

FAQ: Who are the Palestinians?

This FAQ focuses on Palestinians who are not citizens of Israel. For information about Arab citizens of Israel, see [FAQ: Arab Citizens of Israel](#).

DEMOGRAPHY

Where do Palestinians who are not citizens of Israel live?

According to the CIA Factbook, just over 2 million Palestinians live in **Gaza**, while another 3.1 million reside in the **West Bank**. Approximately 350,000 Palestinians live in **East Jerusalem**. The number of Palestinians living **outside of Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza** is difficult to pin down, but the Arab Center, Washington D.C. puts the number around 7 million in a [2022 report](#).

LEGAL STATUS AND POLITICAL REPRESENTATION

What is the legal status of Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem?

Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem hold a unique legal residency status. When Israel captured the area in the 1967 Six Day War, it offered a path to citizenship to the Arab residents, but most refused it. Today, they do not possess Israeli passports and cannot vote or run in national elections (they are, however, eligible to vote in municipal elections, though most opt not to). They can move freely in Israel and the West Bank, they pay taxes to the Israeli government, and they receive social services from the government. A small number of Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem have become Israeli citizens.

What is the legal status of Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza?

Palestinians living in the West Bank are governed by the Palestinian Authority (PA) and are eligible to vote in Palestinian local and national elections. In Gaza, Palestinians have been ruled by Hamas since 2007. Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank need a permit to enter Israel. The West Bank has three zones with differing governance structures: Areas A, B, and C. In Area A, the PA controls security and civil administration; in Area B, the PA controls civil administration, while there is joint PA-Israeli control over security services; and in Area C (where most Israeli Jews who live in the West Bank reside), Israel exercises full civil and security control. For more information on Areas A, B, and C, please see [this map](#) from the Center for Israel Education.

Who are the Palestinian refugees?

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) classifies Palestinian refugees as those who lived in Palestine (the areas known today as Israel, Gaza, and the West Bank) before the establishment of Israel in 1948 and whose homes and means of livelihood were lost in the wake of Israel's founding. Unique among other refugees worldwide, all Palestinian refugees and their descendants are eligible to be registered as refugees regardless of

other national citizenship. Today, people classified as Palestinian refugees live around the world, most predominantly in the West Bank and Gaza; Arab states such as Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, and Egypt; and also in some European and South American countries, as well as the United States.¹

Who represents Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza?

In 2005, democratic Palestinian elections were held in the West Bank and Gaza as a single unit to choose a president, who would exert primary control over the PA. Mahmoud Abbas from the Fatah party won a three-year term. The following year, Palestinian legislative elections were held and Hamas won the most parliamentary seats. In 2007, Hamas violently ousted PA officials from Gaza. Since then, Hamas and the PA have been in a state of conflict with each other, leaving Gaza under Hamas control and the West Bank under PA control. No elections have been held since 2006.

¹ For more information about Palestinian refugee status, visit the [UNWRA website](#).