

# The Rise of Israel's Political Right and Its Possible Demise

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*The following research article is an attempt to analyze the reasons behind the increasing drift of right-wing politics in Israeli parliamentary elections in the last two decades. It also evaluates the impact of national insecurity and scaremongering on the political behavior of Israeli Jewish voters. Finally, the article explores the possibility of the demise of rightwing predominance in Israeli parliamentary elections.*

## New Parties, Splits, and Mergers

It has been observed by political analysts that prior to Israel's parliamentary elections, a number of election developments erupt, such as the formation of new and small parties, including parties formed by ex-military generals, and splits in some of the large parties. This process will be followed by the merger of small parties in order to produce larger election lists and blocs.

The helpful factor that makes these developments possible is the existence of a number of common denominators among Israeli political parties. With the exception of the Israeli Communist Party and the Arab political parties in Israel, Israeli 'Jewish' parties share a number of common denominators such as the Zionist ideology, the drift for right wing politics, the rejection of the establishment of an independent and sovereign Palestinian state, the denial of Arab issues in their political agendas, the support for the establishment of colonial settlements on Palestinian indigenous lands, and objection to vacate existing colonial settlements. All these denominators create loose boundaries among Zionist parties and allow Israeli politicians to cross them.

## No Palestinian Partner

It was the Zionist Left<sup>[1]</sup> that espoused, in 1996, the political solution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Prime Minister Yitshaq Rabin proposed the "Oslo Agreement" as a negotiated solution with the PLO that was led by Yasser Arataf's and dominated by Fateh right-wing faction.

Palestinian-Israeli negotiations did not go well due to Israel's insistence to expand colonial settlements inside the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. After the failure of the Camp David negotiations between Ehud Bark and Yasser Arafat in 2000, Barak who desired to offer an imposed and therefore, unacceptable conditions on Arafat, concluded that there is "no Palestinian partner" to negotiate with.

Soon after, the situation deteriorated and the Palestinians responded with violent operations that targeted Israeli civilians. The Israeli right, led by the Likud, blamed the Zionist Left for the deteriorating situation and manipulated the insecurity of the Israeli electorate who in

turn chose in 2001 the hawkish right-wing general Eric Sharon as their “protector”. This right-wing campaign was certainly assisted by the “no Palestinian partner” slogan that was propagated by the Zionist Left.

### Threats and National Insecurity

To begin with, the impact of psychological perceptions in societies creates dynamic political pressures of their own that are bound to affect the political behavior of electorates. This development became clear within the Israeli Jewish society during the period that extended from the First Intifada in the 1987 to the last Israeli parliamentary election in 2019.

Any threat, real or imaginary, posed by the ongoing resistance of the indigenous Palestinian population, is bound to be perceived by the Israeli settlers, as harmful and causing panic and insecurity to their national well-being. Therefore, such a threat must be neutralized by the use of military force. The frightened Israeli public is inclined to seek help for this task from Israeli hawkish leaders who claim to have a suitable solution.

Consequently, these hawkish leaders, who usually are right-wing Zionist ultra nationalists, do sense the fears and the insecurity of the public. They capitalize on them in their political narratives and successfully manipulate them in their election propaganda, so as to increase their supporters and voters.

Ultimately, the insecurity of the settlers will be articulated politically by a movement to more right-wing positions. The hardening of settler’s nationalist positions will drive them to support right-wing politicians, who are recently more hawkish and racist. The more the Israeli Jewish public feels insecure, the more they express right-wing positions.

### Scaremongering in political speeches



The election propaganda of the present Israeli parties was based on the employment of security fears by the majority of Israeli parties.[2] For example, Likud leader Benjamin Netanyahu, who is entangled in three corruption scandals that could lead to his indictment, concentrated his election propaganda campaign on a number of basic factors such as fear of Israeli citizens from the: “Irani danger”, Hizballah rockets, and the rockets of Palestinian resistance. During the last few years, Netanyahu repeated in his speeches and interviews “information” about the horror that could emanate from Iran claiming that “Iran is attempting to secure a nuclear bomb and intends to use it to annihilate the Jewish people of Israel.”[3]

Moreover, Netanyahu concentrated in his election propaganda on his right-wing political and

ideological positions, using his charisma as a media tool. His Likud party decided that during the previous and recent election campaigns, it did not need to publish a political, social and economic agenda. His “I believe” was a sufficient agenda for the electorate.

