


# The evolving dynamics of Haredi Judaism in Israel: Ideological shifts and political influences



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This article analysed the evolution of Haredi Judaism in Israel, highlighting its deep-rooted fundamentalist beliefs and its transformation from a marginalised group to a central force in Israeli society. As the fastest-growing demographic, the Haredi community exemplified the tension between fundamentalism and modernity. The study explored the defining characteristics, political ideologies and social influence of Haredi Judaism in Israel, detailing how it transitioned from insular religious enclaves to active participants in national politics. The article also examined the Haredi impact on Israeli-Palestinian relations, focusing on their influence on party politics, land disputes and Jerusalem-related issues.

**Contribution:** The study enhanced the understanding of Haredi Judaism's ideological evolution and political integration within Israeli society. It highlighted the Haredim's influence in shaping Israel's national identity and policy directions. Additionally, the research elucidated the significant impact of the Haredi community on Israeli-Palestinian relations.

**Keywords:** Israel; Judaism; Haredim; Ultra-Orthodox; Jewish Fundamentalism; Israeli-Palestinian Relations.

## Introduction

The Haredi community is also known as Haredim or Ultra-Orthodox Jewry. The term 'Haredi' is derived from the Hebrew Bible, where it denotes 'one who trembles at the word of God' (Ezr 10:3; Is 66:2, 66:5). This designation reflects a profound reverence and commitment to adhering to divine laws. The Haredi movement emerged in 19th-century Europe as a conservative response to modernity and the Jewish Enlightenment, positioning itself as the most traditional branch of Judaism. Influenced by Rabbi *Moshe Sofer*, this group regards themselves as the most devout adherents to the *Torah's* commandments, marked by stringent observance of *Halakhic* traditions and deference to rabbinic authority (Silber 1992). They uphold the belief that *Halakha*, as derived from the *Torah* and the *Talmud*, represents the most authentic, sacred and immutable guidance. The Haredi Judaism also maintains that contemporary developments, even if not directly contravening Jewish law, are inherently prohibited by the *Torah* (*Chadash Asor Min Hatorah*).

In recent years, Haredim has transitioned from a marginal to a central position within Israeli society, significantly expanding its influence across politics, culture and various societal domains. This transformation has positioned the Haredim as a pivotal force in shaping Israel's developmental trajectory. Haredim became a significant socio-political force within modern Israel. The community's growing impact is particularly evident in Israeli parliamentary elections, including the formation of Benjamin Netanyahu's government at the end of 2022. This government, heavily influenced by Haredi parties and Religious Zionist Parties, is frequently described as the most right-wing in Israeli history. In the 2022 election, the Ultra-Orthodox parties (*Shas* and *United Torah Judaism*) secured a total of 18 seats, while the Religious Zionist parties, mainly representing the interests of modern Orthodox Jews, obtained 14 seats. It can be asserted that in the current Israeli electoral landscape, the Ultra-Orthodox parties serve as a crucial pillar for the successful formation of Netanyahu's government. In another word, without their participation in the parliament, Likud would have faced significant challenges in establishing a viable government.

The primary interests of Ultra-Orthodox parties within the administration revolve around ensuring that policies related to education and welfare are favourable for their sectorial development; for instance, in the 37th Israeli government, they are actively advocating for funding dedicated to Haredi education. Nevertheless, despite their historical opposition to both state and governmental structures in Israel, they now exhibit a willingness to engage partially in

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governmental cooperation. However, their theological and ideological aspirations continue to focus on influencing secular Israel towards an evolution aligned with Jewish laws. Therefore, it can be said that the primary objective of Haredi political engagement is to gradually steer Israeli political decisions and social values towards a vision of a Jewish nation-state governed by *Halakhic* laws, and to prepare for the future Messianic Kingdom. As history progresses and its population grows significantly, this influence will increasingly strengthen.

This article explored the evolving relationship between Haredi Judaism and modern Israel, examining the ideological and political dynamics that shaped this interaction. The article argued that as Haredi influence continued to rise, the future trajectory of Israeli socio-political landscape was likely to be increasingly influenced by religious principles, marking a significant shift in the state's national identity and policy directions.

