



# BOYCOTT



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 PRODUCED BY SUHAD BABAA DANIEL J. CHALFEN JULIA BACHA DIRECTED BY JULIA BACHA

[www.theboycottfilm.com](http://www.theboycottfilm.com)



# BOYCOTT

DIRECTED BY  
**JULIA BACHA**

PRODUCED BY  
**SUHAD BABAA AND DANIEL J. CHALFEN**

When a news publisher in Arkansas, an attorney in Arizona, and a speech therapist in Texas are told they must choose between their jobs and their political beliefs, they launch legal battles that expose an attack on freedom of speech across 37 states in America.

*Boycott* traces the impact of state legislation designed to penalize individuals and companies that choose to boycott Israel due to its human rights record. A legal thriller with “accidental plaintiffs” at the center of the story, *Boycott* is a bracing look at the far-reaching implications of anti-boycott legislation and an inspiring tale of everyday Americans standing up to protect our rights in an age of shifting politics and threats to freedom of speech.

**For more information:**  
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# DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

For the past 18 years, we've been making films about everyday people going up against extraordinary odds in the struggle for justice, equity and dignity in Israel-Palestine. As we followed this thread in an era of unprecedented democratic backsliding, we noticed a troubling trend: attempts to silence voices of dissent on Israel-Palestine have taken root far beyond the region, with governments in the United States and Europe leading the charge. The trend is especially sharp in local legislatures across America, where 37 states have laws on the books that aim to silence those boycotting Israel based on its human rights record. More than ever, Israel-Palestine has entered the backyards of everyday Americans.

Boycotts have long been a tool used by Americans rallying for social and political change, from farmworkers to civil rights leaders to anti-apartheid activists. Not only that, the Supreme Court – in a landmark 1982 ruling – identified that boycotts were one of the highest forms of protected political speech under the First Amendment. So as filmmakers, we had to ask: how and why had boycotts suddenly become such a threat to state governments across the US? And what impact might anti-boycott legislation have on everyday Americans – not only those taking part in boycotts of Israel, but also those expressing political views on a whole range of issues, from environmental justice to racial justice and beyond?

We found answers to those questions – and unearthed many more – while following the stories of Mikkel Jordahl, Alan Leveritt and Bahia Amawi. As ordinary citizens embroiled in high-stakes constitutional battles, their stories remind us how personal and widespread the implications of anti-boycott legislation are.





As we uncovered the network of supporters and architects of the bills, we also came across some surprising alliances. Traditional Israel lobbying organizations were working in lockstep with fundamentalist right-wing organizations, with the support from several other organizations, including a prominent pro-business organization that has worked on developing model legislation on a wide-range of issues that impacts communities across the country. Their declared aim – to fight the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement, a movement that emerged in 2005 as Palestinian civil society called on the international community to hold Israel accountable for its human rights abuses.

Anti-boycott laws are a Pandora's box that could be used to silence voices of dissent on a whole range of issues. Indeed, lawmakers are now actively citing legislation banning boycotts of Israel as their inspiration for similar laws punishing those who boycott the gun industry or divest from fossil fuels. Many other anti-protest laws, most flying under the radar, are targeting the Movement for Black Lives and indigenous rights activists.

*Boycott* lays bare what is at stake for everyday American citizens. It also shows the power of courageous individuals who are taking on great risk to stand up for the rights of all. Their stories cut to the heart of a pressing national issue and illustrate how the right to free speech could be redefined across our society for generations to come.







WELCOME  
TO THE  
CENTER  
OF THE USA



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# THE STORY

Over the past six years, unbeknownst to most Americans, 37 states passed laws intending to silence boycott and other nonviolent measures aimed at pressuring Israel on its human rights record. These dangerous bills remove the legal protection that has been awarded to boycotts for generations, granting governments the power to condition jobs on political viewpoints.

As this wave of anti-boycott legislation has swept through the country, so has a counter-wave in defense of freedom of speech. Everyday Americans are challenging these laws for their constitutionality in a nation-wide battle likely to go all the way to the Supreme Court.

With full access to the plaintiffs and in revelatory moments with elected officials, *Boycott* chronicles one of the most consequential First Amendment battles of the past few decades and investigates the question – how did we get here?

Our story weaves through the personal histories and legal battles of three “accidental plaintiffs” across the US. Mikkel Jordahl, an attorney in Arizona, provides legal services to incarcerated persons. When the time comes to renew his contract with the State, he is shocked to discover a new clause requiring that he certify that he will not engage in a boycott of Israel. Reflecting on what he considers government overreach and with the impact of a father-son visit to Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories still fresh in his mind, Mikkel decides that he cannot sign the contract in good conscience. He sues the State of Arizona.

