

fact that the Ultra-Orthodox parties set up a Rabbinic body which is composed of key leaders from the different streams who settles divisive issues such as the order of the candidate list. Furthermore, the party does not allow for primaries or women to run for political leadership.

In contrast, in local city elections where there is no formal religious body to bridge the gaps, religious disagreements have political consequences. For example, in the most recent municipal elections in Jerusalem, the Ultra-Orthodox parties ran competing lists and publicly backed different candidates for mayor ([link](#)). For example, secular Mayor Nir Barkat lost the Jerusalem elections in 2003 and was only successful in 2008 because one ultra-Orthodox Hasidic sect refrained from voting for Barkat's religious competitor.

Yet, this consensus comes at a cost. Rabbinic consensus generally adopts the most *extreme* position in order to avoid a split, which gives extremists great power.¹¹⁹ For example, several uncompromising and unpopular demands in the religion and state realm, such as the directive to not perform infrastructure work on the Sabbath and to close all grocery stores on the Sabbath, originated from the head of the Gur community. This legislation was ultimately pushed by the ultra-orthodox parties, despite strong internal opposition, in order to prevent a formal split within the political party.

In summary, political parties with formal religious institutions are more likely to survive. These parties are also more likely to be run by Jewish law and are less likely to hold by several democratic norms. The combination of political flux and intransigent demands among Israel's religious political parties leads to less electoral stability and was an important contributing factor to repeat elections in Israel ([link](#)). Due to the religious community's large birth rates, these political parties are likely to gain more political power in the future, becoming increasingly reliant on more extreme political views in order to maintain the peace among religious leaders.

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THE DECLINE OF DEMOCRACY IN ISRAEL'S SOVEREIGNTY DISCOURSE

By Meirav Jones and Lihi Ben Shitrit

One week before Israel's second round of general elections in September 2019, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced that should he be re-elected, he would act immediately to "apply sovereignty" over the Jordan Valley in the West Bank.¹²⁰ The talk of "sovereignty" only intensified with the Trump Administration's "Peace to Prosperity" plan, which was celebrated by the Israeli right (and center) for its endorsement of Israel applying sovereignty over at least 30% of the occupied West Bank, including the Jordan Valley and all Israeli settlements.¹²¹ While the term "sovereignty" rings of legitimacy, "applying sovereignty," or "*hachalat ribonut*," has become the acceptable Hebrew phrase for the annexation of the West Bank without bestowing citizenship on its majority non-Jewish – Arab-Palestinian – residents. In fact, the Hebrew term for sovereignty, *ribonut*, is currently used almost exclusively in this context, raising serious questions about the compatibility of *ribonut* with democracy.

In our ongoing research project, we explore the extent to which *ribonut* has become synonymous in Israeli public discourse with annexation of land and domination. We make two main arguments. First, this now common notion of sovereignty is incompatible with the dominant Western understanding of sovereignty as self-rule and as the highest order of command within a defined territory. Second, even in the Israeli context, the understanding of sovereignty as domination represents a shift from the way sovereignty had been understood since the establishment of the state. We further argue that the current meaning of sovereignty in Hebrew was consciously registered in the Israeli political imagination by a political movement that emerged from the settler

movement with the disengagement from Gaza in 2005. We bring the vision of this group to light and find that if Israel is to live up to its democratic aspirations, it must resist the conceptual work being done by the “Sovereignty Movement” and reclaim the term sovereignty as self-rule and as the highest order of command within a given territory with recognized borders.

While our work is on the changing meaning of sovereignty in Israeli discourse, these transformations resonate more broadly in the treatment of annexation and domination by the international community. For example, Trump’s “Peace to Prosperity” plan perpetuates inequality between the non-sovereign people (Palestinians) and the sovereign state (Israel) by legitimating annexation and downplaying sovereignty as self-rule within a defined territory.¹²² Though the understanding that sovereignty cultivates equality may need revising,¹²³ replacing a vision of sovereign equality with one of sovereign domination is a problematic outcome for world politics.

