

One occupation – two realities: Psychosocial mechanisms that make genocidal acts possible

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Israel's occupation of Gaza: The genocide debate

A growing number of United Nations mandate holders and committees, along with major NGOs, have characterised Israel's campaign in Gaza as genocide—for example, the UN Special Rapporteur's Anatomy of a Genocide¹; UN independent experts warning that “a genocide is unfolding”; and subsequent NGO assessments by Amnesty International (Dec 2024), Médecins Sans Frontières (2025), Human Rights Watch (2024,2025); World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) (2024,2025) and the Israeli NGOs B'Tselem and Physicians for Human Rights–Israel (July 2025), among many others. The International Association of Genocide Scholars' resolution (2025) on Gaza² established that *Israel's policies and actions in Gaza meet the legal definition of genocide*. The International Court of Justice has not yet issued a final merits judgment, although it has issued three provisional measures orders in the *South Africa vs Israel* case (26 Jan; 28 Mar; 24 May 2024), protecting rights under the Genocide Convention³. In the present Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group, as such: (a) Killing members of the group; (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to

bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.⁴

Collection and documentation of evidence of damage and genocidal acts

Beyond the legal characterisation of these acts, the United Nations system, academia and civil society have extensively documented the widespread harm inflicted on Gaza's population. Table 1 presents a GRADE-CERQual-informed synthesis of the available evidence on the impacts of the occupation of Gaza with a focus on health⁵.

Documentation by Israeli legal and medical human rights organisations

Furthermore, between January 2024 and July 2025 we identified and reviewed 22 reports, position papers, press releases, and situation updates from major Israeli human-rights organisations⁶. Across these sources, a consistent conclusion emerges: the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza is framed not as an unintended by-product of hostilities but as the result of deliberate State policy—with organisations such as ACRI (2024a, 2024b), B'Tse-

¹ A/HRC/55/73, 25 March 2024

² <https://genocidescholars.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/IAGS-Resolution-on-Gaza-FINAL.pdf>

³ In the 26 January Order, the Court held that “the facts and circumstances mentioned [in the Order] are sufficient to conclude that at least some of the rights claimed by South Africa and for which it is seeking protection are plausible. This is the case with respect to the right of the Palestinians in Gaza to be protected from acts of genocide and related prohibited acts identified in Article III” (ICJ, 2024, para. 54). The interpretation of the Court expression “plausible” has been a subject of debate among international lawyers. The legal debate at that moment also included thresholds of proof and the central role of specific intent (*dolus specialis*), the scope of protected groups, and whether starvation/displacement and destruction of health infrastructure satisfy the “conditions of life” elements.

⁴ United Nations. (1948). Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. General Assembly Resolution 260 A (III), adopted on 9 December 1948. Retrieved from <https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/genocide-convention.shtml>

⁵ Using CERQual principles, we graded confidence per table row based on structured judgements of limitations, coherence, adequacy, and relevance; due to scope and heterogeneity (peer-reviewed + institutional reports), this was not a full CERQual appraisal for each source.

⁶ These materials address six themes: (1) starvation and famine, (2) denial of aid and medical care, (3) destruction of Gaza's healthcare system and attacks on medical personnel, (4) forced displacement and ethnic cleansing, (5) accountability and failures of Israel's investigative mechanisms, and (6) broader assessments of occupation and potential genocide (see Supplementary Material 2).

Table 1. *Health impacts of the occupation of Gaza: a GRADE-CERQual evidence synthesis*

Area	Situation in Gaza	Confidence level	Brief justification (key sources)
1. Physical health under occupation	Increases in morbidity, mortality, and malnutrition linked to blockades, armed violence, and destruction of health infrastructure.	High	Converging evidence from WHO Executive Board/ WHA reports (2024–2025), UN OCHA situation updates, OHCHR hospital-attacks thematic report, IPC famine analyses, and peer-reviewed articles.
2. Individual mental health	High prevalence of PTSD, depression, anxiety, and prolonged grief in populations chronically exposed to violence. Trauma is cumulative and persistent.	High	Peer-reviewed studies in Gaza pre and post October 7th (e.g., Qouta et al., 2003; El-Khodary et al., 2020; Aldabbour et al., 2024); institutional sources (UNRWA 2024; WHO/EMHJ 2025; MSF 2024)
3. Psychosocial and community effects	Destruction of social networks and community institutions (schools, mosques, cultural centres) and loss of livelihoods; prolonged displacement eroding survival.	Moderate-High	Converging evidence from UNRWA (education, camp/community services), OCHA (displacement, shelter), WHO Health Cluster (MHPSS service disruption), and peer-reviewed work .
4. Structural determinants of health	Occupation, blockade, checkpoints, territorial fragmentation, and militarisation of space operate as upstream determinants shaping morbidity, mortality, nutrition, and access to care.	High	Triangulation of UN OCHA access/movement reports (2024–2025), WHO oPt health assessments (2023–2025), UNICEF WASH situation updates, UNRWA service disruption reports, and macro-level analyses (World Bank Palestine Economic Monitor); peer-reviewed syntheses (The Lancet Palestinian Health Series; EMHJ/BMJ)
5. Access to essential services and goods	Systematic restriction and/or collapse of water, sanitation, food supply, medicines, fuel and electricity translate into excess preventable mortality and morbidity (malnutrition, infectious disease, unmanaged chronic conditions).	High	Triangulated evidence from UNICEF WASH and nutrition updates, WHO oPt health bulletins, WFP/ IPC food security analyses, UNRWA situation reports, OCHA access constraints, and ICRC statements shows convergent, Gaza-specific documentation of sustained service disruption and denial of essentials; peer-reviewed editorials and correspondence in The Lancet and BMJ
6. Impact on children (health, nutrition, protection, education)	Children in Gaza face extreme risks of malnutrition, infectious disease, injury, disability, toxic stress, and interrupted development due to protracted blockade, large-scale displacement, attacks on civilian infrastructure including health centres and hospitals, and WASH collapse.	High	Converging UNICEF/UNRWA/OCHA/WHO evidence (2024–2025) documents extraordinary child morbidity/mortality, medical evacuations, WASH failures and acute food insecurity; peer-reviewed commentaries in The Lancet and BMJ reinforce paediatric risk framing.
7. Legal and human rights framework	Widespread violations of IHL/IHRL in Gaza, including unlawful attacks on civilians and civilian objects, obstruction of humanitarian relief, starvation as a method of warfare, and attacks on medical facilities and personnel.	High	Triangulated findings from the UN Commission of Inquiry (2024), OHCHR thematic reporting, ICJ provisional measures (2024), Special Rapporteur reports (e.g., right to food; oPt), and major NGOs (Amnesty, HRW); ICRC guidance and Geneva Conventions establish applicable legal standards. Conventions establish applicable legal standards.

WHO = World Health Organization; WHA = World Health Assembly; OCHA = United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs; OHCHR = Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights; IPC = Integrated Food Security Phase Classification; PTSD = Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder; UNRWA = United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East; EMHJ = Eastern Mediterranean Health Journal; MSF = Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders); MHPSS = Mental Health and Psychosocial Support; UNICEF = United Nations Children's Fund; WASH = Water, Sanitation and Hygiene; WFP = United Nations World Food Programme; ICRC = International Committee of the Red Cross; BMJ = British Medical Journal; ICJ = International Court of Justice

lem (2024a–d, 2025a, 2025b), HaMoked (2024, 2025), and Gisha (2025a, 2025b) arguing that starvation, denial of aid, forced displacement, and systematic destruction of essential infrastructure constitute grave breaches of international humanitarian law, amounting to war crimes. Taken together, these reports converge that the civilian population in Gaza is subjected to policies that intentionally dismantle the conditions necessary for survival. Most of these Israeli NGOs demand urgent international intervention, effective accountability mechanisms, and the immediate lifting of restrictions to prevent further civilian harm and systemic destruction (B’Tselem, 2025a; PHRI & GHRC, 2025; Yesh Din, 2024).

Converging assessments by United Nations international institutions and human rights system

At the time of writing these lines, 141 resolutions, position statements, documents or calls had been issued by institutions linked to the United Nations system, as a body for consensus and governance, not counting statements by the Secretary-General or other high-rank representatives. They are summarised in Table 2 (also see supplementary material for the full list and detailed contents of each resolution). The thematic analysis of UN responses on Palestine occupation (2023–2025) shows strong convergence among all UN bodies—particularly the Security Council, General Assembly, Secretary-General, and OCHA—on urgent calls to protect Palestinian civilians, ensure humanitarian access, demand an immediate ceasefire, and maintain support for UNRWA and Palestinian refugees. These responses consistently center on the critical humanitarian situation facing the Palestinian population in Gaza and the West Bank.

