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DATA REPORT AUGUST 10, 2026

Did Israel Expel Palestinians From Their Land? Reading the Archives, the Founding Text and the 1948 Votes

Roughly 700,000 Palestinians were displaced in 1948. What the archives, Israel's founding declaration and the recorded UN votes document.

Nakba

1948 War

Palestinian Displacement

Primary Records

Historical Dispute



Roughly 700,000 Palestinians became refugees during the 1947 to 1949 war, the figure Benny Morris reaches in his 2004 archival study of Israeli military and state records. Morris finds no single uniform cause behind that total: he catalogues military assault, flight ahead of assault, and direct expulsion orders, each decisive in different localities and different phases. The figures that circulate publicly run from that 700,000 up to 1,000,000, and the spread comes from differing baselines for the pre-war Arab population rather than from differing accounts of who left. Behind the question sits a plainer one, which the record answers locality by locality rather than in a single word: was the departure something done to people, or something that happened to them in a war?

Key Findings

- Roughly 700,000 Palestinians became refugees during the 1947 to 1949 war, per Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), an archival history built from Israeli military and state records.
- The Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel, read on 14 May 1948 and signed by 37 members of the People's Council, appeals to "the Arab inhabitants of the State of Israel to preserve peace and participate in the upbuilding of the State on the basis of full and equal citizenship."
- UN General Assembly Resolution 194 (III), adopted 11 December 1948 by a recorded vote of 35 in favour to 15 against with 8 abstentions, states that refugees "wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbours should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date."
- Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics counted 2.130 million Arab residents in September 2025, 21.5% of a population of about 10.148 million, its own official series.
- 7.7% of the antisemitic comments coded on leading UK media Facebook pages in May 2021 denied Jewish self-determination, in the peer-reviewed sample of 1,504 UK comments analysed by Becker, Ascone and Troschke (2022).

How many Palestinians left in 1948, and what made them leave?

Roughly **700,000** Palestinians became refugees during the 1947 to 1949 war, the estimate Benny Morris reaches in *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited* (Cambridge University Press, 2004) from Israeli military and state archives. Morris reconstructs the precipitating cause locality by locality and phase by phase, and reports that no single cause accounts for the whole.

The causes Morris documents include military assault by Haganah and later Israeli forces, flight in anticipation of assault, and direct expulsion, ordered and carried out in particular sectors. His account rejects two simpler propositions at once: that a single master plan of expulsion produced the exodus, and that the departures were voluntary. What the archival record supports, on his reading, is a distribution of causes rather than one cause, with the mix differing between the coastal towns, the Galilee, the corridor to Jerusalem and the south, and shifting sharply between the phases of the fighting.

That distinction matters for the question as it is usually put. A reader asking whether Israel expelled Palestinians is asking about one item in Morris's catalogue, and the archival answer is that expulsion appears in it, documented, dated and locality-specific, alongside other causes that account for other localities. Morris's own framing is that the two propositions most often set against each other, deliberate removal and wartime flight, are each true of parts of the record and neither is true of all of it.

Morris's 700,000 is an archival historian's estimate, built from military records rather than from an enumeration of refugees at the time. No census of the departing population was taken as it left. The number therefore carries the uncertainty of any reconstruction from the records of one of the parties to the fighting, a limitation Morris states in the work itself. It remains the count produced by the fullest archival study of the question, and it is the anchor against which the wider circulating figures can be read.

Who says 750,000 Palestinians were expelled?

750,000 is the figure the Palestinian policy network Al-Shabaka states for 1948 in its published briefs, and the Institute for Middle East Understanding, an advocacy organization, gives a wider range of 750,000 to 1,000,000 for the years 1947 to 1949. Both are those organizations' own stated figures, on their own definitions.

United Nations documentation describes the 1948 war as producing the mass displacement and dispossession of Palestinians, and states that it resulted in the permanent displacement of more than half of the Palestinian population. That is characterisation language about scale and permanence rather than a count with a stated method.

