
Palestinians & Jordanian citizenship

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The [ethnic origins](#) of those living in Jordan are many and contrasting. The current ruling royal family are “Hashemite” descendants of the Sharifs of Makkah and the Hijaz, while the vast majority of those living in Jordan are Arabs from various other backgrounds, some of which come from the Levant (Bilad Ash-Sham) and the Arabian Peninsula. In addition, there are the Circassians who are descendants of the Muslim refugees after the Russian invasion of the Caucasus in the 19th century, and a much smaller group of Chechens. The majority of Jordanians are Muslims although there are a minority of Christian and Druze Arabs. The Jordanian people are made up of Bedouin tribes, as well as local communities that settled in urban and rural areas. Many of the tribes have branches in Jordan and Palestine.

The land that is now called Jordan was part of the Ottoman Empire until its defeat in World War One. The British and French concocted the Sykes-Picot agreement of 1916 to carve up the empire even before it had been conquered. As a result, post-WWI and the creation of the League of Nations, in 1922 Britain was granted the “Mandate” over Palestine and effective stewardship over the new Emirate of Transjordan. The following year, Britain appointed Abdullah Bin Hussain as King of Transjordan, as his family had fought at the head of the British-instigated “Arab revolt” against the Ottoman Empire during WWI. Jordan’s official independence from Britain occurred in 1946. After Britain left Palestine and the Israeli state declared “independence” in 1948, the Emirate of Transjordan emerged from the ceasefire agreement in custody of the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

Jordan's sovereignty expanded to the West Bank after the first Arab-Israeli war

Palestinians in Jordan

The Palestinians make up part of Jordan’s original inhabitants, and after the establishment of Israel in 1948 and its ethnic cleansing of Palestine, some refugees also settled in Jordan. The kingdom has

the largest number of Palestinian refugees among the host countries; they are regarded as the majority population, at more than 6 million people. Jordan's sovereignty expanded to the West Bank after the first Arab-Israeli war. The [Jordanian army entered Palestine on 19 May 1948](#), declared martial law in the Palestinian territories that fell under its control and appointed Omar Matar as military governor of the area; he implemented the 1935 Defence Law.

The majority of these Palestinians had [Jordanian citizenship](#) when King Abdullah I annexed the West Bank to the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan based on decisions made in the Jericho Conference. This was later known as the "Unification of the Two Banks". Along with Jordanian citizenship, such Palestinians were also granted other citizenship rights, such as residence, work and the right to purchase land; construction and voting rights, parliamentary candidacy and participation in governance.

Some Arab countries objected to this annexation, fearing the loss of Palestinian national rights and the abolition of the Palestinian entity. Hence, a clause was added in the annexation document that it was based on the will of the Palestinians and that it did not detract from their national rights.

In 1955, the [Arab League issued a decision](#) that prohibited Arab countries from allowing dual citizenship with other Arab states; it also banned Palestinian refugees from having citizenship in Arab countries order to preserve their identity. As a result, Syria and Lebanon did not grant Palestinian refugees citizenship in order to head off claims that they had resettled and thus were no longer refugees. The Syrian and Lebanese authorities gave the Palestinian refugees travel documents instead of passports.

Was Jordanian citizenship forced on Palestinians?

Lawyer and citizenship affairs researcher [Dr Anees Qassem](#) believes that Jordanian citizenship was imposed on the Palestinian refugees who crossed to the East Bank during 1947 and 1948, in accordance with the amendment made to Jordan's nationality law, Law No.

In 1955, the Arab League issued a decision that prohibited Arab countries from allowing dual citizenship with other Arab states

56, issued in 1949. This [stipulated](#) that “all persons habitually residing in Tran-Jordan or in the western area that is currently being administrated by the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan who hold Palestinian citizenship shall acquire Jordanian citizenship and enjoy all citizen’s rights and responsibilities on the same footing as Jordanians.”

“Within the boundaries of my research,” said Qassem, “and after my review and research of the Palestinian Gazette issues published during the time that the nationality law amendment was made, there was no indication of any West Bank dignitaries or governors requesting the Jordanian government to grant the Palestinians Jordanian citizenship. I have not found anything that proves clearly that the Palestinians requested citizenship from King Abdullah I.”

