



The Haredi Dilemma in Israeli Society and its Impact on National Security

Dridi Mustapha

PhD student

Pro. Dr. Benkhalif Abdelwahab

Faculty of Political Science and International Relations –

University of Algiers 3

m.dridi64@yahoo.fr

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Abstract:

This study examines the challenges posed by the Haredi (ultra-Orthodox Jewish) community in Israel and its impact on national security and domestic policies. The Haredi community represents a strict religious group that adheres to rigorous interpretations of Jewish law and often lives in communities isolated from the rest of Israeli society. Haredim enjoy financial privileges from the state, such as social assistance, which ensures them a relatively comfortable life, despite their limited contribution to the overall economy. One of the major dilemmas facing Israel is the Haredim's reluctance to serve in the military. The majority refuse to serve in the Israeli army based on their religious beliefs, which consider the army a secular institution. This places a significant burden on the rest of Israeli society. In recent years, Israel has witnessed attempts to impose military service on the Haredim or integrate them into alternative programs, sparking widespread protests. A significant portion of the Haredi population does not contribute to the military or the economy, further dividing Israeli society. With the Haredi population growing, this issue, which poses significant challenges to Israeli national security and could potentially threaten it, is becoming increasingly difficult to ignore.

Keywords: Dilemma, Haredim, National Security, Israeli Society

Introduction:

Israeli society was formed through the gathering of Jews from all corners of the earth via successive waves of immigration to the occupied land of Palestine. Following its establishment in 1948, David Ben-Gurion, Israel's first prime minister, attempted to implement a "melting pot" strategy, aiming to assimilate immigrants into the new society in order to build a society free of cultural and identity differences and to establish a Jewish "state" with a democratic orientation. However, it appears that "Israel" today faces internal structural crises on both the social and political levels. These crises represent an unprecedented threat to its survival. Consequently, Ben-Gurion's desire to unite Israelis around defining their country as "Jewish and



democratic" has become far removed from reality among the various segments of Israeli society.

In this context, Peter Lintl (*) argues that Israel is a heterogeneous and divided state, characterized by deep divisions fueled by its diverse population. The result is a multicultural society where existing commonalities have failed to achieve the attempt—launched in the 1950s but now appearing forced or artificial—to create a unique and unified Jewish society in Israel through a social Jewish community.¹

As former Israeli President Reuven Rivlin asserted in 2015, “Demographic and social processes have reshaped Israeli society over the past few decades: from a society with a clear majority (national Zionist) and clear minorities, to a society based on four main sectors or ‘tribes’: secular Israelis, religious nationalist Israelis, ultra-Orthodox Jews, and Arabs.”²

Thus, Israeli society is a mosaic of ethnicities, sects, and religions. On one hand, it includes Sephardim, who are Eastern Jews, and Ashkenazim, who represent Western Jews, along with Arabs and other non-Arab and non-Jewish minorities. On the other hand, it encompasses diverse religions such as Judaism, Islam, and Christianity. Even among religious Jews, there is a division into religious currents such as religious Zionists (religious Zionism) and ultra-Orthodox Jews, particularly the Haredi community.

From a political perspective, Israeli society can be divided into different political currents, such as the left, led by the Labor Party, and the right, led by the Likud Party. In addition, there are centrist and religious currents that are pulled in opposite directions by the two major currents mentioned above.

This division and fragmentation within Israeli society, in its political and religious dimensions, has become a significant challenge to the cohesion of its social fabric and a source of instability in its political system. Within the fragmentation of Israeli society, the phenomenon of the Haredi (ultra-Orthodox) community is emerging and developing significantly within the Israeli landscape. Some voices have even begun to warn of the danger of its demographic and geographic growth within Israel.

The vision adopted by Ben-Gurion more than seventy years ago regarding the construction of a Jewish identity on a national basis has not materialized. On the contrary, the manifestations of division and fragmentation have increased over time.

In this context, Charles D. Freilich(*) states: "Israeli society is deeply concerned about its divisions. In 2012, 76% expressed concern about the social and religious

(*) A German political scientist specializing in Israeli politics, and deputy head of the "Africa and Middle East" research team at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP).