The rest of the right-wing politicians and ideologues use the socio-psychological impact of this panic to back up their political positions and to increase their supporters during election campaigns. They succeeded in employing the “... scaremongering security agendas to curry favor with the Israeli public...”[4]

An attempted explanation for expansion of right-wing electorate

In her analysis of the right-wing drift upward of Israeli electorate, Dahlia Scheindlin wrote that:

“... Seismic shifts during the Second Intifada led to a migration of left-wingers to the self-defined political center. They added to that camp but also replaced some centrists who migrated right, causing the percentage of Jewish right-wingers to drift upward over the decade...”[5]

She added that as a result:

“... the portion of all Israelis who call themselves right wing stands at around 46 percent — among the Jewish population,” while the “... number of self-defined centrists is roughly one-quarter, and the portion of left-wingers is stable at about one-fifth.”[6]

Moreover, when it comes to Israeli youth, the percentage of those identifying themselves as right wing, is much higher. In their analysis of why the Israeli electorate is right wing, both Laura Adkins and Ben Sales wrote that:

“According to the 2018 Israeli Democracy Index (an annual study by the Israeli Democracy Institute, a nonpartisan Israeli think tank), approximately 64 percent of Israeli Jews aged 18-34 identify as right wing, compared to 47 percent of those 35 and older...”[7]

These potential young Israeli voters create a suitable hotbed for Israeli right-wing parties. With the help of an acquiescent Israeli media, they get constantly bombarded by right wing Israeli politicians who openly voice out racist, segregationist, anti-democratic, and pro-ethnic cleansing declarations.

Deterioration of Political Speech

In addition to the panic speech, the Israeli right wing parties employed racist positions in their propaganda. They used outright racist incitement against Arab Palestinian citizens, the indigenous Palestinians of the colonized territories and against foreign workers and African asylum seekers.

In their “**Israeli Election Guide 2019**”, the Institute for Middle East Understanding (IMEU) published a collection of these declarations. The following are few examples of declarations by high-ranking government officials of the Likud-led coalition government.[8]

- **Miri Regev**, Minister of Culture and Sports, is known for fueling racism and violence against Palestinians and other non-Jews. In 2012, she helped incite a [wave of anti-African violence](#), including assaults and [arson attacks](#), targeting people from countries like Sudan and Eritrea, telling an angry mob that asylum seekers “[are a cancer in our body](#).” The same year, she [told](#) an interviewer, “I’m happy to be a fascist”;
- **Ayelet Shaked**, a New Right co-leader and outgoing Minister of Justice [produced an ad](#) showing her spraying on perfume called “fascism”;
- **Oren Hazan**, former Likud Knesset member, released an ad depicting himself [shooting and killing](#) a leader of a political party that represents Palestinian citizens of Israel;
- **Eli Ben-Dahan**, Deputy Minister of Defense. In 2013, then-Deputy Minister for Religious Affairs Ben-Dahan [declared](#), “[Palestinians] are beasts, they are not human”;
- **Bezalel Smotrich**, a notorious [racist and extremist](#), Jewish Home member. Smotrich lives in an illegal settlement on occupied Palestinian land in the West Bank. He supports a [shoot to kill policy for Palestinians](#), including children, who throw stones at their Israeli occupiers. In 2015, he [claimed](#) that the arson attack by Jewish extremists that killed three members of the Dawabsha family, including an 18-month-old baby, was not an act of terrorism;
- **Avigdor Lieberman**: Former Minister of Defence is an immigrant and former nightclub bouncer from Moldova in the former Soviet Union. Currently, he lives in one of the colonial settlements in the West Bank. In 1999, Lieberman founded his party Yisrael Beiteinu which is a secular, ultranationalist right-wing party. It espouses hardline, racist policies towards Palestinian citizens of Israel. In March 2015, Lieberman called for Palestinian citizens of Israel who do not support the Jewish character of the state and its policies to be beheaded, [declaring](#): “Those who are with us deserve everything, but those who are against us deserve to have their heads chopped off with an axe”.



