



Palestine, Gaza Strip — Va-PoReg Country Report

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[For the period between 1900 and 1948, see Palestine.]

05/14/1948 Start No Central Authority: Following the Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel by David Ben Gurion, Egypt, Transjordan, Iraq and Syria invaded the former territory of Palestine and attacked the new Israeli forces. This marked the beginning of the 1948 Arab-Israeli War.¹ Following this, Egyptian forces swiftly entered Gaza, establishing it as the headquarters for the Egyptian expeditionary force in Palestine. Intense battles in the autumn of 1948 led to a significant reduction in the area under Arab control around Gaza, limiting it to a narrow strip measuring 40 km in length and 6–8 km in width. This territory, delineated in the Egyptian-Israeli armistice agreement of 02/24/1949, became known as the Gaza Strip.² In the course of the 1948 Palestine war, particularly the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, tens of thousands of Palestinian refugees sought refuge in the Gaza Strip. By the war's conclusion, 25% of the Arab population in Mandatory Palestine had relocated to Gaza, despite the region comprising only 1% of the total land area.³

09/22/1948 End No Central Authority/Start Direct Rule Occupation Regime [by Egypt, Constitutional Monarchy]: Following the 1948 Arab-Israeli war, the State of Israel extended its control over the territory designated by the UN for the Jewish state and appropriated nearly 60% of the area intended for the Arab state. This included regions like Jaffa, Lydda, Ramle, Upper Galilee, segments of the Negev, and a broad stretch along the Tel Aviv–Jerusalem route. Meanwhile, Egypt occupied the Gaza Strip.⁴ Established on 09/22/1948, amid the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, the All-Palestine Government was formed to administer the Egyptian-controlled territory in Gaza, declared as the All-Palestine Protectorate by Egypt on the same day. Recognized by six out of the seven Arab League members, excluding Transjordan, and endorsed by the Arab League, it asserted authority over the entire former Mandatory Palestine. However, its practical control was confined to the designated All-Palestine Protectorate, eventually known as the Gaza Strip.⁵ From 1949 to 1956 the Gaza Strip was subjected to Egyptian military governance.⁶

10/29/1956 End Direct Rule Occupation Regime [Egypt, One-Party Autocracy]/Start Direct Rule Occupation Regime [Israel, Electoral Democracy]: In the course of the 1956 Suez Crisis, also known as the Second Arab-Israeli war, Israel launched invasions into both Gaza and the Sinai Peninsula. Under international pressure, Israel concluded the occupation in March 1957.⁷

03/01/1957 End Direct Rule Occupation Regime [Israel, Electoral Democracy]/Start Direct Rule Occupation Regime [Egypt, One-Party Autocracy]: On this date, Israel chose to withdraw its forces from the Gaza Strip, resulting in a return to Egyptian occupation. Following the disbandment of the All-Palestine Government in 1959, citing pan-Arabism as a pretext, Egypt maintained control over Gaza until 1967. Although Egypt did not formally annex the Strip, it treated it as a governed territory and oversaw its administration through a military governor.⁸ For that period, V-Dem's PCLI is classified by us as indicating that political liberties were absent.

06/10/1967 End Direct Rule Occupation Regime [Egypt, One-Party Autocracy]/Start Direct Rule Occupation Regime [Israel, Electoral Democracy]: Commencing on 06/05/1967, the Six-Day War initiated with Israel launching surprise attacks on Egyptian airfields in response to the mobilization of Egyptian forces along the Israeli border. In a span of six days, Israel achieved a decisive victory in the land war, gaining control of the Gaza Strip. The subsequent territorial expansion prompted the establishment of a military government to

oversee the affairs of Arab populations under Israeli military rule.⁹ Consequently, the Israeli Military Governorate was established to oversee the civilian population in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Sinai Peninsula, and the western Golan Heights. Operating under the Fourth Geneva Convention's guidelines for military rule in occupied regions, this governance excluded East Jerusalem, which was annexed to Jerusalem's municipal area in 1967, with Israeli law extended to the region in 1980. Throughout this time, the UN and various sources commonly referred to the military-administered areas as Occupied Arab Territories.¹⁰ On 03/26/1979, Israel and Egypt signed the Egypt-Israel peace treaty, requiring Israel to withdraw its forces and civilians from the Sinai Peninsula, captured during the Six-Day War. The Sinai was to be demilitarized by Egypt. However, the treaty did not address the final status of the Gaza Strip or other Israeli-Palestinian relations. Egypt renounced territorial claims north of the international border, while the Gaza Strip continued under Israeli military administration, with Israel responsible for civil facilities and services.¹¹ From 1977 to 1980 FH classifies Westbank and Gaza Strip with a score from 9 to 10 as not free, which we categorize as rather not free.

