

POLITICS AND SOCIETY IN ISRAEL

IRE215

SPRING 2020

Session 11



Maya Hadar

On The Agenda For Today

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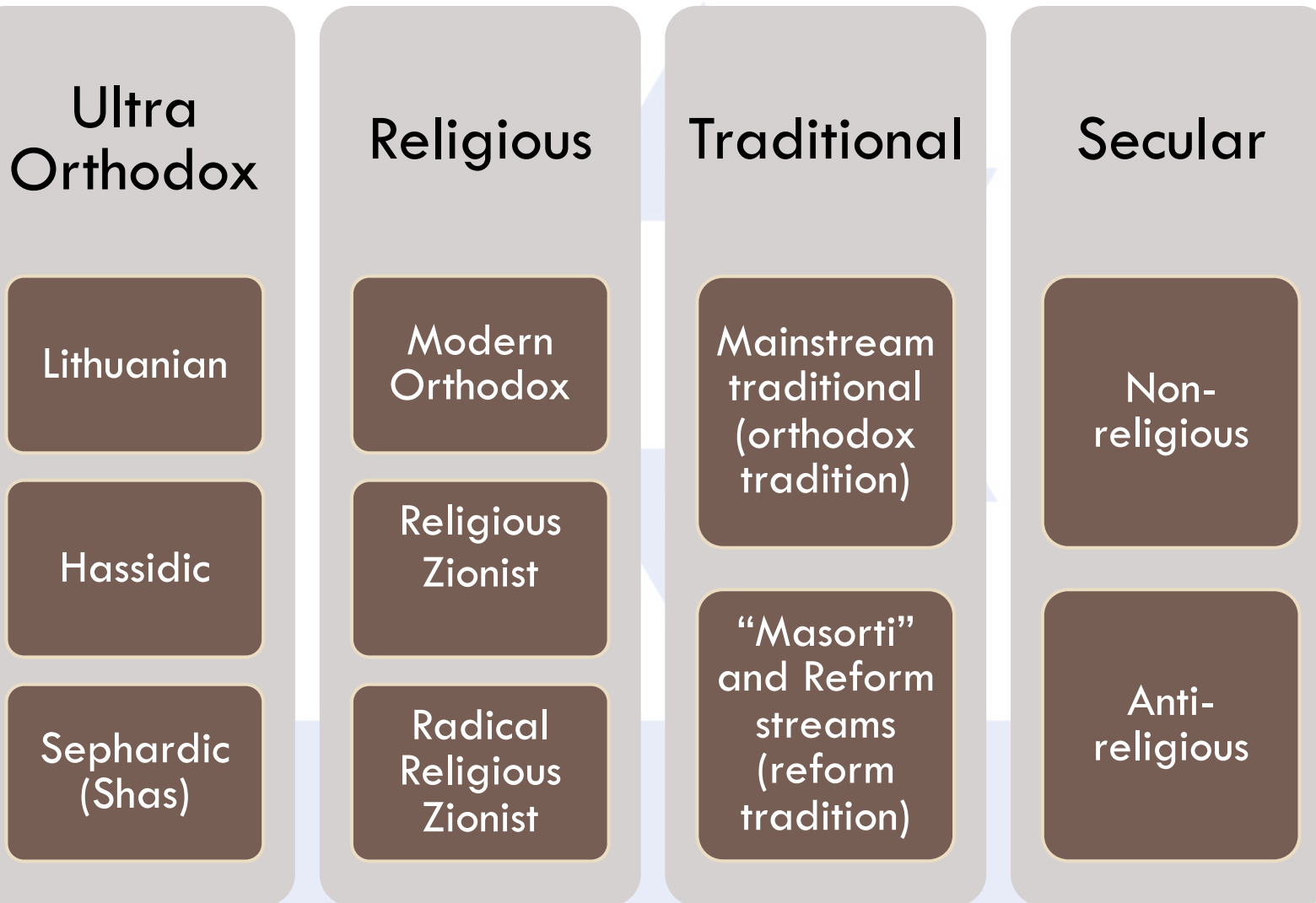
■ Religion and State in Israel

- Jewish Communities of Israel
- The Political-Religious Connection
- Religious Jews and the State of Israel
- The Case of Brother Daniel
- The Ultra Orthodox Sector
- Religious and State: Contemporary Challenges
- Social Cohesion and Disparities

