



Division Continues to Deepen Among Israelis

A recent poll released by the Pew Research Center shows increasing polarization in Israeli society. The two main indicators of this division are political and religious ideologies. This poll covered many questions concerning both, but among the most important were views about Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. 52% of Israelis had an unfavorable view of Netanyahu, while 47% had a favorable view. The poll also indicates a growing division between the political left and right in Israel. 75% of Israelis polled saw strong conflicts between the two groups. This political division is growing with little chance of reconciliation, and trapped in the middle of it are the Palestinians.

It is of note that younger Israelis are more likely than old Israeli to see strong societal conflicts. 18–29-year-olds were most likely to see strong societal conflicts across a range of groups, including between those who are religious and non-religious, Arab and Jewish, and left and right political leanings. This higher percentage of younger people is more likely to see strong societal conflicts. The Israeli military has compulsory military service for all Israeli citizens, with some exceptions. A high percentage of those serving in the military are between the ages of 18 and 29. This data point substantiates a recent string of letters signed by thousands of Israeli service members pledging to not show up for duty if Netanyahu's law dismantling judicial checks is passed.

This internal conflict will likely come to a head when the supreme court rules on a law that will limit its power. The Israeli Supreme Court is currently in a very difficult position. If they allow Netanyahu's coalition to gut the courts, they will have unchecked power to pass laws further discriminating and brutalizing Palestinians. This will escalate tensions and almost certainly lead to a confrontation between the two sides. If they decide to block the law, the coalition could simply ignore the ruling, throwing Israel into a constitutional crisis.

The Palestinians will be negatively affected no matter the ruling of the supreme court. At its roots, this conflict is between those who favor the secular, 1967 brand of Zionism or the current, more extreme brand. This being said, the former is the better of the two, but it is still apartheid. The situation in Palestine is becoming increasingly dire. The far-right extremist government allows and even supports the murder of Palestinians by illegal settlers in the West Bank. The recent killing of Qusai Jamal Maatan is just the latest example of the impunity Israeli settlers have to attack and kill Palestinians.

This poll confirms what many observers have said, there is a deep division among Israelis. This division continues to grow by the day as the gap between the political left and right continues to widen. This growing crisis also has the potential to leave Israel in a highly vulnerable position and gives critics ammunition to argue their points. If the judicial law passes, it will be increasingly difficult to sell the idea that Israel is the only democracy in the Middle East, which was a false statement, to begin with. Blind support for Israel is still the norm among the U.S. Congress, but this sentiment is beginning to change among the American public. A 2023 poll by Gallup indicates waning support for Israel and growing

sympathy toward Palestinians. Due to the entrenched nature of American politics, a switch in policy is unlikely to take place in the near or even far future, but the internal conflict in Israel may expedite this change.

This poll also indicates that the growing divide between the left and right in Israel will not disappear anytime soon. It is more likely that it will escalate. The extent of this escalation is unknown, but some commentators warn that a civil war may be on the horizon. With hundreds of thousands protesting against Netanyahu and his coalition and refusal to serve by a large number of reservists, this may not be too outlandish of a prediction. It also appears unlikely that either side will back down. Netanyahu is not willing because of his desire to escape pending corruption charges, which this new law will aid. The passage of this law is also a conditional requirement to maintain support from his government coalition. If Netanyahu backs down, his government will quickly collapse. The people are unwilling because this law will dismantle the checks that keep the Knesset from holding absolute power over Israel. Many of the laws already proposed will harm both residents of Israel and occupied Palestine. Israel's current political crisis is escalating at breakneck speed without safety rails or breaks. A confrontation is certain. The extent of this will be determined by the actions of the supreme court and military reservists.