General Benny Gantz, used three videos for his election campaign. His first video shows the General “...bragging about how much killing and destruction he committed in Gaza...” The video displays on screen that during his military service General Benny Gantz destroyed “6,231 targets” and killed “1,364 terrorists”. The video’s title included the words “Parts of Gaza were returned to the stone ages.” While the second video “... displays a kill-counter on screen racking up bodies until the number 1,364 is reached. In the background Palestinians are seen conducting funerals”.[9]

Israeli activist and author Miko Peled, who is living in Britain, commented on Gantz’s new

ads by saying that it would be “hard to imagine a more violent neo-fascist campaign than this one, by the new kid in Israel’s elections, war criminal general Benny Gantz.”[10]

In her analysis of the degree of racist hatred by Israeli political candidates, Elizabeth Tsurkov wrote in **Forward**, a progressive Jewish magazine, that “a disturbing new trend has emerged in the political ads of the Israeli elections. Campaign ads seem to be competing over which candidate has killed the most Palestinians.”[11]

When a number of Israeli right wing politicians adopt in their election advertisement: incitement for racism and violence, dehumanization of Palestinians and Africans, glorification for murder of Palestinians, segregationist positions, and fascistic tendencies, they are bound to provide a certain legitimacy for this inevitable hawkish world view. At the same time their speech of hatred will actually convert brutality into an accepted and legitimate ideology.

Ultimately, the impact of this rotten political speech will be detrimental for Israeli youth because it will create for them a right-wing frame of mind and will encourage the development of a right wing culture based on intolerance for others and the glorification of killing and destruction. This in turn will help in bringing more voters for the right-wing parties.

#### Conducive Political Environment

After years of incitement by Israeli right wing politicians, Israeli society became a conducive political environment provided by the dominant ideology of settler colonialism which is known as Political Zionism. This right-wing ideology becomes more extreme whence fear dominates the consciousness of the average Israeli Jewish citizen who feels the weakness of the Zionist state as a result of defeat in two consecutive wars in Lebanon (the 2000 and 2006 wars) and due to challenges that could come from Syria, Lebanon and Iran and as a result of the present internal challenges that could come from Palestinian resistance. The panic stricken Jewish voters will finally seek tough rightwing protectors as a solution for their psychological dire need.

#### The Employment of Racism in Election Campaign

The coalition right wing parties succeeded in legislating numerous racist laws in the Israeli parliament. According to the Institute for Middle East Understanding (IMEU), an Israeli think tank,

“There [are more than 50 laws](#) that discriminate against Palestinian citizens of Israel. directly or indirectly, based solely on their ethnicity, rendering them second or third class citizens in their own homeland.”[12] Moreover, “In recent years, the right has made it all too easy to brand its entire camp as racist, nationalist, populist and fascist...”[13]

Therefore, it could be ascertained that the present Israeli coalition government is the most extreme right-wing government in Israel’s history.

As a result, the measure of Israeli patriotism became a combination of three factors: the level of racist hatred towards the indigenous Palestinian population, the level of brutality of the Zionist leaders and the total destruction caused to Palestinian property and cities.

The state of racist hatred, scaremongering campaign and level of brutal violence are all reflective symptoms of the settler colonial nature of the Israeli Zionist state.

### The Replacement of Vital Issues

It is noticeable that most election agendas of Israeli political parties dealt with political and security-related issues, but ignored to tackle the vital issues of Israeli society such as: health, education, housing, economy, standard of living, and unemployment. The political narrative, especially the election propaganda, focused on scaremongering, racist hatred, security-related issues, and colonial violence. These issues usually create psychological pressures on the collective consciousness of the Israeli citizen. It pushes the citizens to solidify and get along with these issues. Zionist leaders have succeeded in making them appear as components of the Israeli national consensus.

According to a survey conducted by Israeli Television Chanel 13, it appeared that the election propaganda of most Israeli parties concentrated on the following issues: 28 percent on personal issues of the contenders, 16 percent on security issues and 10 percent on issues smearing the other contender. The survey added that 50 percent of election propaganda dealt with non-sense. While the issue of health, education, economy, and housing did not take any attention.[14]

These pressuring psychological impact aim at driving the consciousness of the Israeli citizen away from the real, vital and burning issues that affect their way of living. Currently, the Israeli citizen suffers from: deteriorating health services, especially at government hospitals, costly education and housing services, financial and institutional corruption, and an increasing level of social violence.

