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The Impact of the Israeli–Palestinian Conflict on Civilian Safety in Israel and Palestine

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Abstract

The Israeli–Palestinian conflict remains one of the most enduring armed conflicts in contemporary international politics, with profound consequences for civilian populations. While existing studies have extensively examined its political, legal, and strategic dimensions, comparatively less attention has been paid to the broader implications for civilian safety from a human security perspective. This study examined the impact of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict on civilian safety between 2020 and 2024 using Human Security Theory as its analytical framework. Employing a qualitative research design, the study relied on documentary evidence drawn from peer-reviewed literature, reports of international organisations, humanitarian agencies, and relevant policy documents. Data were analysed through thematic content analysis. The findings reveal that the conflict has undermined civilian safety through three interconnected pathways: extensive civilian casualties, the widespread destruction of critical civilian infrastructure, and large-scale forced displacement that has intensified food insecurity, disrupted healthcare and education, and heightened psychological distress. The study further demonstrates that these consequences are mutually reinforcing, producing a multidimensional crisis that extends beyond direct exposure to armed violence. By situating these findings within the framework of Human Security Theory, the study argues that civilian protection should be understood not merely as the absence of physical violence but as the preservation of the social, institutional, and material conditions necessary for human dignity and well-being. The article concludes that sustainable peace requires integrating civilian protection and human security considerations into humanitarian responses, conflict management, and long-term peacebuilding efforts.

Keywords: *Israeli–Palestinian conflict; civilian safety; human security; armed conflict; humanitarian crisis.*

Introduction

Armed conflicts impose profound costs on societies, but their most enduring consequences are often borne by civilians. Contemporary warfare has increasingly blurred the distinction between combatants and non-combatants, exposing civilian populations to direct violence, forced displacement, destruction of essential infrastructure, and prolonged humanitarian crises. As a result, the protection of civilians has become a central concern within international humanitarian law, peace and conflict studies, and international security scholarship (Kaldor, 2013; United Nations, 2015). Rather than remaining incidental victims

of war, civilians have increasingly become the principal targets and casualties of protracted armed conflicts, making civilian safety an indispensable indicator of both the intensity and the humanitarian consequences of contemporary violence.

Few conflicts illustrate these realities more vividly than the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. Spanning more than a century, the conflict has evolved from competing nationalist aspirations into one of the world's longest-running and most politically contentious disputes. While its origins are commonly traced to the late Ottoman and British Mandate periods, successive wars, military occupation, territorial disputes, competing sovereignty claims, and repeated failures of diplomatic negotiations have entrenched a cycle of violence that continues to shape political and social life across Israel and the Palestinian territories (Khalidi, 2020; Morris, 2001; Pappé, 2006). Despite numerous international peace initiatives, including the Oslo peace process, the fundamental issues surrounding borders, settlements, refugees, Jerusalem, and mutual recognition remain unresolved, sustaining conditions in which civilian populations continue to experience persistent insecurity.

The humanitarian consequences of this protracted conflict have become increasingly severe over the past decade. Military confrontations, rocket attacks, aerial bombardments, restrictions on movement, destruction of civilian infrastructure, and recurrent displacement have collectively undermined the physical security of communities on both sides of the conflict. Although Palestinians particularly those living in the Gaza Strip and the occupied West Bank have borne a disproportionate share of civilian casualties and humanitarian suffering, Israeli civilians have likewise remained vulnerable to indiscriminate rocket attacks, armed incursions, and other forms of politically motivated violence (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs [OCHA], 2024; International Committee of the Red Cross [ICRC], 2024). Consequently, civilian safety has emerged not merely as a humanitarian concern but as a critical measure of the broader societal consequences of the conflict.

The period between 2020 and 2024 represents a particularly consequential phase in the evolution of the conflict. Regional political realignments following the Abraham Accords, the socio-economic disruptions associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, renewed violence in East Jerusalem in 2021, and the unprecedented escalation following the attacks of 7 October 2023 and the ensuing war in Gaza significantly altered the security environment for civilians throughout the region. These developments produced large-scale civilian casualties, widespread displacement, severe damage to healthcare facilities and public infrastructure, and unprecedented humanitarian needs, further demonstrating the vulnerability of civilian populations during prolonged armed conflict.

Despite the extensive body of scholarship on the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, academic attention has remained largely concentrated on its geopolitical, diplomatic, legal, and military dimensions. Studies have examined questions of territorial sovereignty, peace negotiations, regional politics, international humanitarian law, and the strategic behaviour of state and non-state actors (Khalidi, 2020; Akgül-Açıkmeşe & Özel, 2024; Nabiebu et al., 2024). While these contributions have substantially enriched understanding of the conflict's political dynamics, comparatively less attention has been devoted to civilian safety as the primary analytical focus. Existing research frequently documents casualties, displacement, and

humanitarian crises as consequences of military operations but seldom integrates these experiences into a comprehensive assessment of how prolonged conflict systematically reshapes civilian security across both Israeli and Palestinian societies.

This article addresses that gap by examining the impact of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict on civilian safety in Israel and Palestine. Moving beyond conventional state-centred analyses, it evaluates how sustained armed violence has affected the protection of civilian life through casualties, displacement, destruction of civilian infrastructure, restrictions on access to essential services, and the broader humanitarian conditions experienced by affected populations. By placing civilian safety at the centre of analysis, the article contributes to ongoing debates on civilian protection in protracted armed conflicts while offering a more nuanced understanding of the human consequences of one of the world's most enduring geopolitical disputes.