Sovereignty in Israeli discourse

The transformation of the meaning of sovereignty in Hebrew is evident in the ways it is discussed in traditional and contemporary contexts. Historically, *ribonut* in Israel’s public discourse did mean sovereignty, or self-rule within recognized territorial boundaries. In fact, the hegemonic discourse of political Zionism was framed around the modern European model of the nation-state, with Jews constituting a national collective possessing the right to self-determination within a demarcated territory. To the extent that Israel accepted the partition plan voted upon by the UN in 1947, it accepted the fundamentals of self-rule within limited borders, including the existence of sovereign states on the either side of those borders. Israel was also defined from the onset as a democracy; hence the obsession over demographics from the early years of the state as only a Jewish majority would preserve the state’s Jewish character. Efforts to establish a Jewish demographic majority, including the deplorable expulsion of much of the Arab population in 1948, followed to some degree

from principles of Westphalian sovereignty and particularly its logic of partition and separation from difference and its imagining of largely-homogenous self-ruled entities. The traditional modern understanding of sovereignty accepted in the early years of the state is still reflected in the definition of *ribonut* in the authoritative Hebrew dictionary and thesaurus, *Rav-Milim*,¹²⁴ where *ribonut* is synonymous with “*sovereniut*” (which is “sovereignty” transliterated), and other synonyms are self-rule, self-government, autonomy, equal rights, freedom, independence, and other terms for liberty and self-rule.

Yet the Hebrew definition of “*ribonut*” in Wikipedia— a critical and accessible source of information for students and the general public, and one that can reflect popular understandings of terms more quickly than conventional dictionaries¹²⁵— has sovereignty as “the unique right to exercise the highest authority over a geographic territory or a group of people”.¹²⁶ Self-rule and freedom are obliterated from this definition, and sovereignty is about ruling *over*. This difference is not simply due to the way Wikipedia treats sovereignty more generally. Wikipedia in English defines sovereignty as “the full right and power of a governing body over itself, without any interference from outside sources or bodies,”¹²⁷ thereby emphasizing self-governance. Other differences between the Hebrew and English Wikipedia entries are that while international recognition is the key to sovereignty in English, it is portrayed as unnecessary in the Hebrew entry. Furthermore, while the English definition provides a history of the idea and practice of sovereignty from ancient through medieval to modern times, the Hebrew definition forgoes this in favor of a section on “colloquial uses of *ribonut*,” based largely on quoting Israeli generals.

The political ideal of “ruling *over*”, rather than self-rule, also has a history in the state of Israel since before its founding. In Mandate Palestine there was a concept of political authority that competed with *ribonut* as then understood, and this was the concept of *adnut*. While both *ribonut* and *adnut* draw on names of God from biblical and Rabbinic Hebrew, *adnut* also describes a

particular human relationship: the relationship between master and slave; domination. *Adnut* was promoted by influential groups who rejected partition and sought to conquer and rule the entire biblical Land of Israel and control its population; agendas that resonate with the agenda of *ribonut* today, as reflected in the Wikipedia entry but more precisely in the publications of the “Sovereignty Journal” and other publications of the “Sovereignty Movement” we will soon introduce.¹²⁸ It is ironic that while the agenda of *adnut* was considered by Israel’s first Prime Minister David Ben Gurion as threatening Israel’s sovereignty, the heirs to the idea of *adnut* today are shaping how sovereignty/*ribonut* is used in Israeli public discourse.

That the current Hebrew Wikipedia entry dates to 2006 is no accident. This was the year after Israel withdrew from the interior of the Gaza Strip (known as “the disengagement” in Israel). The disengagement is relevant in this context because, among its other implications, it demonstrated the possibility of partition and border-setting without granting the Palestinians sovereignty over territory and therefore reduced the importance of Palestinian sovereignty for Israel’s realization of its own sovereignty. The disengagement was also a turning point for the Settler Movement and the methods it employs to promote annexation and reject Palestinian sovereignty, turning to conceptual work and political lobbying alongside acting on the ground. It was in the wake of the disengagement that the idea of the “Sovereignty Movement” was conceived, which was essentially an idea to redefine sovereignty such that the concept itself would reject partition; this, we find, was critical to shaping how sovereignty is understood as domination in Israeli political discourse today.