Israeli suffering

We have also conducted a CERQual analysis of studies of the impacts of the October 7th attacks and the subsequent hostage crisis and Hamas actions since then, among the Israeli population. United Reports, international NGOs (Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International among others) and independent research has shown the deep individual and community damage (see Table 3).

The recent release of all the hostages and the handing over of the bodies of those who died opens up new processes that time will help to analyse.

The battle of narratives and truths

Focusing on what happened and who is responsible in occupied Gaza is inquiring into how *competing narratives* fight for authority—who gets to define what counts as “truth,” how that truth is

produced, amplified, and weaponised, and with what consequences for policy, public opinion, and people’s lives (e.g., in Gaza and in Israel). Digital platforms, transnational media, and state–nonstate coalitions accelerate claims far faster than verification can keep pace. The result is a strategic contest in which actors weaponise truth and falsehood—flooding the zone with competing framings, and selective datasets—to manufacture parallel worlds. There is an asymmetry between institutions tasked with truth-findings and the role of science in documenting with high standards of proof, and the enormous machinery of propaganda, very often automated in AI-generated media that create “truths” acceptable for citizens looking for self-serving ready-made explanations

The attitude of Israeli public opinion towards policies of a genocidal nature and their degree of social support.

We present in this Section an analysis of Israeli public opinion (2023–2025) triangulating across: (1) the Israel Democracy Institute’s Israeli Voice Index—a monthly national survey series published by IDI’s Viterbi Family Centre, including special “Swords of Iron” waves; (2) Pew Research Centre’s nationally representative surveys of Israelis (May 2024; subsequent waves); (3) the Palestinian–Israeli Pulse (Tel Aviv University’s Tami Steinmetz Centre & PCPSR); (4) INSS “Swords of Iron” surveys on war aims and confidence; and (5) high-frequency polling by major broadcasters—Channel 12 (Midgam), KAN 11 (Kantar), and Channel 13 (Maagar/Camil Fuchs. We note mode/sampling differences across series and therefore privilege convergent findings that replicate across sources⁷. In some of

7 Key source hubs: Israel Democracy Institute — Israeli Voice Index hub: <https://en.idi.org.il/centers/1159/32799>; Israel Democracy Institute — Surveys & Polls hub: <https://en.idi.org.il/tags-en/1465>; Pew Research Centre — Views of the Israel–Hamas War (May 30, 2024): <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2024/05/30/views-of-the-israel-hamas-war-may-2024/>; Pew — Full PDF of the May 30, 2024 report: https://www.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/20/2024/05/pg_2024.05.30_israeli-views-war_report.pdf; Palestinian–Israeli Pulse — Sept 2024 summary (PCPSR): <https://www.pcpsr.org/en/node/731>; INSS — Swords of Iron Survey Results, July 2024: <https://www.inss.org.il/publication/july-2024/>; INSS — Swords of Iron Survey Results, December 2024: <https://www.inss.org.il/publication/survey-december-2024/>; Times of Israel — IDI poll on support for a deal to release all hostages and end the war (Dec 14, 2024): <https://www.timesofisrael.com/poll-majority-of-israelis-support-deal-ending-gaza-war-for-release-of-all-hostages/>; Reuters — KAN/Kantar poll on ceasefire proposal (June 4, 2024): <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/netanyahus-biggest-coalition-partner-backs-prospective-gaza-hostage-deal-2024-06-04/>

Table 2. *Thematic Analysis of UN Institutional Responses to the Occupied Palestinian Territory, 2023–2025*

Thematic Area (focus on Palestinians unless stated)	UNGA	UNSC	HRC	UNSG	OCHA	UNSR	SCIP	WGED
Calls for Ceasefire and De-escalation of Violence	✓	✓		✓	✓			
Protection of Palestinian Civilians under International Humanitarian Law	✓		✓	✓	✓			
Ensuring Safe and Unhindered Humanitarian Access to Palestinians	✓	✓		✓	✓			
Mandate and Continued Support for UNRWA and Palestinian Refugees	✓			✓	✓			
Investigations and Accountability for Human Rights Violations			✓			✓	✓	
Condemnation of Illegal Israeli Settlements and Occupation Policies	✓		✓			✓		
Recognition of Palestinian Right to Self-Determination and Statehood	✓		✓					
Advisory Opinions and Legal Rulings by the ICJ concerning Israeli Practices	✓			✓				
Torture, Hostage-Taking, and Enforced Disappearances Involving Israeli and Palestinian Population						✓		✓
Restrictions on Movement and Blockade of Gaza and the West Bank				✓	✓	✓		
Access to Food, Clean Water, Sanitation and Health Services of Palestinian Population					✓	✓		
Protection of Medical, Civilian and Humanitarian Infrastructure				✓	✓	✓		

UNGA: United Nations General Assembly, UNSC: United Nations Security Council. HRC: Human Rights Council, UNSG: United Nations Secretary General, UNSR: United Nations Special Rapporteur, WGED: Working Group on Enforced Disappearance. SCIP: Special Committee on Israeli Practices. OCHA: Office for Humanitarian Affairs. All thematic areas relate to the Palestinian population in the Occupied Palestinian Territory unless explicitly referring to broader contexts.

the polls commissioned by media there are potentially self-selection biases. The results, thus, are always to be interpreted as tendencies.

Credibility attributed by the Israeli population to different sources of information about events in Gaza.

Israeli public opinion appears largely unreceptive to the testimonies of Palestinian organisations and victims, as well as to re-

ports issued by United Nations bodies and international human rights organisations.: only 15% of Israelis considered that Palestinians⁸ “can be trusted”. 70% of Jewish Israelis said they believe the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) reporting on the extent of Pal-

8 <https://www.pcpsr.org/en/node/823>; Mondoweiss. (2025, August 7). Poll: 4 out of 5 Jewish Israelis are not troubled by the famine in Gaza. <https://mondoweiss.net/2025>

Table 3. *Impacts of the October 7 Attacks and Hostage Crisis on Israeli Civilians: A CERQual Evidence Synthesis*

Area	Key findings	Conf. level	Key sources
Civilian harm and mass casualties (southern Israel)	Large-scale killings and injuries of civilians on Oct 7, including shootings, and assaults across several localities.	High	UN COI A/HRC/56/CRP.3 (2024); HRW (2024) report on Oct 7; peer-reviewed mass-casualty analysis (Gozlan et al., 2024).
Hostage-taking and treatment of hostages	Abduction of hundreds of civilians from Israel to Gaza; ongoing unlawful detention and abuse reported	High	UN COI A/HRC/56/CRP.3 and CRP.4 (2024); HRW (2024) Q&A; Amnesty International (2024)
Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) during the attacks and in captivity	Commission findings indicative of conflict-related sexual violence in several locations on Oct 7 and against some hostages; verification constraints remain.	Moderate	UN COI A/HRC/56/26 and A/HRC/56/CRP.3 (2024) note indications/patterns of SGBV with evidentiary limits; HRW (2024) urges victim-centred investigations; additional Israeli academic/legal reports (2025) present further testimonies.
Indiscriminate rocket and mortar fire into populated areas	Documented barrages of unguided rockets toward Israeli towns lack distinction and are inherently indiscriminate.	High	Amnesty International (2024) Q&A; HRW (2023, 2024) legal analyses describing indiscriminate rocket fire as unlawful.
Mental-health impact on affected Israeli populations	Emerging cohort and population studies show marked increases in PTSD, depression, anxiety and grief among exposed groups (2023-4) decreasing with time (2025)	Moderate-High	Levi-Belz et al. (2024, 2025); Amsalem et al. (2025); Neria (2025) commentary; HRW survivor testimonies (2024).
Legal assessment under IHL and IHRL	Independent investigations conclude that Hamas-led armed groups committed multiple war crimes and crimes against humanity on Oct 7.	High	UN COI press releases and detailed findings (June 2024); HRW (July 2024) report; Amnesty (Dec 2024) findings.

UNCOI: United Nations Commission of Inquiry

estinian civilian casualties “to a very/fairly large extent,” while a majority of Arab Israelis said they do not (IDI, July 2025). A Channel 12 / Midgam snap poll, Sep 5, 2025 (n=722): 59% of Jewish respondents agreed with the statement “*reports of civilian suffering are exaggerated by enemies of Israel.*”

Views of the UN are broadly negative (76% unfavourable overall; 82% among Jewish Israelis, increasing to 84% and 91% in September 2025⁹), aligning with official public scepticism toward UN data and findings. Israeli human-rights NGOs publishing on the situation in Gaza are also viewed

sceptically: in 2023, 60% of Jewish respondents said such groups “cause damage to the State.” Consistent with this pattern, 64% of Israelis judged domestic media coverage as already balanced and not needing more humanitarian reporting on Gaza, and 69% considered CNN, BBC, and Fox News biased toward Palestinians.