Literature Review

Civilian Safety and Conflict-Related Casualties

Civilian safety has emerged as one of the most significant humanitarian concerns in contemporary armed conflicts, particularly in situations characterized by prolonged violence and asymmetric warfare. Within the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, the protection of civilians has remained persistently challenged by recurring military confrontations, occupation, restrictions on movement, and the destruction of civilian infrastructure. Consequently, the conflict has increasingly been conceptualized not merely as a geopolitical dispute over territory and sovereignty but also as a profound crisis of civilian protection in which non-combatants bear a disproportionate share of the human cost (Ayoub, Chemaitelly, & Abu-Raddad, 2024). The literature consistently demonstrates that civilian populations experience the conflict through repeated exposure to death, injury, displacement, and the erosion of essential social services, making civilian safety a central indicator of the conflict's humanitarian consequences (Doocy, Lyles, Tappis, & Norton, 2023).

A dominant strand of scholarship argues that civilian casualties in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict cannot be understood solely as unintended consequences of military operations. Rather, the changing character of contemporary warfare particularly within densely populated urban environments has significantly blurred the traditional distinction between combatants and civilians. Human rights organizations, including B'Tselem, together with humanitarian agencies such as the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA), have documented persistent violations of international humanitarian law arising from indiscriminate attacks, military incursions, and the destruction of residential neighbourhoods, hospitals, schools, and other civilian facilities (Ayoub, Chemaitelly, & Abu-Raddad, 2024). The concentration of military activities within heavily populated areas, particularly in the Gaza Strip, has further heightened civilian vulnerability, exposing non-combatants to risks that extend well beyond immediate battlefield engagements.

Recent scholarship examining developments between 2020 and 2024 similarly suggests that, despite official commitments by both Israeli and Palestinian authorities to minimise civilian casualties, the humanitarian realities on the ground remain deeply concerning. Gordon and

Weizman contend that the conventional distinction between civilians and combatants has become increasingly difficult to sustain in asymmetric conflicts, where military operations frequently occur within civilian communities (Ayoub, Chemaitelly, & Abu-Raddad, 2024). Within this context, Israeli military operations, often justified on security and counterterrorism grounds, have been associated with substantial civilian casualties, while Palestinian armed groups, particularly Hamas, have faced sustained criticism for locating military infrastructure within or adjacent to civilian populations, thereby exposing civilians to heightened risks and raising complex questions regarding compliance with the principles of distinction and proportionality under international humanitarian law.

Beyond physical harm, an expanding body of literature highlights the enduring psychological and social consequences of prolonged armed violence on civilian populations. Recurrent exposure to bombardment, forced displacement, bereavement, and chronic insecurity has generated widespread psychological distress, particularly among children and other vulnerable groups (Asano, 2023). Empirical evidence reported by humanitarian organisations, including Save the Children, indicates increasing incidences of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, depression, and other trauma-related disorders among children living in Gaza and the West Bank. These findings suggest that the humanitarian consequences of the conflict extend beyond immediate casualties to encompass long-term disruptions in psychological well-being, family structures, educational attainment, and community resilience (Asano, 2023).

The empirical evidence on conflict-related casualties further reinforces these concerns. According to reports produced by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), civilian deaths and injuries remained persistently high throughout the period between 2020 and 2024, with the Gaza Strip accounting for the overwhelming majority of casualties resulting from repeated military operations (Asano, 2023). During the escalation of violence in May 2021, for example, more than 200 Palestinians, including over 60 children, lost their lives within a few weeks, while extensive destruction of residential areas and civilian infrastructure compounded the humanitarian crisis, as documented by the Al Mezan Center for Human Rights (Asano, 2023). Although the number of Israeli civilian casualties was comparatively lower, rocket attacks launched from Gaza continued to inflict fatalities, injuries, property destruction, and widespread psychological distress among communities located within the range of militant attacks.

Scholars have also examined the effectiveness of measures intended to reduce civilian harm. Technological innovations, particularly Israel's Iron Dome missile defence system, have significantly reduced civilian fatalities resulting from rocket attacks directed at Israeli population centres. Nevertheless, the broader literature argues that technological protection mechanisms cannot substitute for political solutions to the conflict. Pappé and Khalidi contend that the continued prioritisation of military responses over meaningful diplomatic engagement has contributed to the persistence of cyclical violence, thereby perpetuating conditions under which civilians remain the principal victims of armed confrontation (Asano, 2023). This perspective suggests that while defensive technologies may mitigate immediate threats in particular contexts, they do little to address the structural drivers of civilian insecurity.

Another recurring theme within the literature concerns conflict-induced displacement. Armed confrontations have repeatedly forced civilians to abandon their homes, disrupting livelihoods, weakening community networks, and intensifying humanitarian vulnerabilities. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimated that more than 50,000 people were displaced during the May 2021 escalation alone, with women and children constituting a substantial proportion of those affected (Asano, 2023). The literature consistently associates displacement with deteriorating access to shelter, healthcare, education, food security, and employment opportunities, while simultaneously highlighting its longer-term implications for social cohesion and post-conflict recovery. These findings collectively demonstrate that civilian safety extends beyond protection from direct physical violence to encompass the broader conditions necessary for sustaining human dignity and social stability during periods of protracted armed conflict.

Although existing scholarship has substantially advanced understanding of civilian casualties, humanitarian suffering, and displacement in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, the literature remains fragmented. Much of the empirical work examines these dimensions independently, often concentrating on either casualty statistics, legal compliance, psychological trauma, or humanitarian assistance. Comparatively limited attention has been devoted to integrating these interconnected dimensions into a comprehensive assessment of civilian safety as a multidimensional outcome of protracted conflict. It is this gap that the present study seeks to address by examining civilian safety holistically, incorporating physical security, conflict-related casualties, displacement, and associated humanitarian conditions within a single analytical framework.

International Legal and Institutional Responses to Civilian Protection

The protection of civilians has increasingly become a central concern within scholarship examining the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, particularly through the lens of international law and multilateral institutions. Rather than questioning the existence of legal norms governing armed conflict, recent studies have focused on whether existing international legal frameworks possess sufficient institutional capacity to ensure compliance and protect civilian populations during protracted conflicts. Although international humanitarian law establishes clear principles regarding distinction, proportionality, and the protection of non-combatants, the literature consistently suggests that the implementation of these norms remains constrained by political realities and weak enforcement mechanisms.

