

The War on Gaza: Policies of silencing, intimidation, and persecution against Palestinians in Israel

November 2023

Position paper

Policy Unit

Mada Al-Carmel



This position paper discusses the measures used to gag, silence, and intimidate Palestinians in Israel amid the ongoing war on the Gaza Strip; measures that aim to prevent them from voicing any opinions opposing the war, rejecting the killing and destruction, or supporting civilians in Gaza. This paper contends that the Israeli government's definition of the war as an existential war, a "war on the house", or, as Netanyahu put it, a "Second War of Independence", and the security and political crisis that Israel has undergone since October 7th, combine to create fertile ground for silencing any dissenting voice against the war, the killing and the destruction, and for suppressing and demonizing Palestinians in Israel. The government is exploiting the state of shock, the war, the resulting crises, and the emergency cabinet it formed in order to erase the narrow political margin that Palestinians in Israel have used to exercise their most basic rights. It has drawn up new boundaries for expression and political action by proposing bills and legislative amendments, by adopting policies that facilitate political censorship and heighten incitement against Palestinian citizens, and by allowing the use of live fire against demonstrators.

The scale of the silencing, persecution, and repression

Since the very first days of the war, Israel's security institutions have implemented policies to silence anti-war voices within the Palestinian community. The Israeli media, political establishment and general public have all been complicit in these policies. As a result, any expression, statement or post made on social media expressing a principle position against the war, against the killing of civilians, or even sympathising with the residents of Gaza – women, children, or the elderly – has been considered as support for Hamas. This approach has been translated into a campaign of arrests against Arab citizens on charges of supporting terrorism or endorsing Hamas. The police have arrested dozens of them for posting Tweets in support or sympathy with Gaza, including high-profile social media figures¹ and local leaders such as Dr. Amer al-Huzayil, a mayoral candidate from the town of Rahat.² They likewise include artists such as the singer Dalal Abu Amneh³ and the actress Maisa Abd Elhadi,⁴ as well as Imams and medical staff working in Israeli hospitals.

Israeli academic institutions have issued warnings to a large number of Arab students, suspended some from their studies, and expelled others for expressions opinions in opposition to the war or sympathising with the children of Gaza.⁵ Such persecution has also extended to Arab lecturers at Israeli universities and targeted Arab employees at Israeli workplaces, including educational and

¹ "Detention of Muhannad Taha from Kabul extended on charges of posting content related to Gaza", 12 October 2023, [Arab48](#) (in Arabic).

² "Detention of candidate for mayor of Rahat Amer al-Huzayil until next Monday", 14 October 2023, [Arab48](#) (in Arabic).

³ "Detention of Dalal Abu Amneh until tomorrow", 17 October 2023, [Arab48](#) (in Arabic).

⁴ "Indictment filed against actress Maisa Abd Elhadi", 29 October 2023, [Arab48](#) (in Arabic).

⁵ "Joint student committee to track cases of Arab students facing persecution at universities and higher education institutions", 15 October 2023,

medical institutions, along with Arab students living in Jewish-majority towns. A number of Arab employees have actually been dismissed from their places of work in light of accusations over posts expressing sympathy with the residents of Gaza or opposing the war. One such example is Dr. Abed Samara, the director of the Cardiac Intensive Care unit at the Hasharon Hospital in Petah Tikva.⁶

In cooperation with the Arab Emergency Committee, affiliated with the High Follow-up Committee for Arab Citizens in Israel, Adalah – The Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel published a report on October 27th, 2023 in which it documented 161 cases in which criminal legal proceeding were initiated against Arab citizens (excluding residents of East Jerusalem) “on the basis of expressing opinions concerning current events in the country”. The legal proceedings ranged from summonses for interrogation, arrests, the filing of indictments, requests for detention until the end of legal procedures, and “warning talks” by the police or the General Security Services (Shin Bet). According to Adalah’s report, there were 58 cases of arrests and interrogations based on social media posts, and another 22 arrests for taking part in protests.⁷ The Arab Emergency Committee reported that 82 people had been fired from their workplaces.