Support of Israeli population to torture, genocide and apartheid policies

Alongside, with all due cautions and the methodological limitations exposed, but according to the polls and surveys reviewed, we have some consistent and disturbing data:

9 <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2025/09/05/8-in-10-israelis-view-united-nations-unfavorably/>

1. Suffering, atrocities and harm to the population of Gaza.

- **Concern among Israeli people about reports of famine/suffering in Gaza** (IDI, July 27–31, 2025). In IDI's Israeli Voice Index (July 27–31, 2025), 79% of Jewish Israelis said they are “not so troubled” or “not at all troubled” by reports of famine and suffering in Gaza, while 86% of Arab Israelis reported being “very” or “somewhat” troubled¹⁰. Results remained identical in the August 28–31, 2025 wave.
- **Palestinian victims in Gaza.** (aChord Centre, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, N= 1112; June 2025). 64% of Israelis believe that “there are no innocents” in Gaza (from 87% in supporters of Government to 30% among left-wing voters)
- **Overall view of the military response / proportionality.** Pew (fielded Mar–Apr 2024) found 39% of Israelis said Israel's response in Gaza was “about right,” 34% “not far enough,” 19% “too far.” In a 2024 SISR survey 47% of Jewish respondents thought the Israeli army should not obey international laws nor maintain ethical values in war¹¹
- **Perceived conduct toward civilians (IDI, July 2025).** A clear majority of Jewish Israelis considered that Israel is making substantial efforts to avoid unnecessary suffering; most Arab Israelis choose the alternative that Israel could significantly reduce suffering but chooses not to.
- **Humanitarian access to Gaza:** In Feb 2024, 68% of Jewish Israelis opposed allowing humanitarian aid even if provided by bodies not linked to UNRWA¹².

2. Support for apartheid.

- Pew 2014–2015 national survey (published 2016) showed that 79% agreed that Jews should have preferential treat-

ment over Arabs in Israel (85% among West Bank settlers). 48% of Israeli Jews agreed that all Arabs should be expelled or transferred from Israel.

3. Support for forced exile of all Gazans.

- Achord, an institute affiliated with the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, found that a 60% of Jewish Israelis supported the *cleansing* of Gaza (fieldwork August – September 2025). Polls by Channel 12 and Channel 13 soon after Trump's proposal “to exile Palestinians” found a consistent 69–72% support for “exiling/removing Gazans”. The Peace Index Survey from the Tel-Aviv University (March 2024) reported a 62% support to “evacuating Palestinians from Gaza, even by force or military means” confirmed by a Channel 13 flash poll (Sept 15 2025). The Israeli organisation Jews for Justice for Palestinians (JPJFP) concluded that combining all the surveys, there was a 74% support among Jewish Israelis to expel all Palestinians from Gaza¹³.

4. Support for acts of genocide among Israeli population.

- Penn State University conducted a poll (June 2025; n: 1005) on explicit support for genocide of the Palestinian people¹⁴. The full database has not been published and there are strong methodological concerns¹⁵. According to the Survey, and based on Biblical rhetoric, 50% of the population would support or approve genocide, understood as killing all Palestinians in Gaza¹⁶. The support was high-

10 Israel Democracy Institute. (2025, August 5). Israeli Voice Index – July 2025 (English data tables). <https://en.idi.org.il/media/28796/israeli-voice-index-july-2025-eng-data.pdf>; Israel Democracy Institute. (2025, August 5). Large majority of Jewish Israelis: Israel making substantial efforts to avoid causing unnecessary suffering to Palestinians in Gaza. <https://en.idi.org.il/articles/60357>; Pew Research Center. (2024, May 30). Israeli views of the Israel–Hamas war. <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2024/05/30/israeli-views-of-the-israel-hamas-war/>

11 <https://www.inss.org.il/publication/august-2024-survey/> (Question 21)

12 https://en.idi.org.il/media/23124/war-in-gaza-11-_data_eng.pdf

13 <https://jfp.com/a-grim-poll-showed-most-jewish-israelis-support-expelling-gazans-its-brutal-and-its-true/>

14 <https://www.genocidewatch.com/single-post/poll-show-most-jewish-israelis-support-expelling-gazans>; <https://archivinggenocide.com/penn-state-university-poll-findings/>; <https://jfp.com/a-grim-poll-showed-most-jewish-israelis-support-expelling-gazans-its-brutal-and-its-true/>

15 Internet-based survey; response rate 8.4%; used a system of dichotomous questions (yes/no) instead of the usual 5-points likert scale. The only methodological note is: <https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fbpb-us-e1.wpmucdn.com%2Fsites.psu.edu%2Fdist%2F5%2F129010%2Ffiles%2F2025%2F06%2FSorek-Eliminatory-attitudes-method.docx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK>

16 Support for Genocidal Actions: 47% supported the Israeli army acting like the biblical Israelites under Joshua in Jericho, interpreted as *killing all inhabitants of a conquered city*. Support for Expulsion from Gaza: 82% supported the forced expulsion of Palestinians from Gaza. Support for Expulsion of Palestinian Citizens from Israel: 56% backed expelling Palestinian citizens of Israel, creating a “pure” Jewish State. Belief in Modern-Day Amalek: 65% believed in a modern-day “Amalek” (a biblical

er among younger respondents (under 40), with over 60% supporting “killing all residents” among Traditional, Orthodox and Haredi Jews¹⁷. The results have been replicated in subsequent polls. Achord replicated the wording of the initial study in August and a new wave in September 2025, but including a neutral option and found consistently that 60% of Jewish Israelis still supported the “*complete cleansing of Gaza*”.

Tamir Sorek (2025), author of the Penn Study, interpreted the results not in a literal way, but according to his theory of a *Genocidal Imagination in Israeli Society*.

5. Support for coercive interrogations and torture of prisoners among Israeli population.

- B’Tselem (1998) released a pioneering and landmark study in May 1988 on support to torture among Israeli general population. The report included detailed description of *Shabeh*, a routine combination of torture methods used by the General Security Service (GSS)¹⁸. In a subsequent survey (n=600), 76% of Jews recognised shabeh as torture; 27% opposed its use in general; and 35% approved in ticking-bomb cases (Montell J, 2000). Since then, things seem to have changed. In 1999, the IFRC *People on War Survey* (n=600) reported that torture was “acceptable to obtain important military information” in 44%, with an increase (50%) in a follow-up seven years later (2016)¹⁹. The ICRC/Ipsos *Millennials on War Survey* (2019; Israel sample) question “*Is torturing captured enemy combatants acceptable under some circumstances, or never acceptable?*” found that only 23% of Israeli millennials answered “never acceptable” (lowest rejection among 16 countries)²⁰. The Peace Index (2015) found that support for physical meth-

ods (without a ticking bomb scenario) was higher than 55% in Jewish Israelis²¹. A Channel 12 / Midgam flash poll, Sept 3, 2025: In the context of detained Hamas members, 61% of Jewish Israelis supported “intensive physical pressure,” 24% opposed, 15% unsure, showing an increasing tolerance than in earlier years.

6. Attitudes of support for impunity and rejection of accountability mechanisms.

- Although none of the studies asked directly, markers of tolerance for misconduct by soldiers in salient cases can provide some light. A Channel 2 flash poll (Jan 2017; n= 666) showed 67% of Israelis supported a pardon for soldier Elor Azaria (see footnote)²²; 51% also opposed the final manslaughter verdict²³. A 2024 SISR survey found that 65% of Jewish (opposed to 21% of Arabs) considered that five soldiers suspected of severe abuses, including rape of a male detainee (see footnote)²⁴ should only be disciplined at command level and not face criminal prosecution²⁵. In an IDI, Aug 2025 Voice Index: 64% of Jewish respondents said “*investigating soldiers for alleged misconduct during war should be avoided until after absolute victory*”. Arab Israelis overwhelmingly disagreed.

enemy often associated with Palestinians); 93% of those who believed in a modern-day Amalek supported applying the biblical command to “wipe out Amalek.”