The direction of all of this is agreed across every tier of the record. Morris's archival reconstruction, the Palestinian policy sources and the UN's own descriptive language converge on a displacement that was large-scale, that ran into the hundreds of thousands, and that was not reversed. The measurable disagreement is confined to the spread, and it runs to a range of roughly 300,000 between the lowest and highest circulating figures.

That spread has a documentable origin: nobody counted. The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics conducted its first census in 1997, the second in 2007 and the third in 2017, and the Bureau itself was established only after the Oslo Accords, so Palestinian figures for years before 1997 have no census basis at all and are modelled or back-estimated (PCBS, 2018). A total for 1948 is therefore an estimate resting on an estimate of the pre-war Arab population, and different baselines for that population produce different totals for those displaced from it, with the same underlying events beneath each.

Reading the figures this way separates two things that the single word "expelled" fuses. The count of people who left and did not return is one question, and the record's answer to it sits between 700,000 and 1,000,000 depending on whose baseline is used. The mechanism by which each of them left is a second question, and the archival catalogue rather than the total is what addresses it.

What did Israel's founding declaration say about Arab residents?

The Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel, read on 14 May 1948 and signed by **37** members of the People’s Council, appeals “to the Arab inhabitants of the State of Israel to preserve peace and participate in the upbuilding of the State on the basis of full and equal citizenship and due representation in all its provisional and permanent institutions.”

The same text pledges that the state “will ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all its citizens irrespective of religion, race or sex” and “will guarantee freedom of religion, conscience, language, education and culture.” The Knesset’s published English text reads “all its citizens” in that sentence; other widely used translations render the word as “inhabitants,” so the text being quoted should be identified whenever the clause is quoted.

The Declaration is a founding instrument recording what was declared, on a date, by a named body. It is not a measurement of what followed, and the same passage places its appeal “in the very midst of the onslaught launched against us now for months,” dating itself inside the war whose displacement is the subject of the question.

Israel’s own statistical series is the record of what the resident Arab population became. The Central Bureau of Statistics counted 806,000 residents in the country at the establishment of the state in 1948, and reported 2.130 million Arab residents in September 2025, 21.5% of a total population of about 10.148 million.

Population group	Count	Date	Source
Muslims	1,707,000 (18.1% of all residents)	end of 2021	Israel CBS, 2022 media release
Christians	about 184,200 (1.9%), preliminary	December 2025	Israel CBS, 2025 media release
Druze	about 152,000, preliminary	February 2024	Israel CBS, 2024 media release
All Arabs (Muslims, Arab Christians, Druze)	2,130,000 (21.5%)	September 2025	Israel CBS, 2025 media release

The component counts come from separate releases with separate reference dates and are not a partition of the 2025 total. Two scope notes bind the whole series: the Bureau counts East Jerusalem residents and West Bank settlers inside Israel’s total, a choice distinct from the

convention international monitors use, and its Christian estimate excludes people absent from the Population Register.

