



Israeli Parties and Right-Leaning Bias

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Introduction

The political parties are the cornerstone of the Israeli political system, as they constitute the first building bloc of any election process until the formation of the 120th Knesset seats. The parties then heal anew to form the governmental coalition that leads the occupation state for four years as a complete electoral cycle. Thus, some parties fell within this coalition while some other move to form the opposition wing.

Those parties differ in terms of formation, ideology, and ethnicity. Accordingly, they are categorized according to political, religious, social and economic categorizations; yet the most essential category lies in the political perspectives of those parties; Right, Left and Middle. Probably, those perspectives are ideological.

The Rightest Israeli parties have been spearheading the Israeli political scene since the big coup against the Labor Party in 1977. Led by the biggest party "Likud", they continued to spearhead the Israeli political system during most of the period that follows the coup.

This study addresses the Israeli political parties and the shift to the Right-wing, starting from the political system and its shape, the parties' system and its formation, and the methods adopted to divide those parties. Also, it deals with the main reasons behind the disappearance of the gap between the Right and Left parties in the Israeli political system, and the most prominent results and recommendations of the study.

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First: Israeli Political and Electoral Systems

The Israeli political and electoral systems are no different from the political regimes that follow the modern government paths in all countries of the world. It is based on the existence of the three authorities that shape the State.

First: Political System

The political system is formed by the following:

- Legislative Authority.
- Executive Branch.
- Judicial Authority.

These three authorities are engaged in decision-making, implementation, and oversight to maintain the high interests of the state.

Form of the Political System:

The Israeli political system essentially takes the form of the parliamentary system, with the position of the Head of State in an honorary manner without any significant powers. This means the Head of Government or the Prime Minister is the one representing the government, which is mandated by the Parliament to fully manage the country's affairs with the position of the Head of State in his honorary capacity.¹

Institution of Parliament (Knesset):

The Knesset, the legislative branch of the Israeli political system, is an extension of what was known as the "Great Council", which was forming the Jewish legislature in the 6th century BC, and was also known as the Sanhedrin².

¹ Mustafa, Muhannad, Government System in Israel, Israel Guide 2020, Palestinian Studies Institute, 2020.

² The website of the Israeli Knesset, main.knesset.gov.il



The Knesset consists of several basic bodies and positions, the most important of which is the Chairmanship of the Knesset, the General Authority of the Knesset, the Main and Subsidiary Committees, and the Administrative and Security Organs of the Knesset. Today, the Knesset is composed of 120 members, who are being elected by direct suffrage in accordance with the principle of proportional representation, which has a four-year mandate. The Knesset handles the following:

- Granting trust to governments in charge.
- Electing the Head of State.
- Legislating laws.
- Implementing judicial functions, including: removal of parliamentary immunity, removal of the President under conditions, and numerous other powers.³

Second: Electoral system

The Israeli political system lacks a written constitution that regulates the parliamentary elections of the Knesset, and is compensated for the existence of laws regulating political life, such as the Knesset Law, Government Law, Head of State Law, etc.⁴

Features of the Israeli Electoral System:

1. It is a system based on party lists, weakening the opportunity for individuals and independents to nominate themselves.
2. Gives Priority to large parties with broad party bases.
3. Increases the parties' ability to compete within the inability of one party to resolve elections with the majority.
4. Increases the chance of political unrest and instability in the Knesset and the Government.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Sheikh Khaleel, Nehad, Israeli Political System, Islamic University, Gaza, 2013, P. 6.



5. Enables small parties to blackmail large parties and reap disproportionate gains.⁵

The most prominent feature of the Israeli political system is that it is based on the principle of multipartyism. The origin of this diversity is the explicit social conflict among the ingredients of the community, which is multi-origin and multi-ethnic, making the political and party scene a reflection of this diversity.

Second: Israeli Political Parties

The Israeli parties in their forms and ideologies reflect the shape of the Israeli society and the differentiation of its components. However, this diversity does not give a consistent form to the parties, their values and their principles. Israeli party life frequently changes, as it is subject to many changes in its leadership and organizational structure in each electoral cycle. Homogeneous and heterogeneous conglomerates are formed for electoral purposes, the most important of which is the need to cross the threshold set for the entry of the Knesset.

These parties are divided into two main blocs in terms of ideology.

- **Right Parties:** they include religious and extremist parties such as Likud, the Shas of the Jewish Home, Yisrael Beiteinu, and others.
- **Left and Center Parties:** they include secular and left-wing parties such as Labor Party, the White Blue Party, the Mertes Party, the Yesh Atid Party, Arab Parties and others.