- 17 <https://deepnewz.com/israel/penn-state-poll-82-jewish-israelis-support-expulsion-gazans-56-expel-israeli-47-0d080350>;
- 18 https://www.btslem.org/publications/summaries/199802_routine_torture
- 19 https://www.icrc.org/sites/default/files/document/file_list/people_on_war_report.pdf
- 20 International Committee of the Red Cross. (2019). *Millennials on War* (Full report). Geneva: ICRC. https://www.icrc.org/sites/default/files/wysiwyg/campaign/millennials-on-war/icrc-millennials-on-war_full-report.pdf;

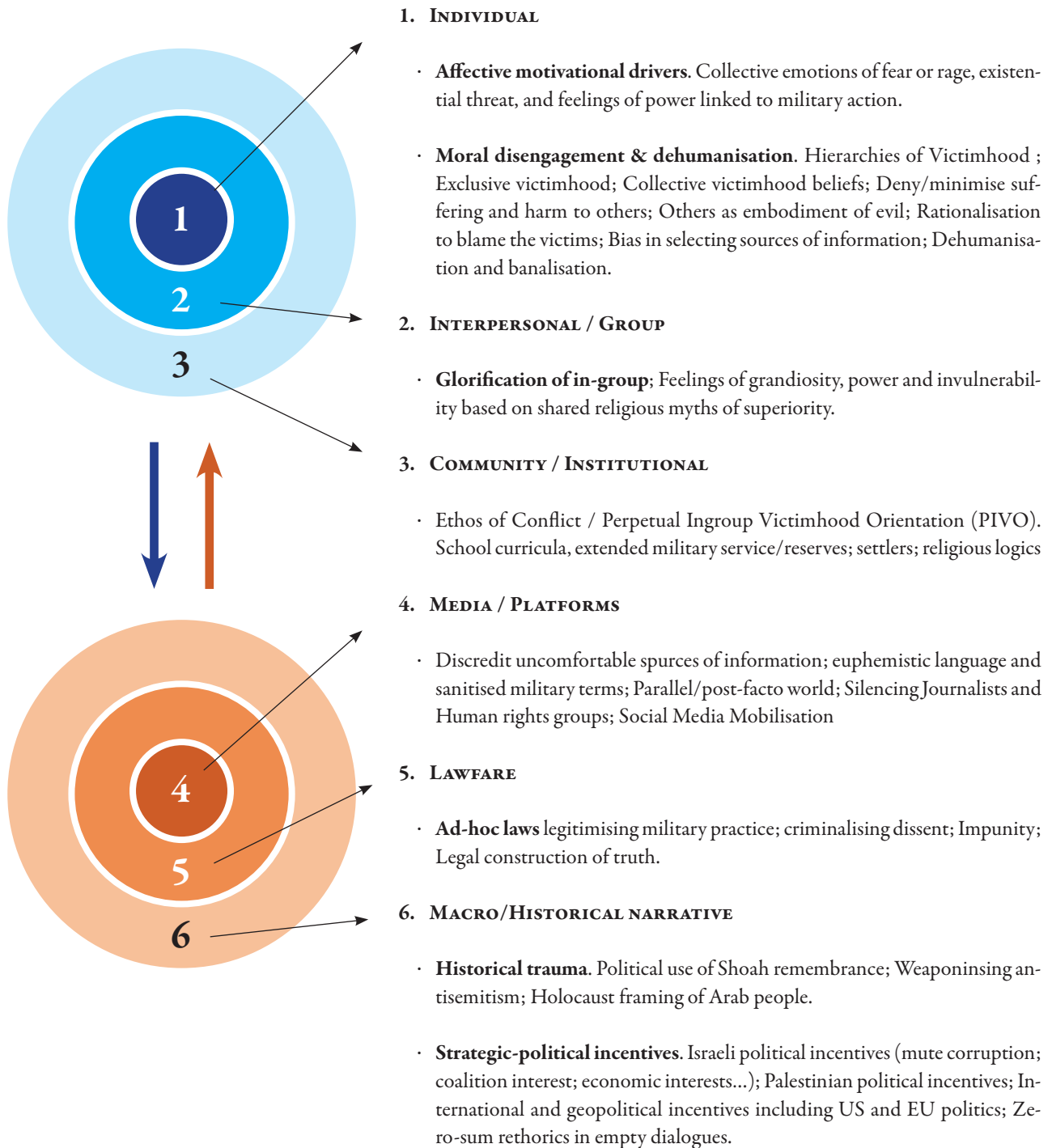
21 <https://www.972mag.com/views-on-torture-split-along-ethnic-lines-israeli-poll-finds/>

22 Elor Azaria, an Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) soldier, shot in the head defenceless Abdel Fattah al-Sharif, a Palestinian, that lay wounded on the ground in Hebron, after stabbing an Israeli soldier.

23 Times of Israel. (2017, January 5). Poll: 67% support pardon for Elor Azaria; majority oppose verdict. <https://www.timesofisrael.com>; Reuters. (2017, January 4–5). Poll shows majority favour pardon for Azaria. <https://www.reuters.com>.

24 They were IDF reservists at the Sde Teiman detention facility (Negev) accused of severe abuse of a Palestinian detainee—reported as a Hamas police officer—including aggravated sodomy (a charge equivalent to rape) and a sustained beating that, according to the indictment and Israeli coverage, broke ribs, punctured a lung, and caused an internal rectal tear. The incident occurred July 5, 2024. https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/house-arrest-of-5-soldiers-suspected-inside-teiman-abuse-case-extended-by-two-weeks; The soldiers are in house arrest while investigated. A military judge proposed mediation and the case had not yet gone to trial due to defence delays (July 2025). <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2025-07-07/ty-article/.premium/judge-proposes-5-soldiers-accused-of-abusing-gazan-detainee-at-sde-teiman-enter-mediation/00000197-e49f-d615-ab9f-ed9f44680000>

25 <https://www.inss.org.il/publication/august-2024-survey/> (Question 14)

Figure 1. Mechanisms underlying radical pro-genocide positions

Hostage crisis

War aims vs. “bring them home”: 68% prioritise bringing the hostages home vs. 25% prioritising toppling Hamas; 49% say both goals cannot be achieved simultaneously (IDI, Apr 2025) and accuse the government of prioritising political objectives at expense of hostages lives.²⁶ 65% back a comprehensive deal freeing all hostages in exchange for ceasefire and full IDF withdrawal (IDI Aug 24–28, 2025). 72.5% say the Prime Minister should accept responsibility for October 7 and resign (now or after the war). More broadly, the government received low grades across multiple wartime issues (IDI, May 2024; Mar 2025)²⁷

Government performance and trust: 72.5% say the Prime Minister should accept responsibility for October 7 and resign (now or after the war). More broadly, the Government received low grades across multiple wartime issues (IDI, May 2024; Mar 2025). Furthermore, a national prospective cohort study among Israeli citizens (Levi-Belz et al., 2024) found that exposure to a potentially morally injurious betrayal by previously trusted leaders was associated with an approximately twofold increase in risk of PTSD and depression.

Again, although the public-opinion figures reported here derive from Israeli surveys, they differ in sampling frames, modes, and question wording. Several rely on opt-in online panels with post-stratification; subgroup estimates—especially for Arab Israelis—rest on small bases with wide confidence intervals. Some questions employ charged or Biblical framing that can prime punitive responses, and media ‘flash polls’ offer limited methodological disclosure. In brief, all point estimates should be treated as indicative and sensitive to wording and timing rather than definitive measures of stable attitudes. But in overall, Israeli public opinion since 2024–2025 shows limited empathy toward Gaza inhabitants and openness to most hard-line measures including torture, extrajudicial killings, apartheid or genocide. Even with acknowledged methodological flaws, the results are too stark to dismiss and point to a critical situation. The survey findings are profoundly alarming and raise serious ethical and humanitarian concerns that warrant attention from the international community²⁸.

26 <https://en.idi.org.il/tags-en/1465>

27 <https://en.idi.org.il/articles/58648>

28 Although it might be hypothesized that similar questions should be posed to Palestinian citizens, there are no similar surveys on Gaza and West Bank populations. There are only some rigorous periodical data from the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (PCPSR) on support for 7 October 2023 attack, support for Hamas and the PNA and the desire of the Gazan population to emigrate, and flash surveys from the Arab Barometer (Palestinian political preferences and living conditions in West Bank & Gaza) and the Arab World for

How is it possible?.

Can academia provide some light on these worrying figures?. We adopt in this section a systems perspective to map the interplay of factors that helps explain these troubling figures. We will combine individual, psychosocial and community, collective, sociological and political aspects. Some of the elements we will detail have a higher level of evidence than others, but they are a sufficiently solid base to give food for reflection on what is going on. A summary is provided in Figure 1 which is just a guide to navigate the analysis that follows. Some mechanisms can be included in more than one category. For instance, *competing victimhood* is at the same time an individual mechanism of moral disengagement and a collective narrative that fosters social cohesion. In other words, this section must be read holistically: the figure reflects a system with mechanisms interact, compound, and reinforce one another.