The text of Law No. 56, Article 3 of the [nationality law](#), and the amendments made in 1954, which were published in Jordan’s Official Gazette in issue 1171, all prove the accuracy of Qassem’s words. Article 3 of the law stipulates that citizenship was conferred upon, “Any person who, not being Jewish, possessed Palestinian nationality before 15 May 1948 and was a regular resident in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan between 20 December 1949 and 16 February 1954.”

Regardless of the debate and disagreement of the politicians who attended the Jericho Conference and agreed on the “Unification of the Two Banks” which saw Jordan annexing the West Bank, the granting of full Jordanian citizenship to the Palestinian refugees in Jordan in 1950 has had [positive effects](#). Citizenship helped them to improve their economic and social standing, as Palestinian refugees were allowed to work, receive education and move freely around the country. They were also able to move to the wealthy Gulf countries or further afield to work and make cash transfers back to Jordan. This helped Palestinian refugees to improve their living standards and was an invaluable contribution to Jordan’s development. Since the founding of the kingdom, they have participated in building hundreds of thousands of trades and industries which have strengthened the local economy.

Citizenship helped [Palestinian refugees] to improve their economic and social standing, as Palestinian refugees were allowed to work, receive education and move freely around the country

However, developments in the politics of Palestine, Jordan and the region in general were tangibly negative for the situation of the Palestinians and their political role in the Hashemite Kingdom. Over the past four decades, during which the sense of Palestinian identity was restored; the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) was established and recognised as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinians; and the potential for a Palestinian entity in the West Bank and Gaza Strip grew, the Palestinians' political role and presence in Jordan declined. At times, this was due to the discriminatory policies that were adopted after "Black September" in 1970. It was also down to what might be called the "withdrawal tendency" of the Palestinian political elites in Jordan, and the spread of a culture of fear and intimidation arising from the "dangerous consequences" of the Palestinians' increased activity and representation in state institutions and Jordanian society, especially with regards to the future of resolving the Palestinian issue.

The situation in Jordan for the Palestinian refugees from the Gaza Strip differs from that of the other refugees

Palestinians from Gaza in Jordan

The [situation in Jordan for the Palestinian refugees from the Gaza Strip](#) differs from that of the other refugees. They are not afforded any basic necessities for life by the government in Amman, and their camps are still crowded and spread across the kingdom. They face a number of legal impediments that deprive them of their basic rights, to the extent that the wider society tends to look down on them at times.

Government statistics estimate that the number of Palestinian Gazans in Jordan is around 140,000, the majority of whom are not originally from Gaza. According to journalist and expert in Palestinian affairs Faraj Shalhoub, the majority of Gazans in Jordan were expelled (or their parents or grandparents were) from various Palestinian villages and cities in 1948. At first they were displaced to the Gaza Strip, which was under Egyptian control post-1948, and then they sought refuge in Jordan in after the Six-Day War of 1967. They were labelled as "Gazans" and have been living in Jordan as such ever since.

These refugees have temporary two-year passports, which do not give them any citizenship rights to state education, own property, equality at work or health insurance. The people from Gaza are not allowed to work in government sectors while the private sector prefers not to employ anyone without Jordanian citizenship.

Their suffering does not stop there, as the Gazans are basically prohibited from practicing their professions and joining Jordanian unions; doctors, engineers, lawyers and so on must be Jordanian citizens to practice in the country.

Breaking the link with the West Bank

In preparation for [breaking the link](#) with the West Bank, in 1983 the Jordanian government began to distinguish between residents of the West Bank and the Palestinians living in the kingdom. It gave the West Bank residents who visit Jordan a “green card”, while the Palestinians living in Jordan received a national identity number. Those who had a family reunification permit or the right to live in the West Bank received a “yellow card” and they use it when they travel between the West Bank and Jordan. The green card started to signify Palestinians living in the West Bank who do not have Jordanian national numbers and do not receive any privileges or rights received by Jordanian citizens or Palestinians living in Jordan.

At the beginning of July 1988, the [Jordanian government decided](#), on King Hussein’s instructions, to take a series of measures to sever Jordan’s legal, administrative and financial ties with the West Bank. This included cancelling Jordan’s plan to develop the West Bank and replacing the ministry of occupied territories’ affairs with the political department in the Jordanian foreign ministry; 21,000 employees in the West Bank lost their jobs, with the temporary exception of those in religious institutions, the ministry of religious endowments and religious courts. The measures included the removal of some Palestinian members of parliament, whose passports were regarded just as forms of identification (similar to the travel documents issued to the refugees by Egypt, Syria

In preparation for breaking the link with the West Bank, in 1983 the Jordanian government began to distinguish between residents of the West Bank and the Palestinians living in the kingdom

and Lebanon), while depriving them of the rights of Jordanian citizenship. They were also no longer allowed to live in Jordan, their Jordanian passports became valid for only two years, and they were only allowed to enter Jordan with an entry visa.