## Definition, factions and characteristics of Haredim in Israel

Globally, the Haredi Jewish population is estimated at approximately 1.8 million, with significant communities in Israel, the United States and Western Europe, the largest of which is in Israel. As of 2021, Haredim constituted about 13% of the Israeli total population, and this demographic is experiencing rapid growth (Cahaner & Malach 2021). The question of 'who are the Haredim' has long been a topic of debate within modern Israel, with various scholars offering differing definitions (Zalberg 2023).

### The complexity of defining Haredim

The complexity in defining Israeli Haredim arises from the country's intricate religious and political landscape, as evidenced by scholarly research. Friedman (1991) asserts that the term 'Haredim' denotes a distinct religious and lifestyle identity centred around the Jewish law *Halakha*. He identifies several key criteria that set Haredim apart from other Jewish sects: strict adherence to Jewish law, a particular emphasis on *Torah* study especially the *Babylonian Talmud* by men, absolute respect and obedience to religious authority, ideological opposition to Zionism, varying degrees of rejection of modernity and a deliberate separation from secular groups. Brown (2017) further underscores the importance of sages and rabbinic authority, highlighting the fact that Haredi obedience extends beyond *Halakha* to encompass all aspects of daily life. This adherence is also manifested in a traditional appearance that serves to differentiate Haredim from the surrounding secular world.

In 2021, the Israel Central Bureau of Statistics proposed three criteria for defining Haredim in their research. Firstly, the educational institution is attended by families, specifically requiring that at least one family member be a student in a *yeshiva*. Secondly, residence or location, where Haredi families live in areas with a high proportion of votes for *Shas* or *United*

*Torah Judaism*. Thirdly, self-identification, which includes individuals who self-identify as Haredim (Friedman 2011). Zalberg (2023), critiques these criteria, arguing that they fail to provide a comprehensive and unambiguous delineation of the Haredi community. Nevertheless, considering the historical context, current demographic distribution and organisational patterns of families and communities, this article supports the Israel Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) criteria as a reflection of the realities of Israeli society. Consequently, it argues that Israel's Haredim should not be viewed as a monolithic religious entity but rather as a diverse and factional group. This encompasses a social collective comprising religious organisations, community structures, educational systems and representative political parties, all rooted in a shared Jewish faith.

Two primary factors contribute to the factional and structured nature of the Haredi community in Israel: the religious–secular divide in response to modernity and Israeli immigration policies, which have attracted Jewish immigrants from various regions. On the one hand, the tension between religion and secularism has been a persistent issue since the establishment of Israel. This tension has elicited varied responses from Israeli Jews, highlighting the complexities involved in defining or categorising Haredi communities. For instance, when conducting demographic or statistical analyses of Israeli Haredim, some scholars include Modern Orthodox as part of this group (Zalberg 2023). On the other hand, Israel is a nation founded by Jewish immigrants from diverse global backgrounds. Jews from Eastern Europe, Western Europe and the Middle East have contributed to the formation of distinct factions within Haredim. Within this community, major factions include *Hasidism*, *Mitnaggedim*, *Sephardi Haredim* and anti-Zionist groups. Each of these major factions is further subdivided into numerous sub-factions and sub-sub-factions, highlighting the complexity and diversity within the Haredi community.

### Hasidic and Lithuanian Haredim

The Hasidic movement encompasses various subgroups, including *Polish Hasidism* and *Hungarian Jews*. This community is typically organised around religious courts led by rabbis, who guide, adjudicate and shape the religious beliefs and daily lives of their followers. Succession in authority often follows through the rabbis' sons or students. *Hasidism* places a high value on religious experience, emphasising fervent prayer and the role of spiritual leaders, and prioritises spirituality over ritual observance. The movement exhibits varying degrees of resistance to modernity, secular culture and Enlightenment ideals. Notably, *Hungarian Hasidism* is considered more traditional and stringent compared to other Hasidic groups (Zalberg 2023).

