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## Opinion | What on Earth Is the Problem With a Jewish Majority in Israel?

Zionism is about creating a democratic state with a Jewish majority. It knows demography is destiny. Since when did that become unacceptable and indefensible for the Zionist left?

Eric H. Yoffie Jul. 18, 2021 3:26 PM [Follow](#)



Zen Read



Celebrations for Israel's 73rd Independence Day in Tel Aviv's Rabin Square this year Credit: Tomer Apelbaum



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Making the case for the Citizenship Law, Israel's Foreign Minister Yair Lapid stated that it should be supported because it "aimed at ensuring Israel's Jewish majority." In response, Carolina Landsmann wrote in Haaretz on July 10 that "a country that strives to deny a minority any

possibility of becoming a majority, whether by force of arms or through the power of law, isn't a democracy."

This contention makes no sense.

Why should the Jewish state not do what it can legally do to maintain a Jewish majority? And what in heaven's name has happened to the Zionist left? Why do so many of its champions find it difficult to affirm what is so clearly sensible and right?

Students of Israel and Zionism know that demography is destiny.

That Zionism, now and in the past, has always been about creating a democratic state with a Jewish majority. That the State of Israel can, and must, take appropriate steps to assure that a stable Jewish majority is maintained. That taking such steps, and being honest about your intentions, need not be inconsistent with democratic principles or with the ideals of Israel's Declaration of Independence. And that the loss of a Jewish majority means the end of Zionism and the disappearance of the State of Israel.



New Jewish immigrants from Ethiopia disembark from their plane in Israel Credit: אלפרט נתן

And not only that. The premise of Zionism is that there are many Jews who desperately want to live among other Jews in a majority-Jewish state. Their eagerness is understandable, and they make no apologies for this fact. They are grateful that the State of Israel, after millennia of Jewish exile, finally enables them to do so.



Israel, they remind us, was created to promote the religion, civilization and culture of the Jewish people and its dominant Jewish majority. Thank God, they say, that Israel is the one place where it is non-Jews who must struggle with the problems of being a minority—even as they are assured by Israeli law, at least in theory, of civil equality and democratic rights.

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**In a moment of honesty, Lapid revealed Israel's antidemocratic essence**

It is true, of course, as Landsmann states, that Israel must not use "force of arms" to suppress the number of its Arab citizens. To state the obvious, to forcibly transfer Arab citizens out of the country would be a violation of democratic norms and international law, not to mention Jewish values and tradition. It would be a repudiation of everything that Zionism stands for and the principles that it represents.

But assuring a Jewish majority by adopting laws and policies that are consistent with democratic governance is an altogether different matter. It is both acceptable and desirable.

Absent a Jewish majority, would Israel continue to provide no-questions-asked refuge to Jews facing danger and distress in countries around the globe? Almost certainly not; a non-Jewish majority would undoubtedly decide otherwise.

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Absent a Jewish majority, would Israel remain the one country in the world where Jewish holidays provide the rhythm of the calendar and where Jews openly apply Jewish values and the Jewish spirit to every aspect of life? Unlikely.

And it was precisely for these reasons that Zionism came into being in the first place.

Having said all of this, Landsmann was right to be critical of Lapid, and right that the Citizenship Law deserved to be defeated. But not for the reasons stated.

The provisions of the Citizenship Law, which was intended to limit the immigration to Israel of Arabs from the territories married to Israeli Arabs, affected only 10,000 to 15,000 people, nowhere near enough to have any impact on the demographic balance. And Israel's Arab citizens offered many convincing reasons why the law should be defeated or amended.



Foreign Minister Lapid, left, and Prime Minister Bennett at the Knesset in June. Credit: Ohad Zwigenberg

In other words, Lapid was right to assert the vital importance to Israel of preserving a secure Jewish majority, but wrong to suggest that renewing the Citizenship Law was a factor of any significance in doing so.

Still, I was pleased to see Lapid raise demographic questions at a time when both the Zionist right and the Zionist left have lost their way on an issue that stands at the very heart of Israel's purpose and being.

The Zionist right has responded to the demographic problem with thuggery and denial. For more than 40 years, it has built settlement after settlement, and even worse, illegal outpost after illegal outpost.

