

Christianity's Survival in Israel Is Under Attack

Extremist government headed by Netanyahu promotes de facto ethnic cleansing

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Israel's new government is still taking shape, but some of the policy changes being promoted are so Jewish-centric that they will inevitably [impact disproportionately](#) on minority disadvantaged communities like the Palestinian Christians and Muslims. The government itself is already being described in the press as the "most extremist or right wing in Israel's history," though what exactly that means is left to the perception of the reader. Several government ministers have even at times been excoriated for some of their extreme views inclusive of encouraging homicidal genocide or even the complete removal of all non-Jews by force from the country and occupied territories.

The Joe Biden Administration, in which nearly half of all senior appointments are Jews, as well as nearly everyone who deals with foreign policy, is doing its part to comply with traditional White House submission to Israel's perceived interests. Israel is in the driving seat, and Biden knows it, declaring himself to be personally a Zionist. Much has been made of the fact that Biden has not invited Netanyahu to the White House to congratulate him on his latest electoral victory over concerns relating to the proposed judiciary changes and [increasing settlement expansion](#), but it is clear that Israel and America's Jewish Lobby are fully in control of both the White House and Congress.

Israel has certainly morphed into a nice place if one likes to feel racially and morally superior while shooting Arab children. This move of the Israeli government rightwards is reflected in a shift in popular sentiment. A [recent poll](#) by Israel Democracy Institute revealed that a record-high 62% of Israeli Jews place themselves on the right wing of the political map. The shift is best appreciated by examining the profiles of several of Netanyahu's new ministers. The one most often cited is [Itamar Ben-Gvir](#) of the Jewish Power party. Ben-Gvir, who calls for deporting Arabs, has been charged with crimes 50 times, and convicted on eight occasions, including once for involvement in a Jewish terrorist group. Ben-Gvir is notorious for his provocations directed against Palestinian Muslims and Christians, which have included marches of armed settlers flaunting Israeli flags through Arab quarters of

cities and towns. To cap the irony, though he is a persistent law violator he has been since November 2022 been the National Security Minister, which gives him authority over the police. He is currently seeking to have the Knesset pass legislation explicitly conferring legal immunity on all Israeli soldiers for any and all killings of Palestinians and also pressed the parliament to institute a formal, judicially administered death penalty for “terrorists”, which would mean any Palestinian who physically resists the Israeli occupation.

Another extremist politician who has obtained a major ministry in the Netanyahu government is **Bezalel Yoel Smotrich** who has served as the Minister of Finance since 2022. He has recently completed [a controversial trip](#) to the United States where he met with American Zionist leaders. Smotrich is the leader of the [Religious Zionist Party](#), and lives in an illegal settlement in a house within the Israeli occupied West Bank that was also built doubly illegally outside the settlement proper. Smotrich supports expanding Israeli settlements in the West Bank, opposes any form of Palestinian statehood, and even denies the existence of the Palestinian people. He has now been granted authority over settlement development and support on the West Bank.

Though Israel’s internal enemies, such as they are, are frequently characterized as Muslims, the dwindling ancient Christian community in Israel and what remains of Palestine has also been under increasing pressure as Israel becomes less multi-cultural and more a state designed only to accommodate Jews. Increasing illegal settlement growth in largely Christian areas has also [threatened the survival](#) of many Christian villages and towns. Nevertheless, Israel remains a home to 185,000 Christian Palestinians, most of whom reside in Nazareth, Haifa and Jerusalem. Tens of thousands of people of partial or full Christian ancestry, some of whom are married to Jews, live in Israel as well. Beyond that, there are many Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant churches, institutions, holy places and cemeteries in Israel.

Several months ago, the head of the Roman Catholic church in Israel, Pierbattista Pizzaballa, said that Christians [have faced difficult challenges](#) since the formation of Netanyahu’s far right-wing government last December. According to Pizzaballa, his government has emboldened ultra-nationalist religious activists, many of whom are armed settlers, and some of whom have harassed male and female members of the clergy and vandalized religious property. Pizzaballa observed how “The frequency of these attacks, the aggressions, has become something new. These people feel they are protected ...the cultural and political atmosphere can now justify, or tolerate, actions against Christians.” A colleague, Francesco Patton, the Custodian of the Holy Land, elaborated how “We are horrified and hurt in the wake of the many incidents of violence and hatred that have taken place recently against the Catholic community in Israel.” He described the desecration of a Lutheran cemetery, the vandalizing of a Maronite prayer room, urination on holy sites, destruction of sacred images and the spraying of “death to Christians” on church property, all taking place shortly after the new government was installed. He also noted “the responsibility of the leaders, of those who have power,” adding that the Israeli police routinely failed to investigate such incidents after the churches reported them.