■ The Israeli Defense Forces

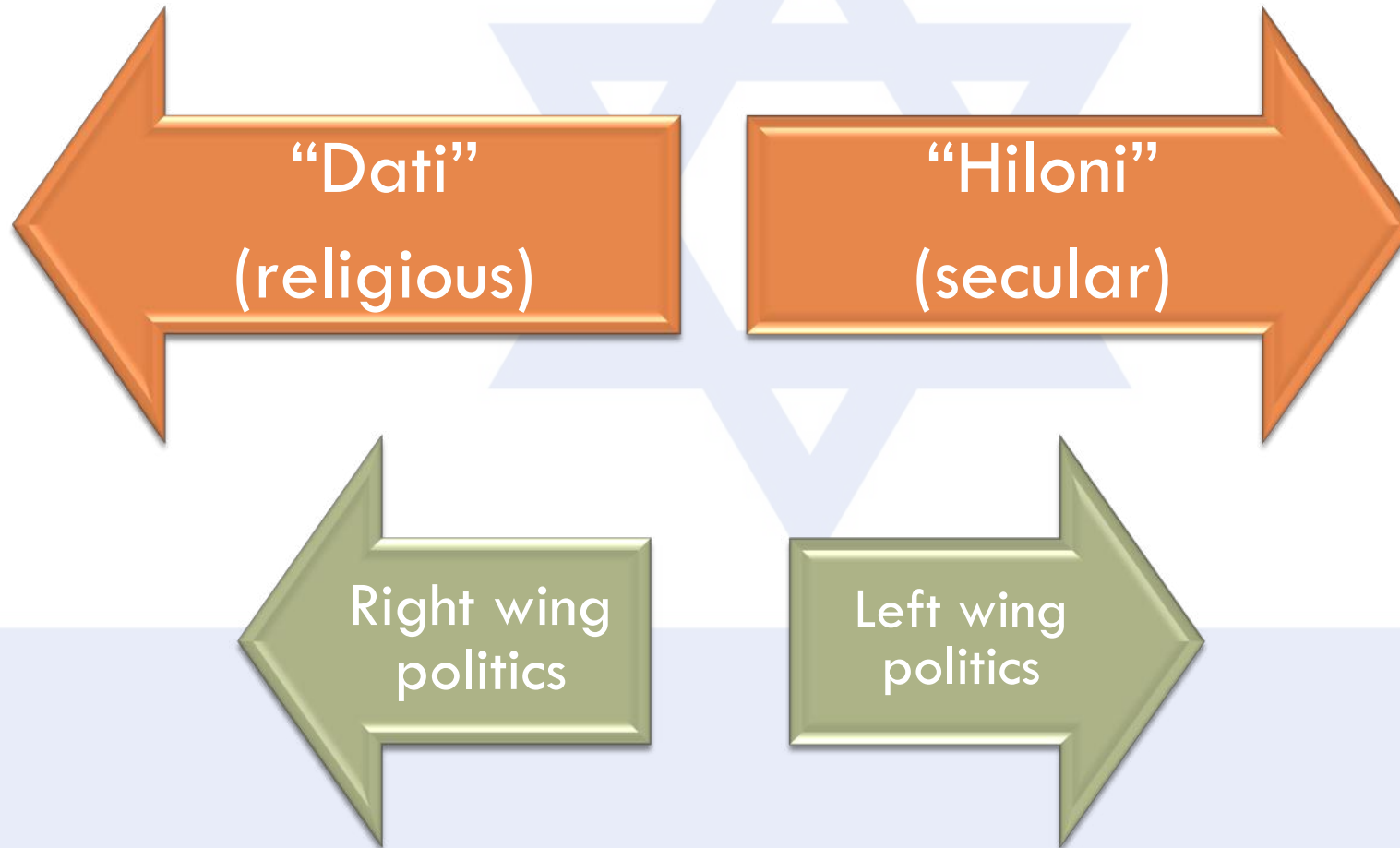
- Historical Background
- Characteristics
- Compulsory Service + Exceptions
- Equipment
- Israel as an Army Nation

Jewish Communities of Israel



Politics and Religion

The commonly perceived religious/political dichotomy:



Religious Jews and the State of Israel

- Before Israel was established, **Zionists** were determined to reach some sort of **agreement** with **Agudas Israel** (a political movement of ultra Orthodox Jews)
 - How will life in future Israel look like?
 - The “**Status quo**” **agreement** (summer of 1947), establishing a framework of coexistence with **Agudas Israel**
- The **Jewish Agency** wanted **political unity in Israel**, but **not a religious state**