Revoking the Jordanian citizenship of Palestinians

Human Rights Watch warned that Jordan intended to revoke the citizenship of 200,000 Palestinians who returned from Kuwait after the second Gulf War. In its report published on 1 February 2010, the organisation noted that since 1988, and especially over the past few years, the Jordanian government intended to revoke the Jordanian citizenship of many of its residents, noting that over half of Jordan's population, 6.3 million people, are of Palestinian origin.

The organisation believed that the real reason for this measure was Jordan's desire to be able to rid itself of hundreds of thousands of Jordanian citizens with Palestinian origins, by deporting to the West Bank or Israel those whose citizenship was revoked. It could be part of a settlement for the Palestinian refugee crisis which was caused by the Israeli occupation in 1948 and 1967.

According to the information in the report, the Jordanian authorities revoked the citizenship of 2,700 Jordanian citizens of Palestinian origin between 2004 and 2008. It did so on an individual basis, which Human Rights Watch confirmed, and in an arbitrary manner, thus clearly violating the Jordanian citizenship law of 1954.

The organisation also noted that the withdrawal of nationality "dramatically complicates the lives of those affected: children lose access to free primary and secondary education, and university education may be out of reach due to vastly higher costs for non-nationals."

The report also states that to live in Jordan, Palestinian non-nationals require a residency permit subject to the approval of the General Intelligence Department (GID).

Three groups of Jordanians

The [Human Rights Watch report](#) says that this system has “created three tiers of citizenship rights, differentiating original East Bank Jordanians and the two groups of West Bank-origin Jordanian nationals (whom Jordanian law still formally considered its nationals and citizens with equal rights). Jordanians residing in the West Bank sometimes lost their right to live in the East Bank. Today, possession of a green or yellow card can serve as the official basis for withdrawing nationality.”

The report also notes that the withdrawal of Jordanian citizenship, according to Jordanian officials, dates back to the decision to sever ties with the West Bank and the Arab League resolutions to prohibit individuals from possessing dual Arab citizenship. However, Jordan forces its citizens of Palestinian origin to keep their theoretical Palestinian citizenship, without actually being able to benefit from it.

“Jordanian officials claim that Jordanians of Palestinian origin must renew their residency permit for the West Bank as issued by the Israeli military’s Civil Administration in order to maintain their Jordanian nationality,” explains HRW. “This Israeli permit grants the right to reside in the West Bank, and, therefore (for those permit-holders residing elsewhere), the right to return to the West Bank should a Palestinian state come into being. Some Jordanians have been unable to renew this permit, and on this basis had their Jordanian nationality withdrawn. Others had never obtained that permit, having lived in Jordan all their lives, or have an open-ended residency permit from the Israelis that does not require renewal, but nevertheless had their nationality withdrawn.”

There is no doubt that the revocation of citizenship is a systematic and deliberate measure

There is no doubt that the revocation of citizenship is a systematic and deliberate measure. According to leaks published by Jordan’s *Al-Arab Al-Yawm* newspaper, which were confirmed by a parliamentary source the next day even though the Jordanian government spokesperson denied this, the [new instructions](#) sent from the ministry of the interior to parliament for approval have decided to revoke the citizenship of the following 13 cases, at the very least:

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- Jordanian citizens with valid Israeli permits.
 - Those with a Palestinian travel document.
 - Those working for the Palestinian Authority (PA).
 - Those who exited via Israeli airports, in agreement with the occupation authorities, and without receiving any documents.
 - Those without a Palestinian travel document or those who left the West Bank or Jerusalem for a foreign country who do not have a Palestinian travel document.
 - Those with a valid or expired Israeli travel document.
 - Those with an Israeli identification card.
 - Those with a green card.
 - Those who were required to serve in the Jordanian army and did not.

These are some of the 30 cases in total that were revealed and they cover two-thirds of the Jordanians of Palestinian origin; around 2 million citizens. This could even expand to include 90 per cent of Palestinians. It is a very dangerous matter that may open the door to the division of Jordanian society and create a serious and deep crisis.

It is important to note here that the Palestinians are the main partners in building the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and that citizenship is a natural right for them and their children, not a right that is earned or granted to them. It is not a favour from anyone.