¹ The Formative Socio-Political Crisis in Israel: Implications for National Security , Meir Elran, Kobi Michael ,Professional Forum | September 2023, in, https://www.inss.org.il/strategic_assessment/political-social-crisis/

² Ibid.



divisions within the Jewish population."³ Furthermore, the Israeli public believes that Israel faces numerous pressing challenges. When asked, "What do you think is the most urgent task for Israel the day after a ceasefire?"—referring to the 2014 Gaza War—29% answered, "Addressing and unifying Israeli society." Around 39% believe that the resilience of Israeli society has weakened compared to before the war, while 33% believe it has strengthened, and 20% believe it has not changed.⁴ These are all indicators of Israelis' unease about their future.

The Haredim, who represent the only Jewish group not based on Zionism, see themselves as traditional, non-modern Jews, embodying authentic Judaism. This adherence to that perspective leads to tensions with both the state and mainstream society. Herein lies what Barry Bouzan calls the "security dilemma," whereby the Haredim perceive the state as a threat to their identity and consequently demand certain privileges to protect their rights and preserve their identity. This study focuses on a segment of Israeli society—the Haredi community—and examines the dilemma it poses within Israeli society and the political system, as well as its implications and impact on Israeli national security.

The Problematic:

The Haredi dilemma in Israeli society is a highly complex issue with religious, social, and political dimensions that significantly affect Israeli national security. The Haredi community has long posed a real challenge to Israeli society through its isolationist behavior and its lack of acceptance of others, particularly secular Jews who do not share its views. The ideology has caused a continuous conflict with the Haredi community throughout the development of this society and its political system, to the point that some have described it as an internal threat to Israeli national security, while others have gone so far as to consider it an existential threat.

The question this research paper poses is: How does the Haredi dilemma in Israeli society affect the stability and security of the "state"? And what are its repercussions on the future cohesion of this society and, consequently, its continued existence?

The following sub-questions stem from this central issue:

- What is the Haredi community? What are its social, demographic, religious, and political characteristics?

(*)Professor Chuck Freilich, a former deputy national security adviser in Israel and long-time senior fellow at Harvard's Belfer Center, has taught political science at Harvard, Columbia, NYU and Tel Aviv University.

³ Israeli National Security, A New Strategy for an Era of Change, CHARLES D. FREILICH, Oxford University Press 2018, pp148

⁴ INSS October 2025 Public Opinion Survey: In the Shadow of the Ceasefire Agreement, Mora Deitch Idit Shafran Gittleman Abir Gitlin Gal Shan, Survey, November 3, 2025
<https://www.inss.org.il/publication/survey-october-2025/>



- Why does the Haredi community refuse integration into this society? What are its fears? And what are its demands of the "state"?
- How do the Haredim influence the political landscape in Israel, especially during elections and government formation?
- What is the impact of the Haredim on Israeli national security in the medium and long term, given the rapid demographic growth it has witnessed in recent years?

From this central issue and these questions, the following hypotheses are formulated:

Hypothesis 1: The Haredi community constitutes a fundamental component In the demographic makeup of Israeli society, given its rapid population growth, the Haredi community cannot be ignored in the Israeli landscape in all its dimensions.

Second hypothesis: The widening gap between the values of the modern state and the character of the Haredi community contributes to increased internal tensions.

Third hypothesis: Haredi population growth poses a structural threat to the "army-nation" and "nation-army" model.

Fourth hypothesis: Israel's future depends on the cohesion of its social structure; therefore, increased internal divisions will affect its security and very existence.

Objectives of the study:

This research paper aims to introduce the Haredi community and its most important demographic, cultural, and identity-related characteristics by analyzing its religious and social backgrounds, along with the advantages this community enjoys compared to other components of Israeli society. It also examines the extent of its involvement in Israeli political life and its influence on political and security decision-making in Israel. It should be noted that the Haredi community faces sharp criticism from secular Israeli society, which views it as a clear threat to Israeli national security.

- Methodology of the Study.

This study adopted a range of methodologies and approaches, including the descriptive-analytical method, which involves collecting, organizing, and analyzing data by presenting the characteristics of the Haredi community and its interaction with the state. It also employed the historical method, which traces the development of this community's emergence, its exemption from military service, and the role of religious parties in this regard. Furthermore, the study utilized content analysis of Haredi party discourse on several issues of concern to their community. The study also relied on a forward-looking approach, examining future scenarios concerning the demographic changes within the Haredi community and their impact on Israeli national security. The theoretical approach was based on broader security theories, such as the societal security theory developed by Barry Buzan (Copenhagen School), which the Haredi community has employed to protect itself from assimilation or integration into Israeli society.