Religious Jews and the State of Israel

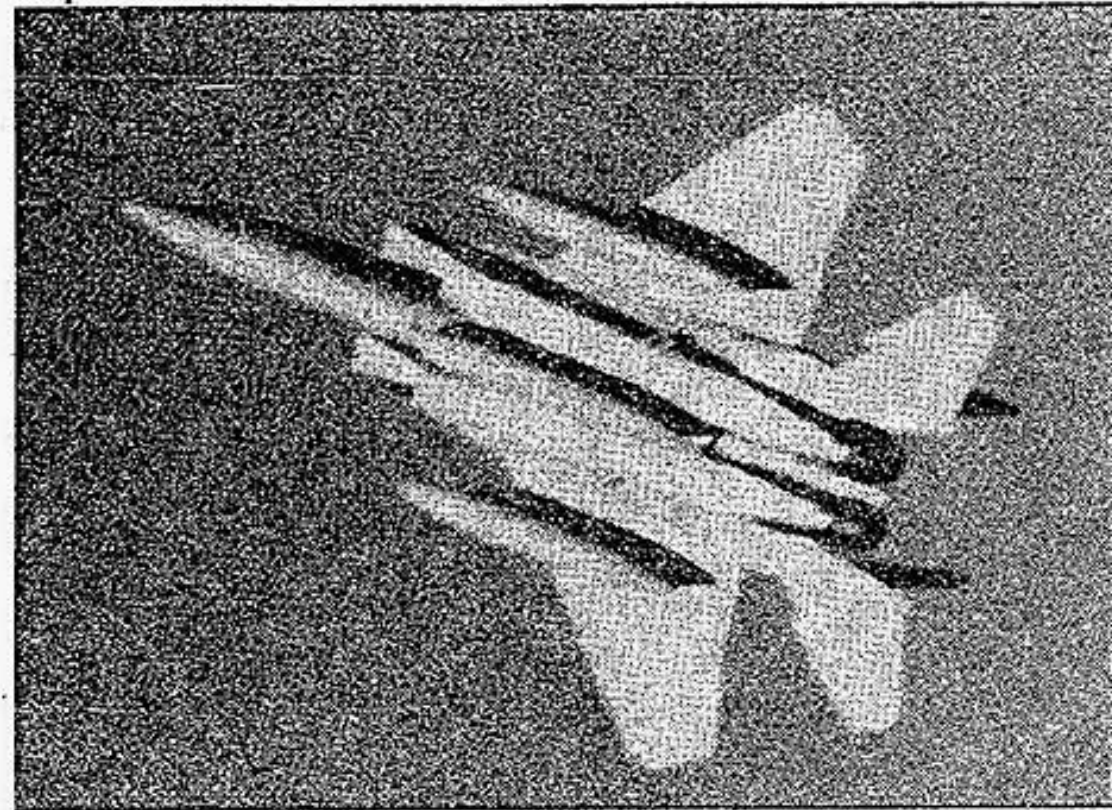
- **Agudas Israel** insisted on a **Jewish entity** that would maintain a basic **halachic** (Jewish religious law) framework for Jewish continuity
- 1949: “**Unified religious front**” as part of Israel’s first government (included Haredim/ultra-Orthodox)
- From 1948 until today, **no single party** has ever won enough seats in an Israeli election (61) in order to govern **without coalition partners**
- The smaller **Orthodox** and **ultra- Orthodox** parties are often very **important** players in **coalition building** and party politics

Religious Jews and the State of Israel

- Important **leverage** and **political power disproportionate** to their **size**
- Many coalition agreements in the past have stipulated “*no changes to the status quo on religion/ state issues*” in order to ensure **stable coalitions**
- **Difficult to change the status quo** governing **religious practice in Israel**
- 1950's: First conflicts: **Aguda leaves government** over women soldiers

Religious Jews and the State of Israel

- 1976: **Religious parties** caused **downfall** of **government** over **deseccration of Sabbath** (a day of religious observance and abstinence from work, kept by Jews from Friday evening to Saturday evening)
 - Three F15 **fighter Jets** arrived in Israel (bought by the IDF) on a Friday afternoon
 - Left the US, stopped for gas on the way and **arrived 20min late**
 - 3,000 Israelis attended a **welcome ceremony**, including the Prime Minister, Ministers, Chief of staff, etc.



Religious Jews and the State of Israel

- **Religious** and **Ultra Orthodox** members of parliament protested over **desecration of Shabbat**
- In the weekly Cabinet's meeting, Prime Minister Rabin explained that the Jets were supposed to arrive **before Shabbat** and when they got delayed, he tried to cancel their arrival, but it was too late as they were already on their way
- Two days later, the parliament discussed a vote of **no confidence** due to **desecration of Shabbat** (48 in favor, 55 against, 9 members of religious parties obtained- were part of the coalition)
- Anticipating a second (now successful) **vote of no confidence**, **Rabin resigned** the following week and called for **early general elections**



Religious Jews and the State of Israel

- 2000: **'Tal Law'** – an attempt to **regulate** and **minimize Ultra Orthodox exemption** from mandatory IDF service

- Please watch the following **video**:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=1&v=me4FqdrmVBs&feature=emb_logo



Ultra Orthodox in Israel

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- Referred to as '**Haredi**' or '**Ultra Orthodox**', broad array of theologically, politically, and socially conservative **Orthodox Jews**
- Common Denominator => **Absolute reverence for Torah** (Written and Oral Jewish Law) as the **central** and **determining** factor in **all aspects of life**
 - Leadership and status are linked to one's Torah scholarship and learnedness (not money/academic degrees)