In this regard, we will address the right-wing parties, which constitute most of the Israeli parties. Most notably:

1. Likud Party:

The Likud Party was founded in 1973 after the union of both the Herut Movement and the National Rally of Independents, under the supervision of

⁵ Ibid.



Ariel Sharon⁶. The Herut formed the hard core of the new Likud Party, and belonged to the Corrective Movement led by Ze'ev Jabotinsky. Menachem Begin is the first leader of Likud, while Yitzhak Shamir is one of the most prominent leaders of the party⁷.

Following is the political program of the Likud Party:

- Al-Quds is the whole and eternal capital of the entity.
- Refusal of refugees' return and any alternative options for return.
- Absolute opposition of the establishment of the Palestinian State, with a phased willingness to recognize it against conditions that would free that State of any sovereign or national content.
- Expansion of colonial settlements in the occupied West Bank.
- Granting the Palestinians autonomy to manage their civil affairs and to avoid the responsibility of occupation over them⁸.

Benjamin Netanyahu had been the most prominent leader of the Likud in history, as he led the Likud and Israeli governments for almost 15 years. Since winning the Israeli elections in 2009, Likud, headed by Netanyahu, had dominated the Israeli political scene until the beginning of the current year, through forming a group of coalitions and alliances with the Right parties, religious extremists, and sometimes the Left.

2. Yisrael Beiteinu Party:

The Yisrael Beiteinu Party is one of the most prominent and powerful Rightest parties, and has secular Right-wing orientations. It was founded in 1999 by the extremist Avigdor Lieberman, who began his political life as a member of the "Kach" terrorist movement and moved in to work with Netanyahu

⁶ Mansour, Kmail, Israel Guide 2011, Palestinian Studies Institute, 2011.

⁷ AL-Naami, Saleh, Regime in Israel, Dr. Saleh Alnaami E-Website.

⁸ Ibid.



in the Likud Party, before finally presiding over his new party⁹. Lieberman also served as Director-General of Benjamin Netanyahu when he became Head of the Israeli Government in 1996¹⁰.

Following is the political program of Yisrael Beiteinu Party:

The Yisrael Beiteinu party is consistent with the basic principles that the Likud generally espouses, especially since Lieberman is a Likud schoolboy and holds a number of the most extreme principles, most notably:

- 1) Resolving the conflict with the resistance in Gaza through its extermination.
- 2) Imposing full Jewish sovereignty over Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa.
- 3) Adopting the beliefs that support expelling the Palestinians out of Palestine to places such as Sinai Desert.
- 4) Threatening to bomb Arab States and strategic sites such as Egypt's High Dam and The Syrian President's Palace in Damascus¹¹.

3. Jewish Home Party:

The Jewish Home party is one of the most prominent of the Right-wing parties founded in the last 10 years, and achieved its greatest achievement in the elections of 2013 with winning 12 seats. Its principles are also very similar to the Likud¹².

It is notable that the Jewish Home party led by PM Naftali Bennett was, for several years, merely a follower of the policies of the Likud leader Benjamin Netanyahu, who, on several occasions, interfered frequently in the form of the

⁹ Abu Daqqa, Ahmed, Israeli Parties in Israel, Al-Bayan Magazine, August 7, 2011.

¹⁰ Avigdor, Liberman, Palestinian Center for Israeli Studies "Madar".

¹¹ Ibid, Al-Naami, Regime in Israel.

¹² Besharat, Said, Role of Religious Jewish Currents in Political Life in Israel between 2000-2019, Al-Quds University, 2019.



party, its coalitions and electoral alliances. As a result, Bennett rebelled against Netanyahu and turned against him in the 2021 Knesset election¹³.

4. Shas party " East Torah Guards"

The Shas party is one of the Israeli religious right parties, affiliated with the founder and godfather Ovadia Yosef. The Shas party emerged in the early 1970s and its political presence in Israeli elections varied throughout subsequent years. However, the party's greatest achievement emerged in the 1999 elections after gaining 17 seats, making it the first religious party and the third political force in the Knesset¹⁴.

The Shas party spawned a number of leaders along the party's spiritual leader Ovadia Yosef, the most prominent leaders were Aryeh Deri and its political leader Eli Yishai.