- Previous Studies.

- Community Security Theory, as discussed by Barry Buzan (Copenhagen School), which the Haredi community has utilized to safeguard itself from assimilation or



integration into Israeli society. Numerous studies have addressed the growing phenomenon of the Haredi community in Israel and its attempts to impose its socio-religious lifestyle on Israeli society. This is achieved through its infiltration of political life via the political parties that represent it, enabling it to influence political and security decision-making and pressure Israeli governments to meet its demands. The following are some examples of these studies:

- Baruch Kimmerling, translated from Hebrew by Hani Al-Abdullah, **Israeli Society: Immigrants Born in the Country**, published by the Center for Arab Unity Studies, Beirut, First Edition, 2011

- Nadia Saad El-Din, **Religious Political Movements and the Future of the Arab-Israeli Conflict**, Arab Scientific Publishers and the Al Jazeera Center for Studies, Doha, First Edition, 2012

- Shlomo Sand, **How I Stopped Being a Jew** Translated by Antoine Shalhat and Asaad Zuabi, published by Dar Al-Ahliya, Amman, 2014 edition.

This study includes an introduction, four main sections, and a conclusion. The first section defines the Haredi community and its origins. The second focuses on the demographic weight of this community within Israeli society. The third section addresses the role and influence of the Haredim in the Israeli political system. The fourth and final section examines the implications of the Haredi dilemma for Israeli national security.

Section One: Defining the Haredi Community and its Origins

In recent years, the Haredi community has become a focal point for many observers of Israeli domestic affairs, due to its distinctive stances on issues of concern to Israeli society in its various dimensions. This has exacerbated tensions and divisions within Israeli society, prompting some political and military officials to sound the alarm regarding the future of Israel and its national security. Based on this, this study focuses on the Haredi community in terms of its nature, status, and demographic weight within Israeli society.

First Requirement: Defining the Haredi Community

The Haredim is the term used to describe an ultra-Orthodox Jewish community that adheres strictly to religious rituals and lives its daily life according to the intricate details of Jewish law, maintaining a lifestyle largely separate from modern life.⁵ The word "Haredim" is the plural of the Hebrew word "Hared," meaning "very fearful" or "terrified" (of God) or "pious." Their beliefs are rooted in ancient Jewish thought.⁶ The word originates from the verb "harada," meaning anger, stinginess, and withdrawal from society. The Haredi community is divided into sects and schools of thought, among which three stand out: the Hasidim, the Lithuanians, and the Sephardim (Eastern Haredim). Several political parties have emerged from these

⁵ <https://rossingcenter.org/ar/judaisms/>

⁶ Jewish Sects (3) The Haredim, Yasser Darwish Ahmed, on the website <https://aqsaonline.org/BlogPosts/Details/955ca2aa-f1a1-43ff-8b4e-e66f56f712db>



groups, such as United Torah Judaism (the party of Ashkenazi Haredim, i.e., Eastern European Jews) and Shas (Guardians of the Torah), the Sephardic party representing Eastern Haredim, i.e., Jews from Arab countries. It is worth noting that they ideologically reject the recognition of Israel as a state.

Alongside religious Zionists, the Haredim are one of the two main branches of Orthodox Judaism in Israel. The ultra-Orthodox Haredim include the two groups of European origin (Ashkenazim) – often referred to as "Lithuanians" – and the Hasidic Jews, as well as the non-European Sephardic Haredim. Within these three main groups fall numerous subgroups—particularly among Hasidic Jews—and there is also a small minority of openly anti-Zionist groups, such as Idah HaHaredis and Neturei Karta, which reject the State of Israel, do not vote, and refuse all forms of government funding.

