



[Click here for the interactive version of Mapping Palestinian Politics](#)

Contents

1. Introduction	5
2. Geography	6
Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT).....	6
Palestinian citizens of Israel	7
Hadash-Ta'al List	8
Balad-Ra'am List	8
Islamic Movement (Northern Branch).....	8
High Follow-Up Committee.....	9
Jerusalem	9
Refugee camps	10
3. Institutions.....	10
Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO)	11
Palestinian National Council (PNC)	12
Palestinian Central Council (PCC).....	12
Executive Committee (EC).....	13
Palestinian Authority (PA).....	14
Executive	14
Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC)	16
Justice system	17
Elections	18
Municipalities	18
Unions.....	19
4. Political actors	19
PLO groups.....	19
Fatah	19
Fatah – Democratic Reform Bloc.....	21
Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP).....	21
Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP).....	21
Palestine Democratic Union (FIDA).....	21
Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command (PFLP-GC)	22

Palestinian People’s Party (PPP).....	22
Palestine Liberation Front (PLF).....	22
Palestine Popular Struggle Front (PPSF).....	22
Non-PLO groups.....	23
Hamas.....	23
Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ).....	25
Popular Resistance Committees (PRC).....	25
Palestinian National Initiative (PNI).....	25
Hizb ut-Tahrir (HuT).....	25
Harakat al-Sabareen (HaS).....	26
5. Armed groups.....	26
Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades (IQB) – Hamas.....	26
Al-Quds Brigades (AQB) – Islamic Jihad.....	26
Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades (AMB) – Fatah.....	27
Al-Nasser Salah al-Deen Brigades – PRC.....	27
Abu Ali Mustafa Brigades – PFLP.....	27
National Resistance Brigades – DFLP.....	27
Salafi-Jihadis.....	28
Jund Ansar Allah.....	28
Al-Tawhid wal-Jihad.....	28
Jaysh al-Umma.....	28
Jaysh al-Islam.....	28
Fatah al-Islam (Lebanon).....	29
6. Security forces.....	29
General Intelligence Service (GIS).....	30
Preventive Security (PS).....	30
National Security Forces (NSF).....	31
Military Intelligence.....	31
Military Liaison.....	31
Presidential Guard.....	31
Security and Protection Unit (Hamass).....	31
Civil Police.....	31
Internal Security Force (ISF).....	32
Internal Security Agency (ISA).....	32

General Intelligence	32
7. Civil society	32
8. Acknowledgements	33
9. Profiles	34
10. ANNEX: MAPS AND DATA.....	67

1. Introduction

Mapping Palestinian Politics provides an interactive overview of the main Palestinian political institutions and players in Palestine, Israel, and the diaspora. Its goal is to provide an easy-to-use, scene-setting resource for researchers, journalists, and policymakers ahead of significant transformations to the Palestinian political order centred around the anticipated departure of Mahmoud Abbas in the near term.

Since succeeding Yasser Arafat as Palestinian leader in 2004, Abbas has consolidated his grip on power within the Palestinian Authority (PA), the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), and Fatah. Over the years, Abbas has steadily purged or constrained his political rivals, monopolised the various Palestinian decision-making processes, and pursued increasingly authoritarian measures to stifle dissent and shrink the space for Palestinian democracy and popular participation. This political fragmentation and fragility has been compounded by continued infighting between Fatah and Hamas and the ensuing political and geographic separation between the West Bank and Gaza.

Unsurprisingly, Palestinian public confidence in traditional Palestinian governance structures continues to decline, confronting Palestinian institutions, Abbas's presidency, and the PA with an unprecedented crisis of legitimacy. Moreover, both Fatah and Hamas – both considered the most dominant Palestinian political parties – have seen a similar decline in popular support. This shift is particularly noticeable among Palestinian youth, who have become increasingly alienated from Palestinian politics and elites.

The ever-present backdrop to Palestinian political fragmentation, of course, remains Israel's prolonged occupation of Palestinian territory and enactment of policies designed to weaken and divide the Palestinian liberation movement. The result is that, while the Palestinian liberation movement remains united around a unifying vision of ending the occupation, it is currently in disarray over how to achieve this following the failure of the Oslo peace process launched in 1993. This is taking place, even as different elements vie with each other to succeed Abbas as president of the PA, chairman of the PLO, and head of the ruling Fatah party.

Crucially, there are no institutional mechanisms currently able to manage the upcoming PA leadership transition given that Israeli policies and intra-Palestinian splits for now preclude legislative and presidential elections. Meanwhile, Abbas's marginalisation of the PLO's Executive Committee and Fatah's Central Committee, and concentration of power within his person, further challenges the ability of the PLO and Fatah to ensure a smooth leadership transition. This democratic atrophication of the nascent Palestinian state – combined with growing popular frustration, shrinking diplomatic horizons for achieving an end to Israel's occupation, and humanitarian pressures in Gaza – is feeding an increasingly volatile situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT).