The tragedy is the fact that the authority to revoke citizenships has been given up by the parliament in Amman to the interior ministry's inspection department (which became the civil status and passport department by a parliamentary decree). This department determines the conditions that, in its opinion, justify the revocation of citizenship from any Jordanian of Palestinian origin. The judicial door has been closed to any complaint filed by Jordanian citizens of Palestinian origin against the decision to revoke their citizenship under the pretext that this matter is associated with sovereign matters and therefore the judiciary cannot deal with it.

It is worth noting that this pretext of “[sovereignty](#)” is only limited

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to any complaint filed by a Jordanian of Palestinian origin against the administration which decided to revoke his citizenship. This can be shown by citing another example: a citizen of Syrian origin filed a complaint against the Jordanian government claiming that he met all of the requirements in Article 4 of the Citizenship Law to gain Jordanian citizenship but the administration rejected his application. The Supreme Court said in its judgement issued on 24 November 2009 that in accordance with Article 4, the parliamentary authority is an authority bound by the conditions of this article, and since the government failed to prove that he did not meet all of the requirements and conditions for the granting of Jordanian citizenship, the revocation is invalid.

“Sovereignty” was not referred to in this decision; rather the Court stressed that the parliament was bound by the law, thus detracting from the argument that citizenship is associated with sovereignty.

Revocation of citizenship violates national and international law

Former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court Farouq Al-Kilani said that, “The revocation of national citizenship violates the fifth amendment of the Jordanian Constitution which stipulates that citizenship can only be revoked in accordance with a decision from the parliament, and not by the staff of the Inspections Department or Civil Status Affairs.”

Article 18 of the Jordanian Citizenship law of 1954 determined the cases where individuals may lose their citizenship:

1. Any person who enters the military service of a foreign state without the prior permission or leave of the Jordanian Council of Ministers and refuses to leave the same when so directed by the Government of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan shall lose his nationality.
2. The Council of Ministers may, with the approval of His Majesty, declare that a Jordanian has lost Jordanian nationality if:
 - a. He enters the civil service of a foreign state and refuses to leave the same when so directed by the

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- Government of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan;
- b. He enters the service of an enemy state;
 - c. He commits or attempts to commit an act deemed to endanger the peace and security of the state.

In addition to this, Article 15 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that everyone has the right to a nationality and that no one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his nationality nor denied the right to change his nationality. Article 21 of the Arab Charter on Human Rights, signed by Jordan, stipulates the same thing.

Former Interior Minister Nayef Al-Qadi denied that laws are violated when citizenship is revoked, saying that what is happening is the correction or improvement of our Palestinian brethren's situation in Jordan and is occurring in order to establish the Palestinians in their territories.

The National Centre for Human Rights explains that the revocation of identification documents is then followed by limiting people's freedom of movement and depriving them of regular work and earning a living. This is in addition to the challenges faced by the children of these individuals when trying to exercise their right to education and healthcare. This is a complete destruction of their lives.

Between the accusations of the existence of secret instructions and a moodiness about decisions to revoke citizenship, and the government's denial of this, the lives of thousands of [Jordanians without citizenship](#) remain in danger and unstable.

Interior ministry replaces citizenship revocation with failure to renew passports

The civil status and passport department [recently refused to renew the passports](#) of several citizens under the pretext that the father of the passport holder was born in Palestine. Umm Rami is a Jordanian citizen with a Jordanian passport. She was surprised when the said department refused to renew her passport, arguing that her status has changed based on the instruction to "break the

link”. The branch of the same department in Irbid also refused to renew the passport of 45 year old Manal under the same pretext. She was asked to contact the Governor of Irbid.

Such measures are occurring despite the fact that former Minister of Interior Saad Hayel Srouf said in a press statement that the ministry had decided to freeze the decision to revoke citizenship for the time being. However, according to many families, the interior ministry has simply replaced the revocation of citizenship and national numbers with failing to renew passports. This has happened to many Palestinians.