5. Yahadut HaTorah Party:

The Yahadut HaTorah Party was established just before the 1988 elections through the merging of three religious parties: Agudat Yisrael, Degel HaTorah and Moria. The party represents the religious Western Jews from Europe and the United States. A number of leaders formed the party's address as Right-wing religious figures such as Rabi Chash, the current Health Minister Jacob Litsman, and Moshe Gaffney¹⁵.

The party's ideas can be summarized through its name, which means (Jews of the Torah). It means that the terms of reference of the Israeli policy must be

¹³ Jewish Home Party, Aljazeera Network, December 6, 2014.

¹⁴ Shas Party, Wafa Newspaper, 2021.

¹⁵ Abu Sada, Muhammed, Political Map in Israel, Egyptian Institute for Studies, October 25, 2019.



subjected to the teachings of the Torah. It also advocates the formation of a religious state based on a Torah identity rather than a civilian one¹⁶.

6. New Hope Party:

The differences within the Likud in 2020 caused a number of party leaders to split, most notably Gideon Saar, one of the party's Right-wing hawks and the second man after Benjamin Netanyahu.

The New Hope Party adopts racist ideas that reject the Two-State solution or any form of an independent Palestinian State. It also does not recognize the Palestinians' authority over West Bank areas, and calls for their annexation as part of the occupied territories controlled by occupation. During its first experience in the 2021 Knesset elections, the party won 6 seats and participated in the Naftali Bennett-led coalition¹⁷.

Third: Israeli Parties and Right-Leaning Bias

The Israeli parties are subject to a number of social, political and religious divisions in their principles and ideas. Perhaps, the most prominent division that classifies them is their dependence on the Right or Left wings in the intellectual and ideological dimensions, either at the local level, or with regard to the Palestinian issue and the perception of the conflict.

First: Division of the Israeli Right and Left Parties

The division between the Right and Left wings began from the beginning of the Jewish presence on the Palestinian land, and was based on socio-economic issues, as well as on the political security axis and the Jewish identity¹⁸. With the development of the Israeli political system and the entry of

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ New Hope Party, Wafa Newspaper 2021, Palestinian National Information Center.

¹⁸ Shehadeh, Imtanes, Political Programs of Right-wing Parties in Israel, Palestine Studies Institute, February 11, 2015.



a large number of parties into the Israeli political arena, the classification expanded to include five main party camps.

1. Right Camp.
2. Religious Right camp.
3. Centre camp.
4. Zionist Left camp.
5. Non-Zionist Left camp¹⁹.

Second: History and Rise of the Right Party

The Right Party has begun its path in the Israeli policy early since the announcement of the occupation of Palestine and the establishment of the entity. The Agudat Yisrael party emerged as the most prominent Right-wing party of that period, and the other Right-wing parties and forces continued to develop until the formation of its first government in 1977²⁰. Regarding the religious people, who are a major pillar of the Right-wing's power, their numbers have increased significantly from about 1.5% of the total population during the Nakba to about 15% at present²¹.

The time stages of the development of the Right can be divided into:

Phase I (1948-1977): This phase was marked by the full control of the Labor Party over the Israeli governance scene. The roles of the Right-wing parties were limited to establishing a stable position that would bring them and their beliefs into line with the State and its regime. The most prominent issues agreed

¹⁹ Al-Faleet, Ahmed, specialist in Zionist affairs, an interview conducted by the researcher on October 5, 2021.

²⁰ Khateeb, Inas, Impact of Religious and Charedi Parties on the Political Scene in Israel, Mada Al-Carmel Research Centre.

²¹ Haredi Judaism and Its Impact on Rightest Attitudes of the Israeli Governments, Vision for Political Development, December 21, 2016.



upon were family laws, education, military service, the Sabbath holy and the laws of slaughter²².

Phase II (1977-2009): This period was remarked by the wide control of the Right-wing parties, mainly the Likud Party, which controlled the government for most of the years during this period. Extremist Right-wing and religious parties have established a foothold to achieve important demands that serve their programs and institutions through participating in successive governments in terms of education, expenditure and individual and collective allocations²³.

This period saw an increase in the racist tones, most notably the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin after he had signed the Oslo Agreement with the Palestinian Authority²⁴. It also witnessed the shift of the Right-wing parties a bit towards the Centrist party, carrying the slogan "Great Israel" with the possibility of achieving a phased solution²⁵.

Phase III (2009-present): The Right-wing party, led by the Likud, took over power from 2009 until Naftali Bennett, the leader of the Yamina Party, took over the prime minister position following Netanyahu's collapse. Thus, the Likud Party has continued to this time. Netanyahu has also contributed significantly to the inclusion of religious and extremist elements from the Far Right in his governmental coalition to win the votes of their electoral bases²⁶.