This 'map' charts Palestinian political actors in order to help understand where people may turn for organisation and leadership in the post-Abbas period. It is based on research, including publicly available resources and literature, as well as discussions with experts and academics. It aims to give a big-picture view but should not be considered comprehensive or exhaustive. The resource will be periodically updated and expanded to reflect internal developments.

2. Geography

The creation of Israel in 1948 resulted in the geographic scattering of the Palestinian people. The displacement of around 700,000 Palestinians from the newly created state of Israel is commemorated by Palestinians as the Nakba (Catastrophe). Many of these refugees arrived in the West Bank, Gaza, and neighbouring countries (Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan).

Palestinian geography was further fragmented following the Arab defeat by Israel during the June 1967 (Six Day) war which saw Israeli forces occupy the West Bank (including East Jerusalem) and Gaza. This sent a second wave of approximately 300,000 Palestinian refugees (half of whom were already refugees from 1948) towards neighbouring countries.

A third phase in Palestine's territorial fragmentation occurred during the Oslo peace process which carved up the West Bank according to various complex jurisdictional schemes under continued Israeli military control, and led to further Palestinian dispossession in East Jerusalem and Area C of the West Bank where Israeli settlements have steadily swallowed up Palestinian land.

These geographic divisions were accentuated by the intra-Palestinian fighting between Hamas and Fatah that erupted following the 2006 legislative election, and the subsequent imposition of a joint Egyptian-Israeli blockade on Hamas-controlled Gaza, limiting trade and movement with the West Bank.

Today, around 3 million Palestinian refugees and their descendants are scattered among refugee camps in Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan. A further estimated 2.5 million live elsewhere as a diaspora, particularly Europe, the United States, and Latin America. This is in addition to 1.8 million Palestinians in Israel, and a further 4.5 million in the OPT (2 million of whom are refugees) – for a total of 12 million Palestinians worldwide.

The Palestinian liberation movement – and its embodiment in the PLO – has reflected these geographical shifts and divisions. Since the 1967 war, the PLO has been variously headquartered in Amman, then Beirut, then Tunis, before returning to the OPT as part of the Oslo peace process. Doing this time, the centre of gravity within the Palestinian liberation movement has shifted from neighbouring refugee camps to the West Bank and Gaza.

As a result, distinct sociopolitical dynamics have arisen throughout the Palestinian population, depending on location. While some groups are now headquartered in the West Bank or Gaza, others such as Hamas continue to base a large portion of their leadership in the diaspora. Others still, such as the Syrian-based Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine – General Command (PFLP-GC), have been heavily co-opted by host governments. Meanwhile, in areas such as East Jerusalem and refugee camps, where the PA/PLO exercises either weak or non-existent control, autonomous leaderships have risen, creating their own distinct political dynamics. This political complexity combined with enduring physical separation and socio-economic backgrounds have weakened the Palestinian polity, making it harder for a unified and representative body to take root or articulate a coherent liberation strategy

Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT)

The OPT consists of the West Bank (including East Jerusalem) and Gaza. Some 4.5 million Palestinians live in the OPT (2.7 million in the West Bank and 1.8 million in Gaza). The fulfilment of a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict would see the creation of a sovereign and unified Palestinian state on this area, with East Jerusalem as its capital, based

on the pre-June 1967 lines (the borders that existed prior to Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza in June 1967).

Israel occupied the West Bank and Gaza during the 1967 war. Between 1976-1993, it administered the OPT through a system of Palestinian "Village Leagues". The launch of the 1993 Oslo peace process between Israel and the PLO, however, led to their replacement with a newly created Palestinian Authority (PA), the return of the previously exiled PLO, and a shift in the Palestinian liberation movement's centre of gravity, away from the refugee camps and diaspora, to the OPT.

The 1993 Oslo Accords have resulted in the gradual fragmentation of the OPT. As part of a four-year interim phase supposedly leading to a final status agreement, the West Bank was divided into three areas with differing jurisdictional arrangements: Area A (17.2 per cent) under full PA control; Area B (23.8 percent) under PA civil control and Israeli security control; and Area C (59 per cent) under full Israeli control. The Oslo peace process also saw a surge in Israeli settlement building. Today, the West Bank is [perforated](#) by over 200 Israeli settlements, dozens of "outposts" and military bases, along with a network of restricted roads and checkpoints. In total, over 588,000 Israeli settlers reside in the OPT.