Second Requirement: The Origins of Haredi Judaism

Haredi Judaism emerged at the end of the 18th century as a new Jewish identity in Eastern Europe, especially in Hungary. It saw itself as a movement drawing on ancient Jewish traditions to counter the modernization and secularization of Jewish society.⁷ Rabbi Moshe Sofer (*) played a prominent role in establishing Haredi Judaism. He laid the groundwork for the separation between the Haredim and the modern Orthodox Jews, who, while considering the Torah the foundation of their identity, did not reject modernity and fully integrated into society. The Haredim also sanctified their customs and traditions, as evidenced by Sofer's will, written in 1836, which warned against changing names, language, or dress. In the 19th century, a strict movement emerged advocating adherence to and preservation of Torah-based Judaism, resisting assimilation into modernity and secularism. Among the most prominent Haredi leaders of this century were Rabbi Chaim of Volosin (1749–1821) and Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kagan, also known as Chofitz Chaim (1838–1933), both from Eastern Europe.

When the Zionist movement began to take shape in Europe in 1897, they vehemently opposed it, asserting that only God could establish a new Israel. They maintained that Judaism is fundamentally a religious community, and that modern concepts of race and nation are alien to it. Thus, for many Haredim, the State of Israel remains a desecration of their religion, according to the website My Jewish Learning.⁸ The founding of Agudat Yisrael in Poland in 1912, a group representing the social and cultural interests of ultra-Orthodox Jews, marked a pivotal moment in the emergence of the Haredi movement.

⁷ <https://www.aljazeera.net/encyclopedia/2024/4/8/>

(*)Moshe Sofer was an Austro-Hungarian rabbi and one of the most prominent Orthodox rabbis of European Jews in the first half of the nineteenth century.

⁸ Abdel Salam Al-Shamikh: They refuse conscription and oppose "secular" Israel... Who are the "Haredim"?, on the website <https://asharq.com/politics/82969/>



Given the diverse origins of the Haredi communities, including those from Poland, Romania, Morocco, and Iraq, and the social environments in which they lived, this sect adopted a distinct lifestyle characterized by isolation and seclusion. They have their own synagogues, religious schools, and community organizations, and are concentrated in the city of Bnei Brak and the Mea Shearim neighborhood of Jerusalem. However, in recent years, their geographical reach has begun to expand beyond these areas. Interest in the Haredi community grew when its demographic weight began to increase in comparison with the rest of the components of Israeli society. The influence of religious forces also gradually strengthened from the mid-1970s, which was practically linked to the emergence of the Gush Emunim movement and the Likud party's first electoral victory and its formation of the government, which was considered at the time to be a major shift in the orientations of Israeli society. The Haredi forces adopted racist right-wing policies, expressed by the leaders of Gush Emunim, most of whom were influential figures in the dominant religious current at the time. These leaders demanded that public life and politics be linked to Jewish law, especially with regard to the Palestinian non-Jews, in application of the culture of Gush Emunim.⁹

Section Two: The Demographic Weight of the Haredi Community in Israeli Society

The demographic factor is of paramount importance in measuring the size and strength of nations in their various dimensions, and in shaping their future directions. Demographics are considered a matter of national security in Israel, and a key indicator of Israeli-Palestinian relations and the future of the conflict between the two sides, on the one hand, and of the future trends of Israeli society in its demographic structure, on the other. In the past decade, the number of Jews increased by 18% and the number of Arabs by 25%. This alone goes a long way in explaining why the Jewish state recognizes the importance of balancing Arab fertility rates and actively supports both Jewish births and anticipated immigration (waves of Jewish immigrants to Israel from the rest of the world), so that the total population of Israel is expected to increase by another two million people by 2040, reaching 12 million. However, the Jewish population is growing primarily thanks to one community: the Haredim, or ultra-Orthodox Jews.¹⁰

The First Requirement: Demographic growth of the Haredi community

The Haredi community in Israeli society has a higher fertility rate than other groups. As of 2020, the number of Haredi women exceeded the fertility rate of any other Israeli group, with an average of 6.6 children, compared to 2.1 children per secular

⁹ Is Israeli division inevitable? (See <http://democraticac.de/?p=1600>)

¹⁰ Israel: a demographic ticking bomb in today's one-state reality by Claudia De Martino and Ruth Hanau Santini, in, <https://aspeniaonline.it/israel-a-demographic-ticking-bomb-in-todays-one-state-reality/>



woman.¹¹ Consequently, the growth rate of the ultra-Orthodox (Haredim) population in Israel is the highest among all populations in developed countries, at approximately 4% annually. This, coupled with the young average age of marriage and the large number of children per family, results in a predominantly young population, with approximately 60% under the age of 20, compared to 31% of the total population. In 2022, the Haredi population reached approximately 1,280,000, compared to 750,000 in 2009. According to the Central Bureau of Statistics, their relative size is expected to reach 16% by 2030, and their population is projected to reach two million by 2033.¹²

The Second Requirement: The Impact of the Haredi demographic weight on the future of Israel.