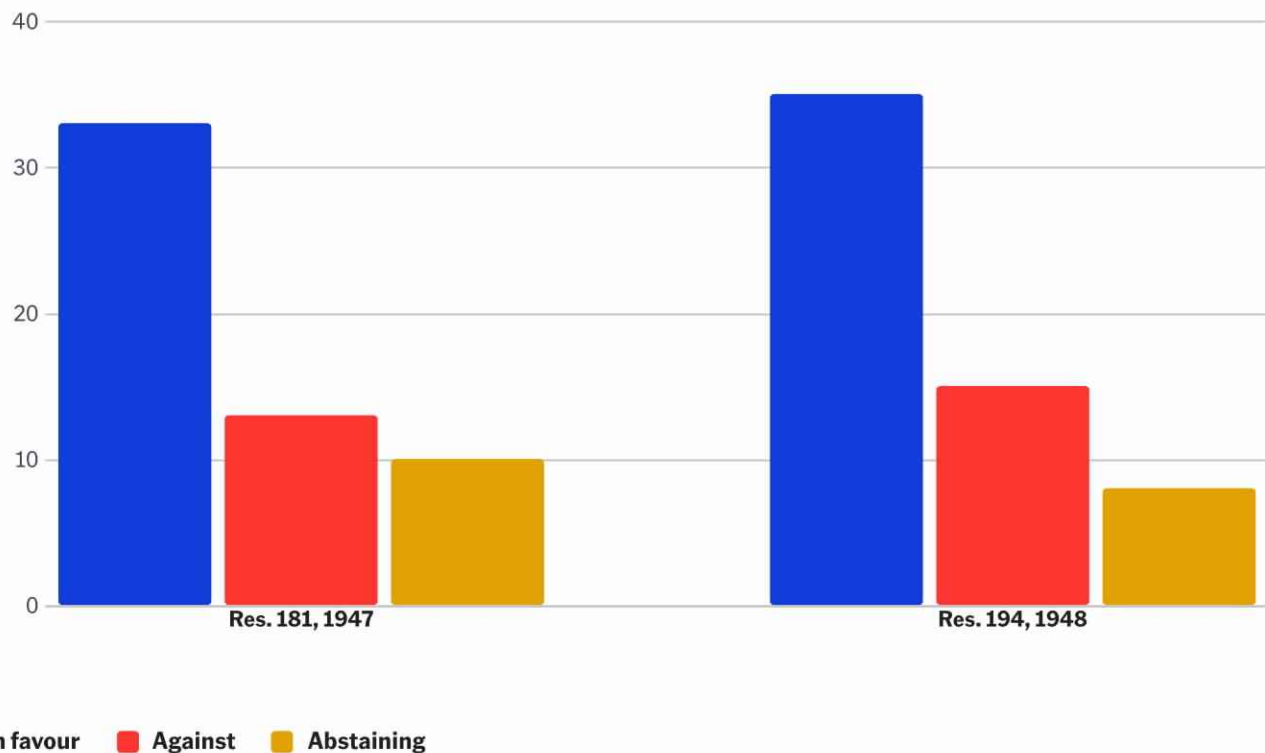
What did the UN vote say about refugee return?

UN General Assembly Resolution 194 (III), adopted on 11 December 1948 by a recorded vote of **35 in favour to 15 against with 8 abstentions**, states in Article 11 that refugees “wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbours should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date, and that compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return.”

The operative verb in that sentence is “should be permitted.” The resolution recommends; it does not adjudicate how the displacement occurred, does not name a cause, and does not fix a number of people to whom it applies. It also attaches a condition to the recommendation, in the clause “and live at peace with their neighbours,” which is part of the text and is frequently dropped when the article is quoted.

The partition decision that preceded it carries its own recorded vote. General Assembly Resolution 181 was adopted on 29 November 1947 by 33 in favour to 13 against with 10 abstentions, and Israel’s founding Declaration cites that vote directly in its recitals, calling the recognition it conferred “irrevocable.”

Recorded votes on the 1947 partition and 1948 refugee resolutions



Source: UN General Assembly, recorded votes, official records.

Set side by side, the two votes bound what the international record established at the time and what it did not. Both were decided by majorities of the states then voting, with 56 states recording a position on partition and 58 on the refugee article. Neither text contains a finding about mechanism. A reader looking to the 1948 record for a determination of whether departures were ordered, induced or chosen will not find one in either resolution; what the resolutions record is a recommendation on return and compensation, and the tally of states that supported it.

Were Palestinians displaced inside Israel after 1948?

Between **35,000 and 45,000** Palestinians were displaced inside Israel between 1949 and 1966, the figure the Palestinian policy network Al-Shabaka states in its published briefs, alongside approximately 700 square kilometres it reports as expropriated from Palestinians who remained inside the state over the same period. Both are that organization's own reporting on its own definitions.