While the settlements might conceivably remain in Israel in some version of a two-state solution, the more than 140 illegal outposts, scattered throughout the territories, make any division of the land less and less likely. And the probable outcome then becomes a single bi-national state, with an Arab majority.



Settlers erect an enormous Star of David before they leave the illegal outpost of Evyatar in accordance with an agreement made with the Israeli government Credit: Tomer Appelbaum

If Lapid really cares about a Jewish majority, where was he when his government surrendered on Evyatar? Yet again, settler lawbreakers seized private land, defied the security concerns of the IDF, and bent the entire government apparatus of the Jewish state to their will. No government body gave approval for this act of stealth and deception; only in Israel are towns constructed not by the directive of

government planners but by the actions of messianic settlers, answering only to their rabbis and to God.

If the outpost remains, and it probably will, it will be yet another victory for the creeping annexationism that is eating Zionism alive.

Please, Mr. Lapid, until you are prepared to evacuate the Evyatars of Judea and Samaria and take on the piracy of the settler fanatics, spare us the sermons on ensuring Israel's Jewish majority.



**A settler and his Palestinian neighbors in Hebron. This year's Passover holiday marks 50 years since the first settlers came to the city to celebrate the week-long festival.** Credit: Mussa Qawasma/Reuters

And finally, what of the Zionist left, which at one time could be counted on to lead the fight for a Jewish majority in a Jewish and democratic Israel?

It is a long and complicated story, but the heart of the matter is that in both Israel and the Diaspora, the Zionist left is wavering. Swayed by Israel's Arab parties, post-Zionist thinking, revulsion at blood-and-soil nationalism, and sincere commitment to universalistic values, Zionists on the left—like their counterparts on the right—have also begun speaking the language of a single state with a Jewish minority, often obscured by the rhetoric of a "Jewish-Arab confederation."

But such a confederation is a pipedream and will happen when hell freezes over.

Until then, the only possible solution, as unlikely as it now seems, must be pieced together from the actual realities on the ground. And that means a Jewish-majority state, consisting of a particular people—the Jewish people; a particular culture—Jewish culture; and a segment of a particular land—Israel/Palestine.



Palestinian protesters hold flags during a demonstration against the illegal Israeli settler outpost of Eviatar, in the town of Beita, near the West Bank city of Nablus last month Credit: JAAAFAR ASHTIYEH - AFP

And that also means a Palestinian-majority state, consisting of a particular people—the Palestinian people; a particular culture—Palestinian culture; and a different segment of that same land—[Israel/Palestine](#). Each state will have minorities, of course, but the dominant majority will set the political and cultural tone of public life.

This configuration will not be perfect. Getting there will not be easy. And it may take many years for the two-state arrangement to be constructed. But left and right take note: in the meantime, the job of Jews is to work for a separation of peoples that will make two states possible, and for a demographic reality that will leave the Jews as a clear, uncontested majority in their part of Israel/Palestine.

I repeat: We Jews want a state of our own, where the Jews, a secure and confident majority, will call the shots, govern democratically, and live in peace with our neighbors. That is what Zionism is. And in the final analysis, binational, one-state schemes and fantasies will give way to the compelling logic of Zionist principles.

*David Mervin is a public writer and teacher in Westfield, Mass.*

*Judaism. Twitter: [@EricYoffie](#)*

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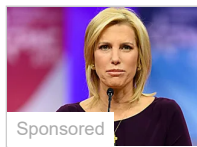
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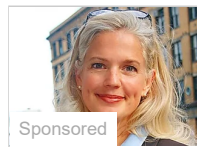


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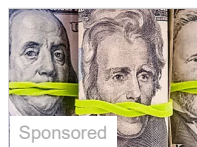


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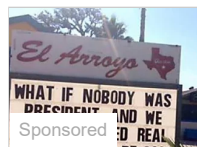


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**Blackbird** 20:15

👍 0 👎 5

40+ years ago Rabbi Kahane separated a Jewish state from a democratic one. To achieve a state that gives asylum to persecuted Jews or allows a Jew to live a meaningful Jewish life, you must forego some major democratic principles. Specifically one cannot have Arabs voting. They may retain personal rights such as buying or selling property but not voting or other governmental rights. Or better yet, they should be banished from the country, with or without compensation. Instead, Israel made the mistake of expelling Kahane from the parliament. The interesting article by Eric Yoffie argues that a Jewish majority can be maintained by democratic means. It does not show how a minority that knows it will be limited in its growth will not become an enemy and eventually turn to open revolt.