To determine if the claims of increased violence and hate crimes directed against Christians were true, on June 26th the liberal leaning Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* [sent one of its journalists](#) dressed as a priest into downtown Jerusalem. Within five minutes, the journalist Yossi Eli “was derided and spat at, including by a child and a soldier... A bit later a man mocked [him] in Hebrew, saying, ‘Forgive me father for I have sinned.’ Then an 8-year-old

spat at [him], as did [another] soldier when a group of troops passed by later.”

Given what is going on on-the-ground, the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC) has called for an investigation into the role that Israeli-US dual national settlers are currently playing in the recent wave of violence directed against both Christian and Muslim Palestinian towns and villages. ADC Executive Director Abed Ayoub has said that “We have strong reason to believe that American citizens are among the key perpetrators of the most recent brutal and violent attacks.” Since June 21st, armed Israeli settler mobs have been terrorizing Palestinian villages in the West Bank on a nearly daily basis. They have destroyed homes, burned vehicles, and killed at least one Palestinian. For decades US Citizens have moved to Israeli settlements, which they use as bases for regularly engaging in violence against Palestinians, all with impunity, as the Israeli police and army provide the Arabs with no protection and instead often protect the settlers. Many of these US Citizens also take advantage of American charitable and non-profit tax laws to fund illegal settlements and initiate violence against Palestinians.

In another major incident, five weeks ago dozens of Israeli extremists, primarily Orthodox Jews, disrupted a Christian prayer event for pilgrims near the Western Wall. The deputy mayor of Jerusalem, Aryeh King and leading Rabbi Avi Thau led the protesters. Denouncing the Christians as “missionaries” trying to convert Jews, the extremists spat at and cursed the pilgrims, many of whom were ironically normally strongly pro-Israel evangelical Christians from the US. Deputy Mayor King said that Christians should enjoy freedom of worship “only inside their churches.”

According to [Protecting Holy Land Christians](#), an organization established by Christian groups to raise awareness of threats their religion, [2022 was “one of the worst years for Christians in Jerusalem to date.”](#) The organization reported spitting attacks, vandalism, and property theft as mechanisms of erasure. And there are other accounts of how Christians have been subjected to increasing persecution. [A recent report](#) details how Palestinians have been targeted what it calls settler-colonialism, which is a series of measures intended to destroy their communities and drive them from their land. It identifies seven policies that Israel uses against Palestinians throughout the whole of Mandatory Palestine (1948 Palestine, Gaza, the West Bank including East Jerusalem) and also to punish those in exile: “denial of residency; land confiscation and denial of use; discriminatory planning; denial of access to natural resources and services; imposition of a permit regime; fragmentation, segregation and isolation; denial of reparations; and suppression of resistance.” The report concludes “Whether these policies are considered separately or taken together, they amount to forced population transfer, a grave breach of international humanitarian law (IHL).”

To cite only one example of how it works, the venerable Armenian Christian community has been the victim of a [controversial land sale](#) in the heart of Jerusalem’s Old City Armenian Quarter that is being developed as a luxury resort which will effectively destroy a neighborhood that has existed for seven hundred years. The Australian-Israeli developer who obtained the land apparently did so through a shady deal with a bribed community official that circumvented local zoning and property sale regulations. The religious leadership of the Armenian community, which numbers less than 1,000, fears that the resort will force many families, already suffering under Israel’s rule, to depart.

Recently, these essentially genocidal measures have included the outright theft of their

historic buildings and land by the government, and denial of other rights, including [refusal to permit gatherings](#) of the faithful at the existing churches on major holidays like Christmas and Easter. There have also been [many physical attacks](#) on individual Christians carried out by extremist Jews as well as desecration of Christian religious sites and destruction or defacement of Christian relics and statuary. A conference in Jerusalem held last Friday to address the issue of increased violence against Christians attracted a number of diplomats, scholars and representatives of religious groups, but it was boycotted by the Israeli Foreign Ministry. The US Embassy also did not send a representative or observer, indicating clearly that it was not interested in the plight of Christians in Israel, or rather that it did not even want to admit that there was a problem.

So there you have it. The new Israeli government is not very interested in human rights for anyone who is not a Conservative or Orthodox Jew. It is, in fact, essentially hostile to all Palestinians and foreigners, be they Muslim, Christian or even irreligious. They denigrate such people as what Germans in the 1930s would have referred to as “untermenschen” meaning subhumans, a word then used to describe Jews, ironically enough. That the United States ignores all of Israel’s war crimes and human rights violations is disgraceful, but par for the course as American Jews who are advocates for Israel have corrupted and taken firm control of the political process. And do not think for a second that Israel’s leaders give one damn about the United States and its people. Recall for a moment how former Prime Minister Ariel Sharon [referred to Americans](#) in a discussion with Foreign Minister Shimon Peres: “Every time we do something you tell me Americans will do this and will do that. I want to tell you something very clear, don’t worry about American pressure on Israel. We, the Jewish people, control America, and the Americans know it.” And more recently [Netanyahu said](#) “America is a thing you can move very easily, move it in the right direction.” That is what they really think of us.

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