*Lithuanian Judaism*, also known as the '*Mitnaggedim*', derives its religious practices from the late 19th-century Jewish communities in Poland and Lithuania. *Lithuanian Jews* or the *Mitnaggedim* first appeared as the opponents of the *Hasidism*. This faction upholds the tradition of the 'society

of learning men', which emphasises that men should dedicate themselves to *Torah* study in *Yeshivas*, while women are responsible for managing household duties and child-rearing (Friedman 1991). The *Lithuanian* places a sacred value on Talmudic scholarship. It rejects the Hasidic emphasis on spirituality, instead it evaluates rabbinic leaders based on their intellectual prowess.

Both Hasidic and Lithuanian Jews are predominantly Ashkenazi and comprise numerous sects and sub-sects. The principal differences between the Lithuanian and Hasidic factions are evident in their interpretations of Judaism's core values, their internal leadership structures, sources of authority and charisma of their leaders and the characteristics of community life. The main political parties representing these factions are *Agudat Israel* and *Degel HaTorah*. *Degel Hatorah* was a splinter from *Agudat Israel* since 1988, which later united to form the *United Torah Judaism*.

### Mizrahi or Sephardi Haredim

Another prominent faction is the *Mizrahi* or *Sephardi* Haredim, primarily composed of Jewish immigrants from Arab countries. This faction emerged in the 1980s, coalescing around the teachings of Rabbi *Ovadia Yosef*, and its growth has been significantly influenced by the political activities of the *Shas* party. Although the *Mizrahi* Haredim adopt a model similar to that of the *Lithuanian* Haredim, there are notable differences from Ashkenazi Jewish communities. Specifically, their adherence to religious laws governing lifestyle tends to be less stringent, leading to their characterisation as 'soft ultra-Orthodox' (Leon 2014). Within this group, various sub-groups exist, reflecting differences in religious practices stemming from their places of origin and divergent interpretations of *Torah* law and rabbinic authority. These distinctions in faith and culture among the *Mizrahi* Haredim are often shaped by their ethnic backgrounds and ritual practices.

In the latter half of the 20th century, a social movement known as *Teshuvah* emerged within the Oriental Jewish community in Israel. This movement aims to encourage secular or non-observant Jews in adopting a Haredi life, thereby transforming them into 'reborn Jews'. Influenced by this movement, many secular Jewish men have entered *yeshivas*, leading to the rise of the 'Baalei Teshuva'. This development has been instrumental in the expansion of the *Mizrahi* Haredim. Some of them, still retain elements of their former lives, especially those who are highly educated and engaged in secular professions. These individuals exhibit greater openness towards modernity and secularism. Consequently, scholars argue that this represents significant development within ultra-Orthodox Judaism in Israel and should be recognised as a distinct faction within the broader Haredim (Doron 2013).

### The Anti-Zionist Haredim

It is important to acknowledge that there is no standardised classification for Israeli Haredi groups, and scholarly

understandings of its boundaries have evolved over time. In addition to the three primary factions discussed, other notable sects include the *Eda Haredit*, *The Jerusalemites* and *Neturei Karta*, among others. These groups share a common opposition to Zionist ideology and the current form of Israel, collectively representing approximately 5% of the Haredi population in Israel (Zalberg 2023).

*The Jerusalemites* represent traditional Jewish communities that existed in Jerusalem prior to the rise of the Zionist movement. They adhere strictly to religious law and oppose Zionism, with *Satmar Hasidism* being a notable representative. *Neturei Karta* emerged as a splinter group from Haredi communities around 1935 and currently comprises approximately 5000 members. *Eda Haredit*, also known as *Badatz*, is a prominent anti-Zionist community primarily based in Jerusalem and its surrounding areas. Founded in 1919 by Rabbi *Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld*, this group encompasses various sub-sects, including *Dushinsky*, *Toldos Aharon*, *Toldos Avraham Yitzchak*, *Spinka*, *Brisk*, *Sanz-Tshokave* and *Braslav*, each distinguished by its own rabbinic leadership, religious courts and geographical location. *Eda Haredit* views Zionism as a heretical deviation from Jewish faith and has waged an ideological campaign against the State of Israel, attributing numerous calamities, including the Holocaust, to Zionism. Despite residing in Israel, its members are prohibited from participating in parliamentary elections and from accepting any government funding or welfare benefits. They are also barred from obtaining Israeli citizenship. Many members display signs stating 'Here lives a non-Zionist Jew' at their homes (Cidor 2009).