The Sovereignty Movement that spearheaded the change in how *ribonut* is understood in Hebrew and the proliferation of its use was established in 2010 by “Women in Green,” a high-profile group of activists in the Israeli settler movement.¹²⁹ The movement’s founding objective was to articulate a clear political theory and vision that could be communicated to the Israeli public and the international community and to promote that

vision through formal legislation. It sought to create a situation in which further disengagement, partition, and the establishment of a Palestinian state would not be viable not only because it would be impractical (due to settlement construction), but conceptually untenable. Through reconceptualizing the term “sovereignty” as control over land, the movement implied – and continues to imply – that Israel is not fully sovereign so long as it does not control the entire territory of the biblical land of Israel.

The success of the movement is unmistakable. First, as the examples from the online dictionaries discussed above showed, sovereignty in Hebrew is now increasingly associated with annexation. In 2018 an addition was made to the Wikipedia entry “*ribonut*” which is a cross-reference to “Sovereignty: A Political Journal”; the journal of the “Sovereignty Movement.” By 2020, all free online dictionaries in Hebrew defined *ribonut* according to the Wikipedia definition, such that sovereignty in Hebrew in internet research does not mean self-rule, but rule *over* a territory or people. This spread suggests that this understanding of sovereignty is now the dominant one in Israeli public discourse.

In that vein, the ubiquitous roadside signs calling for “sovereignty now” are immediately understood by passers-by as calls for annexation. Second, while sovereignty was hardly discussed in Israel in the past, since 2010 the issue of sovereignty has risen exponentially in new reports, almost exclusively with the meaning of *adnut*.¹³⁰ A third mark of success is the extent to which democracy is excluded from sovereignty discourse. Of 10,600 news reports discussing “sovereignty” in 2010 through 2019, only 1,800 discussed democracy. Fourth, the Sovereignty movement has moved from the margins of the settler movement into mainstream society and politics. Its increasing legitimacy is evident in its endorsement by the major religious youth movement (Bnei Akiva), the adoption of the principle of annexation by the ruling Likud party’s Central Committee, and the participation of 39 of 120 Knesset members, ministers and deputy ministers as authors, contributors, or interviewees in the Sovereignty Journal. Finally, the movement’s power is evident

in the current moment, when both major parties agree on “applying sovereignty” to the Jordan Valley, with *ribonut* being a central theme of coalition negotiations.¹³¹

Conclusion: The Evolution of Sovereignty

The meaning of sovereignty is changing not only in Israel but worldwide. While the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st have been considered a period of “sovereignty in crisis,”¹³² our times raise the question of what comes next. With globalization, “sovereignty as domination” and the acceptance of paternalist power-structures in international politics may be one of two viable alternatives for the international arena, the other being a radical rethinking of sovereignty and a move to post-sovereignty and partnerships between peoples irrespective of their territorial possessions. But paternalist power structures are not only about international politics; they are about democracy itself. Israeli discourse reveals that when sovereignty comes to mean domination, sovereignty ceases to become a national right and an expression of national freedom, and becomes a tool for subjection. Those who care about the future of Israel/Palestine and about democracy should be attuned to sovereignty discourse in Israel and its implications.

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HOW MANY IS ONE TOO MANY? ISRAELI ELECTIONS 2018 - 2020

By Tamar Hermann

Between 2018-2020 Israel set a national – perhaps even international - record by holding (at least to the date of this writing) four election campaigns in 18 months:¹³³ one municipal (October 2018) and three national (April and

September 2019, March 2020). The municipal elections were conducted on time and showed no indication of the upcoming saga. Yet, the following three national elections were all inconclusive. For the first time in Israel's history, after both the April and the September rounds none of the largest parties' leaders (Benjamin Netanyahu of Likud and Benny Gantz of Blue and White) was able to assemble a majority-based coalition. Thus, new elections had to be called upon. As a result, Israelis have lived in a protracted elections campaign since late 2018. In addition to the elections, this period was dominated by the legal process focusing on Prime Minister Netanyahu—which resulted in three indictments against him. Netanyahu's case has so dominated the political arena that the common wisdom in Israel is that the three elections were all about the public sentiment “for or against Bibi” while all strategic issues have been neglected. At the same time, Israel has been experiencing for several years now a low level of public trust in the political institutions (Hermann et. al, 2019). Are the frequent elections the last straw that may break the camel's back, i.e., are Israeli citizens losing their political patience and interest in the democratic process?