Around the same time, Bahia Amawi, a childhood speech therapist in Texas’s public school system, finds herself unemployed following her refusal to sign the state’s anti-boycott pledge. Shaped by her family history and driven by a commitment to safeguard the right to free speech for her daughters and future generations, Bahia launches a suit against the State of Texas.





Alan Leveritt, the publisher of the *Arkansas Times*, learns of his state's anti-boycott law when he is told by the University of Arkansas that the state-funded university cannot pay for ads in his newspaper if he doesn't sign Arkansas's anti-boycott pledge. Influenced by his belief that the government has no business forcing individuals to adhere to certain political agendas and recognizing that the law forces the *Arkansas Times* to compromise its journalistic integrity, Alan makes the difficult decision to launch a suit against the State of Arkansas.

As the film unfolds, the larger implications of the anti-boycott bills are interwoven with the stories of our protagonists. We meet several individuals who are proponents of these laws, including State Senator Bart Hester of Arkansas, whose Christian faith drives his support for the legislation. We also hear from Itamar Benzaquen, an Israeli journalist whose investigative research helps us understand the rapid spread of anti-boycott bills, raising the question: in whose interest are these laws being passed?

Providing rich context on the origins of the anti-boycott bills, the narrative arc of the film is set by the personal journeys of our three protagonists. Moving from the Arizona desert to a mosque in Texas, from the ACLU headquarters in NYC to a family farm in Arkansas, the film chronicles the courage of three Americans as they defend freedom of expression, and lays bare what's at stake – our constitutionally-protected right to boycott – if they are defeated.



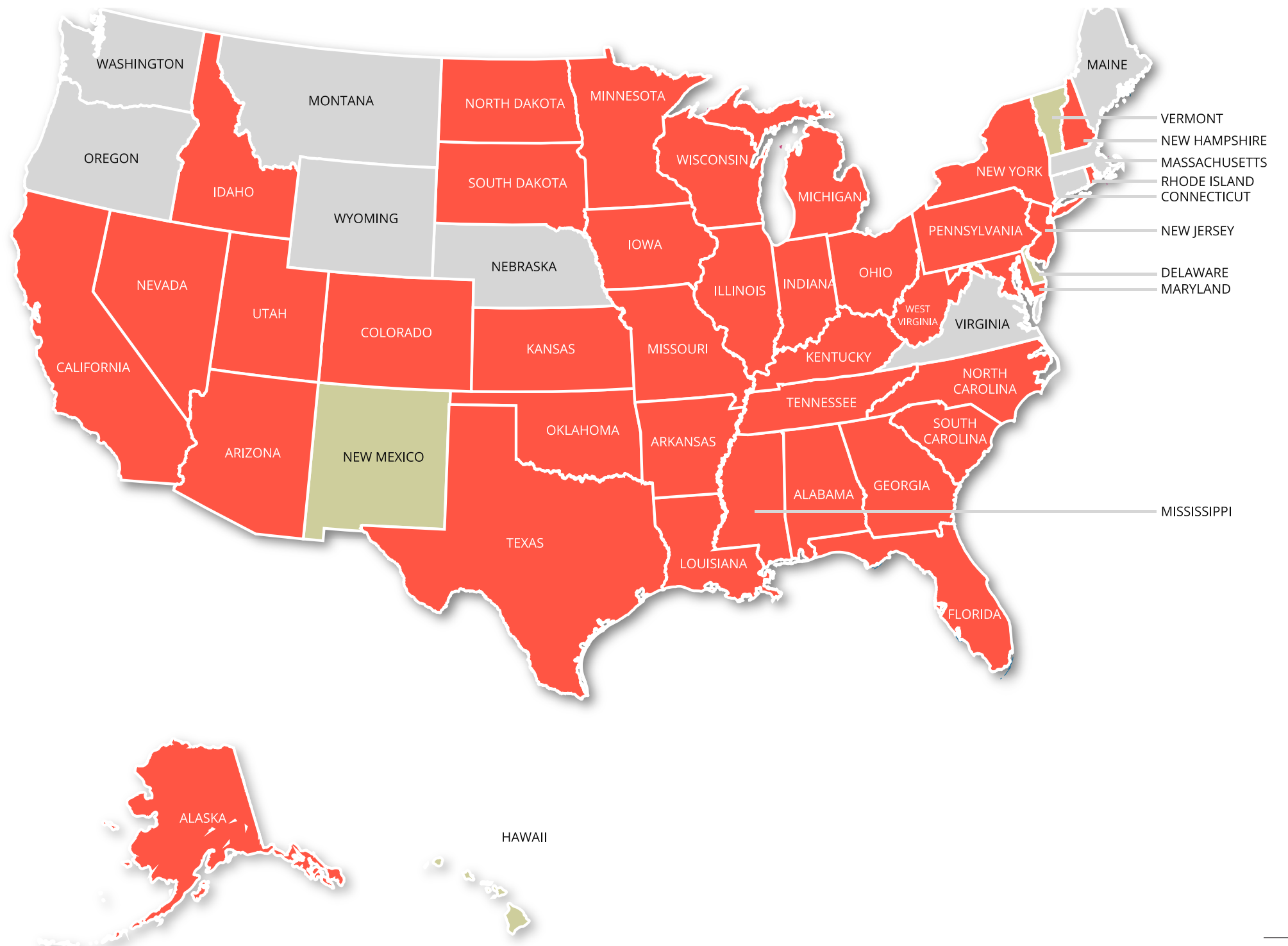
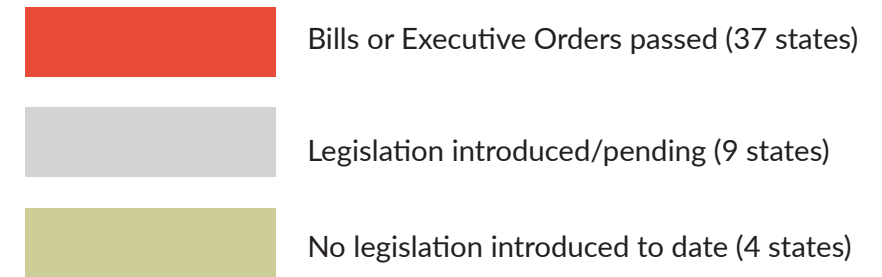