The West Bank and Gaza have been politically split since the intra-Palestinian fighting that erupted after Hamas's victory in the 2006 legislative election. Since then, Hamas has controlled Gaza, while the PA remains in the West Bank. This has resulted in the emergence of two parallel systems of Palestinian governance, despite numerous intra-Palestinian reconciliation attempts. Gaza has also been under an Israeli air, sea, and land blockade since then, limiting the ability of Palestinians to travel and trade with the West Bank, and creating severe social, economic, and humanitarian hardships for Gazans.

Palestinian citizens of Israel

Palestinian citizens of Israel have had the right to vote in Israeli elections since the first Israeli elections in 1949. During military rule until 1966, Palestinian representation was largely organised through the Communist party or satellite factions allied with Israeli Jewish parties. The first independent Arab party that ran for the Knesset, Al-Ard, was outlawed by the Israeli government in 1964. The Abnaa al-Balad movement (Sons of the Village), which promoted a secular nationalist ideology, encouraged a boycott of Israeli elections.

The Israeli Palestinian community's politics is multi-faceted with communist, socialist, nationalist, religious, secular, feminist, and other streams of thought. They generally share a common platform of promoting full civic and national equality for Palestinians in Israel, and of ending Israel's occupation of the Palestinian territories. Although Arab parties are largely focused on political matters inside Israel, since the 1990s they have more strongly asserted their simultaneous connections to the wider Palestinian cause and the Palestinian leadership.

Palestinians in Israel regularly complain that they are treated as "second-class" citizens. According to Adalah, there are over 65 laws in place that discriminate directly or indirectly against Palestinian citizens in Israel and Palestinian residents of the OPT. A [2010 report by the US State Department](#) documented similar issues of "institutional, legal, and societal discrimination".

Palestinian political figures frequently face efforts by Israeli authorities and Jewish parliamentarians to limit their political rights. These include motions to disqualify Arab parties from running in the election; criminal indictments by police against Arab politicians for participating in demonstrations; and a new law allowing 80 Knesset members (out of 120) to expel their colleagues from the parliament, among others.

Hadash-Ta'al List

The Hadash-Ta'al electoral list was created in February 2019 to contest the 2019 Israeli legislative elections. It has 6 Knesset members.

As its name indicates, it is formed of two parties: the Arab-Jewish [Hadash](#) led by [Aman Odeh](#), and the Arab nationalist [Ta'al](#) led by [Ahmad Tibi](#). The formation of the Hadash-Ta'al list followed the dissolution of the [Joint List](#) which had acted as a united slate for the four main Arab political parties in Israel between 2015-2019.

1. Ayman Odeh
2. Ahmad Tibi
3. Aida Touma-Sliman
4. Osama Sa'adi
5. Ofer Cassif
6. Yousef Jabareen

Balad-Ra'am List

The Balad-Ra'am electoral list was created in February 2019 to contest the 2019 Israeli legislative elections. It has 4 Knesset members.

As its name indicates, it is formed of two parties: the Palestinian nationalist Balad and the Islamist Ra'am. On 6 March, the Knesset's Central Election Committee [banned](#) the list accusing it of supporting terror and ruling out Israel's right to exist as a Jewish and Democratic state. The decision was reversed by the Supreme Court.

The formation of the Balad-Ra'am list followed the dissolution of the [Joint List](#) which had acted as a united slate for the four main Arab political parties in Israel between 2015-2019.

1. Mansour Abbas
2. Mtanes Shehadeh
3. Abd Al Hakeem Haj Yahya
4. Talab Abu Arar

Joint List

The Joint List was formed in 2015 as a united slate of the four main Arab political parties in Israel: [Hadash](#) (Arab-Jewish, communist), [Balad](#) (Palestinian nationalist), [Ra'am](#) (Islamist), and [Ta'al](#) (Arab nationalist). The List is currently headed by [Ayman Odeh](#) (Hadash), a lawyer from Haifa.

Although there have been long-standing calls for the Arab factions to unify, the impetus for the List's creation was a new law enacted in March 2014 that raised the Israeli electoral threshold from 2 percent to 3.25 percent – a measure deliberately designed in part to make it more difficult for the smaller Arab parties to enter the Knesset.

The Joint List ostensibly increased the public profile and political engagement of Arab parliamentary members, and boosted its international advocacy including in the United States and the European Union. However, the List also faced various internal disputes, including over seat rotations, political language, and partnerships with left-wing Jewish parties.

In January 2019, the Joint List broke up following the departure of [Ahmad Tibi](#) and his [Ta'al](#) party ahead of the April 2019 Israeli elections. It split into two competing lists: [Balad-Ra'am](#) and [Hadash-Ta'al](#). The Joint List was however re-created to compete in the September 2019 elections.