This paper briefly discusses Israeli public opinion on three relevant topics:

1. Are the elections interesting?
2. Are the elections fair?
3. What are the elections all about?

The data presented below is taken from the Israeli Voice monthly public opinion polls project, conducted by the Guttman Center for Public Opinion and Policy Research in the Israel Democracy Institute.¹³⁴

Are the elections interesting?

Israelis are known for their high political awareness and engagement.¹³⁵ However, when the second round of elections was called for September 2019, many predicted that a large number of Israelis would stay at home because of electoral fatigue or as protest. This did not happen; in fact, the national turnout increased

social norms and personal attitudes,” *Psychological science* 28, no. 9 (2017): 1334–1344.

¹¹¹ Bassan-Nygate and Weiss, “Party Competition and Cooperation Shape Affective Polarization: Evidence from Natural and Survey Experiments in Israel.”

¹¹² Nugent, “The Psychology of Repression and Polarization.”

¹¹³ Arend Lijphart, *Patterns of democracy: Government forms and performance in thirty-six countries* (Yale University Press, 2012).

¹¹⁴ Mia Ashri, “Culture Minister Regev Against the Barbur Gallery: Immediate legislation is required to deny its budget,” *Haaretz*, June 2018, <https://www.haaretz.co.il/gallery/art/.premium-1.6153763>.

Jonathan Lis, “Israel Passes Law Meant to Keep Breaking the Silence Out of Schools,” *Haaretz*, July 2018, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-israel-passes-law-targeting-groups-that-support-soldiers-indictment-1.6284735>.

Michael Freedman Notes

¹¹⁵ Sharan Grewal et al., “Poverty and Divine Rewards: The Electoral Advantage of Islamist Political Parties,” *American Journal of Political Science* 63, no. 4 (July 8, 2019): 859–74, doi:10.1111/ajps.12447.

¹¹⁶ Richard A Nielsen, “The Changing Face of Islamic Authority in the Middle East,” *Middle East Brief* 99 (2016): 1–8.

¹¹⁷ Other sociological changes have also contributed to the weakening of religious authority. These include greater socio-economic mobility and more exposure to Israeli society via university and college studies. See Haim Zicherman and Lee Cahaner, “Modern Ultra-Orthodoxy: The Emergence of a Haredi Middle Class in Israel,” *The Israel Democracy Institute (Hebrew)*, 2012.

¹¹⁸ Nadav G. Shelef and Ori Shelef, “Democratic Inclusion and Religious Nationalists in Israel,” *Political Science Quarterly* 128, no. 2 (2013): 289–316, doi:10.1002/polq.12038; Michael Freedman, “Fighting from the Pulpit: Religious Leaders and Violent Conflict in Israel,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 63, no. 10 (2019): 2262–88.

¹¹⁹ Charles S Liebman, “Extremism as a Religious Norm,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 1983, 75–86; Lisa Blaydes and Drew A. Linzer, “Elite Competition, Religiosity, and Anti-Americanism in the Islamic World,” *American Political Science Review* 106, no. 02 (2012): 225–43, doi:10.1017/S0003055412000135; Barbara F Walter, “The Extremist’s Advantage in Civil Wars,” *International Security* 42, no. 2 (2017): 7–39, doi:10.1162/ISEC.

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¹²⁰ <https://www.haaretz.co.il/news/elections/1.7829170>

¹²¹ The Israeli Right did not accept the plan as a whole, it rejected the part of the plan that outlined a vision for a limited – and not sovereign – Palestinian State.

¹²² <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Peace-to-Prosperty-0120.pdf>, pp. 8–9.