Individual*Affective -motivational drivers*

In prolonged conflict, acute fear and a felt existential threat can make security-first narratives and the emotional relief of “re-gaining control” through force normalise ever-harsher measures. When lack of hope wanes and lives feel suspended, part of the population come to view extreme steps—including violence—as a way out (see Table 4).

Moral disengagement and dehumanisation

In conflict, even more in enduring and protracted conflicts, there is a debate on who are the “real victims”. In this competing victimhood scenario, empathy shrinks and support to hard measures increases, while if suffering is seen as shared, space for compromise with non-violent solutions increase. Furthermore the moral right to self-defence is linked to the alleged right to attack (see Table 5).

Denial of others’ suffering grows when the out-group is dehumanised and their accounts are dismissed as exaggeration or lies. Responsibility is shied with claims that “they brought it on themselves.” Moral stories cast the out-group as evil, so harsh measures seem not just allowed, but required. Furthermore, “both-sides” framing and selective forgetting blunt awareness of one’s own harms. To protect a positive self-image, communities reach for rationalisations, downplay harm, question intent, or look away. Empathy thins, and accountability feels less necessary.

Research and Development (AWRAD) and the Washington Institute for Near East Policy on Palestinian views of the US role in the war and, again, support to Hamas.

Table 4. *Studies supporting affective-motivational drives to hard-policies*

1. Emotions of threat, fear or rage (Cannetti-Nisim D, et Alt., 2009) and *existential threat* are associated with opposition to peaceful compromises.
2. Discourse around security and the right to be free from fear (Maoz, I. & McCauley, C., 2008). Authorities as granting collective security in front of the enemy as an ill-defined but omnipresent threat (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2015).
3. Feelings of power linked to military actions as a relief in front of fear, and helplessness. Different studies show that hope for victory predicts support for extreme war policies and violent intentions (Shani, M. et al., 2024; Kahalon et al., 2019).
4. Life project detained in time. Lack of hope and desire to end the situation by whatever means including the use of violence (Halperin, E. et al., 2011; Hasler, B. et al., 2023)..

Table 5. *Studies on moral disengagement and support to hard-policies*

1. Victim status. Hierarchies of Victimhood and who would be the true “victims”. In Israel/Palestine studies decades of research show that collective victimhood beliefs shape threat perception, empathy, and support for hardline policies; these effects are stronger when victimhood is framed as exclusive (our group *alone* is the victim) rather than inclusive (there are victims and suffering in both sides / the suffering of all victims deserves equal attention) (Bar-Tal, D, 2007, 2009; Vollhardt, J. R. 2009; Noor, M et al.-2012). Some studies suggest, by contrast, that while being remembered the Holocaust increases aggressive cognitions against Palestinians (Wohl, M.J.A et Alt, 2008), Holocaust survivors themselves and their offsprings tend to have guilty feelings rather than external aggression in front of atrocities (Nadler et Alt, 1985) when they do not feel threatened (Canetti, D. et Alt, 2018)
2. The moral right to “self-defence” linked to victim’s identity and status (Schori-Eyal, 2017).
 - Denial of the suffering of others. Including Dehumanisation [different mechanisms – use of language ; discrediting voices as exaggerated or false and others] (Maoz, I. et al. (2008))
 - Discrediting, denial and delegitimisation of victim’s voices. (Cohen, S. (2001))
 - Blaming the outer group victims for their victimhood. You brought it on yourself.
 - The other as the representation of *evil*. Self-protecting narratives to recall and confirm (self-fulfilling prophecies) all evil qualities in the other group. As you are fighting the evil (or the barbarians), your violence is not only morally correct, but morally required. (Bandura, A. 1999; Bar-Tal, D. 1990; Bar-Tal, D., & Teichman, Y. 2005)
 - The Two Evils discourse – Both sides have committed evil acts and it is balanced and wise to consider them as basically equivalent.
 - Selective amnesia for one’s group wrongdoings (Roccas et alt, 2004).
 - Self-preservation: the need to avoid individual and collective guilt through rationalisations that minimise in-group culpability, by downplaying harm, denying responsibility, or engaging in dissociation
3. Proximity to harm in a small society - “we all are victims”. A nationally representative telephone survey of Israeli adults (2006; n=500) found that 11.2% reported direct exposure to a threatening incident and 20.2% reported exposure of a family member or friend (Bleich et Alt, 2006). Among non-direct exposed persons, fear is predicted by negative self-labelling as victim, while decreases by self-labelling as survivor or fighter (Cohen-Louck et alt, 2025)
4. Self-serving bias in sources of information.
 - Selection of sources of information confirming ones’ worldviews, victimhood status and offenses, and nurturing a sense of outrage (Schori-Eyal, N., Halperin, E., & Bar-Tal, D., 2014, Brady et alt, 2021).
 - Avoiding uncomfortable information. A PRC Poll (2024) found that 72% of people favor removing war images of Palestinians from TV and media¹.
 - Desensitisation through affectless saturation of atrocity imagery. A longitudinal study with youth in Israel/PA found repeated media exposure to ethnic-political violence predicted an increase in violent responses through a desensitisation mechanism (Bruneau et Alt, 2017; Dvir-Gvirsman et Alt, 2014)

1 <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2024/08/26/many-israelis-say-social-media-content-about-the-israel-hamas-war-should-be-censored/>

Table 6. *Preliminary studies on Institutional and Community elements fostering genocide policies.*

1. Political discourses and versions of history in schools and educational institutions (Harbourn, 2024). As an example, Peled (2012) offers an extensive analysis of Israeli textbooks, arguing that they construct a strong biased collective identity that serves to justify occupation.
2. Prolonged military service, where young adults can be indoctrinated and reinforced in ideas linked to defence and war. For instance, Levy et al. (2008) found that military service melds the young soldiers' conceptions of citizenship, and is a powerful mechanism of legitimising a militarised and class-differentiated social order. Kimhi and Sagy (2008) also showed a routinisation of coercive roles in former soldiers assigned to roadblock duties. Furthermore, different studies show that exposure to combat hardens attitudes toward the Palestinians and reduces support for negotiation and compromise towards peace.. These attitudes translate into voting behaviour: combatants are likely to vote more for right-wing parties (Grossman G, 2015).
3. Settlements and other social / ideologically cohesive communal spaces (Bar-Tal, 1995; Perliger, A, 2015). Cohesive communities actively produce and enforce hard-line norms through day-to-day social processes, with shared values and rituals and progressive group polarisation and radicalisation linked to reduced out-group contact and proximity to conflict areas with heavy military presence¹.
4. Creation of an Ethos of Conflict as a general orientation for society and transmitted across generations (Sharvit, K. et al, 2007). The concept was coined by Bar-Tal (2013) in his seminal book to describe a socially shared belief system that (a) makes sense of chronic threat, (b) legitimises in-group goals and means, and (c) prescribes norms for “how we think/feel/act” toward others. A somehow similar concept is Perpetual Ingroup Victimhood Orientation (PIVO) as a stable belief system in which people chronically construe their ingroup as an enduring, uniquely targeted victim, across time and situations. It functions like a lens to read the context: and is linked to harsher conflict attitudes and lower support for reconciliation (Schori-Eyal, 2017). While Ethos of Conflict refers to an intergenerational societal narrative (macro level) that teaches you how to think, feel and do in a chronic conflict, PIVO has been formulated as an individual orientation cognitive globalised belief (micro level).

1 In Pedahzur, A., & Perliger, A. (2011). *Jewish terrorism in Israel*. Columbia University Press, the authors map **settler-linked extremist networks**, their ideology, socialisation sites, and tactical repertoires, defining them as “terrorist groups”, And updated document is International Crisis Group. (2024, September 6). *Stemming Israeli settler violence at its root* (Report No. 246).

People seek sources that confirm their views and avoid unsettling facts and raise tolerance for severe pro-genocide policies.

Moreover, in small, tightly connected societies, many people face direct or near-direct threats. A shared sense of “*we are all victims*” increases solidarity and resilience, but it can also narrow empathy across the divide and hardline measures then feel correct and protective.

Interpersonal/Group.