It should be noted that, given the lack of substantial differences in religious beliefs or adherence to Jewish law among these factions, and their interconnected divisions, some scholars consider *The Jerusalemites* and *Neturei Karta* as subgroups of *Eda Haredit* (Zalberg 2023). However, this article, based on a comparative analysis of the rabbinic authority and political ideologies of these factions and drawing from interviews with Rabbi *Israel Meir Hirsch*, the leader associated with *Neturei Karta* (Shavit 2023), treats them as distinct sects. Collectively, they are classified as anti-Zionist factions.

Additionally, some scholars propose that Modern Orthodox Jews should be considered a branch of Haredim in Israel. Modern Orthodox Jews refers to individuals who were raised within ultra-Orthodox communities but have increasingly integrated into a broader secular society, adopting contemporary Western values. Unlike their more traditional counterparts, Modern Orthodox Jews do not view the 'society of learning men' as a lifelong ideal, nor do they necessarily revere religious authority or dedicate themselves exclusively to *Torah* study. Instead, they embrace modernity and higher education, participate in the military service, job market and societal life. This subgroup currently represents approximately 7% of the Haredi population in Israel (Cahener 2020).



## The tension between fundamentalism and modernity

A defining characteristic of Israeli Haredim is the tension between fundamentalism and modernity. Emerging as a response to the Jewish Enlightenment, nationalism and secularism of 19th-century Europe, Haredi Jews navigate this conflict with varying responses. The term 'Haredi' itself suggested it can be regarded as a form of religious fundamentalism or orthodoxy. In its formative years, this community emphasised the absolute authority of the *Torah* and the *Talmud*, insisting on their rigorous observance and rejecting any modifications or omissions. Scholars have identified Israeli Haredim as a form of fundamentalism, characterised by a 'religious cultural enclave' that remains distinct from mainstream societal culture (Sivan 1995).

Haredim see themselves as defenders of Orthodox Judaism, motivated by a profound sense of mission and duty. This self-perception fosters a strong sense of identity and superiority compared to other Jewish groups, underpinned by the belief that the redemption of the *Messiah* and the establishment of the Messianic kingdom hinge on their adherence to faith. This conviction contributes to a robust internal cohesion based on their perceived righteousness. The primary objective of the Haredim was to preserve the Jewish faith by interpreting Jewish law in ways that counter the secular and liberal tendencies of modern society. They maintained clear boundaries between their communities and the broader society by adhering to purity concepts outlined in the Hebrew Bible. This included the observance of *Kashrut* (Jewish dietary laws), *Niddah* (family purity laws) and a commitment to a modest lifestyle. They viewed their isolationist and anti-modern cultural model as the only authentic and pure form of Judaism, asserting its superiority and authority over other religious factions. This included active opposition to Jewish liberal or reform movements (Dodtmann 2023).

Since 1948, most of the Haredi community has shifted from isolationism to engaging in certain political activities, collaborating with leaders who they believe best support their way of life (Dodtmann 2023). For Haredi Jews, the continual emergence of new items creates tension between strict adherence to Jewish law and the modernity of societal civilisation. In addressing this issue, Israeli Haredim employs two primary strategies: isolation and accommodation.

'Isolation' involved maintaining a distance from secular society, rejecting modern technologies and scientific advancements and intensifying traditional Jewish practices. For instance, young men often focused exclusively on *Torah* study, avoiding military service and secular employment. They upheld an independent educational network that resisted the demands of the modern workforce and essential skills training. This approach was particularly evident among Hasidic and anti-Zionist factions.