Ultra Orthodox in Israel

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- In order to **prevent outside influence** (they are considered contamination of values and practices), haredim strive to **limit** their **contact** with the **outside world**, avoiding, as much as possible, both non-haredi Jews and non-Jews
 - Interaction with outsiders is generally confined to **basic economic contact + unavoidable public interactions** (e.g., going to the post office)
 - Certain groups of haredim (e.g. Chabad Lubavitch), do contact non-haredi Jews in order to **encourage** them to adopt **more stringent religious observance**
- With the most explosive birth-rate of **any Jewish group**, haredi Judaism may very well come to dominate the population of the **Jewish world** in years to come

Ultra Orthodox in Israel

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Family and Lifestyle =>

- Haredi Jews usually live in **communities** populated **mostly** or **exclusively** by **Haredim**
 - Each community has its own synagogues, yeshivot, community-oriented organizations, etc.
 - The major centers of Haredi life in Israel are the city of **Bnei Brak** and in **Jerusalem's Mea She'arim district** (in the US- in and around **New York City**)



Ultra Orthodox in Israel

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Family and Lifestyle =>

- Most **adult men** devote themselves to **full-time Torah study**, and their **wives** assume the role of **breadwinner**
 - As single-earner households with large numbers of children, haredi communities are generally characterized by **extreme poverty**, requiring subsidies from **charities** and **governments** in order to subsist
- When faced with **major life decisions** (where to live, whom to marry, whether to study full-time or work), haredi Jews often consult their **rabbis**
 - Rooted in the principle of 'Torah knowledge': one should seek **Torah-based guidance** from a recognized **rabbinic** authority on **all matters of life**

Ultra Orthodox in Israel

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Haredi Politics =>

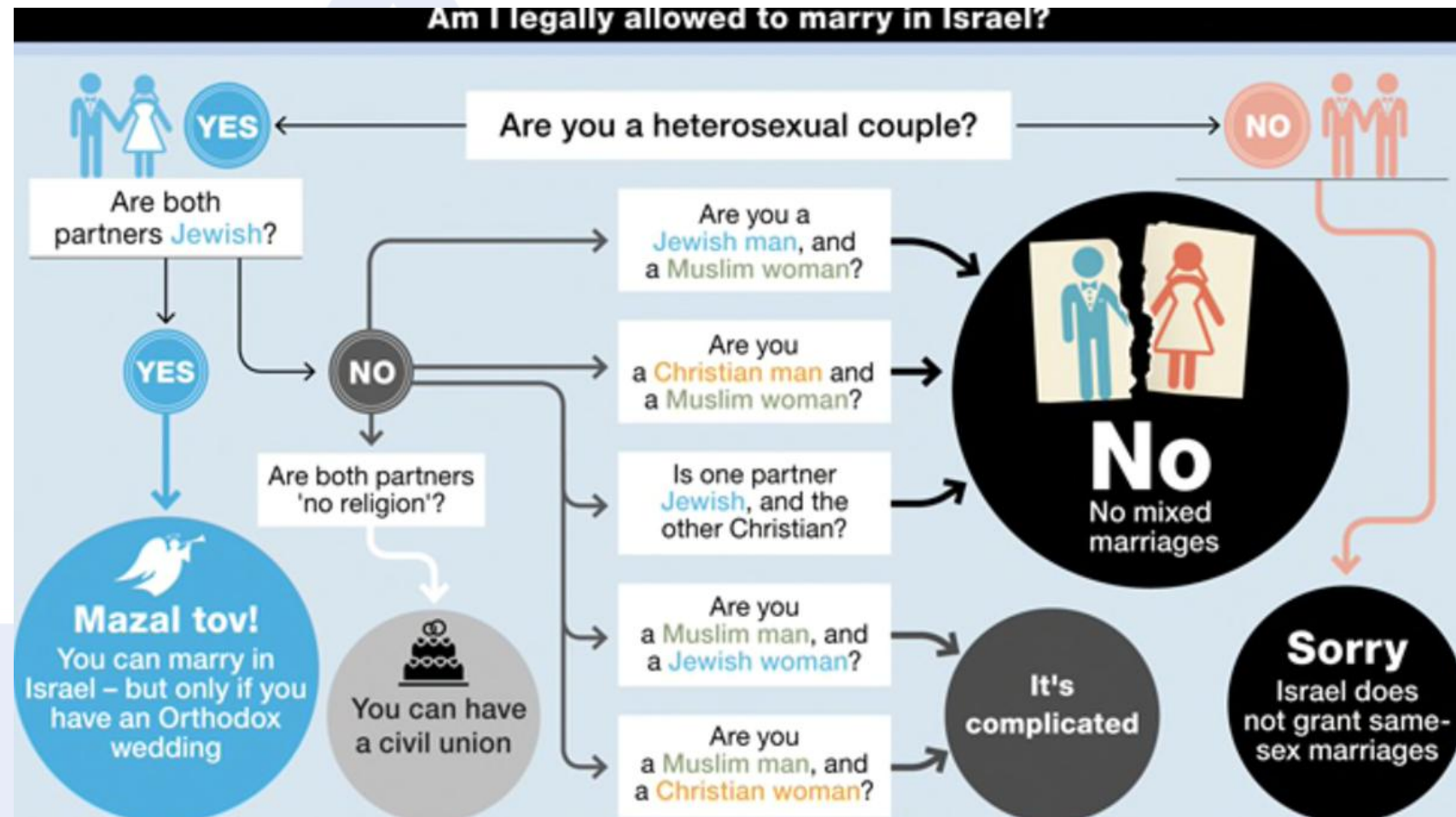
- Many haredim are **fundamentally opposed** to a **secular, modern, pre-messianic Jewish state**
 - A **minority** (e.g. Chabad-Lubavitch Hasidim), support **Zionism**
- Haredi political group's goal is to align **Israel's policies and laws** with **halacha** (Jewish law) and insuring that **haredi schools and institutions** continue to receive government **funding**