Reply

Report

7

**Leopold Bloom** 19:31

👍 8 👎 0

Thank you, Rabbi Yoffie, for this clear statement of what a modest and reasonable Zionism could be. I would only emphasize that when the State of Israel uses legal means to sustain a Jewish majority, those means must pass the test of international law, not just laws internal to Israel. In particular, such laws must not violate the individual human rights of any people living in the State of Israel proper or territories it controls. Sadly such violations are all too common nowadays and have been for many years.

Reply

Report

**Ted** 19:56 → *Leopold Bloom*

👍 0 👎 4

No need to state the obvious.

Reply

Report

**Leopold Bloom** 20:36 → *Leopold Bloom*

👍 3 👎 0

Ted, since there isn't even a consensus about the legitimacy of Israel's goal of remaining a Jewish-majority state, it isn't so obvious what counts as "obvious" to readers of these

comments.

**Reply**

**Report**

6

**Terry** 18:50

 5  2

A single state would soon be majority-Arab. The probability that a majority-Arab state will be as democratic as Israel is virtually ZERO. Israel was ranked 28 out of 167 on The Economist's Democracy Index. That's better than Belgium, Italy, Greece, Cyprus & at least a dozen other European countries. Israel has maintained democracy even though it's been under continual attack. By contrast, we Americans locked American citizens of Japanese descent in concentration camps during world war 2 & we confiscated Joe DiMaggio's father's fishing boat because he was of Italian descent. The highest Arab state is Tunisia which is ranked 69. Palestine is 109, Libya 154, Sudan 155, Yemen 158, Saudi Arabia 159, Algeria 126, Egypt 127, Qatar 133, Oman 140, United Arab Emirates 147, Bahrain 148, Morocco 100, Lebanon 106, Iraq 114, Jordan 115, Kuwait 116, Comoros 121, Mauritania 119, Djibouti 146, Syria 166. Iran 150.

**Reply**

**Report**

5

**Darth Zaider** 17:57

 8  5

Cut the bill. What the Jewish progressives are really saying is that Israel would be a really nice country *only* if the percent of Jews were not that high relative to overall population. Too many Jews - that is a problem indeed. Anti-Semites of the world: UNITE !

**Reply**

**Report**



**Sam Spade** 18:18 → *Darth Zaider*

 5  9

Being a Canadian racist bigot, you of course revel and celebrate Israeli apartheid. As a white nationalist, you like your hero neo nazi richard spencer who supported the Nation State Law know best.

**Reply**



**Report**

4


**Daniel** 17:40

 2  10

I get where Rabbi Yoffie is coming from, but I think he is fundamentally wrong. In a true democracy with a large Jewish population, in a land culturally and historically tied to the Jewish people, we would be able to demand refuge for our persecuted kin and to have our customs and holidays and religion be part of the mold of this truly democratic nation. Democracy works by rule of majority, and if, by law or by force, a certain majority is set to exist, it is a way of rigging the game to ensure their privileges. True democracy can't use of these subterfuges, or else it will lead to caste systems and apartheid.

**Reply****Report** **bronxite10** 19:08 → *Daniel* 6  2

In a true democracy with majority rule in which there were an Arab demographic majority, you would have a caste system in which Jews would be on the short end of the stick and there would never be any refuge for our persecuted kin. Pretending that that is not the case is an evasion, and it also violates the first part of the Hillel observation, if I am not for myself, who will be. The Arab demographic majority would have preferred the nonexistence of the Yishuv even if the consequence were the death of 4/5th of its population. That would have been their choice if the alternative was upsetting their demography. Rabbi Yoffie's position is to have respect for one's own and for the other as well. The "progressive" position is to rig the game so that there is no Jewish majority and then when Jews are on the short end, to say, gee that's tough and we do not support that and it's part of suffering in general and what's for lunch.

**Reply****Report****3** **jim** 17:14 13  0

Well argued. Now it is the duty of the post-Netanyahu government to do something to show that it can offer Palestinians a state worth the name. Failing that, Zionism's reputation in the world will continue to slide, and that "a-word" will continue to arise.