Within this context, Putra, Persadha, and Suhardi (2024) evaluate the contribution of United Nations Security Council Resolution 2334 to civilian protection by examining its implications for human security in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. Drawing upon the human security framework, the authors argue that the Resolution reflects internationally accepted principles aimed at safeguarding civilians through compliance with international humanitarian law, cessation of settlement expansion, and protection of basic human rights. However, their analysis demonstrates a significant disparity between the normative aspirations of the Resolution and its practical implementation. Persistent non-compliance, particularly by Israel, coupled with the absence of effective enforcement mechanisms, has substantially limited the Resolution's capacity to improve civilian safety. Consequently, the

study concludes that international legal instruments, irrespective of their normative strength, remain ineffective where political commitment and institutional enforcement are lacking.

A similar conclusion emerges from the legal analysis presented by Pons Rafols (2024), who situates the recent war in Gaza within the broader historical trajectory of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. Examining questions surrounding self-defence, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and the application of international humanitarian law, Rafols argues that existing legal principles provide an adequate normative framework for regulating armed conflict and protecting civilians. Nevertheless, the study contends that the fragmented response of the international community particularly the inability of the United Nations Security Council to adopt decisive measures has undermined the practical effectiveness of these legal protections. While acknowledging the efforts of the United Nations General Assembly to address the humanitarian crisis, Rafols maintains that the absence of coordinated international action has allowed civilian suffering to persist despite well-established legal obligations.

Extending this debate, Liu (2024) critically examines the doctrine of non-combatant immunity, one of the foundational principles of just war theory and contemporary international humanitarian law. Liu argues that although the doctrine remains central to international legal discourse, its practical effectiveness has steadily diminished in modern asymmetric warfare. Using the Israeli–Palestinian conflict as a case study, the study demonstrates that civilians continue to experience extensive harm despite the existence of comprehensive legal protections. The increasing invocation of self-defence by both state and non-state actors, according to Liu (2024), has often overshadowed the primary obligation to safeguard civilian populations, thereby exposing fundamental weaknesses in the existing legal architecture. Consequently, the study advocates renewed international efforts to strengthen both the legal interpretation and practical enforcement of civilian protection norms.

Collectively, these studies demonstrate broad scholarly consensus that international legal instruments possess considerable normative value but comparatively limited practical effectiveness in protecting civilians during protracted armed conflicts. While Putra et al. (2024) emphasize institutional weaknesses in implementing Security Council resolutions, Pons Rafols (2024) highlights the political limitations confronting international organizations, and Liu (2024) questions the practical relevance of existing legal doctrines governing civilian protection. Together, these studies suggest that the principal challenge lies not in the absence of legal standards but in the persistent gap between international legal commitments and their implementation in active conflict settings. However, despite their valuable legal insights, these studies devote comparatively limited attention to examining how these institutional shortcomings translate into the everyday realities of civilian safety, particularly regarding casualties, displacement, and humanitarian vulnerability. It is this empirical dimension that the present study seeks to explore.

State Violence, Civilian Responses and the Dynamics of Civilian Safety

Beyond legal and institutional perspectives, another important strand of scholarship examines how military strategies, state coercion, and punitive policies influence civilian behaviour and

shape the broader dynamics of civilian safety during the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. Rather than treating civilians as passive victims, these studies explore how exposure to violence affects public attitudes, state legitimacy, and patterns of conflict escalation, thereby providing a more nuanced understanding of civilian experiences within protracted armed conflicts.

Loewenthal, Miaari, and Abrahams (2023) investigate whether Israeli security policies, particularly the blockade of Gaza and military operations targeting Hamas, successfully reduce civilian support for militant organisations. Employing a difference-in-differences approach that combines public opinion surveys, labour force data, and fatality records, the authors find little evidence that collective punishment produces its intended political outcomes. Although increases in Palestinian fatalities are associated with temporary increases in support for militant groups, these effects diminish over time, while the Gaza blockade demonstrates only limited and short-lived influence on civilian political attitudes. Their findings therefore challenge conventional deterrence theory by suggesting that punitive military strategies neither substantially weaken nor sustainably strengthen civilian support for militant organisations. Nevertheless, the authors acknowledge that the relatively short observation period limits understanding of longer-term changes in public opinion.

Noah (2023) approaches civilian safety from a different perspective by introducing the concept of *conflict penalty* to explain how states employ punishment as an instrument of conflict management. Focusing on Israel's incarceration of Palestinians accused of security offences, the study argues that penal institutions serve not only security objectives but also broader political functions aimed at delegitimising perceived adversaries. Drawing upon punishment theory, Noah demonstrates that conflict environments fundamentally reshape the exercise of state penal power, producing tensions between immediate security imperatives and longer-term considerations of justice, legitimacy, and human rights. Although the study substantially broadens theoretical understanding of punishment in conflict settings, its reliance on a single case limits the generalisability of its conclusions beyond the Israeli–Palestinian context.

These studies broaden understanding of civilian safety by demonstrating that the consequences of armed conflict extend beyond physical casualties to encompass political behaviour, state legitimacy, and institutional practices. Loewenthal et al. (2023) reveal the limited effectiveness of coercive security policies in altering civilian attitudes, whereas Noah (2023) illustrates how punitive state practices may simultaneously pursue security objectives while generating broader normative and humanitarian concerns. Despite these important contributions, neither study directly evaluates civilian safety as a multidimensional outcome incorporating physical security, humanitarian vulnerability, displacement, and civilian well-being. Consequently, important gaps remain in understanding how diverse forms of violence collectively shape the overall security experiences of civilian populations throughout the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. Addressing this gap provides the central focus of the present study.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in Human Security Theory, which provides a people-centred framework for understanding the consequences of armed conflict. Unlike traditional security

paradigms that privilege the protection of states and territorial sovereignty, Human Security Theory shifts the referent object of security from the state to the individual, emphasizing the protection of people from pervasive threats to their survival, dignity, and well-being (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 1994). Emerging in the post-Cold War era, the theory challenged the dominant assumption that national security necessarily translates into human security, arguing instead that individuals may remain profoundly insecure even where states successfully defend their territorial integrity.