The rapid growth of the Haredi population within Israeli society poses a significant challenge to the future of Israel, given their demographic weight compared to other components of this society. Consequently, this issue has become a central point of contention within the state. According to a research study conducted by the Israel Democracy Institute, the demographic growth of the Haredim cannot be treated merely as a matter of numbers. It is a key factor reshaping the Israeli economy, the military structure, and the nature of the political system. Consequently, it is one of the most influential factors that will determine the shape of Israel between 2040 and 2050.¹³

Sergio Della Pergola(*) confirms this view, stating: "The key to Israel's demographic future is undoubtedly in the hands of the Haredim. Within the demographics of the State of Israel, there exists a kind of sacred alliance between the various segments of Jewish society. In any case, we will be facing a completely different Israeli society by the middle of the 21st century."¹⁴ The Haredim represent a pivotal factor influencing political, social, and economic aspects. The rapid growth of this population group could lead to significant changes in the future of the state, both in terms of demographic balance and the economic and social challenges that may arise as a result of heavy reliance on government aid and low labor force participation. At the same time, their political power allows them to influence government policies, which could lead to conflicts with other segments of Israeli society, particularly secular Israelis.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Report on Annual Statistical Ultra-Orthodox (Haredi) Society in Israel 2022, Gilad Malach, Lee Cahaner, in, <https://en.idi.org.il/>

¹³ Haredi Jews and their demographic growth in the eye of the storm, by Antoine Shalhat, on the website, <http://www.madarceneter.org/>

(*)Professor Emeritus at the Hebrew University, specialist in the demography of the contemporary Jewish world. Author of numerous books, including *Jewish*...

¹⁴ The Haredim are the key to Israel's demographic future, according to Haaretz, by Sergio Della Pergola, on the website: <https://mukhtaraat.palestine-studies.org/ar/node/10879>



Section Three: The Role and Influence of the Haredim in the Israeli Political System

Due to the nature of the Israeli political system, which is based on proportional representation in parliament and has produced a multi-party system, it has become difficult for any single party to obtain a parliamentary majority except through alliances between parties to form governments.

As the Haredi community's demographic weight within Israeli society has grown and its geographical reach has expanded, after having previously adopted a more isolated lifestyle, it now plays a significant role and exerts considerable influence in the Israeli political system through alliances with major parties, which it often relies on to secure a parliamentary majority and form a government. This community has also come to play a prominent role in influencing and often shaping Israeli political decisions, particularly on social and religious issues of concern to them, as well as the issue of mandatory military service for yeshiva students.

These religious groups have also gained significant influence over Israeli political decision-making.

The first requirement: The Haredi perspective on democracy

When Israel was founded in 1948, its Declaration of Independence defined it as the nation-state of the Jewish people and expressed its commitment to democratic and liberal principles.¹⁵ However, the Haredi community rejected this declaration and continued to view democracy as a philosophical concept alien to Haredi thought, contradicting Torah-based religious concepts. Peter Lintl states in this regard: The Haredi approach to democracy must be understood within the context of their Haskavah (*), their worldview. In their understanding of themselves, the Haredim see themselves as the last Jewish group adhering to the principles of what they consider the traditional world, built entirely on the Torah and its interpretations codified in the Talmud and elsewhere. The beginning of modernity is seen as a destruction of "authentic" traditional Judaism. Instead, the Haredi model aspires to pre-secular, distinct societies where sectarian conflicts can be resolved solely based on interpretations of religious texts, in contrast to societies that question the significance of the texts themselves.¹⁶ Therefore, demographic growth The Haredi community poses a threat to Israeli democracy due to its alleged disregard for liberal norms. As

¹⁵ Bordering Beliefs: Israel's Sociopolitical Divide Between Liberal and Ultra-Orthodox Values

Adv. Edna Harel Fisher; in, <https://en.idi.org.il/articles/53017>

(*)"Hasakah" refers to "Haskalah," a Jewish Enlightenment movement that began in the 18th and 19th centuries CE. "Haskalah" (Hebrew: השכלה) means enlightenment or education. The movement aimed to integrate Jews into European societies and increase education in secular studies, in addition to traditional Jewish studies.