This is the period the public framing of the question tends to skip, moving directly from 1948 to the present. It is also the period with the thinnest official statistical coverage on either side. Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics publishes population by group, district and locality, and its releases carried here report no series counting residents by displacement status, so no Israeli official counterpart to the 35,000 to 45,000 figure appears in the record. On the Palestinian side there was no statistical authority at all until after the Oslo Accords, and the first Palestinian census was conducted in 1997 (PCBS, 2018), four decades after the period the figure covers.

The land component sits alongside a separate documentary trail of declarations, statutes and court records on [land expropriation](#), which is where the legal instruments behind transfers of title are recorded. The 700 square kilometre figure is an organizational aggregate rather than a title-by-title tally, and Al-Shabaka publishes it without a public case-level dataset attached.

What can be said from the record with a named source is narrower than the figure itself. The period 1949 to 1966 is documented in Palestinian policy and research publications as one of continued internal displacement and land transfer, and it is not documented as a distinct statistical series by any national statistical office identified here. That absence is a fact about the record rather than about the events: an unmeasured period is not an empty one, and a figure carried only by one organization is carried at that organization's stated definitions, which are not published in a form that permits reconstruction.

How many Palestinians has Israel deported from the occupied territories?

415 Palestinians were deported from the occupied territories to South Lebanon on 17 December 1992, documented in a 1993 report by B'Tselem, an Israeli monitoring organization with an advocacy mission. The same report records more than 1,000 deportations in the first twenty months of the first intifada, against 66 in the preceding five years.

The baseline is what makes those numbers legible. A rate of 66 over five years is roughly 13 a year; more than 1,000 over twenty months is more than 600 a year, a shift of more than an order of magnitude, followed by a single-day action involving 415 people. Those are the

monitoring organization's own counts on its own criteria, compiled from its case documentation rather than from a published government series.

Deportation differs in kind from the 1948 events in a way the shared vocabulary of "displacement" obscures. A deportation is an administrative act of the state: it has an order, a date, an authority, a named legal instrument and an identifiable set of people it applies to. Wartime flight has none of those and is reconstructed after the fact from military records, which is why Morris's 1948 work is an archival reconstruction and the 1992 action is a documented event with a day attached.

No official Israeli count of deportations from the occupied territories appears among the government releases carried in this report. The Central Bureau of Statistics publishes demographic series, not enforcement series, and the Ministry of Defense unit that coordinates activity in the territories publishes operational figures on movement of goods rather than on removals of people. Where an official count exists it is not in the public statistical output examined here, and the documented per-event numbers therefore come from the monitoring record, labelled as such.

Do historians agree the exodus was planned?

Ilan Pappé's *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (Oneworld, 2006) argues that Plan Dalet amounted to a master plan for the systematic removal of the Palestinian population, the strongest scholarly statement of that characterisation. Benny Morris, working the same Israeli archives in his 2004 revised study, concludes there was no blanket cabinet-level expulsion policy, while documenting expulsions ordered at brigade and local level.

The two positions are not a disagreement about whether expulsions occurred. Morris records them, town by town, and rejects the proposition that departures were voluntary. The disagreement is about the level at which decisions were taken and whether a centralised design connects them: Pappé reads Plan Dalet as that design, Morris reads it as an operational military directive whose implementation varied by commander, sector and phase, producing expulsion in some places and not in others.

Each works substantially from the same body of material, the Israeli military and state archives, which is what makes the dispute a genuine one about interpretation rather than about access. Morris's volume is a Cambridge University Press monograph, revised in 2004 on the basis of newly released files. Pappé's is a trade academic book in which the author states an explicit moral position, and its title is the home of the ethnic-cleansing characterisation as it now circulates.

The characterisation is contested outside the academy as well, in both directions. The Anti-Defamation League, a monitoring organization with an advocacy mission, publishes a standing page rejecting the ethnic-cleansing description of Israel's conduct, and Palestinian policy and research organizations publish the same description as settled. Those are organizational positions, dated and named, and they rest on the same underlying archival dispute rather than on separate evidence.