When times feel unsafe, shared identity elements—religion, traditions, music, history—bring people together. The use of emotionally charged and powerful identitarian concepts that reinforce collective identity and provide a sense of togetherness and security. (Zerubavel, Y, 1995). But at the same time, radical narratives of *glorification* linked to feelings of grandiosity, power and invulnerability, often linked to shared myths about being superior to others, chosen by God, entitled to sacred privileges and rights, promote extremist attitudes (see empirical studies by Selvanathan, 2020; Roccas, 2006).

Institutional/Community

Community institutions—schools and universities, the military and reserve units, settlements and other cohesive communities, religious organisations, local councils, and media—are everyday settings where identities are formed, where norms are reinforced, and lessons are passed across generations. Preliminary research show the links with genocide policies (see Table 6).

Media/Platforms

Media shape what people see and how they judge it. In polarised settings, audiences sort into partisan outlets. Selective exposure increases, with emotionally charged content. Although independent and public-service journalism helps to counter media bias and promote accountability, covert operations aimed at controlling the media disrupt this balance. They seek to exert influence without attribution or transparency. Tactics include planted stories, covert funding, editorial pressure, and advertorials masked as news (see Table 7).

Table 7. *Media determinantes of hard-line and pro-Genocide positions.*

1. Discredit of sources of information that report uncomfortable information. (e.g. smear Campaign against UNRWA, HRW or Amnesty International). These dynamics are fuelled by official discourse — for example, the 2016 “Transparency Law” targeting NGOs¹, which labels and stigmatizes them. Such measures seek to undermine public trust in critical information sources and in those who disseminate them.
2. Use of standardised, media-aligned euphemistic language that alternately employs threatening or sanitised militarised terms, as needed (e.g., civilian casualties labelled “terrorists”; “neutralised” rather than “killed”; “targets” instead of homes/buildings)². Research shows that language choices shape threat perception and legitimise harsher policies (Bar-Tal, D., 2007). Society gradually becomes habituated to manipulated realities and ad-hoc terminology, normalising and internalising such rhetoric.
3. Creating a parallel / post-facto world (i.e. health centres and hospitals are terrorist basis; doctors are portrayed as terrorist commanders; ambulances as combat transport, schools/UN facilities as weapons depots, residential blocks as “launch sites” or “terrorist infrastructure” and casualties in targeted bombing as “affiliates” (Dor, D., 2004).
4. Silencing of Journalistic and Human-Rights Oversight. The Committee to Protect Journalists (August 2025) summarizes 197 journalists and media workers confirmed killed: 189 Palestinians (in Gaza), 2 Israelis, and 6 Lebanese³. Similar figures are provided by Reporters without Borders⁴. As an example, in 2014, Israel’s public broadcaster refused to air B’Tselem’s radio spot reading the names of Gaza’s dead children; the High Court upheld the ban⁵.
5. Orchestrated Social-Media Mobilisation. Coordinated digital influence through apps, bots/AI, and mission-based campaigns that simulate consensus and suppress counter-narratives. This targeted campaigns spread deceptive information⁶ and create a simulated international consensus around Israeli positions supporting narratives of dehumanisation that minimise civilian harm
 - Think-tanks monitoring social media. For instance ACT-IL, a smartphone app self-defined as an on-line community that acts⁷ to “detect and fight” antisemitism⁸. Act-IL claims to have millions of user worldwide, although no independent empirical examination of its impact has yet been conducted.
 - Manipulation of voting preferences. An international consortium of journalist uncovered “Team Jorge”, a team of contractors based in Tel Aviv who claim to have manipulated more than 30 elections around the world using hacking, sabotage and automated disinformation⁹. According to this research, the company controls a vast army of thousands of fake social media profiles on X, LinkedIn, Facebook, Telegram, Gmail, Instagram and YouTube. The company has an official registration in the Israeli Ministry of Defense⁸.

1 Human Rights Watch. (2016, July 13). Israel: Law targets human rights groups (NGO “transparency” law). <https://www.hrw.org/>

2 Levy G, Levac A. To Understand What ‘To Neutralize’ Means, Look at This Broken Palestinian . Haaretz. Nov 13. 2015 ; The Guardian. (2024, June 24). *Israeli documents show expansive government effort to reframe debate via “Voices of Israel/Concert”*; The Intercept summary via Nieman Lab. (2024, April 16). *Leaked NYT Gaza memo tells journalists to avoid words “genocide,” “ethnic cleansing,” and “occupied territory”*.

3 <https://cpj.org/2023/10/journalist-casualties-in-the-israel-gaza-conflict>

4 <https://rsf.org/en/israel-gaza-war-list-journalists-killed-line-duty-palestine-israel-and-lebanon-gets-longer>

5 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jul/24/israel-bans-radio-advert-listing-names-children-killed-gaz>

6 Meta / Reuters. (2024, May 29). *Meta identifies networks pushing deceptive, likely AI-generated content* (network linked to Israeli firm STOIC). *Reuters*. <https://www.reuters.com/>; OpenAI / The Guardian. (2024, May 30). *OpenAI says Russian and Israeli groups used its tools to spread disinformation* (STO-IC). <https://www.theguardian.com/>

7 Users can download and install it and where users are given “missions” to comment on articles, send complaints, discredit pro-Palestinian positions etc.

8 <https://www.abbaeban.runi.ac.il/act-il>

9 Guardian, The. (2023, Feb. 15). *Revealed: The hacking and disinformation team meddling in elections (“Team Jorge”)*. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/feb/15/revealed-disinformation-team-jorge-claim-meddling-elections-tal-hanan>

Institutional/State

Lawfare refers to the strategic use — or misuse — of legal systems, institutions, and processes as instruments to achieve military, political, or strategic objectives, often by delegitimising opponents or constraining their actions under the guise of legality. It enables “hard” policies by declaring coercive practices lawful. When severe measures are framed as legal, public support rises; when framed as illegal, it falls. Dissent is criminalised. Law can also be instrumentalised to produce impunity and white-wash human rights violations, providing a sense of legality to the population more prone to pro-genocide attitudes (see Table 8).

Table 8. *Empirical evidences and studies on lawfare and the legitimisation of violence and pro-genocide positions.*

1. Ad-hoc laws legitimising military practices and violent behaviours. Studies show that what is “legal” is presumed legitimate, irrespective of how abhorrent or egregious might be. Different survey experiments (none with Israeli samples) consistently found that when harsh measures (torture, drone strikes, bombing) are presented as lawful or routine, popular support rises; when described as illegal, support falls (Wallace, 2013).
2. Criminalising dissent¹ (e.g. Anty Boycott Laws including deny of entry visas to foreigners who advocate BDS campaigns). (ACRI, 2017; Brin, 2012)
3. Instrumentalising law as related to impunity. Yesh Din reports that in 2017–2021 1,260 complaints were filed against Israeli soldiers; only 0.87% led to prosecution. The NGO concludes the military law-enforcement system largely “whitewashes” offenses, sustaining a trigger-happy use of lethal force². UN assessments and reports link impunity to more unlawful killings and sustained violent practices (OHCHR, 2025)
4. Legal construction of truth. I.e. legal tools like the Nakba Law³ that privilege some collective memories while silencing or marginalising others (Gutman, 2021; Kapshuk, 2021).

- 1 Chachko, E. (2017, March 9). The Israeli anti-BDS travel ban in (legal) context. *Lawfare*<https://www.lawfaremedia.org/article/israeli-anti-bds-travel-ban-legal-context>
- 2 https://www.yesh-din.org/en/law-enforcement-against-israeli-soldiers-suspected-of-harming-palestinians-and-their-property-summary-of-figures-for-2017-2021/?utm_source=chatgpt.com
- 3 The Law proposed from criminal penalties to financial sanctions to organisations that commemorate the Nakba, in what scholarly work has labelled as “forced forgetting”.