The Human Development Report published by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in 1994 conceptualized human security as *freedom from fear* and *freedom from want*, arguing that genuine security extends beyond military defence to include protection against violence, poverty, disease, displacement, environmental degradation, and political repression (UNDP, 1994). The framework identifies seven interrelated dimensions of human security: personal, economic, food, health, environmental, community, and political security, which collectively shape the quality of human life. Consequently, the theory contends that the effectiveness of security policies should ultimately be evaluated by their ability to safeguard individuals rather than merely preserve the territorial integrity or military strength of states.

Although Human Security Theory has become highly influential in conflict and development studies, it has not escaped criticism. Scholars such as Roland Paris (2001) argue that the concept is excessively broad, making it analytically difficult to determine what constitutes a human security threat and how such threats should be prioritized. Similarly, David Chandler (2008) contends that the expansive scope of the concept risks blurring the boundaries between security, development, and human rights, thereby weakening its explanatory precision. These criticisms have contributed to an enduring debate over whether human security should be regarded as a comprehensive normative agenda or a more narrowly defined analytical framework.

Notwithstanding these criticisms, the present study adopts Human Security Theory because its analytical strengths outweigh its conceptual limitations in explaining the humanitarian consequences of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. The principal concern of this study is neither military strategy nor the geopolitical calculations of the parties involved; rather, it is the impact of prolonged conflict on the safety of civilian populations. Human Security Theory therefore provides a more appropriate analytical lens than state-centred theories because it directs attention to the lived experiences of individuals whose security is threatened by recurrent violence, forced displacement, destruction of civilian infrastructure, restricted access to healthcare and education, economic deprivation, and psychological trauma.

The relevance of Human Security Theory is particularly evident in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, where debates have traditionally centred on territorial sovereignty, national security, military operations, and diplomatic negotiations. While these issues remain important, they often obscure the humanitarian realities experienced by civilians living in Israel and the Palestinian territories. From a human security perspective, security cannot be regarded as achieved where civilians continue to experience persistent threats to life, health, dignity, and livelihoods irrespective of military or political outcomes. The theory therefore broadens the analytical focus from battlefield dynamics to the everyday conditions that shape civilian vulnerability in situations of protracted armed conflict.

Recent scholarship increasingly reflects this shift towards people-centred analyses of the conflict. Putra, Persadha, and Suhardi (2024) argue that the effectiveness of United Nations Security Council Resolution 2334 should be evaluated according to its contribution to protecting human security rather than merely its diplomatic significance. Likewise, Pons Rafols (2024) demonstrates that the recent war in Gaza exposes the persistent gap between international legal commitments and the humanitarian realities confronting civilian populations. Liu (2024) further argues that the doctrine of non-combatant immunity, despite its central place within international humanitarian law, has proved insufficient to prevent widespread civilian harm in contemporary asymmetric warfare. Collectively, these studies reinforce the central proposition of Human Security Theory that security should be assessed according to its capacity to protect human lives rather than the strategic successes of political actors.

Accordingly, Human Security Theory provides the most appropriate framework for this study because it aligns directly with its central objective of examining the impact of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict on civilian safety. The theory enables a multidimensional assessment of civilian vulnerability by integrating conflict-related casualties, forced displacement, destruction of civilian infrastructure, restrictions on access to essential services, and the broader humanitarian consequences of prolonged violence into a single analytical framework. In doing so, it offers a more comprehensive explanation of civilian safety than conventional state-centric approaches and provides the conceptual foundation upon which the analysis presented in this study is built.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design to examine the impact of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict on civilian safety between 2020 and 2024. A qualitative approach is appropriate because the study seeks to develop an in-depth understanding of the humanitarian consequences of protracted armed conflict through the interpretation of documentary evidence rather than the measurement of statistical relationships. The analysis focuses on the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, and affected areas within Israel, where recurrent military confrontations have generated significant civilian casualties, displacement, destruction of infrastructure, and humanitarian challenges.

The study relies exclusively on secondary data obtained through systematic desk-based research. Data were drawn from peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, reports published by international organizations including the United Nations, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Human Rights Watch, and Amnesty International—as well as official government publications, international legal instruments, United Nations Security Council resolutions, and other authoritative policy documents. Relevant literature was identified through electronic databases, including JSTOR, Google Scholar, Scopus, and institutional repositories, using predefined search terms related to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, civilian safety, armed conflict, human security, and international humanitarian law.

Data were analysed using qualitative thematic content analysis. Documentary sources were systematically examined to identify recurring themes relating to conflict-related casualties, forced displacement, destruction of civilian infrastructure, access to essential services, humanitarian protection, and the broader implications of armed conflict for civilian safety. These themes were subsequently interpreted through the analytical lens of Human Security Theory to explain how prolonged violence has shaped civilian vulnerability in both Israel and the Palestinian territories. To enhance analytical rigour, evidence was triangulated across multiple categories of sources, including academic literature, humanitarian reports, legal documents, and official statistics. Priority was given to peer-reviewed publications and reports produced by internationally recognised institutions to ensure the credibility, consistency, and trustworthiness of the findings.

Findings and Discussion

Escalating Civilian Casualties and Physical Insecurity

The documentary evidence reviewed in this study consistently identifies civilian casualties as the most immediate manifestation of the deteriorating security environment created by the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. Although both Israeli and Palestinian civilians have experienced significant human losses, the evidence demonstrates that the humanitarian consequences have been disproportionately concentrated in the Gaza Strip, where sustained military operations have resulted in extensive loss of life, widespread injuries, and heightened civilian vulnerability. These findings reinforce the argument that contemporary armed conflicts increasingly expose civilians to direct violence despite the existence of international humanitarian norms intended to protect non-combatants.