Religion and State

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- **No separation** of 'church' and state
 - No civil marriage for Jews, no mixed marriage
- **Precedence of Judaism** over liberalism
 - Israel as the only 'Jewish state' in the world



Religion and State

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Contemporary Challenges =>

- The **Jewish** nature of the state vs. contemporary **secular majority** which **objects** the **dominance** of **religious orthodoxy** (e.g., marriage, Sabbath observing etc.)
- **Israel** => The only **Jewish state** in the world
 - **Secularization** of the **population** vs. sustaining a **Jewish character**
 - What would the potential **repercussions** of Israel becoming 'less Jewish' be (Jewish life in Israel, world Jewry) ?

Religion and State

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Contemporary Challenges =>

- When trying to answer these questions, we should differentiate between **symbolic** aspects and '**modus operandi**' (practical) aspects of the state-
 - **Symbols:** May/should remain **Jewish** + accommodations to make **non-Jewish** communities feel represented => Increase **inclusion**
 - **Practical issues: more complicated-**
 - Civil marriage?, Public transportation on sabbath (Saturdays)?
same sex marriage (opposed by Orthodox Judaism)?

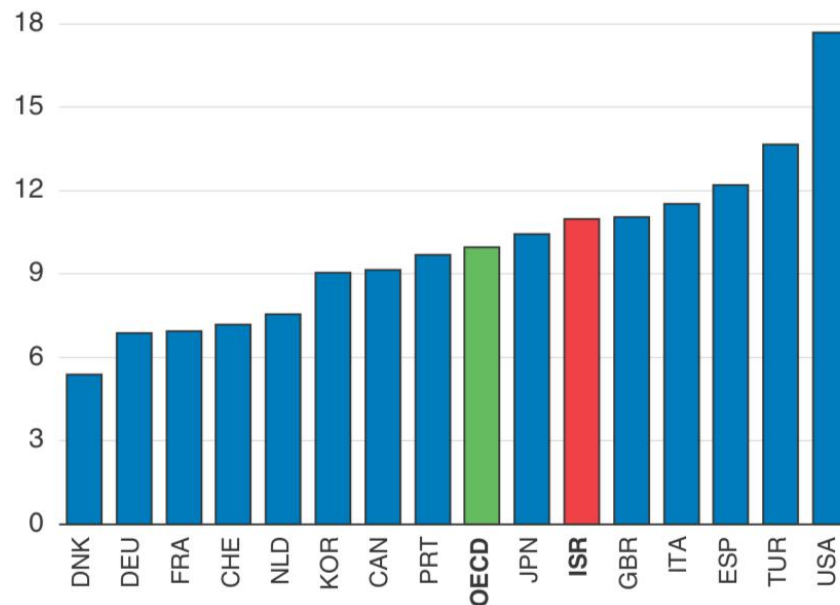
Israeli Society

Social Cohesion =>