Those Israelis who have adopted the rightwing frame of mind are in solidarity with their parties. They are ready to identify with the ideology of their leaders to the point where they are willing to ignore their financial corruption, provided that they feel protected and secure. For example, Netanyahu has been accused by the Attorney General on three cases of corruption, but went on in his election campaign. He has not been charged yet but will be put to trial after he manages to establish a new coalition government. Apparently, the accusation of corruption did not harm his image nor reputation as a tough and hawkish right-wing leader.

### External Support and Rising Criticism

In addition to local internal support by a significant portion of Israeli pro-rightwing voters, Israeli rightwing governments have enjoyed the support of most of the European governments, the American administration, especially that of the rightwing Donald Trump, and the support of a number of reactionary Arab regimes such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Oman.

Israeli rightwing governments have received huge military and economic assistance from Western countries, especially the various American administrations. Outright political support was provided to Israeli rightwing governments, especially at the United Nations. This questionable assistance was given even when Israeli rightwing governments blatantly violated both international law and human rights. Israeli violations were, mostly, not condemned but encouraged. War crimes were and still being committed by the Israeli army and by Zionist settlers against the indigenous Palestinian civilians, yet, no Israeli war



criminal was brought to justice at the International Court of Justice.

Moreover, Israeli rightwing governments have been supported for years by the dominant Western media, capitalist think tanks, a significant part of Western academics and intellectuals, and a great portion of world public opinion. In turn, Israeli policies towards the indigenous Palestinian people have been defended as necessary acts of “defense” in face of Arab “terrorism”.

The totality of this varied support for the policies of Israeli rightwing governments provided Israel with a protective shield and sanctioned its internal and external policies that violate international law and contravene human rights. It also prevented the United Nations and the International Court of Justice from making Israel become accountable for its war crimes.

However, Israel is a settler colonialist entity that was created both by British imperialism and Political Zionism inside Palestine, which was populated by the indigenous Palestinian Arabs. In his evaluation of the impact of the colonization process on Israeli society [Bashir Abu-Manneh](#), wrote that:

Israeli society is not merely a society of immigrants; it is one of settlers. This society, including its working class, was shaped through a process of colonization.... The permanent conflict between settlers' society and the indigenous, displaced Palestinian Arabs has never stopped and it has shaped the very structure of Israeli sociology, politics, and economics.[15]

Justification of Zionist crimes and harsh policies towards the indigenous Palestinians needed a reasoning, an ideological tool, an enemy and scaremongering. The creation of an enemy for Zionist Israel has been a strategic asset of both rightwing and leftwing Zionism. This asset has been elaborated by both Bill and Kathleen Christison, who wrote a research article, in which they put the following reasoning for both the creation and employment of the ‘enemy’ in Zionist political speech.

Indeed, the most pernicious aspect of a political philosophy like Zionism that masquerades as democratic is that it requires an enemy in order to survive and, where an enemy does not already exist, it requires that one be created. In order to justify racist repression and dispossession, particularly in a system purporting to be democratic, those being repressed and displaced must be portrayed as murderous and predatory. And in order to keep its own population in line, to prevent a humane people from objecting to their own government's repressive policies, it requires that fear be instilled in the population: fear of “the other,” fear of the terrorist, fear of the Jew-hater. The Jews of Israel must always be made to believe that they are the preyed-upon. This justifies having forced these enemies to leave, it justifies discriminating against those who remained, it justifies denying democratic rights to those who later came under Israel's control in the occupied territories.[16]

Due to the fact that Israel is a product of ongoing settler colonialism, a process of rightwing political socialization is still thriving and crystallizing among the Jewish settler society. This process was affected by US-Israeli relationship, which in turn was consolidated since 1967. Bashir Abu-Manneh reflected on that relationship by writing the following description.