What a reader can take from the historiography is therefore specific. Both historians document orders to remove residents from particular places, both date them, and they diverge on whether those orders express a policy or aggregate into one. That divergence has not been resolved by the archives as released.

What do current displacement claims rest on?

The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics reports that roughly **two million** of Gaza's residents were displaced within the Strip, in its brief on the status of the Palestinian people at the end of 2025, and that roughly 100,000 people left Gaza altogether. These are the Bureau's own estimates rather than an enumeration.

The same brief puts Gaza's population at about 2.13 million at the end of 2025, a decline of approximately 254,000 people, which it states is a decrease of 10.6% against pre-aggression population estimates, and attributes the change to war-related deaths, missing persons, reduced births and forced out-migration. It reports roughly 2.2 million people living in Gaza on the eve of the war. The 254,000 is a net demographic change across four stated components, not a casualty count.

The framing tier is separate from the counting tier. Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and UN-related reporting describe recent Israeli conduct in the West Bank and Gaza using the terms “forced displacement,” “unlawful transfer” and “ethnic cleansing.” Those are legal characterisations of events applied by those organizations under their own criteria, and they are not counts: none of the three terms carries a number inside it.

The party’s own reporting occupies the third tier. Israel’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in a position statement last updated 17 September 2025, reports more than 106,000 aid trucks carrying over two million tons of supplies entering Gaza since October 2023, its own stated totals as a party to the conflict. COGAT, the Israeli Ministry of Defense unit coordinating activity in the territories, records 1,778,363 metric tons of food entering Gaza between 10 October 2025 and 7 June 2026, tonnages that rest on self-declaration by suppliers rather than on weighing at the crossings, and describes evacuation instructions as area-specific.

What none of these measures is the question a reader is asking. An aid tonnage is not a count of people moved; a legal characterisation is not a count either; and the Bureau’s displacement estimate counts people away from their homes without recording who ordered the move or whether they returned. The three tiers describe the same period and answer different questions.

How does the expulsion framing appear in measured discourse?

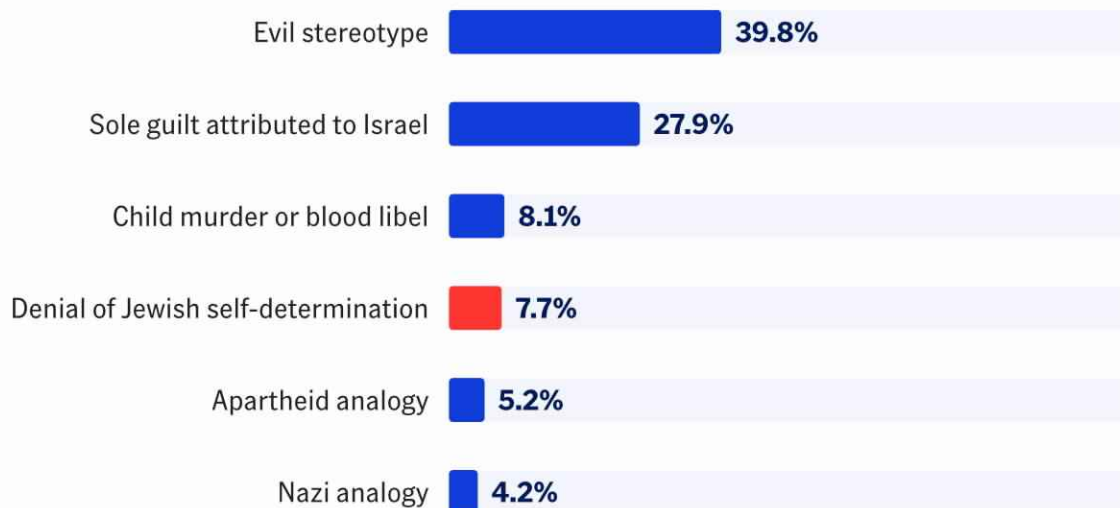
7.7% of the antisemitic comments in a UK sample denied Jewish self-determination, in the peer-reviewed coding by Becker, Ascone and Troschke (2022) of 1,504 comments on leading British media Facebook pages responding to the May 2021 escalation, of which 26.9% were coded antisemitic under an IHRA-based scheme.