The civil status and passport department recently refused to renew the passports of several citizens under the pretext that the father of the passport holder was born in Palestine

Examples of revoked citizenship

The list of those whose citizenship has been revoked by Jordan is very long, but here are a few examples:

- Specialist neck and throat tumour surgeon [Dr Ahmed Al-Jazzar](#) had his national number revoked in accordance with instructions that remain secret. Despite the fact that he refused to talk about the matter, senior surgeons in Jordan tried to intervene on his behalf in order for him to be able to renew his Amman clinic’s licence. They hoped that he would help them to perform rare surgery that generates a large income for those in the field.
- [Jamal Arabi Nakhla](#)’s citizenship was revoked even though he never had any of the crossing cards. This was done under the pretext of his past residence in Algeria as a teacher. He was given a temporary passport instead, on which he was labelled as a resident of Jerusalem even though he has never visited the city. He was also labelled as a green card holder, but this has never been the case.
- A Palestinian woman whose Jordanian citizenship was revoked tried to commit suicide at the civil status and passport department. In an open letter to King Abdullah II, the woman, of Palestinian origin, complained that she fell victim of the “break the link” instructions. She gave a detailed explanation of her experience with the minister of the interior

and security in Jordan.

[Rula Ismail Attiyeh](#) addressed the monarch thus: “I have been unable to return to my husband and ill child in Syria for 92 days. After the suffering, pressure and provocation that I have been and continue to be subjected to on a daily basis, I attempted to commit suicide from atop the civil status and passport department building, but my aunt and cousin prevented me from doing so.”

She did not elaborate on the nature of the harassment mentioned in her letter, but her relatives said that she was subject to provocation that was inappropriate and violated the traditions and values of Jordanian society whenever she went to follow up on her case at various official institutions.

Attiyeh briefly told King Abdullah her story and stressed that she, her mother and her siblings all carry Jordanian citizenship and all the official documents, including a passport, family book and an identification card issued by the civil status and passport department. She said that she lives in Syria with her husband and only child, who is three years old, and that she does not possess any border crossing cards that are invalid or expired. She went back and forth to the Jordanian Embassy in Damascus for three months in order to renew her passport, but the officials refused to do so and asked her to travel to Amman to submit a renewal form there.

She also wrote that she arrived in Amman on 29 November 2012 and, since then, she had not been able to renew her passport. She was surprised by the General Intelligence Agency’s response, which was sent to the legal department in the civil status and passport department ordering that she be granted a temporary passport (meaning her citizenship had been revoked).

- [Bassam Badarin](#), head of *Al-Quds Al-Arabi* newspaper office, talked about his personal experience when he applied for travel documents for his children. The official at the civil status and passport department said that he would spare him and not send him to the interior ministry’s inspection department (specialising in the revocation of citizenship). When he asked the employee why, he allegedly said, “Your wife was born

in Kuwait and this is a clear reason for me to doubt your citizenship or the citizenship of your wife and children, which would require me to seek the opinion of the inspection department.”

This means that a spouse's birth in Kuwait is one more reason to add to the secret reasons for revoking citizenship, especially from the ordinary citizens who do not know what is going on and do not know how to deal with it.

Conclusion

The aforementioned information clarifies the danger of the revocation of Jordanian citizenship held by Palestinians, a matter which requires immediate and documented clarification by the government. It is irrational for a person to go to sleep as a Jordanian and wake up the next day to find that they no longer hold such nationality. The ministry of the interior is urged to organise its affairs, especially regarding the new application of the “break the link” instructions which have been amended recently. The ministry is also urged not to revoke the citizenship of tens of thousands of Jordanians under the pretext of not understanding the amended clauses. There is also a need to completely examine the soundness of the measures and decisions being made and the exposure of the documented secret instructions based on which decisions to revoke citizenship are being made. We cannot accept the manipulation of the citizenship of Jordanians and their constitutional rights.

It is worth noting that the Palestinians are insisting on returning to their country and they will not accept an alternative to their land. They have and continue to reject resettlement or an alternative country, but until they are able to return to their land, when it is liberated, they must be treated humanely and their rights must be respected.

In addition, we must also highlight the issue of unequal treatment and the feelings of resentment and invasion felt between Palestinian and Jordanian identities, despite the fact that Jordanians and Palestinians belong to the same nation and have

similar traditions and customs.

The strategic mistake made by the Jordanian government is that it continues to fuel the feelings of its citizens to feel that they are either Palestinians or eastern Jordanians, and this feeds into the Jordanian nationals' sense of locational identity on both their Jordanian and Palestinian sides. This ultimately leads to the prominence of a number of local and regional identities at the expense of the general, unified national identity. Working to inflame regional and tribal feelings within a nation contradicts the characteristics of a modern state and may one day lead to a social political divide that will threaten the stability and unity of Jordan.

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