¹²³ Hans Kelsen, “The Principle of Sovereign Equality of States as a Basis for International Organization,” *Yale Law Journal* 53 (1944); Benedict Kingsbury, “Sovereignty and Inequality,” *The European Journal of International Law* 9 (1998), 599–625; Jean L. Cohen, “Sovereign Equality vs. Imperial Right: The Battle Over the “New World Order”, *Constellations* 13:4 (2006), 485–505;

¹²⁴ First published in 1997 by the Center for Educational Technology, now available online to subscribers that include Israel’s colleges and universities, publishing houses, and news outlets: <https://www.ravmilim.co.il/naerr.asp>

¹²⁵ Wikipedia has been studied as a source utilized by both school and college students, alongside other sources of knowledge. Alison Head and Michael Eisenberg, “How Today’s College Students Use Wikipedia for Course-Related Research,” *First Monday* 15:3 (2010); Sook Lim, How and Why do College Students Use Wikipedia?” *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology* 60:11 (2009) 2189–2202. Scholarship on Israel has argued that Wikipedia is a more valuable source of information resource than teachers appreciate. Hagit Meishar-Tal, “Teachers’ Use of Wikipedia with their Students,” *Australian Journal of Teacher Education* 40:12 (2005). Further, in Computer Science, Wikipedia is nowadays being used as a resource to recreate natural-language processing, leaning on the vast amount of human knowledge encoded within it. Evgeniy Gabrilovich, Shaul Markovitch, “Wikipedia-based Semantic Interpretation for Natural Language Processing,” *Journal of Artificial Intelligence Research* 34 (2009), 443–498. Finally, recent studies have found that Wikipedia is legitimated by US news sources, partly by their reliance upon it. Marcus Messner and Jeff South, “Legitimizing Wikipedia,” *Journalism Practice* (2011) 5:2. Wikipedia is thus an important resource for both human and computer learning, as well as for information gathering and wide dissemination, and its content is more significant than might otherwise be assumed.

¹²⁶ Wikipedia, “Ribonut” [Hebrew], Accessed April 3, 2020.

¹²⁷ Wikipedia, “Sovereignty,” Accessed April 3, 2020

¹²⁸ Adnut was a stated goal of the “Lehi” movement, as articulated in its charter. Lehi was an acronym for *Lohamei Heirut Israel*, or Israel Freedom Fighters. The Lehi’s 18-point charter called “Principles of Rebirth”, identifies its goal as *adnut* over the entire biblical land of Israel (point 11 on the charter), and redemption (point 4a) ultimately to be marked by the construction of the third temple in Jerusalem (point 18). Conquering the land from non-Jewish inhabitants (using the term *kibush*, which is currently used for “occupation”) is point 10 on the charter. https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/f/f8/18_Pinciples_of_Rebirth.jpg. The Sovereignty Movement sees itself as conducting a campaign to evade the possibility of dividing the land of Israel and to push for Jewish control over

the entire territory. It is comfortable with redemption, and among its activists are those who work towards the construction of the Third Temple in our times. One member of the steering committee of the movement, Geula Cohen, was herself a member of the Lehi from 1943 until the movement split up, and on the website of the Sovereignty journal she is listed as a Lehi fighter.

<http://ribonut.co.il/AboutSection.aspx?NewsHomeItemId=3&lang=2>

¹²⁹ <http://www.ribonut.co.il/?lang=1>
¹³⁰ Exponential rise in the use of the term in news (through google search, April 7,2020) in two-year blocks seen in a preliminary search for ribonut (in Hebrew) on Google under the “News” tab. 2008-2009: 43 mentions, not with the meaning of domination. 2010-2011: 149 articles mentioning ribonut with the meaning of domination; 2012-2013: 289 articles; 2014-2015: 646 articles 2016-2017; 1210 articles. 2018-2019: 5320 articles.

¹³¹ <https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/west-bank-annexation-could-move-forward-as-early-as-july-623802>.

¹³² Brown, Wendy. *Walled states, waning sovereignty*. MIT Press, 2017.

Hermann Notes

¹³³ Hermann, T. et. al., 2019. *The Israeli Democracy Index 2019*. Jerusalem: The Israel Democracy Institute

¹³⁴ For the Israeli Voice surveys entire data set see (idi.org.il).