Table 9. *Studies linking Holocaust suffering and transgenerational trauma with present-day violence and genocide.*

1. According to some Israeli / Jewish scholars, Holocaust / Shoah immense sufferings have been used for decades as a political tool to deflect criticisms, justify hard-policies and gain legitimacy for political purposes (Finkelstein, N. G., 2003). The Shoah is not only remembered; it is instrumentalised as political capital to build identity, discipline dissent, and justify state force¹.
2. Weaponising of antisemitism². Expansive, politicised definitions of antisemitism are used to delegitimise criticism of Israeli state policies, having a chilling effect on debates (Gordon, 2024; Tatour, 2024; Gould, 2020). This observation does not contest the reality or gravity of antisemitism; it just addresses policy implementation and safeguards for legitimate speech.
3. Continual mourning and (unresolved?) collective trauma (Schori-Eyal, 2017) have also been linked to hard-policies. Vamik Volkan (2001, 2013, 2021), has produced on unresolved trauma and grief and in which way impedes Arab-Israeli dialogues. Experimental studies show that flagging collective victimhood functions in reinforcing a particular collective identity narrative that, in turn, facilitates, in the long term, more exclusionary attitudes (Shelef, N. et al., 2024).
4. Holocaust-Equivalence Framing. Identification of present aggressors (Arabs) with past aggressors (Nazi perpetrators)³. Different studies show how from the 1940s–1970s and again in later right-wing discourse, Arab enemies were framed as the Nazis’ successors or Nazi sympathizers bent on Jewish destruction (Steir-Livny, L. 2016; Turner, M., 2019)

- 1 According to his analysis there are 4 linked phenomena: (1) The state curates memory in schools/rituals, sacralising the Shoah and reinforcing a sense of permanent threat. Leaders mobilize “permanent threat” narratives (2) “Never Again” is framed particularly to policy legitimization and to justify security-maximalist policies (wars, occupation, settlements). Jewish suffering is privileged; universalist readings (“never again for anyone”) are marginalised. Furthermore, sacralisation of memory risks a blank-check effect—current injustices get obscured under the aura of past victimhood.
- 2 See a comprehensive/balanced review in: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Weaponisation_of_antisemitism
- 3 Netanyahu in a discourse to the Knesset (2023, Oct 21) said “Hamas is the new version of Nazism”. In a incendiary speech to the 37th World Zionist Congress accused the second world war Palestinian grand mufti of Jerusalem of having suggested the genocide of the Jews to Adolf Hitler.

Historical Trauma Narrative

Historical trauma – the legacy of the Holocaust.

This is a highly sensitive subject and we proceed with the utmost respect, mindful of diverse experiences and the deep historical and present roots of harm and trauma. Over the past three decades, some Holocaust scholars and researchers have examined how memories of the Shoah are mobilised for political capi-

tal to legitimise violence and exclusion (see Table 9). Antisemitism is discrimination, prejudice, hostility, or violence against Jews as Jews —and against Jewish institutions as such. It does not preclude legitimate criticism of governments or political actors, which becomes antisemitic only when it relies on anti-Jewish tropes, demonises Jews as a collective, or denies them rights as Jews. Critics also warn that expansive, politicised definitions of antisemitism are used to silence dissenting voices. Furthermore, social-psychological work links continual mourning and unresolved collective trauma to hardened conflict attitudes.

Table 10. *Selection of political incentives and constraints linked to hard violent policies.*

1. Israeli Political incentives and constraint. Among others, crises can mute corruption scandals, crowd out socioeconomic discontent or counteract falling approval of Government, especially in relation to the hostage crisis (Berrebi and Klor 2008; Getmansky and Zeitzoff, 2014). Coalition maintenance: dependence on religious and ultranationalist partners; Intra-right competition to appear tougher than rival. Including framing conflict in civilisational or biblical terms; protecting/advancing West Bank settler's projects; : institutional and economic incentives around the Israeli military and defence sector.
2. Palestinian political incentives. Among others, acting into factional rivalry: Hamas vs. Fatah/Palestinian Authority competition for legitimacy (e.g., prisoner releases, “resistance” credentials); Gaza as an excuse to military actions to deter or message Hezbollah/Iran and other Arab countries.
3. International and geopolitical incentives. Among others: US domestic internal cycles, economic and military interest in escalation of conflict, and the business of reconstruction; European Union inability to solve internal contradictions between collective guilt towards Jewish Genocide and horror towards Palestinian Genocide. Use of collective guilt of past perpetrators (Germany¹ and other European countries) to ensure their position as allied or at least bystanders (Marwecki, D., 2020).
4. Negotiation dynamics and rhetorical frames. Among others: Use of victimhood narratives and zero-sum rhetoric (any gain for the other side is a loss for one's own) reducing to a minimum the space for compromise. “Reconciliation” without policy: peace-sounding language without real political will, leading to frustration of expectations and periodically bursts into violence.

1 Angela Merkel in a speech to the Knesset (2008, March 18) defined Israel's security as part of Germany's Staatsräson (reason of state), translating Holocaust memory and German guilt into a standing commitment of political/military backing in any circumstance.

Strategic–Political Incentives and Constraints

Finally we include several contested, case-specific propositions as theory-informed hypotheses about political incentives, international constraints, and negotiation frames. They draw on well-established mechanisms in political science and conflict studies, but rely here on grey literature and contemporaneous Israeli/Palestinian sources. We therefore present them in Table 10 not as causal findings but as plausibility claims to be tested against rival explanations, and updated as systematic evidence accumulates.

Conclusions

The unique collection of papers in this Special Section is an impressive academic effort that provides data and reflections on the on-going situation and grounded support to the claims that genocidal acts are being committed by Israel against the Palestinians, a conclusions shared by most major human-rights and legal organisations and United Nations human rights mechanisms. Pending a final decision, ICJ provisional measures also frame a grave risk that trigger State obligations to prevent genocide, an obligation owed by all States.

The analysis of public opinion polls and studies, plus an analysis of the community, social and political situation and the social mechanisms that make genocide possible, portray an extremely dangerous situation. The convergent evidence shows an acutely dangerous environment in which the ongoing genocide—already among the worst human-made disasters of our time—risks further escalation.

We have seen, in a detailed and documented analysis, that a multi-level mechanism network—from individual affect to legal-policy legitimisation interacts and accumulates over time.

The banalisation of violence. The Gaza conflict has produced a profound process of moral disengagement within Israeli society²⁹. There is a banalisation of suffering, where psy-

29 In cities such as Sderot, bombardments have become a form of spectacle: people gather at viewing points and pay to watch

chological distance and dehumanisation turn collective trauma into spectacle³⁰. Violence and death ceases to be a tragedy and becomes a mediated event—digestible, sharable, and thus socially permissible.

From trauma to collective indifference. The trauma of October 7, 2023, has functioned as a catalyst for collective social and moral closure. Instead of fostering reflection, it has reinforced defensive nationalism grounded in fear and revenge. Survey data reveal a widespread endorsement of punitive attitudes, including collective punishment, forced transfer, starvation and denial of Palestinian civilian innocence. This psychological and sociological shift—from victimhood to moral assumption of perpetration—reflects Bandura's mechanisms of moral disengagement: diffusion of responsibility, moral justification, and displacement of ethical agency under the guise of survival, some very well known mechanism in contemporary genocides (including Balkans, Rwanda and the Nazi Holocaust).

Identity shifts and moral erosion. Public discourse in Israel has progressively moved toward the normalisation of extremist positions. Ideas that once belonged to the margins—such as ethnic cleansing or total annihilation of Gaza—now circulate in mainstream media and political speech. Scholars such as Daniel Bar-Tal and others reviewed in this editorial have been advising since the 1990's of this progressive tendency in Israeli society in which absolute victimhood and righteousness extinguish empathy. Rationalisation mechanisms—selective comparison, context denial, victim-blaming—sustain violence without inner moral conflict and a loss of basic ethical and human values. Collective trauma becomes not only a justification but a core identity component, turning aggression into a form of moral cohesion.

Responsibility and dissent within Israeli society. Despite this dominant ethos, small groups continue to resist and denounce the drift toward genocidal logic. Yet their public

visibility is marginal, and repression of dissent illustrates how the boundaries of legitimate discourse have narrowed. From a psychosocial standpoint, endorsing violence now operates as a ritual of belonging: to question it is to risk exclusion. Media polarisation and securitarian politics reinforce this closure, producing a cognitive environment where critical reflection equates to betrayal. The transformation of dissent into deviance reveals a profound reconfiguration of democratic culture.

Learning from history. Security is not achieved by revenge. On the contrary, revenge perpetuates the cycle of violence and endangers the Israeli society. Real security requires stopping dehumanisation. The idea that in a society, like the Palestinians, there are “no innocents” is not only obviously false but dangerous: It normalises mass crimes, isolates Israel and erodes key alliances. Famine and starvation, justifying lawfare and normalising the killing of journalist destroys democratic principles of a society. The trauma of October 7th is real, but pain does not grant a license to deny the rights of millions and break international law.

Jewish ethics offer another path. Within Israel's own moral and theological tradition lie resources to resist moral corrosion. The principle of *Pikuach Nefesh*—the duty to preserve human life above almost any other commandment—asserts that saving even one life outweighs national, religious, or political imperatives³¹. Likewise, *Tzelem Elohim*, the belief that every person is created in the image of God³², affirms the inherent dignity of all human beings, including those considered enemies³³. Reclaiming these ethical pillars would not weaken Israeli identity but deepen it, reconnecting collective security with moral responsibility. To remember that the protection of life is itself a sacred act is to challenge the normalisation of violence from within one's own moral framework, rather than through external condemnation.