Reports published by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Amnesty International, and Reuters indicate that military hostilities following the events of 7 October 2023 produced unprecedented civilian casualties across the region. By July 2024, more than 39,000 Palestinians had been killed and approximately 89,800 injured in Gaza, while approximately 1,200 people were killed during the initial Hamas attacks in Israel, with over 5,000 others sustaining injuries during subsequent hostilities (OCHA, 2024; Amnesty International, 2024; Reuters, 2024). The documentary evidence further indicates that women and children accounted for nearly seventy per cent of recorded fatalities in Gaza, illustrating the disproportionate burden borne by vulnerable civilian populations.

Table 1**Civilian Impact of the Israeli–Palestinian Conflict (October 2023–July 2024)**

Impact Category	Gaza (Palestine)	Israel
Civilian deaths	39,006	Approximately 1,200
Civilian injuries	89,818	Over 5,000
Women and children among fatalities	Approximately 70%	Not officially disaggregated
Internally displaced persons	Over 1.7 million	Thousands temporarily displaced
Schools damaged or destroyed	More than 60%	Minimal reported damage
Students unable to attend school	Approximately 625,000	Limited regional disruption
Healthcare system	Near collapse; approximately 70% of hospitals non-functional	Functional but under emergency pressure
Vaccination programmes	Significantly disrupted	No major disruption reported
Child malnutrition	More than 60,000 severe cases	No widespread cases reported
Mental health	Widespread trauma and psychological distress	Increased anxiety and trauma in affected communities

Source: United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA, 2024); Amnesty International (2024); Reuters (2024).

As shown in **Table 1**, civilian casualties extended beyond fatalities to encompass injuries, forced displacement, disruption of education, deterioration of healthcare systems, and widespread psychological trauma. While both societies experienced insecurity, the scale of humanitarian suffering differed considerably. The overwhelming concentration of casualties, displacement, and destruction within Gaza demonstrates that civilians have become the principal victims of the conflict rather than incidental casualties of military engagements.

These findings corroborate earlier studies by Ayoub, Chemaitelly, and Abu-Raddad (2024), who argue that civilian populations increasingly bear the greatest burden of contemporary asymmetric warfare. Similarly, Doocy, Lyles, Tappis, and Norton (2023) observed that prolonged armed conflict fundamentally undermines civilian protection through repeated exposure to violence, injury, and displacement. The present findings therefore reinforce the broader scholarly consensus that civilian casualties in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict are not isolated humanitarian incidents but constitute a persistent feature of the conflict itself.

The findings also provide empirical support for Human Security Theory. Rather than evaluating security according to military achievements or territorial control, Human Security Theory emphasizes the protection of individuals from threats to life and personal safety (UNDP, 1994). The extensive civilian casualties documented during the study period demonstrate that conventional security strategies have failed to provide meaningful protection for non-combatants. Instead, military escalation has intensified physical insecurity, particularly among women, children, and other vulnerable groups, thereby illustrating the

widening disconnect between national security objectives and the security of civilian populations.

Destruction of Civilian Infrastructure and the Erosion of Essential Services

Beyond the immediate loss of life, the documentary evidence indicates that the Israeli–Palestinian conflict has profoundly undermined civilian safety through the extensive destruction of critical infrastructure and the disruption of essential public services. Human Security Theory argues that security extends beyond protection from direct physical violence to include sustained access to healthcare, education, water, sanitation, electricity, and other basic services necessary for human well-being (UNDP, 1994). The evidence reviewed demonstrates that the prolonged hostilities have systematically weakened these essential systems, particularly within the Gaza Strip, thereby creating conditions that continue to endanger civilian populations long after military engagements have subsided.

The destruction of civilian infrastructure has emerged as one of the defining humanitarian consequences of the conflict. Reports published by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Save the Children, and the Al Mezan Center for Human Rights indicate that hundreds of educational institutions, healthcare facilities, water infrastructure, and humanitarian shelters have either been damaged or rendered inoperable during the conflict (OCHA, 2024; Save the Children, 2024; Al Mezan Center for Human Rights, 2025). The widespread destruction of these facilities has significantly reduced access to essential services, particularly among women, children, older persons, and individuals with disabilities, whose dependence on public services is considerably greater during humanitarian emergencies.

Table 2

Impact of the Conflict on Civilian Infrastructure and Essential Services in Gaza (October 2023–April 2025)

Infrastructure Category	Extent of Damage	Humanitarian Implication
Schools	379 partially or completely destroyed	Over 60% of educational facilities rendered non-operational; prolonged disruption of learning
Hospitals	36 hospitals damaged or destroyed	Approximately 70% of hospitals rendered non-functional; severe reduction in emergency and routine healthcare
Water and sanitation facilities	56 major facilities damaged	Increased shortages of safe drinking water and heightened risk of water-borne diseases
UNRWA shelters	148 shelters damaged or directly affected	Increased displacement and overcrowding in temporary shelters
Power infrastructure	12 major installations damaged	Average electricity outages of approximately 22 hours daily across Gaza

Source: United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA, 2024); Save the Children (2024); Al Mezan Center for Human Rights (2025).

As presented in **Table 2**, the destruction extended well beyond military targets to include facilities fundamental to civilian welfare. The collapse of healthcare infrastructure significantly reduced the capacity of hospitals to provide emergency treatment, maternal care, chronic disease management, and preventive health services. According to OCHA (2024), shortages of medicines, medical consumables, fuel, and specialised equipment placed many health facilities under extraordinary operational pressure. Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF, 2024) similarly reported that fuel shortages forced medical personnel to ration electricity for intensive care units, surgical theatres, and life-support equipment, thereby further compromising patient outcomes.