**Reply****Report****2** **BG** 16:51 5  8

The logic of your argument is today's reality -Apartheid where a "whites" majority state is upheld by differing laws and "homelands" ie area A & B, for non-Jews. There is no agenda to change this anytime soon. The real threat to Israel is its education system, especially in religious communities.

**Reply****Report** **Sandra Chitayat** 17:18 → *BG* 1  2

I find difficulty w/this thinking as well. We are all descended from Adam & Eve, & only HaShem has power over life & death. Anochi Hai! Says the First Commandment. To find G-d, look into your heart & soul. Be honest w/yourself. Also, If I am not for myself, who am I? If I am for myself alone, what am I? Respect for HaShem is respect for the other. In fact, the widow & the stranger. Surely, the Third Temple will be for all humanity, when we all learn to live together in harmony. I don't know. I am just human, but I know we do depend on the milk of human

kindness. One just has to be tolerant & kind, as a rule. For if we ask it of others, we must be prepared to extend it ourselves.

**Reply**

**Report**

**bronxite10** 17:41 → BG

👍 6 👎 2

Nonesense. The logic of the argument is that Jews need a state of their own where they are the majority culture, and Palestinians need the same. The difference is simply that Rabbi Yoffie says that both should co-exist and "progressives" say that only a Palestinian state should exist. Rabbi Yoffie says that the history and culture of each should be respected, and the "progressive" says that Jewish history and culture simply don't count for much compared to Palestinian "indigenous rights". The "progressive" is willing to live with reactionary, fundamentalist oligarchies such as Hamas and Hezbollah in preference to a Jewish state just as the settler on the West Bank is willing to live with "price tag" and taking pot shots at Palestinians "in your face" actions against Palestinians that are obvious. Rabbi

**Reply** **Read more**

1

**ErikT** 16:14

👍 7 👎 9

It is not the citizenship law, it is far more fundamental.

It is where Yoffie states that it is important that "Israel continue to provide no-questions-asked refuge to Jews" and at the same time to deny the Palestinian refugees of 1948 and 1967 the right to return to their home.

It is the Nation-State Law, that limits self-determination to the Jewish citizens only.

Inequality is built into the foundations of Israel. There is no majority-minority thinking, which is an element of a democracy, there is superiority-minority thinking, which is the core of an apartheid regime. It is a pity that Yoffie is not able to recognize those facts.

**Reply**

**Report**

↳ **Iggy of Ophir** 16:29 → ErikT

👍 3 👎 6

**@ErikT: Is it JUST POSSIBLE that the HUMAN RACE'S efforts to LOGICALLY ORGANIZE ITSELF--is NOTHING MORE than--a MILLENNIA-LONG exercise of..."WHACK-A-MOLE"?**

**Reply**

**Report**

**ErikT -> Iggy** 16:57 → ErikT

👍 5    👎 6

Superiority thinking has been a driving force for millennia. It is at the basis of slavery, it is at the basis of religious persecution and many more negative aspects of humanity.

I thought that the principle behind "never again" and the establishment of the UN aimed to change that superiority instinct of humankind.

PS. I know your preference to use capitals throughout your texts, but it does not make them easier to read.

**Reply**

**Report**

**Sandra Chitayat** 17:11 → *ErikT*

👍 2    👎 0

For once, I agree w/your sense of humour, Iggy.

**Reply**

**Report**

**Sandra Chitayat** 17:21 → *ErikT*

👍 3    👎 3

There is no such thing as "no questions asked" to emigrate to Israel as a Jew. I know from experience. Life is not easy in Israel, you have to make a pot of money to survive there. That is a fact. "No questions asked" is a myth.

**Reply**

**Report**

**Harry** 19:05 → *ErikT*

👍 0    👎 1

Erik, they will have to make their homes elsewhere. Get over it

**Reply**

**Report**

**Iggy of Ophir** 20:59 → *ErikT*

👍 0    👎 1

@ErikT: Thanks for your comment & have a great day!

**Reply**

**Report**

**Iggy of Ophir** 21:00 → *ErikT*

👍 0    👎 1

@Sandra Chitayat: Thanks for your comment, and have a great day!

**Reply**

**Report**

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