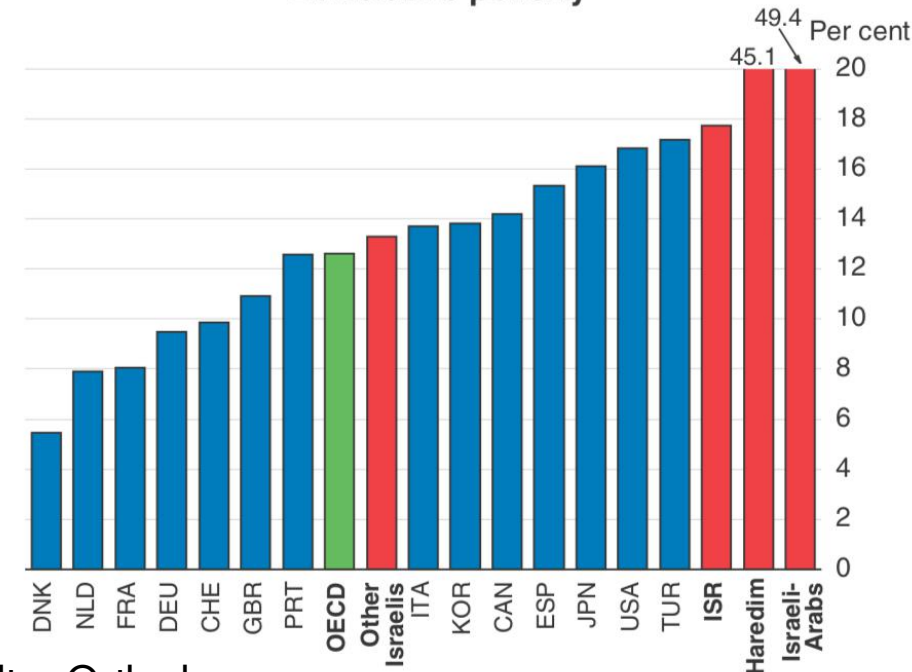
- Israeli society is marked by a **lack of social cohesion** and **significant disparities**

- Better social + labour-market integration of Israeli Arabs and Ultra Orthodox-crucial**

A. Income inequality¹



B. Relative poverty²



Haredim = Ultra Orthodox

Israeli Society

Social Disparities =>

- Israeli society is marked by significant **disparities** between different communities

Haredim = Ultra Orthodox

	Israeli-Arabs	Haredim	Others
Share of the population – 2016 (%)	21	11	68
Share of the population – 2059 (%)	20	29	51
Fertility rate – 2016	3.1	6.7	2.5
Number of children per household – 2016	4	6.5	2
Median hourly wage as a % of the national median hourly wage – 2015	70	87	109
Median wage as a % of the national median wage – 2015	74	68	111
Participation rate – 2016 (%)	58	66	81
PISA mean mathematics scores – 2015	391	-	495
Relative poverty rates – 2015 (%)	53.3	48.7	13.5

Source: National Insurance Institute (2016), *Poverty and Social Gaps Report, 2015*; OECD, *PISA Database*; Central Bureau of Statistics.

- **Different outcomes in the labour markets: earnings**
- **Haredi + Israeli-Arabs' average skills and remuneration levels are low, their families large and social transfers limited**

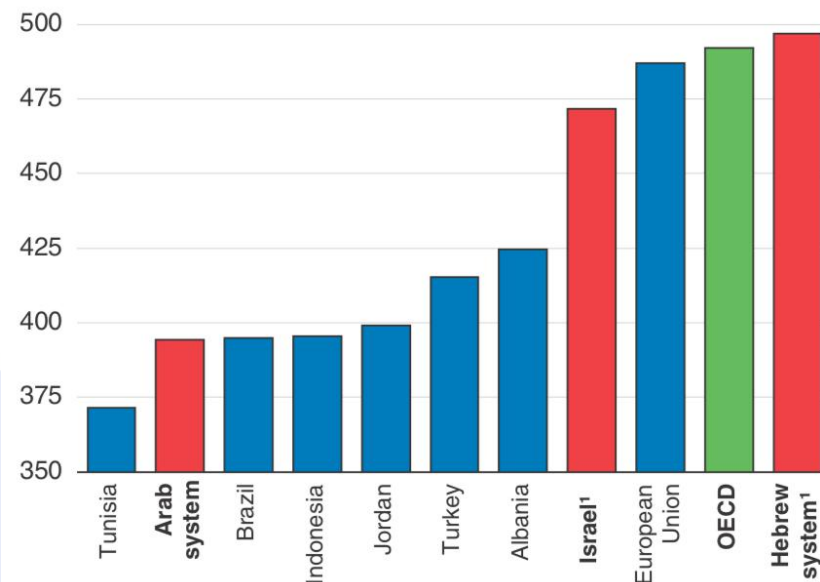
Israeli Society

- Strong disparities in **formal education** between Israeli-Arabs, Ultra Orthodox and the **rest of the Israeli population**