The impossibility of understanding. The very nature of such processes makes it impossible for those living through them to fully comprehend them in the present. They lack the necessary cognitive and emotional distance to avoid an intense—and entirely understandable—rejection of the data and analyses presented in this editorial. The lenses of an identity

explosions. Le Monde. (2025, 23 de julio). “*The best show in town*”: From a hilltop in Israel, observers have a sinister view of Gaza bombings. Le Monde. https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2025/07/23/the-best-show-in-town-from-a-hilltop-in-israel-observers-have-a-sinister-view-of-gaza-bombings_6743627_4.html

- 30 In cities such as Sderot, bombardments have become a form of spectacle: people gather at viewing points and pay to watch explosions. Le Monde. (2025, 23 de julio). “*The best show in town*”: From a hilltop in Israel, observers have a sinister view of Gaza bombings. Le Monde. https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2025/07/23/the-best-show-in-town-from-a-hilltop-in-israel-observers-have-a-sinister-view-of-gaza-bombings_6743627_4.html

31 Glustrom, S. (n.d.). *Saving a life (Pikuach Nefesh)*. My Jewish Learning. Retrieved October 7, 2025, from <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/saving-a-life-pikuach-nefesh/>

32 Shultziner, D. (2006). A Jewish conception of human dignity: Philosophy and its ethical implications for Israeli Supreme Court decisions. *Journal of Religious Ethics*, 34(4), 663–683. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9795.2006.00289.x>

33 Dorff, E. N., & Crane, J. K. (Eds.). (2012). *The Oxford Handbook of Jewish Ethics and Morality*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press

built around violence color every perception and shape the entire interpretive framework. Only the passage of time —perhaps even one or two generations— will allow enough distance to question the dominant narrative and grasp the full extent of the harm inflicted. The new scenario that is opening up with the release of the hostages should mark a turning point and soften the sociological trends noted in this editorial. Only time will tell whether this is indeed the case and whether emotional, group, sociological and political de-escalation will prevail.

The role of the international community. Indifference or enthusiasm toward Gaza's destruction cannot be treated as an internal Israeli phenomenon. International actors, by accepting uncritical security narratives, indirectly normalise moral impunity. Global institutions should recognise public dehumanisation as a precursor to international crimes. And provide effective responses more than diplomatic statements.

The voices of conflict. In this analysis, two additional points deserve special attention : (1) The courage of the Palestinian organisations, some of them contributing to this issue, that even being criminalised and accused of being accomplices to terrorism, their workers targeted, their resources frozen and their professionals threatened, keep on documenting and helping having updated data. (2) The incalculable value of Israeli organisations that, in a near-impossible context from every angle, persist in raising their voices for human rights—even at the cost of a double exposure: to grief and to accountability. At a crossroads where they are viewed as both wounded and implicated, as part of the perpetrators for some, and as part of the victims for others, and asked, both for protection and for reckoning, and facing in daily seemingly unsolvable moral dilemmas, and still refuse to fall silent.

Ultimately, Israeli society stands before a critical threshold. Its capacity to uphold humanitarian principles amid collective trauma will determine whether it remains a democracy anchored in human rights or slides into a permanent state of exception. Understanding these dynamics is not only Israel's challenge but a global responsibility. To witness and remain silent is, itself, a form of complicity in the normalisation of an unfolding genocide.

In this issue

The core of this regular issue is a Special Section of papers drawn from a Call for Papers on torture in Israel and Israeli-occupied Palestine launched early this year, coordinated by a multinational team of eight Guest Editors: Jens Modvig (Denmark), Tania Herbert (Australia), Mahmud Sewail (Occupied Palestine), Malcolm Evans (UK), John Schiemann (US), Daniel Weishut (Israel) and Nora Sveaass (Norway). We publish this dossier to

advance our mission of leading rigorous, evidence-based debate on torture—even when the topic is politically charged and methodologically difficult—and in continuity with prior special sections on Rwanda, the Balkans, Guantánamo, and other contemporary conflicts where torture is a central issue.

Since the Call was launched, we undertook targeted outreach in Israel, proactively contacting human-rights organisations and inviting submissions from affected communities, including victims of the October 2023 attacks. On the Palestinian side, we also contacted Gaza and West Bank organisations, making available to those wishing to submit articles secure communication channels, style editing and translation support, and flexible deadlines. We also offered optional partnering with institutions (e.g., DIGNITY—Danish Institute Against Torture and SiRa-Spain). The aim is a rigorous, diverse record that foregrounds survivor testimony alongside clinical, legal, and human rights analyses.

The collection opens with the testimony of Hatem Abu Zaydeh, a health researcher who presents an autoethnographic account of his life and that of his family since October 7th, 2023.

Three papers cover the situation of Palestinian prisoners in a complementary way. Mahmud Sewail et al. (Palestinian Treatment and Rehabilitation Centre for Victims of Torture - Ramallah) present a post-detention study of 100 Palestinian detainees from the West Bank and Jerusalem; Maha Aon et al. (Palestinian Centre for Human Rights-Gaza) analyse a parallel post-detention sample of 100 prisoners from Gaza; and Layan Kateb and Rania Faqeh from Addameer Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association, document torture methods and their effects during detention through systematic lawyers' visits. Taken together, the studies converge on comparable techniques, intensity/frequency, as well as physical and psychological sequelae, enabling cross-contextual comparison and a cohesive picture of practices and harms across the occupied Palestinian territories. In addition, Grant Shubin contributes with a legal analysis of gendered power as an instrument of torture in Palestinian detainees, while Samah Jabr, Mental Health Coordinator of the Palestinian National Authority, reflects on torture as an apparatus of domination and the psycho-political logic underpinning its use against Palestinians.

The next two papers broaden the lens. The first revisits Walid Nimer Daqqa (1951–2024), the longest-serving Palestinian prisoner at the time of his death, and his essay "*Melting Consciousness: The Redefinition of Torture*" (available primarily in Arabic). Lera et al. provide a critical synopsis and commentary of the book— offered in English as supplementary material —arguing that Israeli prisons operate as a microcosm and

metaphor of Gaza, and distilling lessons for understanding practices under the ongoing occupation. Central to Daqqa's analysis is the panopticon, the all-seeing eye that produces perpetual visibility, anticipation, and self-discipline. Complementing this carceral reading, John Hawkins explores the architecture of controlled space and surveillance in Gaza—walls and checkpoints, aerial reconnaissance, biometric registries, and algorithmic targeting—arguing how these spatial technologies translate into, allegedly, psychological torture through hypervigilance, loss of agency, and the compression of time and space. Together, the two contributions extend the discussion from the microphysics of prison to the governance of territory, illuminating a continuous repertoire of coercive techniques.

The following contributions address child-focused dimensions of torture and related coercive practices. Drawing on field documentation by Defence for Children International – Palestine (DCIP), Kathryn Ravey presents empirical findings and a legal analysis of the deliberate use of hunger and starvation against children in Gaza. Joel B. (Al-Haq Center) examine evidence of Palestinian children used as human shields by Israeli forces, situating these practices within the prohibitions of international humanitarian and human-rights law and highlighting accountability gaps.

Addameer's legal unit contributes with a doctrinal brief on the architecture of apartheid and the progressive erosion of Palestinian rights, tracing how legal-administrative instruments enable detention and abuse. Dana Abu Qamar—a Palestinian lawyer who has faced reprisals for civic engagement—surveys how Western governments have sought to suppress solidarity movements and pressure journalists, activists, and human-rights defenders, framing these measures as punitive torture with significant psychosocial effects.

Complementing the Palestine-focused pieces, the Lebanese Centre for Human Rights reviews and provide their own data and legal analysis on attacks by the Israeli Army against medical personnel and health facilities in Lebanon as violations, among others, of the Geneva Conventions and International Humanitarian Law.

Two Israeli human-rights organisations—PCATI (Public Committee Against Torture in Israel) and Physicians for Human Rights-Israel—analyse the impact of a joint conference in Tel Aviv in November 2024 aimed at raising public awareness of the prohibition of torture and strengthening uptake of the Istanbul Protocol in clinical-forensic practice.

Finally, the issue also includes an extended summary of the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture Alice Jill Edwards' report on hostage-taking as torture, and a review by Nora Sveaass of Malcolm D. Evans' *Tackling Torture: Prevention in Practice*.

All the papers in the Special Section reflect the opinion of the authors and not necessarily the opinion of the Journal, publisher and Guest Editors.

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