

## **Allegation: Israel is an Apartheid State**

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It is not uncommon today to see critics of Israel accusing it of being an apartheid state. Whether such a description is being used to describe Israeli policies towards Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, or towards Arab citizens of Israel, the label is inaccurate, offensive, and often used to delegitimize and denigrate Israel as a whole. Moreover, the use of this inaccurate and highly charged label is also counterproductive to resolving issues related to injustices within Israeli society or the complex Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Apartheid usually refers to the guiding policy of racial segregation in pre-1990s South Africa. Apartheid was a racist, repressive system, by which South Africa's white minority enforced its domination, through a systematic framework of racist legislation, over black and other non-white racial groups who made up more than 90 percent of the country's population.

The accusation of apartheid fundamentally distorts what Israel is.

While there is no doubt that Israel, like every country, has tremendous societal challenges and must do better in dealing with issues of institutionalized bias, discrimination, inequity and racism, choosing to apply the apartheid label would seem to question the legitimacy of the world's only Jewish state and its continued existence.

Within Israel, there are safeguards aimed at ensuring the equal treatment of all citizens, Jewish or Arab, and Israeli laws and democratic institutions, including the independent courts and robust free press, assigned to uphold and speak out for these rights. Representing over 20% of Israel's population, Israeli Arab citizens

serve as judges, ambassadors, legislators, journalists, professors, artists and play prominent roles in all aspects of Israeli society. And for the first time, as of June 2021, an Islamist Arab political party is a partner in a governing coalition.

Israeli policies in the West Bank and related to the Gaza Strip, are still subject to dispute and negotiation by both Israelis and Palestinians. They are complicated, and, due to the lack of final agreement, there are indeed policies and restrictions – including limitations on movement and access to certain resources that can impose tremendous hardships on Palestinians. From an Israeli perspective, such policies are justified by security considerations, given the past and ongoing threats posed by Palestinian terrorist organizations targeting Israeli civilians, even within Israel's pre-1967 borders. While Israel's policies and practices can certainly be criticized, it is not factually accurate to say they are akin to a permanent and institutionalized system motivated and designed by racism.

One must also ask what purpose is served by the accusation of apartheid. Is it to challenge and change specific policies? Or is it to demonize the entire state?

In [responding](#) to a 2021 Human Rights Watch Report alleging that Israel engages in apartheid policies, longtime experts engaged in Israeli-Palestinian negotiations Daniel C. Kurzer and Aaron David Miller said about the use of this label: "It will do nothing to improve the situation on the ground. It will infantilize Palestinians and Israelis and, rather than facilitate criticism of Israel, it will likely make it that much more difficult to bring about change in two of the constituencies that really matter: the [U.S.] Biden Administration and Israel."

As [noted](#) by Justice Richard Goldstone – a former senior South African jurist and critic of Israeli policies: "those who conflate the situations in Israel and the West Bank and liken both to the old South Africa do a disservice to all who hope for justice and peace."