In contrast, 'Accommodation' entailed engaging with modernity in ways that did not violate religious laws. Exemplified by the *Lithuanian* faction and Modern Orthodox Jews, this approach held that modern knowledge was necessary to effectively address contemporary challenges. They established newspapers, radio stations and websites focused on Jewish religious discourse, used modern facilities and equipment, provided these complied with rabbinic *kosher* standards rather than secular norms. In the early 21st century, a new trend emerged within this modernisation process: the rise of a working Haredi middle class. This group now engages in activities previously strictly prohibited by Jewish law but are now permitted, such as leisure consumption, domestic and international travel, specialised media content for women, sports and artistic activities adhering to Haredi religious requirements (Dodtmann 2023).

To conclude, Haredi Jews, as the most orthodox and pure inheritors of Judaism, believe they hold the ultimate truth and will ultimately prevail in Israeli public life. They are convinced that the current Israeli secular culture will eventually fade and that Haredim should remain distanced from it to avoid contamination. Historically, Haredi parties have consistently engaged in Israel's parliamentary elections; since 1977, they have frequently formed political alliances with ruling parties, primarily right-wing factions, thereby securing significant advantages across political, economic, educational and welfare domains. This engagement and integration into Israeli secular society is referred to as the 'Israelisation' of the Haredim (Caplan & Sivan 2013).

## The rapid growth of population and influence

Another notable feature of the Israeli Haredim is its rapid population growth and increasing social influence. Although Haredi Jews constitute a minority in terms of population proportion, they demonstrate a remarkable growth trend and developmental potential. Since the establishment of the state of Israel, the Haredi population has surged dramatically, making it the fastest-growing demographic in the country, with an annual growth rate of about 4%, compared to just 1.4% for other Jewish populations (Cahaner & Malach 2020). As of 2020, they represent approximately 12% of Israel's total population. This growth is largely driven by religious imperatives. According to the Hebrew Bible, the commandment to 'be fruitful and multiply' (Gn 9:7) is a fundamental requirement, and contraception is therefore prohibited.

Relative to other societal groups in Israel, the Haredi community is notably youthful, with a significant proportion under the age of 20. In the 2010s, approximately 60% of Haredi Jews were under 16 years old. Projections by the Israel Central Bureau of Statistics estimate that by 2033, the Haredi population will reach 2 million, constituting 16% of Israel's total population. By 2065, this number is expected to rise to 5.5 million, approaching 30% of the overall population

and 40% of the Jewish population in Israel. Furthermore, it is anticipated that one in every two Israeli children will belong to the Haredi community (Ben-David 2018).

Given the population growth trends, the Haredi community's influence across various sectors in Israel is expected to increase substantially. Although a small minority within the community continues to hold anti-Zionist views, this does not reflect the mainstream Haredi position. The attitude of the Haredim towards the Israeli state has evolved from rejection and isolation to acceptance and involvement. Most Haredim, despite ideological differences with the secular Israeli state, have become an integral part of Israeli society and politics. They view the state as a temporary phase and aim to use their political power and social influence to guide Israel towards a Jewish nation-state grounded in *Torah* and *Halakha*. In recent years, the influence of religious forces on Israeli politics and society has deepened. Consequently, it can be argued that the future development of Israel will be closely linked to the evolution of the Haredi community.

## The influence of Haredim on Israeli politics and Israeli-Palestinian relations

The relationship between Haredi Judaism and Zionism has undergone significant changes over time. The rise of the Zionism and the State of Israel exacerbated internal divisions within the Haredi community. At the inception of Zionism in the 19th century, it garnered support from several prominent Haredi leaders across Europe. However, as the movement progressed into the late 19th and early 20th centuries and adopted a more secular orientation, the perspectives of these Haredi leaders underwent a significant transformation. Many began to distance themselves from Zionism or criticise it, arguing that it aimed to replace traditional Jewish values with secular nationalist ideals. A representative figure among them is Rabbi *Shalom Dov Ber Schneerson*, the fifth leader of *Habad Hasidism* at that time (Caplan & Leon 2024).