09/17/1978 Continuation Direct Rule Occupation Regime [by Israel, Electoral Democracy]: Incorporated into the Camp David Accords of 1978, the establishment of a civil administration¹² for the West Bank and Gaza Strip aimed to replace the military government set up by Israel in 1967. Despite the exclusion of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) from the talks on territories claimed by Palestinians, the Civil Administration, formed thereafter, did not separate civil affairs from the military. While technically under the control of the Civil Administration, in practice, it remained subordinate to the military and the Shin Bet.¹³ During Menachem Begin's administration (1979–83), Israeli settlements more than tripled, and settlers increased over fivefold, raising suspicions of eventual annexation. From December 1987 to around 1993 the First Intifada took place, which was a prolonged series of protests and violent actions by Palestinians in the Israeli-occupied territories. It stemmed from collective frustration with Israel's twenty-year military occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, which commenced after the 1967 Arab-Israeli War. The uprising concluded around the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993, with the Madrid Conference in 1991 marking a significant point in its timeline.¹⁴ As classified by FH for 1981-1988, West Bank and Gaza Strip score between 9 and 10 as not free, which we interpret as rather not free. Per FH, for the rest of this regime period, the country scores between 11 and 14 as not free, which we also interpret as not free.

01/29/1996 End Direct Rule Occupation Regime [by Israel, Electoral Democracy]/Start Electoral Autocracy: As a consequence of the 1993 Oslo Accords, Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) reached an agreement for a five-year transitional period. During this time, the Israeli military progressively withdrew from Gaza and the Jericho area, facilitating the incremental transfer of self-governance responsibilities to the Palestinian Authority (PA).¹⁵ In 1996, both presidential and legislative elections took place. According to assessments from international and local observers, the elections were conducted in a manner that adhered to principles of freedom and democracy.¹⁶ Fatah Chairman Yasser Arafat emerged victorious in the presidential elections, securing 87% of the votes. Concurrently, Fatah also attained a majority of seats in the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC), signifying its dominance in the legislative branch of the Palestinian Authority (PA).¹⁷ Even though the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) approved the Basic Law, which aimed to establish a formal system of checks and balances, it was never officially ratified. Coupled with the absence of an independent judiciary, this renders the checks and balances virtually non-existent (Karatnycky 1999). Led by Yasser Arafat, the fledgling Palestinian government faced challenges such as economic stagnation, divided popular support, stalled negotiations with Israel, and the threat of terrorism from groups like Islamic Jihad and Hamas, which opposed compromise with Israel.¹⁸ Furthermore, the Arafat administration was marked by significant human rights abuses and persistent violent clashes with Israeli forces (Amnesty International 1996). This culminated in the initiation of the Second Intifada after Ariel Sharon's visit to the Temple Mount. Following the failed 2000 Camp David summit, intended to resolve Palestinian status issues, the violence escalated, leading to Yasser Arafat's confinement by the IDF until his subsequent death in 2004. In the 2005 presidential elections, Arafat's successor as PLO chairman, Mahmoud Abbas, was elected president.

Surprisingly, the 2006 legislative elections were won by the Islamist group Hamas and a Palestinian Authority national unity government was formed, led by Ismail Haniya and comprised of both Hamas and Fatah. However, the resulting Hamas-Fatah coalition disintegrated swiftly, sparking military clashes between the coalition partners. This conflict concluded with Hamas taking sole control of Gaza. During the Battle of Gaza, Hamas took control of the Gaza Strip by seizing government institutions and replacing officials from Fatah and other factions.¹⁹ Consequently, Mahmoud Abbas declared a state of emergency in the remaining Fatah-led territory in the West Bank in June 2007.²⁰