According to Adalah’s report, most of the allegations under investigation involved violations of the penal code, such as “inappropriate conduct that could lead to a breach of public order”, or violations of the Counter-Terrorism Law, enacted in 2016, for example, “incitement to terrorism” and “identification with a terrorist organization”. The majority of those who underwent questioning or were arrested were released immediately after interrogation, though under restrictive conditions such as house arrest, restraining orders, and payment of bail bonds. In addition, 11 indictments were filed against Palestinian citizens in relation to posts on social media platforms.

The Joint Committee of Arab Students Groups (which includes 26 Arab students’ groups based at various Israeli universities and colleges and operates under the umbrella of the Arab Emergency Committee) reported that over 100 Arab students had been referred to disciplinary committees in Israeli academic institutions. In addition, they stated, hundreds of inciting posts had been published against hundreds of them by their fellow students, with the complicity and collaboration of their universities, colleges, and student unions. This incitement culminated in an assault on Arab students in their student dormitories at the Netanya Academic College. The lives of the Arab students were put in danger during the assault, which resulted in them being evacuated from their residences, after a group of Jewish citizens blockaded them inside and

⁶ For more information about firings from workplaces, see position paper by the MADAR Center: Miryam Farah, “The unprecedented and escalating campaign of persecution and gagging against Palestinians in Israel on the pretext of ‘supporting terrorism’” 2 November 2023, [MADAR Center](#) (in Arabic).

⁷ Lama Taha, “Adalah monitors war violations: Hundreds of cases of various forms of persecution against Palestinian citizens”, 27 October 2023, [Adalah](#) (in Arabic).

threatened them, without anyone assuming responsibility for the safety or security of the students.⁸

The police in service of political repression

Since Itamar Ben-Gvir assumed the position of Israel's Minister of National Security, he has made it publicly clear that his primary mission is to prevent a repetition of the events that occurred during "Operation Guardian of the Walls" in 2021. He has declared that he will deal with any protest with an iron fist and eliminate the "danger" posed by Palestinians in Israel. He has publicly referred to Palestinian citizens as a security threat to Israel.

Ben-Gvir believes that he can take advantage of the war and state of emergency to implement his policies towards the Palestinian community in Israel, unimpeded. At the beginning of the war on Gaza, the National Security Minister purchased 10,000 assault rifles and handed them out to "protection units" in Israeli towns. Officers were also appointed to organize "civilian combat units" in Israeli towns.⁹ The police also began to crack down on any anti-war political activity, and the government proposed new legislation to make it easier for the police to make political arrests and to bring charges against anyone who voices opposition to the war or the killing of civilians.

The suppression of expressions of anti-war political views has expanded during the war, to affect Arab institutions and joint Arab-Jewish activism. For instance, the Israeli police banned a joint Arab-Jewish meeting that had been organized by the High Follow-Up Committee to take place on October 26th, 2023 for Arab and Jewish academics and intellectuals in a venue in the city of Haifa. According to the Follow-Up Committee, "The Israeli police threatened the owners of the hall where the meeting was supposed to be held, informing them that if they hosted the meeting, the hall would be closed down."¹⁰ The Committee described this as "an extremely dangerous step that reveals a mounting fascist and anti-democratic attack, and part of a wider political siege on Arab citizens, which has reached the point of banning dialogue with progressive and democratic forces within Israeli society."

The enabling of political repression and arrests has been translated into a systematic policy by the police and the State Attorney's Office, which has amended its directives and procedures to facilitate arrests and detentions. According to procedures in place prior to the declaration of war, the police required the approval of the State Attorney or one of his two deputies in order to execute an arrest on charges of incitement. With the outbreak of the war, however, the State

⁸ "Joint Committee of Student Groups discusses the persecution of Arab students at colleges and universities", 29 October 2023, [Arab48](#) (in Arabic).

⁹ "The impact of the security situation: Ben-Gvir orders purchase of thousands of firearms", 10 October 2023, [Channel 14](#) (in Hebrew).