### Political ideologies of Israeli Haredim

The Haredi perspective on the State of Israel, its national identity and its political system has evolved through two distinct phases.

Firstly, adherence to Messianic visions is a defining characteristic of certain Haredi groups. These factions assert that a genuine Jewish state can only be realised through divine intervention and should be governed by *Halakhic* law. They regard the State of Israel as a breach of the divine plan for redemption and a challenge to the Messianic kingdom. This perspective is prevalent among groups such as *Eda Haredit*. Members of these factions refuse to recognise the State of Israel, avoid compulsory military service, abstain

from participating in elections, decline to pay taxes and reject government welfare. They also generally support Palestinian claims to sovereignty over the Holy Land. This faction remains a minority within the contemporary Haredi community, comprising approximately 5% of the total population.

Secondly, acceptance of the State of Israel represents the predominant stance within the Haredi community. Influenced by anti-Semitism and the Holocaust, approximately 95% of Haredim have accepted Israel and its political framework. Although they oppose the secular aspects of Zionism on ideological grounds, they acknowledge the reality of the Zionist state and generally avoid conflicts with state authorities (Brown 2017). This majority views modern Israel as a temporary positive development towards the Messianic Kingdom but insists that Jewish law should take precedence over secular legislation. They aim to use their political influence to create space for religious practices within the state. This objective is evident in the platform of *Agudat Israel*, which seeks to align Israeli society with *Torah* governance across political, economic and spiritual domains (Caplan & Leon 2024).

Haredim have played a minimal role in shaping Israeli society during the initial decade, particularly regarding military and political engagement. However, following the victories in conflicts with Arab states in 1967, this dynamic began to shift. By the 1970s, their involvement in social and political matters had significantly increased. Initially focused on securing educational and economic welfare, they later opposed secularisation and interference in the judicial system during the 1980s and 1990s. More recently, they have exerted substantial influence on national identity, social spaces and the Israeli-Palestinian relations (Dodtmann 2023).

### The Haredi perspective on the Holy Land

The vision of land and redemption within the Messianic context is central to Haredi beliefs. This ongoing narrative of covenantal loyalty and inherent rights to the land underpins the divine basis for the Jewish connection to Palestine. According to the Hebrew Bible and rabbinic interpretations, Haredim believe that God has promised the entire land to the Jewish people. They view the return to this promised land as a means to end the long *Exile* and fulfil the vision of Jewish peoplehood. For Haredim, the land of Israel is inherently sacred, and any concession or abandonment of this land is seen as a betrayal of God's divine promise and a desecration of His will. Sand (2009) suggests that the establishment of modern Israel represents a shift in the concept of 'Jewish people' from an ethno-religious community to an ethno-religious nation. This perspective links the fate of the Jewish people directly to the Biblical narrative of the land, asserting that the legitimacy of modern Israel is derived from Biblical authority. The divine promises made to the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Gn 15:18–21; 26:3; 28:13) are perceived as direct validations of Israel territorial legitimacy.

The Haredi theological interpretation of Palestine significantly shapes their political views and impacts Israel–Palestine relations. While in the 1990s, Haredi leaders like Rabbi *Elazar Menachem Schach* and Rabbi *Ovadia Yosef* previously supported the ‘Land for Peace’ initiative and a two-state solution, recent trends show a shift. Today, many Haredim advocate for Israel’s claim to all or parts of the Palestinian territories. Strict adherence to Jewish law leads them to view the control over all the land as a sacred duty. The West Bank, including East Jerusalem, is seen as integral to the *Great Israel*, making settlement in these areas a vital religious obligation. Consequently, Haredim actively contribute to establishing Jewish settlements, viewing these actions as essential to preserving Israel territorial integrity and fulfilling its sacred mission.