06/14/2007 End Electoral Autocracy/Start One-Party Autocracy: By 06/14/2007, Hamas had gained full control over the Gaza Strip.²¹ In the aftermath of the 2006 legislative elections, in which Hamas secured a majority of seats, Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh was appointed as prime minister by the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC). Following the rift between Fatah and Hamas, President Mahmoud Abbas dismissed Haniyeh. However, the dismissal of the elected Hamas government was not recognized by Hamas. Consequently, Hamas continues to exercise executive power to this day. Mahmoud Abbas's decision to formally dissolve the PLC in 2018 was also contested by Hamas. Consequently, the Hamas-led PLC continues its operations, despite the expiration of its electoral mandate in 2010. FH characterizes the Gaza administration as a one-party state, as only a limited number of minor parties, aside from Hamas, are tolerated to varying degrees. The Hamas government governs in an authoritarian manner without an electoral mandate or a functional system of checks and balances. Freedom of religion is significantly restricted, with Islam considered the official religion of Palestine. Despite this, the Basic Law proclaims respect for and sanctity of other religions such as Judaism or Christianity. Moreover, Hamas exercises political control over mosques, enforces Sunni Islamic practices, and deems blasphemy a criminal offense.²² While the judicial system of the Hamas regime is partially based on Islamic Sharia Law, it also draws inspiration from Ottoman Laws, the legal code of the British Mandate from 1936, and Israeli Military orders.²³ It can be concluded that, although Hamas's ideology is rooted in the radical political Islam of the Muslim Brotherhood, the Hamas regime cannot be definitively classified as an Islamist ideocracy.²⁴ In late June 2008, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan declared Abbas's West Bank-based cabinet as the „sole legitimate Palestinian government.“ Egypt moved its embassy from Gaza to the West Bank. On 01/23/2008, Hamas damaged the Gaza-Egypt wall in Rafah, enabling thousands to cross for supplies. In the 2008 Israel-Gaza conflict, rockets targeted Israeli cities. On 12/27/2008, Israel struck Gaza, leading to a ground invasion on 01/03/2009.²⁵ The 2014 Gaza War, or Operation Protective Edge, began on 07/08/2014, with Israeli military operations in the Gaza Strip. Following the kidnapping and murder of three Israeli teenagers, Israel initiated Operation Brother's Keeper.²⁶ Hamas responded with increased rocket attacks, resulting in a seven-week conflict. From 2018 to 2019, the Great March of Return protests occurred near the Israel-Gaza barrier, demanding Palestinian refugees' right to return and protesting Israel's blockade and the U.S. recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital.²⁷ On 10/07/2023, Hamas attacked southwest Israel, causing casualties and taking hostages. On 10/09/2023, Israel declared war on Hamas and imposed a „total blockade“ of the Gaza Strip.²⁸ From 2007 to 2009, according to FH's classification of 'Palestinian Authority-Administered Territories', a score between 11 and 14 makes the territory not free, which we also place in the not free category. From 2010 onwards, Gaza Strip and the West Bank are classified separately by FH. As classified by FH for the rest of this regime period, the Gaza Strip is scored from 11 to 14 as not free, which corresponds to our interpretation of not free. For that period, V-Dem's PCLI is classified by us as indicating that political liberties are not really present from 2007 to 2009, in 2011, between 2013 and 2017 and since 2019, are absent in 2018 and are ambiguous in 2010 and 2012. For 2007-2012, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were moderate, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were absent. For 2013 and 2014, V-Dem's JCE is classified by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were limited, whereas V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were absent. During 2015-2017, V-Dem's JCE indicates that judicial constraints on the executive are limited. At the same time, V-Dem's LCE shows no value, which, with appropriate caution, can be interpreted as an absence of legislative

constraints on the executive. For 2018 and 2020-2022, V-Dem's JCE is classified as absent, indicating no judicial oversight of the executive. Concurrently, V-Dem's LCE shows no value, which can be cautiously interpreted as indicating an absence of legislative constraints on the executive. For 2019, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were moderate, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were limited. For 2023, V-Dem's JCE indicates that judicial constraints on the executive are limited. At the same time, V-Dem's LCE shows no value, which, with appropriate caution, can be interpreted as an absence of legislative constraints on the executive. LIED does not treat the Gaza Strip in its data.

One-Party Autocracy as of 07/01/2025 continued.

Notes

- ¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1948_Arab%E2%80%93Israeli_War#
- ² <https://www.britannica.com/place/Gaza-Strip#ref279792>
- ³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gaza_Strip#1948%E2%80%931959:_All-Palestine_government
- ⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1948_Arab%E2%80%93Israeli_War
- ⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/All-Palestine_Government
- ⁶ <https://www.britannica.com/place/Gaza-Strip#ref279792>
- ⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gaza_Strip#1956%E2%80%931957:_Israeli_occupation
- ⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gaza_Strip#1959%E2%80%931967:_Egyptian_occupation
- ⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Israeli_Military_Governorate
- ¹⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Israeli_Military_Governorate
- ¹¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gaza_Strip#1967:_Israeli_occupation
- ¹² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Israeli_Civil_Administration refers to Military Order No. 947, which can be found here:
<https://web.archive.org/web/20140112171005/http://www.israelawresourcecenter.org/israelmilitaryorders/fulltext/mo0947.htm#>
- ¹³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Israeli_Civil_Administration
- ¹⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gaza_Strip#1987:_First_Intifada
- ¹⁵ <https://www.britannica.com/place/West-Bank>
- ¹⁶ <https://www.elections.ps/tabid/1118/Default.aspx?q=election+1996#gsc.tab=0&gsc.q=election%201996&gsc.page=1>
- ¹⁷ https://ecfr.eu/special/mapping_palestinian_politics/
- ¹⁸ <https://www.britannica.com/place/Gaza-Strip#ref279792>
- ¹⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gaza_Strip#Post-2006:_Hamis_takeover
- ²⁰ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Palestinian-Authority>
- ²¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gaza_Strip#Post-2006:_Hamis_takeover
- ²² <https://freedomhouse.org/country/gaza-strip/freedom-world/2024>
- ²³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gaza_Strip
- ²⁴ https://ecfr.eu/special/mapping_palestinian_politics/hamas/
- ²⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gaza_Strip#2008%E2%80%932009:_Gaza_War
- ²⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gaza_Strip#2014:_Gaza_War
- ²⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gaza_Strip#2018%E2%80%932019:_Great_March_of_Return
- ²⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gaza_Strip#2023:_Israel%E2%80%93Hamis_war

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- Karatnycky, Adrian (Hrsg.) (1999): Freedom in the World: The Annual Survey of Political Rights & Civil Liberties 1998-1999. New York: Freedom House.