



Actually, Palestinians Are Doing Pretty Well Under Israeli Rule

If you look at the data, life keeps improving in the Palestinian territories.

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Correction, 3/20/18: The piece originally stated that at the end of the Six-Day War in 1967, "Israel took over the Palestinian territories." During the Six-Day War, the territories in question belonged to Jordan, not "Palestine." The piece has been updated accordingly.

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Of the various complaints made against Israelis, the worst has been the charge that the country is committing genocide. To wit: Nobel laureate José Saramago not long ago claimed that “what is happening in Palestine is a crime we can put on the same plane as what happened at Auschwitz.” While not every critic of Israel takes this line, enough influential academics and journalists have made similar claims, so that world opinion now judges Israel to be scarcely better than North Korea.

But “genocide” isn’t merely a matter of opinion; it’s measurable. Massive empirical data about life in Israel and the Palestinian territories has been compiled by distinguished Israeli journalist Ben-Dror Yemini and his recently translated 2014 book *Industry of Lies* shows just how ludicrous the genocide charge is.

Begin with life expectancy. At the end of the Six-Day War in 1967, when Israel took over the territories from Jordan, the average Palestinian in the West Bank and Gaza expected to live just 49 years, according to a U.N. report. In 1975, Palestinian life expectancy rose to 56; by 1984, it climbed to 66. Yemini notes that this is “a rise of almost seventeen years in longevity within seventeen years of Israeli rule.” Since 1984, Palestinians have lived an average of 75 years. That’s not only higher than the global average, but longer than the life expectancy in many Arab and South American countries—and even in some European countries. Israeli Arabs, meanwhile, have the highest life expectancy in the Muslim world.

Infant mortality is another marker of genocide and happily it’s been declining in Palestinian life, having shown dramatic improvement since 1967. Also a happy statistic: the high birth and low

death rates of Palestinians in Gaza put the territory near the top of the world in population growth. It is a strange kind of “genocide” that creates the conditions for a population of people to flourish.

But it isn’t just the Palestinian people who have flourished. Infrastructure has also meaningfully improved—most notably, Palestinian access to clean drinking water. Under Jordanian occupation, only 4 out of 708 Palestinian towns and villages in the West Bank had modern water supply systems and running water.

Five years after Israel took over, the network of fresh water sources grew by 50 percent and continued to expand: By 2004, 641 Palestinian communities—accounting for 96 percent of the population—had running water, even in seasons of low rainfall. True, Hamas’s reckless sewage management and over-pumping from Gaza’s aquifer are aggravating regional challenges; but pioneering Israeli conservation tactics and technologies (such as drip irrigation and desalination plants) offer hope for the whole area. “One of the driest countries on Earth now makes more freshwater than it needs,” cheered *Scientific American*.

With improvements in physical well-being have come advances in culture. Palestinian literacy is impressive indeed: an astonishing 91 percent adult literacy rate. That makes the Palestinians the most educated population in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, according to a 2006 World Bank report.

Israeli Arabs are also doing quite well academically, especially Arab Christians—who outperform Jews in matriculation certificates. “Christian Arabs do better than the Israeli Jewish population at large,” Yemini writes. “If the charge of significant [anti-Arab] discrimination were true, it is hard to imagine such an outcome.”

And if voting with their feet is any indication, a majority of Israeli Arabs prefer to live in Israel rather than other countries, as suggested in various polls. Many even favor Israeli-ruled East Jerusalem over Palestinian citizenship in the territories.

But what about all the bloodshed? Isn’t the Israeli-Palestinian conflict among the worst the world has ever seen? You wouldn’t use a word like “genocide” if it wasn’t, would you? As Yemini underscores: This is a big “no.” Over the last 70 years, 5 million lives have been lost in wars across the Middle East and North Africa; the Israeli-Palestinian conflict accounts for less than one percent of the death toll.

And even the larger Arab-Israeli conflict is way down the list of the world’s most lethal wars. Consider one comparison: In the Algerian War, France killed more Muslims in eight years than all the people killed in the entire 100 years of the Arab-Israeli conflict. About ten times more. And during those eight years, the French killed far more Algerians—nearly 30 times more—than Israelis killed Palestinians *since 1948*. “Relative to population size,” Yemini says, “more Palestinians have died in traffic accidents than in violent clashes with Israel.”

Given the extensive media coverage of this minor conflict, you would think academics and journalists might provide the public with more of these relevant comparisons. But comparative analysis is rarely how they explore the Israeli-Palestinian dispute. Like advertisers selling a

product, they single out and sensationalize. Professors such as Harvard's Stephen Walt and University of Chicago's John Mearsheimer admitted as much in their scorched-earth attack on the Jewish state: "Our focus will be primarily on Israeli behavior," the professors confessed in *The Israel Lobby*, "and no attempt will be made to compare it with the actions of other states in the region or in other parts of the world."

Virtually anything can be made to look ugly when you isolate it and put it under a microscope: People are people and they often behave in ugly ways. This fact is part of the human condition, and not unique to Israelis or Palestinians or anyone else. And if what you're looking to confirm is your own biases, there will always be anecdotal data you can find to support your case.

Israelis and Palestinians certainly have imperfections. Their shared home isn't yet the land of milk and honey, but nor is it the hellhole often depicted by intellectuals and the media. To understand this truth, all you have to do is look at the objective data.

Next time a commentator starts to catastrophize about Israel, cheer them up with truths of increasing Palestinian life expectancy, declining infant mortality, growing populations, improved water conditions, amazing literacy, comparatively low casualty rates, and much of the other good news in Yemini's level-headed book.