Mahla (2023) highlights that, despite significant differences between Haredi and religious Zionist approaches to modern Israel, both groups share a common ideological belief in Jewish law and the concept of the ‘promised land’ and ‘Messianic kingdom’. They both view settlement in the holy land as a divine mission. As of 2020, approximately one-third of Jewish settlers in the West Bank are Haredim, making them the largest settler group in these regions. Their share of the settler population has increased from 12% in 1996 to over 30% today. According to Cahaner and Malach (2016), this rapid growth suggests that Haredi representatives and their political parties are likely to adopt a more right-leaning and hardline stance on land issues in the future.

### The Haredi perspective on Jerusalem and the Temple Mount

The Haredi religious narrative profoundly shapes their views on the Israeli–Palestinian relations, particularly regarding Jerusalem. For Haredi Jews, Jerusalem is central to their national and religious identity, embodying God’s promise and the fulfilment of their return to the holy land. Historically, Jerusalem, established as the capital by *King David* and *Solomon*, has symbolised Jewish presence and divine connection. *The Temple Mount*, seen as the spiritual nexus between the Jewish people and God, gained increased sacred significance after the Six-Day War in 1967, with the ‘return of East Jerusalem’ viewed as evidence of divine promise and a precursor to the *Messiah*.

The dispute over Jerusalem and *the Temple Mount* extends beyond religious concerns to have substantial political ramifications. East Jerusalem encompasses the *Al-Aqsa Mosque* and the Dome of the Rock, both of which are of profound significance within Islamic tradition. The religious importance of these sites makes any compromise or concession politically and spiritually unacceptable to many. For Haredim, Jerusalem’s role in Messianic belief means that negotiations or concessions regarding the city are seen as a denial of divine promises and a departure from faith. This perspective is closely tied to the ongoing *Temple Mount* dispute and often exacerbates the Israeli–Palestinian conflict.

Actions related to *the Temple Mount*, such as attempts by some Haredi extremists to pray on the site, often spark clashes between Jews and Muslims and exacerbate Israeli–Palestinian tensions. Such incidents have been ongoing since 1967. During the Israeli–Palestinian peace process of the 1990s and in the aftermath of the Second *Intifada* in 2000, Jewish religious extremists in the West Bank, some of whom are Haredi settlers, sought to establish a theocratic state governed by Jewish law. This ambition resulted in violent acts against Palestinian vehicles, bombings within Arab villages and assaults on Arab mosques. Notably, in the first half of 2015 alone, Israeli police documented over 140 incidents of violence involving Jewish extremists across Jerusalem and the West Bank.

It can be said that since 1967, *the Temple Mount* has shifted from a purely religious issue to one with significant political and nationalist overtones. Access to the site has become a means for various factions to assert control and demonstrate their presence. As internal divisions within the Haredi community in contemporary Israeli society have grown, visits by Haredi Jews to *the Temple Mount* have become more common. These activities often provoke strong reactions from Palestinian Arabs, leading to resistance and retaliatory actions. The escalation of tensions, highlighted by the conflict between Israel and Hamas that erupted on 07 October 2023, underscores the severity of these issues.

### The Haredi political power and its influence

Since 1952, Haredim has developed into a stable and influential socio-political force within Israel. Throughout the 1950s to 1980s, *Agudat Israel* served as the principal representative of the Haredi sector. In 1977, *Agudat Israel* joined a right-wing coalition within a secular government. Since then, Haredi party representatives have consistently been part of governing coalitions. A split from *Agudat Israel* in 1988 led to the formation of *Degel HaTorah*. This party, along with *Agudat Israel*, merged in 1992 to create *United Torah Judaism*, which continues to represent *Ashkenazi* Haredi interests. Since the mid-1980s, *Shas*, a faction that originated from *Agudat Israel*, has emerged as a prominent political entity advocating for the interests of *Sephardic* Haredi communities. *Agudat Israel* was a participant in two coalitions led by the *Mapai* Party during the first Knesset of Israel. From 1992 to 1996, *Shas* joined the coalition headed by the Labor Party. Since the late 1990s, Haredi parties have consistently maintained a stable electoral presence and have proven to be reliable allies of centrist and right-wing parties, primarily the *Likud* party. In the 2022 elections, Haredi parties secured 18 seats, becoming pivotal partners in Netanyahu’s coalition government and achieving an unprecedented level of influence in Israeli politics, surpassing any historical precedent (Zalberg 2023).