Third: Reasons behind the rise of the Right and the Demise of Left Forces

The main reasons behind the rise of the Israeli Right can be summarized through the following factors:

1. Provision of support to the settlement projects in the West Bank.

²² Ibid, Khateeb, Impact of Religious and Charedi Parties on the Political Scene in Israel, p. 11.

²³ Ibid, P. 12-13.

²⁴ Wated, Nedal, 4th Israeli Elections: Right Competes and Arab conflict, New Arab Website, February 6, 2021.

²⁵ Al-Musalami, Atef, Israeli Left: Stable or Not? Palestinian Planning Center, January 16, 2006.

²⁶ Far-Right Parties in Israeli Policy, special translation, Al-Hadaf News, March 14, 2019.



2. The ability to conclude peace agreements with some Arab States.
3. Enhancement of the relationship with the United States, and making it strategic²⁷.
4. The collapse and weakness of Left Camp and the absence of active leaders²⁸.
5. The inability of the Left-wing forces to influence Right-wing groupings that were influenced by Far Right-oriented intellectual elites²⁹.
6. The migration of about one million Jews from the Soviet Union with Right-wing ideas³⁰.
7. Length and continuity of the term of ruling³¹.

Fourth: Religious influence:

The infiltration of the religious mainstream into the parties' scene and the rule in the Israeli arena began with the hope that some gains regarding the protection of religious customs and traditions would be made.

This role has evolved to be exploited by active Right-wing parties like Likud in resolving electoral rounds³². As the Religious Right-wing presence has

²⁷ Battah, Ahmed, Israeli Right-Wing: Why does it Dominate Political Scene? Al Ra'i Newspaper, March 30, 2021.

²⁸ Nabulsi, Razi, Israel Crisis: When Right and Left Struggle, Palestinian Center for Political Researches and Strategic Studies "Masarat", November 19, 2019.

²⁹ Samara, Mutasem, Substantive Reasons behind Right Wing's Advancement in Israel, Al-Quds Center for Studies, 2018.

³⁰ Israeli Left: From a Dominant Political Force to Parties in Danger of Disappearing, France 24, February 26, 2020.

³¹ Mohammed Abdel Aleem, New Israeli Right: Reasons and Repercussions, Al-Ain Newspaper, December 7, 2019.

³² Al-Awar, Ali, Israeli Political Map Moves Towards Right-Wing, Maan News Network, December 30, 2020.



increased, these parties have become a crucial factor in the preponderance of the winners of the parliamentary elections³³.

The religious Right-wing integration into the Israeli political scene has increased, to the extent that it has absorbed a number of extremists such as Itmar Ben-Gvir, the leader of the Jewish Power Party, which was classified as terrorist by the Israeli government in the 1990s. Ben Gvir was personally charged with the murder of former PM Yitzhak Rabin³⁴.

The control of Right-wing parties did not only depend on the political aspects and issues relating to the laws of the entity's religious communities. However, the control of the Religious Right-wing elites increased to include sensitive positions in the army and the political and military decision-making process³⁵.

Fifth: Differences in the Palestinian Issue

It can be said that the prevailing criteria for classifying parties as Right and Left are no longer present in dealing with the Israeli state, as the Palestinian issue has emerged as a crucial element in the Right-Left classification process³⁶. Examining the programs of the Right-wing and Left-wing parties in this context shows that they are very close to each other on issues of state identity and nationality, settlement issues, negotiations, Two-State solution discussion, and the establishment of an independent Palestinian State³⁷.

³³ Pollock, David, Hermann, Tamar, The Increasingly Right Stuff: Religious Parties in Israel's Upcoming Election, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Washington D.C., pp.1.

³⁴ Marouf, Abdullah, Would Kahane's Studies have control over Government in Israel? TRT Website, February 23, 2021.

³⁵ Ibrahim, Mustafa, Extremist Israeli Right Wing Strengthens Its Power, Palestine Forum website, December 26, 2020.

³⁶ Abdel Majid, Waheed, Privacy of Right and Left Parties in Israel, Al-Ittihad Newspaper, April 3.

³⁷ Ibid, Shehadeh, Political Programs of Right-wing Parties in Israel.