# QUICK FACTS

## ABOUT THE ANTI-BOYCOTT LEGISLATION

Over the past several years, anti-boycott legislation has passed in state legislatures across all corners of the United States.

- 37 states have laws on the books that penalize individuals or companies that use boycott and other nonviolent measures aimed at pressuring Israel on its human rights record.
- There are parallel efforts at the federal level to adopt legislation prohibiting American citizens from boycotting companies that profit from Israel's violation of international law.
- Some of the anti-boycott bills/laws require the creation of blacklists of activists, non-profit organizations, and/or companies that are engaged in such boycott campaigns. Opponents have called the blacklists 21st-century McCarthyism.
- Several states have passed or introduced similar legislation that punishes companies that boycott or divest from the fossil fuel industry or firearm manufacturers. Architects for the fossil fuel bills cite the anti-boycott bills related to Israel as their model.





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# WHO'S WHO



**Alan Leveritt** is the publisher of a local newspaper, the *Arkansas Times*. Alan, who comes from a conservative, libertarian family, is distraught by the role of fundamentalist right-wing organizations on the rapid spread of these bills across the country. He is committed to bringing his case all the way to the Supreme Court if necessary.



**Bahia Amawi** is a Palestinian-American speech therapist for Austin public schools, a mother of four young children and an observant Muslim. After she is fired from her job for refusing to sign the anti-boycott pledge, Bahia remains undaunted, suing the State of Texas and becoming a powerful symbol for the Muslim-American community in Texas, the largest in the United States.



**Mikkel Jordahl** is an attorney who works as a civil rights advisor in Arizona. During a long-postponed trip to Israel to celebrate his son's Bar Mitzvah, Mik decides to boycott companies complicit in Israel's occupation. As Mikkel challenges the anti-boycott bill, his relationship with his son deepens.



**Brian Hauss** is an up-and-coming lawyer with the American Civil Liberties Union. Brian is stunned that boycotts, an act he believes to be core to American democracy – from the colonial era boycott of British goods to the civil rights era boycotts to end Jim Crow laws – is at risk nationwide.

**Laiken Jordahl** is Mik's son and an environmental and social justice activist. Laiken grew up in the Jewish tradition and reflects on his bond to his grandparents and the injustices he and his father witnessed when visiting the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

**Vince Warren** is the Executive Director of the Center for Constitutional Rights, a group that has been investigating the role of the pro-business organization, American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), in passing anti-boycott laws across the country.

**Itamar Benzaquen** is a reporter for *The Seventh Eye*, an Israeli investigative magazine devoted to journalism, the media, freedom of speech and transparency.

**Senator Bart Hester** is the Republican Majority Leader of the State Senate in Arkansas. He is the proud sponsor of the Arkansas anti-boycott bill and speaks about his motivation to sponsor the bill, introducing us to a network that is determined to help lawmakers replicate these bills in state legislatures across the country.