The education sector experienced comparable disruption. OCHA (2024) estimates that approximately 625,000 children were unable to access formal education owing to the destruction of schools, displacement, and the continued insecurity surrounding educational facilities. The loss of educational infrastructure has implications extending beyond interrupted schooling, contributing to heightened psychosocial distress, reduced child protection, and long-term human capital deficits. These findings support earlier observations by Asano (2023), who argues that prolonged exposure to conflict weakens not only physical security but also the broader social systems that sustain community resilience and future development.

The deterioration of water, sanitation, electricity, and humanitarian shelter further compounded civilian vulnerability. Damage to water treatment facilities and sanitation systems increased the risk of infectious disease outbreaks, while prolonged electricity shortages disrupted healthcare delivery, food preservation, and household livelihoods. Simultaneously, repeated attacks affecting UNRWA shelters intensified overcrowding within displacement centres, exposing civilians to deteriorating living conditions and increasing public health risks. Collectively, these interconnected challenges demonstrate that the humanitarian consequences of armed conflict extend beyond direct violence to encompass the progressive erosion of the infrastructure upon which civilian survival depends.

These findings closely align with Human Security Theory, which conceptualizes security as the protection of individuals from multiple and interconnected threats to their well-being. The destruction of hospitals, schools, water systems, and humanitarian facilities illustrates that civilian insecurity is multidimensional, affecting health, education, food security, community resilience, and human dignity simultaneously. Rather than representing isolated humanitarian incidents, the evidence suggests that the degradation of civilian infrastructure has become a central mechanism through which the conflict undermines human security across the Gaza Strip. The findings indicate that the destruction of essential civilian infrastructure has significantly amplified the humanitarian consequences of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. By disrupting access to healthcare, education, clean water, electricity, and humanitarian assistance, the conflict has deepened civilian vulnerability and prolonged the conditions of insecurity experienced by affected populations, thereby reinforcing the central proposition of Human Security Theory that the protection of human life requires safeguarding both individuals and the institutions that sustain their well-being.

Destruction of Civilian Infrastructure and the Erosion of Human Security

The documentary evidence demonstrates that the impact of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict on civilian safety extends well beyond conflict-related casualties to include the systematic deterioration of the infrastructure upon which civilian survival depends. Across the documents reviewed, the destruction of hospitals, schools, water facilities, electricity networks, and humanitarian shelters consistently emerged as one of the defining characteristics of the conflict. Rather than representing isolated physical losses, the destruction of these facilities significantly weakened the capacity of affected communities to access healthcare, education, clean water, sanitation, and emergency humanitarian assistance, thereby intensifying civilian vulnerability.

Table 3

Impact of the Conflict on Civilian Infrastructure and Essential Services in Gaza (October 2023–April 2025)

Infrastructure Category	Extent of Damage	Implications for Civilian Safety
Schools	379 partially or completely destroyed	Disruption of education, loss of safe learning spaces, increased psychosocial vulnerability among children
Hospitals	36 hospitals damaged or destroyed	Collapse of emergency healthcare, reduced access to surgery, maternal care, and treatment of chronic illnesses
Water and sanitation facilities	56 major facilities damaged	Shortages of potable water and increased exposure to communicable diseases
UNRWA shelters	148 shelters damaged or directly affected	Overcrowding, reduced humanitarian protection, and heightened exposure to health risks
Power infrastructure	12 major installations damaged	Prolonged electricity outages affecting hospitals, water systems, communication, and household livelihoods

Source: United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA, 2024); Save the Children (2024); Al Mezan Center for Human Rights (2025).

As summarised in **Table 3**, the widespread destruction of civilian infrastructure fundamentally altered the conditions necessary for everyday life. The documentary evidence indicates that damage to hospitals not only reduced emergency medical capacity but also disrupted routine healthcare services, including maternal care, childhood immunisation, chronic disease management, and mental health support. Reports from OCHA (2024) and Médecins Sans Frontières (2024) further reveal that shortages of medicines, fuel, and medical equipment compelled healthcare providers to ration life-saving services, increasing preventable morbidity and mortality among civilians. Consequently, the impact of the conflict extended beyond those directly injured during military operations to include individuals whose survival depended on functioning health systems.

The education sector experienced comparable disruption. OCHA (2024) estimates that approximately 625,000 children were unable to access formal education following the destruction of schools and repeated displacement of communities. Beyond interrupting learning, the closure of educational facilities deprived children of protective environments, psychosocial support, and essential social services that schools ordinarily provide during humanitarian emergencies. The findings therefore suggest that attacks on educational infrastructure have both immediate and long-term implications for civilian safety by increasing children's exposure to exploitation, psychological distress, and future socioeconomic disadvantage.

Similarly, the destruction of water, sanitation, and electricity infrastructure generated interconnected humanitarian challenges that extended far beyond physical damage to public utilities. Damage to water treatment facilities reduced access to safe drinking water, increasing the risk of water-borne diseases, while prolonged electricity outages disrupted hospital operations, food preservation, sanitation systems, and communication networks. These cascading effects demonstrate that infrastructure destruction creates multiple and mutually reinforcing threats to civilian well-being, thereby deepening humanitarian vulnerability even in areas where active hostilities have subsided.

The evidence also indicates that displacement shelters were themselves increasingly affected by the conflict. Reports documenting damage to UNRWA shelters reveal that facilities intended to provide humanitarian protection frequently became overcrowded and incapable of meeting the basic needs of displaced populations. The deterioration of shelter conditions heightened exposure to communicable diseases, gender-based violence, food insecurity, and psychological trauma, particularly among women, children, older persons, and persons living with disabilities. These findings illustrate that the humanitarian consequences of infrastructure destruction extend beyond the loss of physical assets to undermine the broader systems designed to protect civilian populations during armed conflict.