As this gap faded, a new classification that is more racist than the Right and Left parties emerged. It is called the right of the Israeli Right party, and it's different from the normal Right in the following:

1. Calls for imposing the Israeli sovereignty over the occupied territories immediately.
2. Prevents any autonomy of the Palestinians.
3. Suppresses any act of resistance to the maximum extent without any internal or external legal considerations.
4. Supports expansion of settlements without regard to international considerations and the American position³⁸.

At the level of the comparison between the Right and Left parties, the Left leaders call for racist slogans that are hostile to the relationship with the Arabs. Some of these leaders have also participated in Right-wing governments of racist orientations, while another part calls for expelling the Arabs from the entity, considering them an anti-occupation 5th column³⁹. Practically, the leaders of the Left Party and Labor Party contributed to establishing the Palestinian suffering through Al-Nakba crimes and the 1967 wars⁴⁰.

Sixth: Future of the Right-wing camp in the Israeli Political System:

According to the current reading to the governing scene in the Israeli arena, it appears that the competition process for the entity's management will be confined for years to the corridors of the Israeli Right. It does not seem that there is an uprising close to the Left that brings it back into the forefront of the Israeli political scene⁴¹. The faith of the Israeli electorate is also largely convinced of the Right-wing nationalist, secular, extremist and religious

³⁸ Khalifa, Ahmed, Far-Right Parties in Israel: Ideological and Political Features, Journal of Palestine Studies, Folder 2, Number 5, 1991.

³⁹ Eraqi, Amjad, What if Left becomes Right? Palestinian Politics Network, March 11, 2018.

⁴⁰ Al-Sahli, Nabeel, Israel Left Lie, Arabi 21 Website, March 24, 2020.

⁴¹ Israel: Right-Wing Government, Aljazeera Center for Studies, April 8, 2013.



directions. This was translated by the election results, with the Right-wing trend gaining 72 seats, representing 60% of the Knesset's total⁴².

At the same time, the Left parties and peace advocates in the Israeli street suffer from a relapse from a sharp decline in popular presence, and their ability to influence some small parties and weightless figures within or outside their parties⁴³.

At the level of the Right party, the Right has begun to replace itself from within the right. It also has forced the left parties to enter a government under its presidency with a high level of extortion, emphasizing the right's racist slogans of disavowing conventions and preventing the establishment of a Palestinian state⁴⁴. The new Right-wing leader, Bennett, publicly states that he intends to carry out the annexation of the West Bank and to prevent any Palestinian State from exercising its full sovereignty⁴⁵.

Conclusions and Recommendation:

First: Conclusions

- The Israeli political system consists of constructive structures, which together form the occupation's three authorities.
- The Israeli parties are the pillars of the Israeli political system, starting from the Knesset up to the government.
- The ideology of the winning parties in the elections is reflected on the strategy of the Israeli government, shaped by those parties.

⁴² Haikal, Fattouh and others, Israeli Elections 2021: Reading and Analysis of the Results, Map of Coalitions and Possible Attitudes, Trends for Research and Advisory, March 21, 2021.

⁴³ Al-Sahli, Nabeel, Peace in Israeli Parties' Agenda, Aljazeera Network, January 5, 2016.

⁴⁴ Musleh, Eid, specialist in Israeli affairs, an interview conducted by the researcher on September 30, 2021.

⁴⁵ Between Extremist Right and Zionism: Political History of Neftali Bennett, Sasa Post, June 16, 2021.



- The Right-wing party with its religious and secular parts control all the important and dynamic aspects of the occupation state along the political, military and social fields.
- The longevity of the Right-wing's reign and the continuity of the Left-wing's collapse led to changes in the Israeli grass-roots and their shift to the right. Also, the left-wing's alignment with the right-wing's strategies and beliefs led to narrowing the gap between the two wings.
- The impact of the religious mainstream increases in the Right-wing in a manner that aggravates racism and extremism in the Zionist-government institutions.
- It is expected that the superior position of the Right-wing in the immediate and medium-term future would continue without an effective opportunity for the left-wing to recover.

Recommendations:

The study comes up with several recommendations:

- A Palestinian political system must be built to confront the extremist regime of the occupation.
- A comprehensive media system must be built to expose the occupation's crimes and its extremist ideological beliefs which aim to destroy the Palestinian society, people, future, and the possibility to establish their state.
- Efforts must be exerted effectively to deter the occupation from its occupational goals and programs, and to force it to recognize the Palestinian right either through activating the political work with the international and regional partners, or activating the role of resistance with all of its kinds.
- An international network concerned about the Palestinian rights must be established to chase the occupation in the international forums, and increase the popular and economic boycott to press on the occupation.

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