The primary objective of Haredi political involvement is to influence Israel’s judicial framework and societal values, steering the country towards a state governed by religious principles and laws. Historically, Haredi parties have



leveraged their parliamentary presence to secure religious, educational and social welfare benefits. They actively negotiate with other parties to shape government policies, particularly concerning religious affairs and social welfare. Although they do not constitute a majority in Israeli politics, the unity and stability of Haredi parties make them valuable coalition partners. As a result, their political influence has increased, impacting policy agendas across various governmental and societal domains.

As the Haredi population continues to grow and their voter turnout remains high, their influence on Israel is expected to increase. This trend suggests a significant boost in support for right-wing parties that adopt hardline stances on issues related to the land and Jerusalem. Consequently, this shift impacts policies concerning the Israeli-Palestinian relations, with such parties typically advocating for measures that support territorial expansion, and oppose peace initiatives. A key observation is that as Haredi Jews become more devout, they increasingly align Israel's national identity with Jewish religion, making them less inclined to support compromises with Palestinians. Should religious parties gain more power, the prospects for reaching peace agreements between Israel and Palestine are likely to diminish.

## Conclusion

This article examined the complex and evolving nature of Haredi Judaism in Israel, highlighting its significant influence on Israeli society, politics and the Israeli-Palestinian relations. Since the 1970s, Israeli Haredim have transformed from a marginalised group striving for survival within a secular state to a powerful and integrated force in Israeli society (Caplan & Leon 2024). This transformation reflects broader ideological shifts within the Haredi community, from strict adherence to Messianic visions to a more pragmatic acceptance of modern Israel. The analysis revealed that while a small faction within the Haredi community continues to reject the legitimacy of the secular Zionist state, the majority have pragmatically engaged with the Israeli political system.

This engagement has allowed them to secure significant educational, economic and social welfare benefits, thereby reinforcing their position within the national framework. Furthermore, the Haredi community's demographic growth and high voter turnout have amplified their political influence, making them crucial coalition partners and enabling them to shape policies related to religious affairs, social welfare and land disputes. As their political and social influence grows, their values and ideologies may gain broader acceptance. Although it is unlikely that Israel will become a theocratic state in the near future, the trend towards increased religious influence is evident. In this sense, the notion that the future of Israel will be religious has some validity.

The study also highlighted the pivotal role of the Haredim in the Israeli-Palestinian relations. Today, Haredim are among the most nationalist groups in Israel, even more so than religious Zionists (Sprinzak 1998). Their religious narratives concerning the land and Jerusalem, coupled with their

political stances, have significant implications for peace processes and territorial negotiations. The Haredi perspective, deeply rooted in Biblical promises and Messianic beliefs, often aligns with right-wing, hardline positions that advocate for territorial expansion and oppose compromises with Palestinian Arabs. Haredim play an important role in Israeli media, public spheres and the comprehensive decision-making processes of the government regarding economic and political matters. Their rhetoric emphasises security threats from Palestinians and the claims over the entire land, aiming to garner public support and reinforce their position. They shape public opinion, national identity and significantly affect the direction of the modern Israel. This alignment suggests that as the Haredi influence continues to grow, the likelihood of reaching a peaceful resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict diminishes.

In conclusion, the Haredi community's trajectory from insular religious enclaves to influential political actors underscores the dynamic interplay between religion, politics and society in Israel. Their increasing integration into the political landscape not only shapes national identity and public opinion but also plays a critical role in determining Israel's future direction. As such, understanding the complexities of Haredi Judaism is essential for comprehending the broader socio-political context of contemporary Israel and its ongoing conflicts.

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## Authors' contributions

In the preparation of the article, C.Y. undertook the drafting and editing, followed by a comprehensive review conducted by L.Y.

## Ethical considerations

This article does not contain any studies involving human participants performed by any of the authors.

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## Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

## Disclaimer

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