli army. Such attacks surged beginning in October, with 21 incidents recorded by UN OCHA between January and October 7 and more than 340 recorded between that date and mid-December. In response to Hamas's October attack, Israel's minister of national security oversaw the creation of civilian paramilitary forces in Israel and among settlers in the West Bank, raising concerns that the program could fuel additional violence against Palestinian civilians.

F4 0-4 pts

Do laws, policies, and practices guarantee equal treatment of various segments of the population? 1 / 4

The legal arrangements operative in the West Bank are fundamentally discriminatory: Jewish Israeli settlers and Palestinians who reside or commit crimes in the same location are subject to different courts and laws. Since 2021, Israeli and international human rights groups including B'Tselem, Human Rights Watch (HRW), and Amnesty International have published reports concluding that the Israeli-imposed occupation regime in the West Bank, combined and contrasted with conditions inside Israel,

met the definition of “apartheid” under international law, meaning it used systematic oppression to maintain the domination of one racial or ethnic group over another. The findings by these organizations added to an existing body of research developed by Palestinian experts.

While some PA laws and policies are designed to uphold equality for women and improve their status, such limited protections are often subordinated in practice to discriminatory societal norms. Palestinian women are underrepresented in most professions and encounter discrimination in employment, though they have equal access to universities. Women are legally excluded from what are deemed dangerous occupations. Gender-based harassment and violence remain major problems. Israeli women are treated equally in Israeli criminal and civil courts and have achieved substantial parity within Israeli society, though economic and other forms of discrimination persist, particularly in certain religious communities.

LGBT+ people do not face prosecution for same-sex sexual activity, but they have been subject to harassment and abuse by PA authorities and members of society, and there are no PA laws that specifically prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity. While discrimination based on sexual orientation is illegal under the laws that apply to Israelis, LGBT+ people continue to face bias in some Israeli communities. Gay and transgender Israelis are permitted to serve openly in the military.

G Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights

G1 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy freedom of movement, including the ability 1 / to change their place of residence, employment, or education? 4

Israeli checkpoints, travel permits, and other restrictions seriously constrain freedom of movement and limit Palestinian access to jobs, hospitals, and schools. The Israeli permit system lacks an effective appeal mechanism, and permits are often denied without explanation. According to UN OCHA, Israeli forces established 49 new physical obstacles to internal travel between October 7 and mid-December 2023, bringing the total number to 694.

The Israeli separation barrier, 85 percent of which lies in West Bank territory and which was declared illegal in 2004 by the International Court of Justice, divides Palestinian communities and causes general hardship and disruption of services.

East Jerusalem Palestinians are vulnerable to revocation of their residency status if they leave the city for extended periods, or if they are deemed to be a threat to public safety, security, or the state of Israel. Palestinians

living elsewhere in the West Bank need a special permit from Israeli authorities to visit East Jerusalem.

G2 0-4 pts

Are individuals able to exercise the right to own property and establish private businesses without undue interference from state or nonstate actors? 1 / 4

While Palestinians are able to own property and engage in business activity, their rights are seriously undermined by Israeli movement and access restrictions and the expansion of Jewish Israeli settlements, which is encouraged by the Israeli government and private groups. Israeli authorities employ a variety of methods to prevent Palestinians from developing their privately owned land, particularly in Area C, for example by declaring nature reserves, denying permit requests, and demolishing structures. Palestinian property is also illegally damaged by Israeli settlers.

G3 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy personal social freedoms, including choice of marriage partner and size of family, protection from domestic violence, and control over appearance? 2 / 4

Palestinian laws and societal norms, derived in part from religious law, often put women at a disadvantage in matters such as marriage and divorce. Related cases are overseen by Muslim and Christian religious courts. For Jewish Israeli settlers, personal status issues are managed by Jewish religious courts, which can also impose disadvantages on women. It is extremely difficult for West Bank Palestinians who are married to Israeli citizens to obtain permission to live with their spouses in East Jerusalem or Israel proper. An Israeli ordinance implemented in 2022 requires foreigners seeking to enter the West Bank to declare any romantic relationships, as part of a broader effort to limit long-term stays or residency.

Rape and domestic abuse remain underreported and frequently go unpunished, as authorities are allegedly reluctant to pursue such cases, and effective mechanisms for complaints and victim protection are lacking. The problem of so-called honor killings persists in the West Bank despite 2018 PA legal amendments designed to eliminate leniency in sentencing for perpetrators.

G4 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy equality of opportunity and freedom from economic exploitation? 1 / 4

Unemployment rates are high compared with the rest of the Middle East and global averages. The excess supply of workers creates conditions in which labor exploitation is more likely. PA labor laws, including restrictions on child labor, are not effectively enforced.

Many West Bank Palestinians, most of them male, work in Israel and the settlements, where the PA has no jurisdiction. These workers are covered by Israeli labor laws when employed legally with permits, and some have achieved collective-bargaining agreements with Israeli employers, but inconsistent enforcement has been reported as a concern. Palestinians' work permits usually tie them to a single employer, creating a relationship of dependency, and tens of thousands work without permits, making them vulnerable to greater exploitation. Many Palestinians also lose considerable income to brokers who connect them to Israeli employers. After Hamas's October 2023 attack, Israeli authorities prohibited entry to Israel or settlements for most West Bank Palestinian workers, leaving some 150,000 without employment. Several thousand such workers were allowed to return under heightened security requirements beginning in late December.

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