The findings closely correspond with earlier studies reviewed in the literature. Doocy, Lyles, Tappis, and Norton (2023) argue that modern armed conflicts increasingly weaken civilian resilience by disrupting access to essential services rather than through direct violence alone. Likewise, Asano (2023) demonstrates that prolonged exposure to deteriorating public services compounds the physical and psychological effects of conflict, particularly among children and other vulnerable groups. The present findings reinforce these observations by demonstrating that infrastructure destruction functions as a critical pathway through which armed conflict generates sustained humanitarian insecurity.

From the perspective of Human Security Theory, these findings underscore the multidimensional nature of civilian safety. Security cannot be understood solely in terms of protection from armed attacks when civilians simultaneously experience the collapse of healthcare systems, educational institutions, water supply, sanitation, electricity, and humanitarian services. The documentary evidence reviewed in this study therefore supports the central proposition of Human Security Theory that civilian security is inseparable from the continued functioning of the institutions and services that sustain human life and dignity. Consequently, the destruction of civilian infrastructure should be understood not merely as a

consequence of conflict but as a central mechanism through which prolonged armed violence undermines human security.

Forced Displacement and the Deepening Humanitarian Crisis

The documentary evidence further demonstrates that one of the most profound consequences of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict has been the large-scale displacement of civilian populations and the resulting humanitarian crisis. Beyond exposing civilians to immediate physical danger, displacement fundamentally altered living conditions by disrupting access to shelter, food, healthcare, education, livelihoods, and other basic necessities. The evidence reviewed consistently indicates that forced displacement has transformed civilian insecurity from a temporary consequence of armed conflict into a prolonged humanitarian condition affecting millions of people, particularly within the Gaza Strip.

Reports published by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA), UNICEF, and the World Health Organization (WHO) reveal that repeated evacuation orders, aerial bombardments, and military operations forced civilians to flee their homes on an unprecedented scale. By mid-2024, more than 1.7 million Palestinians representing the overwhelming majority of Gaza's population had been internally displaced, with many families experiencing multiple episodes of displacement as hostilities expanded across different parts of the territory (OCHA, 2024; UNRWA, 2024). Although displacement also occurred in Israel following rocket attacks and cross-border violence, the documentary evidence indicates that its scale and humanitarian consequences were considerably more severe in Gaza.

Table 4

Selected Humanitarian Indicators Associated with Civilian Displacement in Gaza

Humanitarian Indicator	Reported Situation	Principal Source
Internally displaced persons	Over 1.7 million	OCHA (2024)
Population requiring humanitarian assistance	Nearly the entire population	OCHA (2024); UNRWA (2024)
Children out of school	Approximately 625,000	OCHA (2024)
Children facing severe acute malnutrition	More than 60,000	UNICEF (2024)
Hospitals functioning	Approximately 30% fully operational	OCHA (2024); WHO (2024)
Population experiencing severe food insecurity	Widespread across Gaza	IPC (2024); FAO (2024)
Access to clean water	Critically reduced in most areas	WHO (2024); UNICEF (2024)

Source: United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA, 2024); United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA, 2024); UNICEF (2024); World Health Organization (WHO, 2024); Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC, 2024); Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 2024).

As presented in **Table 4**, displacement was accompanied by multiple and interconnected humanitarian challenges. The movement of large populations into overcrowded temporary shelters placed enormous pressure on already weakened humanitarian services. Many displaced families lacked adequate shelter, clean drinking water, sanitation facilities, electricity, and essential household supplies. The resulting overcrowding significantly increased the risks of communicable diseases, particularly among children, older persons, pregnant women, and individuals living with chronic illnesses. These findings suggest that displacement did not merely relocate civilian populations but substantially increased their exposure to new forms of insecurity.

Food insecurity emerged as another defining feature of the humanitarian crisis. The destruction of agricultural production, disruption of commercial supply chains, restrictions on humanitarian access, and continuing military operations collectively reduced the availability of food across much of Gaza. Documentary evidence reviewed for this study indicates that thousands of children suffered severe acute malnutrition, while many households experienced prolonged shortages of essential food items (UNICEF, 2024; IPC, 2024). The findings therefore demonstrate that conflict-related displacement directly undermined food security by disrupting both the availability of food and civilians' ability to access it safely.

The evidence similarly points to a severe deterioration in public health conditions. The collapse of sanitation systems, shortages of clean water, and overcrowded living environments increased the risk of infectious disease outbreaks, while damage to healthcare facilities reduced the capacity of medical personnel to respond effectively. Simultaneously, repeated displacement generated significant psychological consequences, including anxiety, depression, prolonged stress, and trauma, particularly among children exposed to recurrent violence and uncertainty. These humanitarian impacts extended beyond immediate physical harm, affecting the long-term well-being and resilience of affected communities.

The findings are consistent with previous studies reviewed in this article. Doocy, Lyles, Tappis, and Norton (2023) argue that displacement represents one of the principal mechanisms through which armed conflict generates long-term humanitarian crises, while Asano (2023) demonstrates that prolonged displacement substantially increases psychological distress and social vulnerability among civilian populations. Similarly, Putra, Persadha, and Suhardi (2024) contend that the protection of displaced civilians constitutes a central component of human security, requiring effective humanitarian responses that extend beyond military ceasefires.

From the perspective of Human Security Theory, these findings illustrate that civilian security encompasses far more than protection from direct violence. Forced displacement simultaneously undermines personal security, food security, health security, economic security, community security, and access to essential public services. Consequently, the humanitarian crisis observed in Gaza reflects a multidimensional erosion of human security in which the cumulative effects of displacement, deprivation, and institutional collapse reinforce one another. This interconnected pattern of vulnerability demonstrates that civilian safety cannot be restored solely through the cessation of armed hostilities without parallel efforts to rebuild the social and humanitarian systems upon which civilian well-being depends.