**Lara Friedman** President of the Foundation for Middle East Peace, a Washington-based organization promoting a just resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

**Dima Khalidi** Founder and Director of Palestine Legal, a group that provides legal advice and litigation support to individuals and communities who stand up for justice in Palestine.

**Peter Beinart** Columnist, journalist and political commentator, a regular contributor to *The New York Times* and frequent commentator on CNN.

**Rabbi Barry Block** Rabbi of Congregation B'nai Israel, the largest synagogue in Arkansas.



## ABOUT THE FILMMAKING TEAM



**JULIA BACHA, DIRECTOR**

Julia Bacha is a Peabody award-winning filmmaker and the Creative Director at Just Vision. She started her filmmaking career in Cairo, where she wrote and edited *Control Room* (Sundance 2004), for which she was nominated to the Writer's Guild of America Award. Subsequently, she directed *Encounter Point* (Tribeca 2006), *Budrus* (Berlinale 2009), *My Neighbourhood* (Tribeca 2012), and *Naila and the Uprising* (IDFA 2017). Julia's films have been broadcast on PBS, HBO, CBC in Canada, among others. In addition to over thirty film festival awards, Julia is the recipient of the 2011 Ridenhour Film Prize, the 2012 Doc Society Creative Impact Award, a 2015 Guggenheim Fellowship, the 2017 Columbia University Medal of Excellence, and the 2019 Chicken & Egg Award. Originally from Brazil, Julia is a Documentary Branch Member of AMPAS and has given two TED talks, "[Pay attention to nonviolence](#)" and "[How women wage conflict without violence.](#)"



**SUHAD BABAA, PRODUCER**

Suhad Babaa is a producer, news publisher, and the Executive Director & President of Just Vision. Suhad produced *Boycott* (2021) and executive produced *Naila and the Uprising* (2017). She is also the co-publisher of the award-winning Hebrew-language news site, *Local Call*. Additionally, Suhad helped lead the impact campaigns for Just Vision's critically acclaimed film, *Budrus* (2009), which was recognized with the Doc Society Social Impact Award in 2012, as well as the Peabody award-winning documentary, *My Neighbourhood* (2012), which has since helped support a global campaign to save Sheikh Jarrah, the community that sits at the heart of the film. Her work has been featured by institutions including TED, Tate Britain and the Nobel Women's Initiative and highlighted in outlets including *The New York Times*, CNN, *Yedioth Ahronoth*, PBS, BBC, Channel 2 News (Israel), *Ma'an News*, *Al Quds*, *The Forward* and beyond. Suhad is a Sundance Creative Producing Fellow, Global Shaper with the World Economic Forum, and Term Member at the Council on Foreign Relations.



**DANIEL J. CHALFEN, PRODUCER**

Daniel J. Chalfen is a Peabody and duPont winning and multiple-Emmy nominated film and television producer, and a co-founder of Naked Edge Films. His documentaries have premiered at the world's foremost film festivals, including Berlin, Sundance, SXSW, Toronto, and Tribeca, have been released by companies including Samuel Goldwyn Films, Participant Media, Kino Lorber, and Focus Features, and have aired/streamed worldwide including in the US on Amazon, DirecTV, Discovery ID, HBO, Netflix, Showtime, and PBS, among others. Daniel's recent credits include *Pray Away* (executive produced by Jason Blum & Ryan Murphy), *Always in Season*, *The Infiltrators*, *Bathtubs Over Broadway* (executive produced by Jason Blum & David Letterman), *United Skates* (executive produced by John Legend), *Call her Ganda*, *The Feeling of Being Watched*, *Prescription Thugs*, *Southwest of Salem*, and *Silenced* (executive produced by Susan Sarandon). Daniel is a Documentary Branch member of AMPAS and a voting member of the British Academy of Film and Television Arts (BAFTA).





**AMBER FARES, DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY**

Amber Fares is an award-winning documentary director and cinematographer. Her recent projects include *And She Could Be Next* (PBS), *America Inside Out with Katie Couric* (National Geographic), *Transparent* (Amazon), *The Judge* (PBS), and *Speed Sisters* (Netflix). Amber's films have won numerous awards and have played in film festivals around the world, including TIFF, Sheffield, Hot Docs, IDFA, and DOC NYC. Her work has been featured on Netflix, CNN, Al Jazeera, ALLURE, Amazon, Hulu, PBS, and National Geographic. Amber was a 2019 Sundance Momentum Fellow, 2014 Sundance Catalyst participant, and 2014 Sundance Institute Edit Lab Fellow.