The same study coded 1,500 French comments and 1,520 German comments from equivalent pages, finding 12.6% and 13.6% antisemitic respectively. Within the UK antisemitic comments, the coded categories ran to 39.8% invoking an “evil” stereotype, 27.9% attributing sole guilt to Israel, 8.1% child murder or blood libel, 5.2% an apartheid analogy and 4.2% a Nazi analogy. The authors report that thread context was needed to infer antisemitic

meaning in 38.7% of the UK antisemitic comments, so the coding depends on material beyond the comment itself.

Categories coded within antisemitic comments on UK media Facebook pages

SHARE OF THE UK ANTISEMITIC COMMENTS, MAY 2021 SAMPLE, CATEGORIES NON-EXCLUSIVE



Source: Becker, Ascone and Troschke, 2022, peer-reviewed.

A second corpus puts the same category higher. Jikeli and colleagues (2022), coding an expert-annotated set of 4,016 English-language tweets against the IHRA definition, found 15% of the antisemitic tweets containing “Jews” fit the paragraph on denial of Jewish self-determination, within a corpus in which 11.2% of conversations mentioning Jews were antisemitic.

On attitudes rather than content, Ozer, Obaidi and Bergh (2025) ran two experiments with British samples (N = 354 and N = 490) priming participants with war-in-Gaza material. They report two separate pathways associated with hostility toward Jews: one running through social dominance orientation, and one through out-group identity fusion with the Palestinian people, which they describe as conflating attitudes toward Israel with prejudice toward Jews. These are measured associations in experimental samples, reported with the authors’ own correlational caveats, and the abstract-level detail available does not extend to effect sizes.

Methodology

This report assembles the record on a historical question from four source types, each labelled where it is used.

Primary and official records: the Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel (14 May 1948, Knesset published English text); the recorded votes on UN General Assembly Resolutions 181 (29 November 1947) and 194 (11 December 1948) and the operative text of Article 11; the Israel Central Bureau of Statistics media releases on the Muslim, Christian and Druze populations and on Independence Day, Rosh Hashana and Holocaust Day; the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics 2017 census and its end-of-2025 status brief. Israeli statistical releases count East Jerusalem residents and West Bank settlers inside Israel's total, a scope choice distinct from the convention international monitors use, and several are marked preliminary by the Bureau.

Peer-reviewed research: Morris (2004) for the 1948 refugee estimate and its cause distribution; Becker, Ascone and Troschke (2022) and Jikeli and colleagues (2022) for coded shares in comment and tweet corpora; Ozer, Obaidi and Bergh (2025), abstract-sourced, for the experimental attitude pathways. Pappé (2006) is an academic monograph in which the author states a moral position, cited as the home of the ethnic-cleansing thesis.

Party's own reporting: COGAT's July 2026 ceasefire situation report and Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs position statement of 17 September 2025 are counts published by a party to the events they describe, not independently verified, with COGAT's tonnages resting on supplier self-declaration.

Organizational positions: Al-Shabaka, the Institute for Middle East Understanding, B'Tselem, Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and the Anti-Defamation League are named and dated for the figures and characterisations they publish under their own definitions. Their counts are not independently audited and are reported as theirs.

Two limitations bind the historical figures. No enumeration of the 1948 displaced population was taken at the time, and Palestinian figures for years before 1997 have no census basis, so every 1948 total is an estimate resting on an estimated pre-war baseline. Where the scholarly literature disagrees, the disagreement is named rather than resolved: Morris (2004) and

Pappé (2006) work substantially the same Israeli archives and reach opposite conclusions on whether a centralised expulsion policy existed.