¹⁰ "Follow-Up Committee holds press conference after police ban holding of Arab-Jewish meeting", 25 October 2023, [Arab48](#) (in Arabic).

Attorney withdrew this requirement and authorized the police to initiate investigations into charges of incitement without the office's approval.¹¹

The State Attorney has insisted on this position despite protests by rights groups such as the Association for Civil Rights in Israel and Adalah.¹² On October 24th, 2023, the State Attorney and the police activated emergency regulations that allow for severe measures to be taken against detainees as part of the campaign of political persecution against Arab activists amid the war on Gaza. Such measures include extending the period for which detainees can be held in custody and denying them access to legal counsel for up to 90 days.¹³

In addition, the Minister of National Security, Itamar Ben-Gvir, submitted a draft resolution to the government that would make radical changes to the police's open-fire regulations. The proposal would reverse a government decision taken following the recommendations of the Or Commission, in order to make it easier for police to open live fire on demonstrators who close down main roads or block entrances to towns, on the pretext that such actions could hamper the war effort.¹⁴ The Attorney General approved this proposal, though the government has not yet done so.

Meanings of political repression

There has been an almost total breakdown of Israel's formal democratic tools during the war, including the right to freedom of expression, and the right to protest and oppose the war. There has also been a dangerous escalation in the way the State, its security institutions and Israeli society as a whole, treat Palestinian citizens. It is clear that the longer the war goes on, the more serious this repression and these attacks will become, as a form of revenge against anyone who is Palestinian. It further represents an attempt to impose different rules of political conduct on Palestinian citizens, determined by the Zionist consensus.

From the tools that have been used to deal with Palestinian citizens so far, one can infer that, at times of acute security crisis, the Israeli establishment views them as enemies, or at the least potential enemies. Thus, what is now happening can be described as an unannounced return to military rule. The current war on Gaza highlights the fragile and hollow nature of the citizenship granted to Palestinians in Israel, as well as its total subordination to the needs and conditions of the security establishment and the Zionist consensus. The measures currently being taken by

¹¹ Jack Khouri, Chen Menit and Ran Shimoni, "Arrest of dozens of Arab citizens on charges of incitement on social media networks", 16 October 2023, [Ynet](#) (in Hebrew).

¹² Hilo Glazer and Itay Mashiach, "False arrests, dismissals from work for bogus reasons: This is what persecution of Israel's Arabs looks like", 2 November 2024, [Haaretz](#) (in Hebrew).

¹³ "Adalah demands revocation of emergency regulations that allow detainees to be prevented from meeting lawyers", 30 October 2023, [Arab48](#) (in Arabic).

¹⁴ "Following the Attorney General's approval: A vote on Sunday to amend open-fire regulations to allow field executions", 26 October 2023, [Arab 48](#) (in Arabic).

Israel against Palestinian citizens may become permanent fixtures after the war if the Zionist consensus is persuaded that they work to its advantage, and do not elicit a real reaction or exact a political price.

At the same time, the war has exposed the failure of Israel's political strategy towards the Palestinian issue, a strategy that has sought to divide Gaza from the West Bank, disregarded the natural rights of the Palestinian people, denied its right to self-determination, and prevented the establishment of the Palestinian State. It is therefore to be anticipated that the Palestinian issue will once again become a focal point of Israel's political and party-political landscape, having being virtually ignored for the past two decades.

All of these shifts demonstrate how important it now is to begin to develop visions for collective political action by Palestinians in Israel, based on analysis of the transformations taking place within Israeli society and institutions, as well as the political implications of the current war. Of paramount importance here is the question of the substance and meanings of the citizenship held by Palestinians in Israel, given the re-emergence of the Palestinian issue and the occupation as major political questions. Both questions were side-lined in recent years by issues of day-to-day living and the issue of violence, and the illusion of political influence that has permeated some Arab political parties.

Moreover, this current stage underscores the importance of concerted collective action, establishing unions and collective institutions for service provision, and restructuring university students' unions, as means of resisting the policies of silencing, intimidation and persecution being pursued against Palestinians in Israel.