... The United States has been determining major economic and political

outcomes in the Middle East since at least 1967, with Israel continuing to play a crucial role in their realization. In Israel-Palestine, this has meant that force and colonial peace have alternated as main instruments of policy, with the main objective being a constant: Jewish supremacy in Palestine—as much land as possible, as few Palestinians as possible. The United States has exploited this Zionist imperative for its own interests in the region, and has fostered a militarized and fundamentalist Israel in the process. This reality can be gauged in Israel's most recent parliamentary elections...[17]

James Petras described Jewish solidarity with Israel, among the educated strata, as in fact, being a choice to "...embrace an 'ethno-religious' Supremacist dogma, which binds them to an apartheid, militarist state and ideology ready to drag the world into a global war." [18]

However, a new phenomenon is on the rise among Diaspora Jewry. Young Jews are increasingly becoming critical of and disenchanted with Israeli policies. The increasing weight of this phenomenon and the accumulated world public pressure, are bound to affect Israeli policies towards the indigenous Palestinians. According to the evaluation of James Petras,

Jews, especially young Jews, are increasingly repelled by Israel's crimes against humanity. The next step for them (and for us) is to criticize, demystify and stand up to the toxic supremacist ideology linking the powerful domestic Zionist power configuration and its political clones with Israel.[19]

All settler colonial societies exhibit rightwing tendencies because of espousing ultra nationalist ideologies. During the conflict with the indigenous population, colonial settlers develop a racist frame of mind and a narrow minded world view. The more inhuman crimes the settlers perpetuate, the more extreme rightwing positions they adopt.

In conclusion, the Zionist political rightwing is on the rise among Israeli Jewish electorate. It has created an apartheid state that is heading towards a stage of becoming a rogue state. It will soon become a pariah state living on the sword and committing detestable crimes and policies. So far such objectionable status is tolerated by a portion of world public opinion. However, sooner or later, it will become harder for Israeli supporters and allies to continue to support a state that is increasingly sinking in racism, ultra-nationalism, colonial violence, expansion of colonial settlement, colonial segregation, intolerance, inhuman policies and rightwing narrow mindedness.

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Notes

[1] The Israeli Labor Party, along with the Meretz Party (ZS)



[2] I have attentively watched all the party propaganda advertisements that were televised by Israeli Chanel 13, two weeks prior to the Israeli election that took place on April 9<sup>th</sup>, 2019 (ZS).

[3] This theme has been repeated a number of times prior and during election propaganda. It could be ascertained from news bulletins and other electronically documented information (ZS).

[4] Trew , [Bel](#) , “Racism against Arab Israelis will reach unprecedented levels by Israel’s April elections – and the world won’t care”, <https://www.independent.co.uk>, 3 February 2019.

[5] [Scheindlin](#), Dahlia, “The right keeps winning in Israel because Israelis are right wing”, <https://972mag.com>, November 19, 2018.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Adkins, Laura and Sales, Ben, “The kids are all right-wing: Why Israel’s younger voters are more conservative”, <https://www.timesofisrael.com>, 11 April 2019.

[8] IMEU, “Discrimination Against Palestinian Citizens of Israel”, <https://imeu.org>, September 28, 2011.

[9] Abunimah, Ali, “Israeli election ad boasts Gaza bombed back to “stone ages”, <https://electronicintifada.net>, 21 January 2019

[10] Ibid.

[11] Tsurkov, Elizabeth, “How Did Israeli Elections Get So Racist?”, <https://forward.com>, January 30, 2019

[12] IMEU, “Discrimination Against Palestinian Citizens of Israel”, <https://imeu.org>, September 28, 2011.

[13] Scheindlin, Dahlia, “What will it take for Israel’s right-wing voters to say enough?”, <https://972mag.com>, March 1, 2019.

[14] Survey conducted by Israeli television, Chanel 13. It was broadcasted in the news bulletin, on April 5, 2019

[15] [Abu-Manneh, Bashir](#), “Israel in the U.S. Empire”, <https://monthlyreview.org>, Mar 01, 2007

[16] Christison, Bill and Kathleen, “Zionism as Racist Ideology”, <https://www.counterpunch.org>, November 5, 2003.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Petras, James, “The Doctrine of ‘Superior People’: The Bond between Israel and World Zionism”, <https://www.globalresearch.ca>, September 05, 2015

[19] Ibid.

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