¹⁶ Haredi Parties and Israeli Democracy, Peter Lintl, The Palgrave International Handbook of Israel Living reference work, Latest edition © 2025, in,

<https://link-springer-com.snd11.arn.dz/referencework/10.1007/978-981-16-2717-0?page=1#toc>



Yochanann Plessner(**) stated at a conference in Jerusalem, "Among the population of Israel, the Haredi community exhibits the lowest level of identification with democratic values." Plessner added, "As the Haredim have become a significant element of Israeli society, they pose a formidable challenge to the strength and flourishing of democracy in the State of Israel."¹⁷ However, the Haredim have also manipulated the democratic process, engaging in political life to advance their interests and influence the political system. For decades, the political structure that underpinned the Haredim's political power has been based on a simple utilitarian logic: in exchange for guaranteed support in the Knesset, Haredi parties received budgets, institutional autonomy, and protection for their religious practices.

Second Requirement: Haredi political parties

The Haredim have clear party representation in the Knesset through parties that define themselves as representing a specific religious and social constituency. The most prominent of these are Shas, associated with the Sephardic Haredim, and United Torah Judaism, associated with the Ashkenazi Haredim. In the 25th Knesset, the two parties won 18 seats (11 for Shas and 7 for United Torah Judaism), which gave them significant leverage to use in pragmatic coalition-building maneuvers to achieve their goals of protecting the Haredim's social autonomy.

In this regard, Jonathan Freeman, a professor of political science at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, told Anadolu Agency: "Generally speaking, the Haredim have become increasingly important to any governing coalition over a very long period."¹⁸ He added: "I can say that whoever forms a government, regardless of the party, negotiates with the ultra-Orthodox parties (the Haredim), and this is where their growing importance lies."¹⁹ These statements reveal the strength and influence of religious parties on the Israeli political scene, particularly in political decision-making. It's worth noting that all religious parties have adopted a firm stance on the Palestinian issue. The ultra-Orthodox parties, in particular, have shifted from supporting peace initiatives, especially the Oslo Accords, to aligning with the extreme right on the issue of eliminating the other side.²⁰

Fourth Section: The Impact of the Ultra-Orthodox Dilemma on Israeli National Security

The cohesion and unity of Israeli society are fundamental pillars of its national security. However, this factor no longer satisfies the security establishment in Israel,

(**) who now heads the Israel Democracy Institute, and is a former Knesset member from the Kadima party

¹⁷ 'Haredi community a threat to Israel's democracy', Tzvi Lev, in, <https://www.israelnationalnews.com/news/241440>

¹⁸ Why do political parties seek the approval of the Haredim? The story of the community's influence. (See <https://arabicpost.net>)

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ How could the massive opposition of the Haredim reshape Israel? (in, <https://ismfrance.org/index.php/2025/11/02/>)



given the divisions and rifts that have emerged within Israeli society in recent years. These divisions stem from differences and disagreements on numerous issues, especially between the ultra-Orthodox community and the secular public. Warnings issued by Israeli research centers and think tanks indicate that Israel's national security is threatened by internal divisions and conflicts that are eroding Israeli society and jeopardizing its cohesion. Among these warnings is the annual strategic assessment issued by the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS) for 2021, which states that Israel faces an internal strategic threat that could weaken state institutions and erode public trust in them. Notably, this assessment identifies internal divisions for the first time as a direct source of threats to national security in its broadest sense (the narrower sense being related to the military dimension), as it undermines societal "resilience," according to the Israeli definition.²¹

In this context, the warning issued by former Israeli Chief of Staff Gadi Eisenkot stands out, regarding the disintegration of social solidarity, which he estimates constitutes 51% of national security (Maariv, January 28, 2022). What worries Gadi Eisenkot, the 13th Chief of Staff of the Israeli army, more than any external threat is the social and internal cohesion of the State of Israel. He says in this regard: "I believe that the fragmentation of Israeli society, the exchange of accusations, the decline in the state's presence, the decrease in trust in its institutions and courts, and the expansion of crime—all these constitute the greatest threat to the future of the state. I do not underestimate external threats; I have faced them throughout my life. But national resilience in Israeli society is the most important component of national security."²²

