



Palestine, West Bank — Va-PoReg Country Report

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

05/15/1948 Start No Central Authority: Following the Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel on 05/14/1948, the Arab-Israeli War broke out on 05/15/1948. Jordan occupied and annexed areas in the region.

07/20/1949 End No Central Authority/Start Direct Rule Occupation Regime [by Jordan, Constitutional Monarchy]: On this date the Arab-Israeli War ended and Jordan controlled certain areas in the West Bank.

04/24/1950 End Direct Rule Occupation Regime [by Jordan, Constitutional Monarchy]/Start Part of Other Country [of Jordan, Constitutional Monarchy]: From this date Jordan officially administered the West Bank, the region it occupied and annexed during the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. V-Dem and LIED do not provide data for the West Bank for this timeframe.

06/10/1967 End Part of Other Country [of Jordan, Constitutional Monarchy]/Start Direct Rule Occupation Regime [by Israel, Electoral Democracy]: Following the Six-Day War, which started on 06/05/1967, Israel set up a Military Governorate to oversee the civilian population in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Sinai Peninsula, and the western Golan Heights. Although Israel's occupation started in 1967, Jordan did not officially renounce its claim to the territory until 1988.¹ The unresolved issue of Israeli rule over West Bank Palestinians persisted, with Israel considering it vital for security, while the PLO, the political representative for West Bank Palestinians, refused to negotiate or recognize Israel until 1988. This impasse led to years of non-recognition and non-negotiation between the two parties.² On 09/17/1978 the Camp David Accords of 1978, the establishment of a civil administration for the West Bank and Gaza Strip aimed to replace the military government set up by Israel in 1967.³ 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.⁴ 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.⁵ 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).⁶ 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.⁷ 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).⁸ 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.⁹ 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.¹⁰ Consequently, Mahmoud Abbas declared a state of emergency in the remaining Fatah-led territory in the West Bank in June 2007.¹¹

06/14/2007 End Electoral Autocracy/Start One-Party Autocracy: The Palestinian Authority officially governs a geographically non-contiguous portion of the West Bank, known as Area A, comprising approximately 11% of the territory. However, this area remains susceptible to Israeli incursions. Area B, constituting around 28%, is under joint Israeli-Palestinian military control and Palestinian civil administration. Area C, making up about 61%, is fully under Israeli control. While 164 nations label the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, as „Occupied Palestinian Territory,“ Israel maintains that only territories captured from an „established and recognized sovereign“ in war are considered occupied according to UN definitions.¹² It is noteworthy that the Palestinian Authority (PA) effectively governs only 39% of the West Bank territory, specifically Areas A and B. The PA lacks authority over the remaining 61% of West Bank territory, currently under Israeli control. Therefore, when referencing the PA administration in the West Bank, it pertains to the civil administration of Area A and B. According to FH, the Fatah-led Palestinian Authority governs the West Bank in an „authoritarian manner.“¹³ Even though presidential and legislative elections being overdue since 2009 and 2010, Mahmoud Abbas and the PA leadership continue to govern on the basis of an expired mandate. The Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) has been unable to function since the rift between secular Fatah and Islamist Hamas, leading to its dissolution by Abbas in 2018. Consequently, all new laws are issued by presidential decree. While there are minuscule parties, they maintain close ties to the PA leadership, whereas oppositional parties with connections to Hamas face harsh crackdowns by the PA. This establishes Fatah as the dominant force within the PA. Furthermore, the PA engages in repressive actions against regime-critical journalists and activists.¹⁴ The West Bank continues to be a focal point of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. For Palestinians, it holds significant importance as the core of their envisioned state, alongside the Gaza Strip. On the other hand, right-wing and religious Israelis view it as their ancestral homeland, rich in biblical sites. Some Israelis advocate for either partial or complete annexation of this territory. Furthermore, the West Bank is witnessing a growing population of Israeli settlers.¹⁵ In 2023, a surge of violence between Israeli settlers and Palestinians in the West Bank is evident, resulting in over 500 Palestinians killed by radical settlers or the IDF, along with approximately 30 Israelis. Following the Hamas terrorist attack on 10/07/2023 and the Israeli military campaign in Gaza, the IDF has increased its presence in the West Bank. This includes the

establishment of new physical barriers to restrict internal movement within Palestinian territory.¹⁶ From 1996 to 2009, as indicated above the FH score is given separately for ‘Israeli-Occupied Territories’ and ‘Palestinian Authority-Administered Territories’. Per FH, for 2007-2009, the Israeli-Occupied Territories score between 11 and 14 as not free, which we also interpret as not free. According to FH’s classification for the Palestinian Authority-Administered Territories from 2007 to 2009, a score between 11 and 14 makes the territories 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 this regime period, the West Bank is scored from 11 to 14 as not free, which corresponds to our interpretation of not free. For that timeframe, V-Dem’s PCLI is classified by us as ambiguous between 2007 and 2009, in 2011, from 2015 to 2016 and since 2023 and as somewhat present for the remaining years regarding the status of political liberties. For 2007-2009, V-Dem’s JCE and LCE are both interpreted by us as indicating moderate constraints on the executive. From 2010 to 2012, V-Dem’s JCE indicates that judicial constraints on the executive are moderate. Simultaneously, V-Dem’s LCE shows no value, which, with appropriate caution, can be interpreted as an absence of legislative constraints on the executive. For 2013 and 2014, V-Dem’s JCE is classified as robust, indicating strong and regular judicial oversight. Concurrently, V-Dem’s LCE shows no value, which can be cautiously interpreted as indicating an absence of legislative constraints on the executive. In 2015 and 2016, V-Dem’s JCE is classified by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were robust, while V-Dem’s LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were also robust. For 2017 and 2018 again, V-Dem’s JCE is classified as robust, indicating strong and regular judicial oversight. 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 indicates that judicial constraints on the executive are comprehensive. Simultaneously, V-Dem’s LCE shows no value, which, with appropriate caution, can be interpreted as an absence of legislative constraints on the executive. For 2020 and from 2022 onward, V-Dem’s JCE indicates that judicial constraints on the executive are moderate. Simultaneously, V-Dem’s LCE shows no value, which, with appropriate caution, can be interpreted as an absence of legislative constraints on the executive. In 2021, 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. LIED does not provide data for Palestine West Bank.

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

Notes

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jordanian_annexation_of_the_West_Bank

² <https://www.britannica.com/place/West-Bank>

³ 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#>

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Israeli_Civil_Administration

⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gaza_Strip#1987:_First_Intifada

⁶ <https://www.britannica.com/place/West-Bank>

⁷ <https://www.elections.ps/tabid/1118/Default.aspx?q=election+1996#gsc.tab=0&gsc.q=election%201996&gsc.page=1>

⁸ https://ecfr.eu/special/mapping_palestinian_politics/

⁹ <https://www.britannica.com/place/Gaza-Strip#ref279792>

¹⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gaza_Strip#Post-2006:_Hamass_takeover

¹¹ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Palestinian-Authority>

¹² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/West_Bank#Israeli_Military_Governorate_and_Civil_Administration

¹³ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/west-bank/freedom-world/2024>

¹⁴ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/west-bank/freedom-world/2024>

¹⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/West_Bank#

¹⁶ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/west-bank/freedom-world/2024>

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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.