**FLAVIA DE SOUZA, EDITOR**

Flavia de Souza is the editor of the Academy Award-nominated short documentary *Open Heart*. Her work also includes the 2019 News & Documentary Emmy Award-winning feature film *Armed with Faith*, as well as credits on *Naila and the Uprising*, *Song of Lahore*, and *Rancher Farmer Fisherman*, which premiered at the 2017 Sundance Film Festival. Flávia's work has screened at Tribeca, DOC NYC, and Sheffield, among other festivals, and has broadcast on HBO, PBS, Arté, and the Discovery Channel.



**ERIC DANIEL METZGAR, EDITOR**

Eric Daniel Metzgar is an Emmy Award-winning filmmaker based in San Francisco, California. He is a two-time Sundance Documentary Lab Fellow. He directed, shot and edited *Reporter*, which premiered at the Sundance Film Festival, aired on HBO, and was nominated for an Emmy Award. Eric also directed, shot and edited *Life. Support. Music.* (POV, 2008) and *The Chances of the World Changing* (POV, 2006), which was nominated for an Independent Spirit Award. Eric also edited and produced *Crime + Punishment* (Emmy Winner, Sundance, Hulu), and edited *Mayor* (POV), *Give Up Tomorrow* (Emmy-nominated, POV), and *Almost Sunrise* (Emmy-nominated, POV).



**NAINITA DESAI, COMPOSER**

Royal Television Society award-winning composer Nainita Desai is a BIFA, Cinema Eye Honors, and Ivor Novella 2020 nominee, a BAFTA Breakthrough Brit and the IFMCA Breakthrough Composer of 2020. Amongst various BAFTA, Oscar, Emmy acclaimed productions, Nainita's recent projects include critically acclaimed Oscar 2020 nominated film *For Sama*, Sundance 2020 winning feature *The Reason I Jump*, *American Murder* (Netflix's most-watched documentary feature to date), Annapurna Interactive Film-Game *Telling Lies*, and BBC drama series *Unprecedented*.



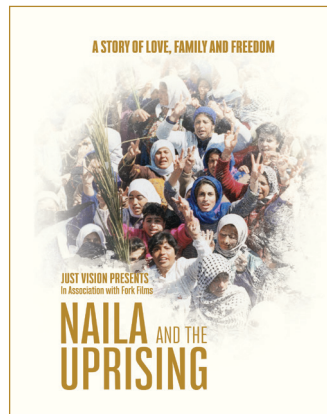
# ABOUT JUST VISION

Just Vision fills a media gap on Israel-Palestine through independent storytelling and strategic audience engagement.

We place documentary filmmaking and journalism at the center of our mission because we believe that stories have the power to shape public norms, equip audiences with vital information, undermine stereotypes and inspire.

Just Vision has produced several award-winning documentary films (*Encounter Point*, *Budrus*, *My Neighbourhood* and *Naila and the Uprising*), a graphic novel (*Budrus*), and co-publishes an independent Hebrew-language news site, *Local Call*.

Our films have been placed in top film festivals internationally from the Berlinale to IDFA to Tribeca, received high-level media attention and won numerous prestigious prizes, including over two-dozen festival honors, the 2012 DocSociety Creative Impact Award and a Peabody Award in 2013. Our documentaries have been broadcast by Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya. Our work has also been featured in leading press outlets including *The New York Times*, BBC, Israeli Channel 2, Al Arabiya, HBO Latin America, and many others.



# ABOUT NAKED EDGE FILMS

Naked Edge Films was founded in 2008 by Jim Butterworth and Daniel J. Chalfen to produce and executive produce documentary films.

NEF also focuses on scripted remakes of their non-fiction IP. Recent NEF credits include Ali El-Arabi's *Captains of Zaatari* (Sundance 2021), Kristine Stolakis' Netflix Original *Pray Away* (executive produced by Jason Blum & Ryan Murphy), the 2019 Sundance award winners *Always in Season* and *The Infiltrators* (both for PBS), Tina Brown & Dyana Winkler's *United Skates* for HBO (executive produced by John Legend), and Deborah Esquenazi's Peabody and Critics Choice-winning *Southwest of Salem* for Discovery ID. Other credits include *Call her Ganda*, *The Feeling of Being Watched*, *Silenced*, *The Mind of Mark DeFriest*, *The Revisionaries*, and *War Don Don*.

NEF films have premiered at the world's top film festivals and have been released globally including in the US by Amazon, DirecTV, Discovery, HBO, Kino Lorber, Netflix, Samuel Goldwyn Films, Showtime, and PBS. NEF films have garnered an Oscar, a Peabody, two duPonts, multiple Emmy nominations, and dozens of festival awards.