Conclusion

Was the departure something done to people, or something that happened to them in a war? The archives answer place by place, and both descriptions are true of parts of the record: Morris's 2004 reconstruction puts roughly 700,000 Palestinians out of their homes across 1947 to 1949 and finds expulsion decisive in some localities, military assault in more of them, and flight ahead of assault in others, with no single cause covering the whole.

The rest of the record is unusually well documented for a question that circulates so loosely. Israel's founding text, on 14 May 1948, appealed to Arab inhabitants to remain on the basis of full and equal citizenship; its statistics bureau counted 2.130 million Arab residents in September 2025. The General Assembly recommended by 35 votes to 15 that refugees wishing to return and live at peace should be permitted to do so, and recommended nothing about how they came to leave. Deportations from the occupied territories are documented with dates and orders attached, 415 people on a single day in December 1992 against 66 across the preceding five years. And 1949 to 1966, the period in which Palestinian policy organizations report a further 35,000 to 45,000 people displaced inside Israel, has no national statistical series on either side. The word "expelled" compresses events that the record keeps separate: an order, a battle, a bus, an absence of data.

Which brings the question back to where the Institute works. Denial of Jewish self-determination was coded in 7.7% of antisemitic UK comments in the May 2021 sample and in 15% of antisemitic tweets mentioning Jews, and British experimental samples show hostility toward Jews travelling along a pathway of identity fusion with the Palestinian people. A history this specific arrives in public argument as a single verb. What happens to a population's understanding of a conflict when eight decades of dated orders, contested archives and unmeasured years collapse into one word, and does that compression itself become one of the inputs the discourse then carries?

Frequently Asked Questions

Which body counts Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza today?

The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics counted 4,780,978 residents of the West Bank and Gaza in its 2017 census, 2,881,687 in the West Bank and 1,899,291 in Gaza. The World Bank's World Development Indicators give about 5.29 million for 2024, a projection off that census base rather than a count.

Why do Palestinian population figures before 1997 vary so widely?

The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics was established after the Oslo Accords and conducted its first census in 1997, with further rounds in 2007 and 2017. Figures for earlier years have no census basis and are modelled or back-estimated, which is why totals for the 1940s differ between sources that use different baselines.

How does Israel's statistics bureau define "Arabs" in its population releases?

The Central Bureau of Statistics defines "Arabs" as Muslims, Arab Christians and Druze, and "Others" as non-Arab Christians, other religions and those registered as not classified by religion. Its releases also count East Jerusalem residents inside Israel's totals, a scope choice distinct from the convention international monitors apply.

How large was Israel's population at its founding compared with today?

The Central Bureau of Statistics reports 806,000 residents at the establishment of the state in 1948 and 10.244 million on the eve of Independence Day 2026, a preliminary estimate more than 12.5 times the 1948 figure. The Bureau also records over 3.5 million immigrants arriving since 1948, about 1.68 million of them since 1990.

Does measured antisemitic content respond to conflict events?

Sear and Johnson (2023, preprint) report that antisemitic hate rose sharply within minutes of the Hamas attack of 7 October 2023, before Israel had responded. Verma, Sear and Johnson (2024, peer-reviewed) separately measured a 117.57% rise in antisemitic content in hate communities across 7 to 11 November 2020 against the preceding five days.

How many Jews live in Israel and elsewhere today?

The Central Bureau of Statistics reports a world Jewish population of 15.7 million at the beginning of 2024, of whom 7.1 million (45%) lived in Israel and 6.3 million (40%) in the United States, with France next at 438,000. Figures outside Israel use a “core” Jewish population definition drawn from the American Jewish Year Book.

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The Hanover Institute for Public Policy studies the inputs fueling antisemitism in the United States and publishes what the evidence shows. Its work is content analysis, computational social science, and other data-driven research, and its reports take no policy positions.

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