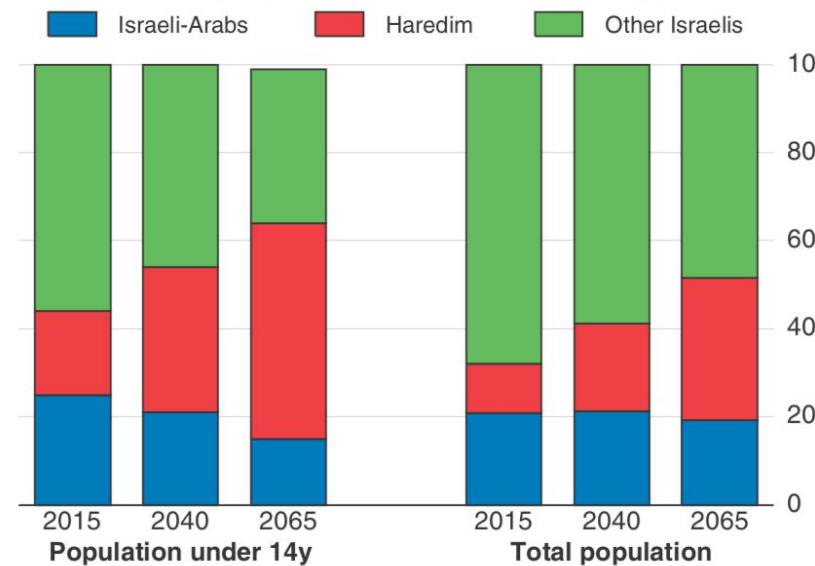
- Demographic Trends**

- 44% of people under 14 are Arab/Haredi, the Haredi share is growing rapidly

A. Average overall PISA score, 2015



B. Demographic trends by community group



Haredim = Ultra Orthodox

Israel's Religiously Divided Society

- To conclusion the topic of **religion** and **religious communities** in Israel, please watch this interesting video
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vCH0uecc4dY>

The Israeli Defense Forces

- Founded in 1948, the **Israel Defense Forces (IDF)**, armed forces of Israel is comprised of **army, navy, air force**
- Ranks among the **most battle-tested armed forces in the world**, as it participated in six major wars
- The IDF's security **objectives** are to **defend the sovereignty and territorial integrity** of Israel + **deter enemies and terrorism** that threaten daily life
- **Main tasks:** Ensuring overall **security** in the West Bank in coordination with the PA, lead the war against **terrorism** (in Israel + across its borders), maintaining a **deterrent capability** to prevent outbreak of hostilities

The Israeli Defense Forces

- The IDF's strategic doctrine is **defensive**, tactics are **offensive**
 - In preparing for defense, the IDF deploys a **small standing army (conscripts and career personnel)** with early warning capability + regular air force, navy
 - Due to IDF's reliance on **reserve units** to provide much of its **infantry strength**, it could be categorized as a **citizen militia** supplemented by small corps of **career officers** and active-duty **conscripts**
- Always been **outnumbered by its enemies**, the IDF maintains a **qualitative advantage** by deploying **advanced weapons systems**, many of which are **developed and manufactured in Israel** for its specific needs

The Israeli Defense Forces

- Most of IDF forces are **reservists**, called up regularly for **training** and service, in time of war are **quickly mobilized** into their units
- The Chief of General Staff (head of the military) is **appointed** by the **government** for a **three-year term** (usually extended in one year)
- **Men and women of all ranks serve side by side**
 - More **women** are now serving in **combat units**, as **pilots**



The Israeli Defense Forces

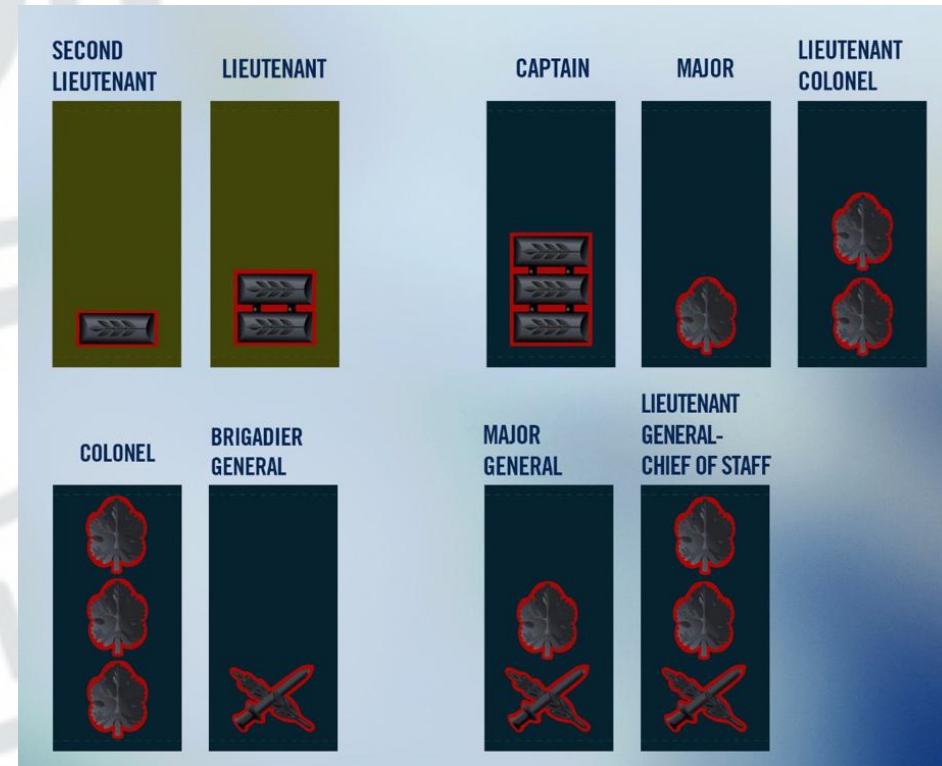
- **Military service is compulsory for Jews (man and women), Circassian and Druze men**
 - **Bedouin** men often **volunteer** for the draft
 - **Exemptions** from service are granted to married women, women with children, and men who are undertaking religious studies (a point of **contention** between secular and religious Israelis)
 - The IDF tried to accommodate the ultra Orthodox who wants to serve by setting up special units called ***Nahal Haredi***
 - Period of **active-duty**: 32 months for men, 24 months for women (minimum)
 - Compulsory **reserve duty** (to age 50: women in specific positions, age 55: men)