Human Security Implications of the Findings

The findings of this study demonstrate that the impact of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict on civilian safety extends far beyond the immediate consequences of armed confrontation. Rather than existing as discrete humanitarian challenges, conflict-related casualties, the destruction of civilian infrastructure, and large-scale forced displacement collectively constitute an interconnected system of insecurity that undermines virtually every dimension of civilian life. The evidence reviewed suggests that the deterioration of civilian safety cannot be adequately understood through conventional military indicators alone, as the conflict has progressively weakened the institutions and social conditions necessary for sustaining human life and dignity.

A central finding of this study is that civilian insecurity is multidimensional. While the loss of life represents the most visible consequence of the conflict, documentary evidence indicates that the collapse of healthcare systems, disruption of education, deterioration of water and sanitation services, widespread displacement, food insecurity, and psychological trauma have produced equally significant humanitarian consequences. These findings reinforce the argument that civilian safety should not be conceptualised solely as protection from direct violence but as the preservation of the broader social, economic, and institutional conditions that enable individuals and communities to live in security. In this respect, the study demonstrates that prolonged armed conflict generates cumulative forms of vulnerability that persist even beyond periods of active military engagement.

The findings correspond closely with previous scholarship examining the humanitarian consequences of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. Doocy, Lyles, Tappis, and Norton (2023) argue that modern armed conflicts increasingly undermine civilian well-being through the destruction of essential services and the displacement of populations rather than through battlefield casualties alone. Likewise, Asano (2023) identifies prolonged exposure to violence and displacement as major contributors to deteriorating mental health and social resilience, particularly among children. The present study reinforces these observations by demonstrating that civilian harm in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict is not confined to physical injury but encompasses a broader erosion of human welfare that affects health, education, livelihoods, and community stability.

The findings also lend support to studies that question the effectiveness of existing international humanitarian mechanisms in protecting civilians during protracted conflicts. Putra, Persadha, and Suhardi (2024) argue that although international legal instruments provide important normative standards for civilian protection, their practical impact remains constrained by inconsistent implementation and limited enforcement. Similarly, Liu (2024) contends that the doctrine of non-combatant immunity has struggled to provide meaningful protection for civilians in contemporary asymmetric warfare. The documentary evidence analysed in this study supports these arguments by revealing the persistence of widespread civilian casualties, repeated displacement, and extensive destruction of civilian infrastructure despite the existence of well-established international humanitarian norms.

From a theoretical perspective, the findings provide substantial support for Human Security Theory. The theory maintains that genuine security should be evaluated according to the

extent to which individuals are protected from threats to their survival, dignity, and well-being rather than by the military capabilities or territorial gains of states (UNDP, 1994). The evidence reviewed throughout this study demonstrates that although military operations have often been justified in terms of national security and self-defence, their humanitarian consequences have simultaneously generated profound insecurity for civilian populations. The conflict has therefore exposed the limitations of state-centric approaches to security by illustrating that improvements in military security do not necessarily translate into greater security for ordinary people.

Importantly, the findings suggest that the different dimensions of human security are mutually reinforcing. The destruction of healthcare facilities reduced access to medical treatment; the collapse of educational institutions disrupted learning and child protection; damage to water and sanitation infrastructure heightened public health risks; and large-scale displacement intensified poverty, food insecurity, and psychological distress. Rather than functioning independently, these humanitarian challenges interacted to produce a cycle of vulnerability in which the deterioration of one aspect of civilian life accelerated the decline of others. This interconnected pattern of insecurity represents one of the principal contributions of the present study, highlighting the need to understand civilian safety as a multidimensional phenomenon rather than a narrow measure of conflict-related fatalities.

The findings further suggest that sustainable civilian protection cannot be achieved through military measures alone. While ceasefires and reductions in hostilities remain essential, the restoration of civilian safety also requires the rehabilitation of healthcare systems, educational institutions, water infrastructure, housing, and humanitarian services that have been severely weakened by prolonged conflict. Accordingly, policies aimed at protecting civilians should adopt a comprehensive human security approach that integrates humanitarian relief, post-conflict reconstruction, institutional recovery, and sustained compliance with international humanitarian law.

Policy Implications

The findings of this study have important implications for both humanitarian policy and conflict management. First, protecting civilians should become a central objective of military and political decision-making rather than a secondary humanitarian concern. This requires stricter adherence by all parties to the principles of distinction, proportionality, and precaution under international humanitarian law. Second, humanitarian responses should move beyond emergency relief to prioritise the restoration of hospitals, schools, water systems, and other essential public services that underpin civilian well-being. Finally, international organisations and mediators should adopt a human security approach in peace initiatives by ensuring that civilian welfare, access to basic services, and post-conflict recovery receive the same level of attention as political negotiations and security arrangements.

Conclusion

This study examined the impact of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict on civilian safety between 2020 and 2024 through the lens of Human Security Theory. Based on the documentary

evidence analysed, the study found that the conflict has affected civilian safety in three interrelated ways. First, it has resulted in extensive civilian casualties, with women and children accounting for a disproportionately large share of those killed and injured. Second, the widespread destruction of hospitals, schools, water facilities, and other critical infrastructure has significantly reduced access to essential services, thereby increasing civilian vulnerability beyond the immediate effects of armed violence. Third, the large-scale displacement of civilians has deepened the humanitarian crisis by intensifying food insecurity, disrupting healthcare and education, and exposing affected populations to prolonged physical, social, and psychological hardship. These findings demonstrate that civilian insecurity in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict is not driven solely by direct violence but also by the cumulative breakdown of the systems that sustain everyday life. By applying Human Security Theory, this study shows that assessing the consequences of the conflict requires moving beyond conventional measures of military success to consider their broader implications for human life, dignity, and well-being. Sustainable peace will therefore depend not only on ending hostilities but also on ensuring meaningful protection for civilians and rebuilding the essential institutions upon which their security depends.

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