Islamic Movement (Northern Branch)

The Islamic Movement in Israel split into two branches in 1996 over its decision to stand candidates for the Knesset. The southern branch formed the Ra'am party (now part of the Joint List), while the northern branch continues to boycott elections. The northern branch – led by Raed Salah – is said to have links with Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood.

In November 2015, the Israeli government issued an executive order under the 1945 Emergency Regulations that outlawed the northern Islamic Movement and 17 associated NGOs. The Murabitat and Murabitoun, a collective established by the movement to 'defend' Al-Aqsa, were also outlawed.

1. *Raed Salah (Leader)*

High Follow-Up Committee

Established in 1982, the High Follow-Up Committee (HFC) is an extra-parliamentary organisation that acts as a national coordinating and representative body for Palestinian citizens of Israel. Its membership is drawn from the National Council of the Heads of Arab Localities, the Arab political parties in the Knesset, Arab civil society organisations, and others. It is currently headed by Mohammad Barakeh, a former Knesset member for Hadash.

Decisions in the HFC are reached by consensus and organised through various sub-committees. In 2006-2007, it facilitated the creation of the [Future Vision Document](#), which articulated the Palestinian citizens' demand for Israel to become a 'state for all its citizens'. However, the HFC has been criticised in recent years for being ineffective and offering few actions aside from general strikes.

Israel refuses to recognise the HFC as a representative body, viewing it as an attempt to establish political autonomy outside of the state's institutions; the subsequent pressure from Israeli authorities has prevented the HFC from renewing its leadership.

1. *Mohammad Barakeh (Leader)*

Jerusalem

Jerusalem is at the centre of the Palestinian liberation movement, and where it first developed in the late 1920s. But Palestinian factions, and the PLO, currently have a very minimal presence in the city.

Jerusalem was emptied of Palestinian political forces, first by Jordan after the 1948 war, and then by Israel after the 1967 war. It experienced some political revival in the 1990s after the launch of the Oslo peace process allowed the PLO to establish a presence in the city. During the Second Intifada, however, Israel expelled the PLO from Jerusalem and closed its headquarters in the city – the “Orient House”. In 2011 Israel expelled four Hamas PLC members from the city: Muhammad Totah, Ahmad Atoun, Muhammad Abu Tir, and Khaled Abu Arafah, a former Palestinian minister for Jerusalem affairs.

Residents have recently shown the ability to mobilise in resistance to Israeli policies in the city. Most notable is the movement led by youth and supported by religious institutions in the city (including the Waqf, the Mufti, Sharia Courts, and the Islamic Higher Council) to block Israel from installing security structures at the gates of Al-Aqsa mosque in March 2017.

Refugee camps

The majority of Palestinians – over 5 million – are refugees. About one-third of the Palestinian refugee population are spread out across 58 UNRWA-administered camps in the OPT, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria. In addition, there are an estimated 10,000 unregistered refugees in Iraq, and a further 50,000 in Egypt. Palestinian refugees also make up 68 per cent of Gaza's population. UN Resolution 194 (1948), which enshrines the right of return of Palestinian refugees, remains at the heart of Palestinian national consensus.

While UNRWA administers health, education, and other services in the camps, refugees organise themselves politically through popular committees. Refugee staff of UNRWA are organised within the Local Staff Union and regularly mobilise against UNRWA reduction of their employment or services in the camps.

Palestinian political movements and factions emerged from the refugee camps, and continue to serve as recruiting grounds and as locations of political contestation. In the OPT, the camps played a major role in the resistance against the Israeli occupation in the First and Second Intifadas. Recent years have seen PA security forces [clash](#) in refugee camps such as Jenin and Balata, allegedly with Fatah activists loyal to Mohammed Dahlan.

Although Palestinian factions such as Fatah and Hamas maintain a strong presence in refugee camps in Lebanon (outside of Lebanese security control) these have however witnessed the rise of [Salafi-jihadist factions](#) such as Fatah al-Islam. Refugee camps in Syria, meanwhile, play host to a number of [pro-Syrian Palestinian groups](#) such as the PFLP-GC.

3. Institutions

The Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) was established in 1964. Over the years, it grew to embody the Palestinian national liberation movement and become the sole and legitimate representative of Palestinians everywhere.

The PLO's power was eclipsed by the creation of the Palestinian National Authority – more commonly referred to as the PA (PA) – in 1993, following the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self Government (the Oslo Accords) signed between the PLO and the government of Israel. The PA was established as an interim administrative organisation that nominally governs parts of the West Bank and Gaza, and whose role is restricted according to the PLO's