

Israel: The Jewish State or haven for all?

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08/22/2023



Protests in London by Haredi Jews against President Benjamin Netanyahu's visit in 2023

Jacob Sagers – Benjamin Netanyahu's recent victory in Israeli legislative elections is built with a coalition more conservative than his previous governments. Relying on ultra-orthodox Jews for support has resulted in him weakening Israel's courts, many of whom have upheld liberal policies, and looking at expanding all-male rabbinical courts' power. Now many secular Jews and Muslims fear Israel could become an ultraorthodox state. Public sex segregation has become the latest push amid an identity being built around Zionism or the Jewish state.

Israeli [national identity](#), or the way Israelis view their attachment to the country, is largely built from religion: stemming from Jewish identity and history. Not all Jews are the same, however. They hold different levels of devoutness and ancestry from different areas which challenges a single, homogenous identity. This shows in Israeli politics with the Israeli left wing being largely secular Jews while the right wing is spearheaded by ultra-orthodox and conservative Jews. Furthermore, despite Netanyahu's attempts at promoting a Jewish state, Israel still holds sizeable Muslim and Christian minorities. They are generally ostracized in the political scene, forming an unstable national identity that is prone to rapid change. Nevertheless, religion plays a vital role in policy, culture, social issues, and Israel's future.

Israeli national identity is starting to be drawn along lines of gender and sex. With more extreme elements of Judaism gaining power in the Knesset, Israel's parliament, many feel threatened by proposals of sex segregation in schools, public, and transportation. Recent proposals would bind all women to Orthodox policies, essentially

restricting them to private rather than public activities. The current government has made and begun to use tools to form a new Israel. These tools include expanding religious courts, gaining control over the military, privileges for Orthodox Jews, and pardoning Netanyahu. Muslims and LGBTQ+ people would also feel the brunt as Orthodox supremacy runs the state, shattering the idea of an open, diverse, liberal democracy in the Middle East. Whether Netanyahu can remain in power, however, amid corruption investigations, protests, and future elections challenges the rewriting of Israeli national identity.

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