What can be inferred from these statements is that Israeli society has become, more than ever, vulnerable to divisions and fragmentation, especially between the ultra-Orthodox community and the secular stream on several contentious issues concerning the future of Israeli national security. These include the issue of exempting ultra-Orthodox men from mandatory military service and government support for approximately 50% of adult ultra-Orthodox men who are not engaged in paid employment due to their Torah studies, which is beginning to affect the Israeli economy. This has led a large segment of the Israeli population to criticize the preferential treatment they receive at the expense of the majority. Large sectors of Israeli society feel that the Haredim wield significant influence over their lives. Legal scholar Mordechai Kremnitzer even speaks of a "dominant minority," and a large majority complains of an unfair distribution of burdens and responsibilities. In one poll, 90% of respondents viewed the Haredim as an economic burden. For the Haredi

²¹ Amtanis Shehadeh, "The Division in Israeli Society: A Threat to National Security," International Reports, Haifa, on the website, <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/politics>

²² Ben Caspit, former Chief of Staff Gadi Eisenkot: The most significant danger facing Israel is internal division, on the website, <https://mukhtaraat.palestine-studies.org/ar/node/4878>



community, however, these elements are fundamental to their environment and must be protected from state interference.

According to a study conducted by the University of Haifa, Israel is moving toward becoming a "religious state." Consequently, concerns are growing about a "takeover by the ultra-Orthodox," a "Jewish version of Iran," or even the "annihilation" of secular Israelis.

First requirement: The Haredim and the Issue of Compulsory Military Service

The Security Service Law (Compulsory Military Service) was among the first laws enacted by Israel. The law stipulates, in principle, that all Israeli citizens, men and women, will join the Israel Defense Forces upon reaching the age of eighteen.

Fearing that military service would cause spiritual harm to yeshiva students and occupy time better spent studying the Torah, the Haredi (ultra-Orthodox) community initiated legislation requiring prospective recruits to appear before the Israel Defense Forces and declare that "Torah is their life's work." This legislation later became known as "Torato Umanuto," meaning "Torah is their profession."²³ They then entered into negotiations with Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion to secure exemption from conscription for this group of students.

In a pragmatic compromise, Ben-Gurion decided in 1948 to exempt several hundred yeshiva students from military service at the request of the Agudat Yisrael party. The argument was that the Haredi lifestyle, centered on religious study and social segregation, was incompatible with the army as an institution forging a modern Israeli identity. Over time, this exemption became an advantage.

But today, "Haredim represent 23.5% of those fit for military service, and this percentage could reach 40% by 2050."²⁴ It should be noted that "there are 66,000 young men of military age in religious seminaries, and about 1,000 of them have joined the army, but this represents only 1% of the total. It would be enough for 20,000 of these young men to join the ranks of the Israeli army, and there would be no need to call up new reserve soldiers."²⁵

It appears, based on the "Al-Aqsa Flood" war that erupted on October 7, 2023, that the Israeli army's need for recruitment has become more urgent than ever, for purely security and economic reasons. This is especially true since, without integration, the GDP is at risk of decreasing by 10%.

²³ Dr. Muhammad Shadi, "The War on Gaza: The Straw That Could Break the Back of Israeli Society," on the website <https://www.habtoorresearch.com/ar/programmes>

²⁴ By 2050, nearly one in four Israelis will be ultra-Orthodox, according to a study by Rossella Tercatin, available at <https://fr.timeofisrael.com/dici2050-pres-dun-israelien-sur-quatre-sera-ultra-orthodoxe-etude>

²⁵ Haredi Enlistment in the IDF: Does the Proposed New Law Invite Substantive Change?

INSS Insight No. 1529, November 2, 2021, Shlomo Black, in, <https://www.inss.org.il/publication/idf-orthodox-jews/>



Consequently, a large segment of Israeli society, particularly secular Israelis, is demanding a review of the social contract concluded during Ben-Gurion's era with the Haredi community. This shift was clearly manifested in the court ruling of March 28, 2024, which suspended or froze government funding for religious seminaries for students of conscription age. The ruling took effect on April 1, 2024, and the Supreme Court's decision of June 25, 2024, upheld this ruling, confirming the state's obligation to begin drafting seminary students.