¹³⁵ By the Economist Intelligence Unit political participation index Israel scores

¹³⁶ This trichotomy is hardly relevant for the Israeli Arab citizens as they put themselves almost totally on the Left.

¹³⁷ The three blocs are very different in size: about 55-60% identify with the Right, about 15% with the Left and 25-30% with the Center.

¹³⁸ When the two surveys were conducted the Deal of the Century was not yet on the table and relations with the Palestinians were hardly on the agenda of any party as the matter seemed dead ended.

Marc Lynch Notes

¹³⁹ Marc Lynch, “Is There An Islamist Advantage At War?” APSA MENA Politics Newsletter 2(1), available at <https://apsamena.org/2019/04/16/is-there-an-islamist-advantage-at-war/>

¹⁴⁰ Steven Brooke, *Winning Hearts and Votes: Social Services and the Islamist Political Advantage*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018.

¹⁴¹ Elizabeth R. Nugent, *After Repression: How Polarization Derails Democratic Transitions*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020.

Khalil Al-Anani Notes

¹⁴² Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckman, *The Social Construction of Reality*, (London: Penguin Books, 1966).

¹⁴³ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995)

¹⁴⁴ Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (New York: International Publishers Co, 1971)

¹⁴⁵ Roger Petersen, “Emotions as the Residue of Lived Experience.”, *PS: Political Science & Politics*, Volume 50, Issue 4, October 2017, pp. 932-935.

¹⁴⁶ See for example, Jeff Goodwin, James M. Jasper, Francesca Polletta, *Passionate Politics: Emotions and Social Movements* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001); G.E. Marcus, “Emotions in Politics.”, *American Political Science Review*, 2000 3:1, 221-250, and Roger Petersen, “Emotions as the Residue of Lived Experience.”, *PS: Political Science & Politics*, Volume 50, Issue 4, October 2017, pp. 932-935.

¹⁴⁷ Interview, August 24, 2017

¹⁴⁸ Interview, August 24, 2017

¹⁴⁹ Interview, August 24, 2017

¹⁵⁰ Mustafa Menshawy, *Leaving the Brotherhood: Self, Society, and the State*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019)

¹⁵¹ Interview, November 12, 2017

¹⁵² Mada Masr, 9/9/2019 at <https://madamasr.com/en/2019/09/09/feature/politics/in-a-letter-from-prison-jailed-muslim-brotherhood-youth-call-on-prominent-public-figures-to-mediate-with-authorities-to-secure-their-release/>

Steven Brooke Notes

¹⁵³ Steven Brooke, *Winning Hearts and Votes: Social Services and the Islamist Political Advantage*, (Cornell University Press, 2019); Melani Cammett and Pauline Jones Luong, “Is There an Islamist Political Advantage?” *Annual Review of Political Science*, 17 (2014), pgs. 187-206; Tarek Masoud, *Counting Islam: Religion, Class, and Elections in Egypt* (Cambridge University Press, 2014). Thomas Pepinsky, R. William Liddle, and Saiful Mujani, “Testing Islam’s Political Advantage: Evidence from Indonesia,” *American Journal of Political Science*, 56:3 (2014), pgs. 584-600.

¹⁵⁴ Ana Arjona, *Rebelocracy: Social Order in the Columbian Civil War*, (Cambridge University Press, 2017); Ana Arjona, Nelson Kasfir, and Zachariah Mampilly, *Rebel Governance in Civil War*, (Cambridge University Press, 2015); Zachariah Mampilly, *Rebel Rulers: Insurgent Governance and Civilian Life During War*, (Cornell University Press, 2011).

¹⁵⁵ Steven Brooke, “From Medicine to Mobilization: Social Service Provision and the Islamist Political Advantage,” *Perspectives on Politics*, 15:1 (2017), pgs. 42-61.

¹⁵⁶ Melani Cammett and Aytüğ Şaşmaz, “Political Context, Organizational Mission, and the Quality of Social Services: Insights from the Health Sector in Lebanon,” *World Development*, 98 (2017), pgs. 120-132.

Nicholas J. Lotito Notes

¹⁵⁷ The combined data include 352 groups, of which 38 (11%).