The Israeli Defense Forces

- For **Orthodox women + Arab Israelis** who want to contribute but are reluctant to fully integrate into the secular corps/excepted from service, the IDF established ***Sherut Leumi*** (national service)
 - Participants volunteer full-time for one/two years, mostly in schools, hospitals, nursing homes etc.
 - ***Sherut Leumi*** is open to **Israeli Jews** who weren't drafted (e.g. due to medical reasons) or wish to do a year of **national service before the mandatory military service**

The Israeli Defense Forces

- The IDF is responsive for the **cultural and social needs** of its soldiers, providing **recreational activities + personal support services**
- Active in **nation-building enterprises**, the IDF also provides **remedial + supplementary education to civilian populations** and contributes to the **absorption of newcomers**
 - Recruits with **incomplete educational background** are given opportunities to upgrade their level of education in service
 - **Career officers** are encouraged to **study** at the IDF's **expense**



The Israeli Defense Forces

IDF: Equipment =>

- An element in Israel's strategy of overcoming the **quantitative gap** between itself and its potential enemies is the constant striving to achieve and keep a **qualitative edge in terms of military equipment**
 - **Fragile issue**, depends on the international situation + financial possibilities, both favored the Arab side in the past (e.g., The Egyptian-Czech arms deal: 1955)
 - The IDF often development **its own** hardware as foreign source of supply failed (e.g., The **Merkava**, Israel's battle tank)



The Israeli Defense Forces

IDF: Equipment =>

- Aware of the critical **importance of the IDF to Israel's survival**, the relative share of the defense budget in Israel is **the highest in the Western world**, considering the sizable contribution in loans + grants from the **US**
 - Usually 1/3 of the **total budget**
- Whilst the IDF is constantly on the lookout for the best **equipment** it can procure/develop, there is **no guarantee** that the **material advantage** will always be on the **Israeli** side
 - **Other factors** (human factor, 'small smart army') are important

Israel as an Army Nation

A Jewish Military =>

- Israel's first years: IDF lionized the **embodiment of Zionist values**
- The first **Jewish military** in 2,000 years, it was charged with **protecting a nation** still recovering from the genocide of European Jewry (The **Holocaust**)
 - The stunning **success** of the **small** motivated army surrounded by bigger enemies gave it the image of a mythic **David** against **Goliath**
- The army performed/continues to perform **important social role** as a primary **melting pot** and **equalizer** for a **country of immigrants**
 - By imposing **compulsory army service**

Israel as an Army Nation

- **Enlistment is a milestone for the Israeli teenager**
 - Families tend to throw parties and videotape farewells with children at induction centres
- Army service offers a broad range of jobs (e.g., infantry, intelligence, military band). Membership in an **elite commando unit** carries the most **prestige**
 - Competition to get into these units is often fierce, especially to become **pilots of**



Israel as an Army Nation

- **Army service** offers a broad range of **jobs** (e.g., infantry, intelligence, military band)
 - Membership in an **elite commando unit** carries the most **prestige**
 - Competition to get into these units is often fierce, especially to become **pilots of combat jets** in the Air Force
 - Soldiers who work in an **office** are often referred to **derisively** as “jobniks”
- Outstanding soldiers are invited to become **officers** (requires **extra service**)



Israel as an Army Nation

- **Professional soldiers** (made the army their career) receive many benefits (e.g., generous pension plans) + **network of acquaintances** formed during the service that often **opens doors** for **prominent jobs** after they leave the army
- The IDF made an **invaluable contribution to Israel's economy**
 - Many innovations developed by the army are used by decommissioned soldiers for **civilian applications**, a phenomenon which became the basis for Israel's growing **high-tech industry**
- Name recognition + security credentials that goes along with become **high ranking generals** make military men attractive assets to **political parties**
 - Many Israeli **prime ministers** came to **politics directly** from the **army**

Next Session...

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- **The Israeli Palestinian Conflict**
 - **Peace in the Middle East?**
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Thank You For Your Attention!

Questions? Please email me!