Second Requirement: The Social and Economic Privileges of the Haredim

The social and economic privileges enjoyed by the Haredi community, in addition to exemptions from military service for their sons, as mentioned in the previous section, and other preferential treatment, have become major national issues in recent years. They have sparked widespread debate within Israeli society, which now views the matter as a social justice issue that could pose a significant threat to the future of the Israeli economy and, consequently, to Israel's national security. It is worth noting that "the rapid growth of the Haredi (ultra-Orthodox) population is expected to have a significant impact on the Israeli economy due to the group's distinctive patterns in education and employment."²⁶ In this regard, Misgav (*) considered Haredi (ultra-Orthodox) and nationalist Haredi politicians "an existential threat to Israel," adding that Israel's productive population "is required to fund Haredi education networks with billions, provide food vouchers, maintain numerous religious schools and their students' stipends, instead of supporting themselves and others. This is in addition to unlimited child allowances and exemptions from military and civil service. This is how a modern, democratic state commits suicide."²⁷

According to statistics published by the Israel Democracy Institute, the poverty rate among Haredim reaches 50%. The institute attributes this to their lack of participation in the labor market and their reliance on state and religious party allowances. The statistics also indicate that approximately half of Haredi men are unemployed, reaching about 46.5%, a rate three times higher than that of other Israelis.

One hundred and thirty leading Israeli economists warned against increasing the burden on reserve soldiers and continuing to exempt ultra-Orthodox Jews from military service. According to a letter from the economists to the government, as reported by the Israeli news site Globes, "If the current trend continues, many of those bearing the economic and security burden will prefer to emigrate from Israel. Specifically, the most educated and skilled individuals will be the first to leave. The remaining population will be less productive, and the burden on those who stay will increase, leading to a vicious cycle of emigration and decline." They added that "this downward spiral will particularly harm the ultra-Orthodox sector, which relies on public funding provided by the state." The signatories of the letter warned that "once

²⁶ D'ici 2050 près d'un israélien sur quatre sera ultra-orthodoxe, étude, op.cit.

²⁷ Haredim: An economic burden on Israel amid rising inflation (<https://asharq.com/politics/161825/>)



the population bearing the financial burden concludes that the State of Israel has embarked on an irreversible path, collapse will occur."²⁸

Conclusion:

The ultra-Orthodox dilemma is one of the most difficult and complex problems facing the Israeli landscape, given its various dimensions, whether social, religious, political, or security-related. The Haredim, who are part of Israeli society—which itself is a mosaic of Diaspora Jews—possess distinct social, religious, and identity characteristics that they wish to preserve from being lost or absorbed into the broader society.

Since David Ben-Gurion, Israel's first prime minister, desired to unify all Jewish communities into a single society, a concept he termed the "melting pot theory"—which, according to him, meant the dissolution of all social and ideological differences in favor of a unified Israeli society—he found it very difficult to convince the Haredi community of this idea. This led him to establish a social contract with their rabbis, granting them certain privileges such as exemption from mandatory military service for yeshiva students and the provision of government subsidies. However, with the rapid demographic growth of the Haredi community over the past three decades and its expansion into a geographical area, fundamental changes have occurred in Israel's demographic makeup. This segment of society is no longer a minority; statistical estimates indicate that it has become an influential demographic force. It is now viewed as a real problem that could affect Israel's economic and security future.

The Haredi dilemma within Israeli society lies in the tensions arising from divisions between the Haredim and the rest of society, particularly regarding military service, the economy, and education. The Haredim reject mandatory conscription based on their religious beliefs, which limits the full utilization of human resources in the army. Their reliance on government subsidies and high unemployment rates also put pressure on the economy. Politically, Haredi parties represent a significant electoral force, influencing government formation and decision-making through legislation that serves their interests.

On the security level, the absence of Haredim in the army could pose challenges to Israel's ability to confront military threats. More broadly, the Haredi dilemma presents internal challenges that affect the stability of Israeli society and its national security, requiring solutions that balance religious, social, and political needs.

²⁸ Ibid.



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