



ZU-LAT
Equality and Human Rights

Election Disruption

What to Watch Out For

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Introduction

The State of Israel is in the midst of an election year, experiencing it under a non-democratic regime for the first time in its history. As a report published by Zulat in early 2026 shows, the rules of the game that once governed free and fair elections have eroded, the gatekeepers have weakened and subject to constant attack, and the institutions meant to safeguard the integrity of the democratic process remain under sustained political pressure. Election disruption is no longer a theoretical concern but an evolving, systematic set of actions undertaken by the ruling coalition to secure an advantage while maintaining a democratic façade. In fact, the cumulative impact of authoritarian measures taken by the government over the past three years has laid the groundwork for disruption in the upcoming elections.¹

A primary example is the growing effort to restrict freedom of expression and protest since National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir took office three years ago. The draconian restrictions imposed on participation in protests during the war with Iran in March–April 2026, enforced in defiance of Supreme Court rulings and accompanied by bursts of violence against demonstrators, illustrate the range of measures that the current version of the Israel Police may employ in the upcoming elections as well. Special attention must therefore be paid to the politicization of law enforcement bodies, as well as the continued erosion of judicial independence, efforts to tilt the media, the spread of disinformation, and the use of unofficial political violence, particularly against the Arab public, which has been the focus of delegitimization and exclusion efforts.

Israel is not an exception. It is being swept up in a broad historical wave pushing many countries away from liberal-democratic patterns toward authoritarian regimes, especially competitive authoritarian ones. A common practice in such regimes is not to cancel elections altogether but to disrupt them and systematically undermine fair competition long before Election Day, as seen over the past decade in Brazil, the United States, Turkey, Poland, and Hungary. The “toolbox” employed by these regimes includes undermining public trust in elections, attacking the judiciary and the media, criminalizing and inciting against the opposition, taking advantage of state resources, and at times encouraging or turning a blind eye to political violence.

The upcoming elections in Israel are not just another routine electoral cycle. They are likely to be a decisive turning point for the future of the regime, either toward deepening the slide into full authoritarianism or starting the return to a democratic path. In light of this reality, the responsibility for ensuring free and fair elections does not rest solely on the shoulders of the Supreme Court’s justices, but requires an unprecedented level of political, media, and public vigilance.




1. Eitay Mack and Michal Evron Yaniv, My Country Has Changed Her Face: Israel's Regime Becomes Competitive Authoritarian, Zulat (22 Jan 2026).

The Government's Playbook

The steps that Netanyahu's government may take to throw the elections are detailed below. Some are based on actions taken over the past three years, from which its modus operandi can be inferred. Others are an assessment of possible actions ahead of the elections, based on tactics used by similar competitive authoritarian regimes.

Political Use of Police

One of the central achievements of the current Netanyahu government en route to turning Israel into a competitive authoritarian regime has been the political takeover of the police force. This process began immediately upon the formation of the government, by means of the amendment to the Police Ordinance, Ben-Gvir's appointment as Minister of National Security, and unprecedented massive political involvement in Israel Police's work. Even after the Supreme Court invalidated some provisions that granted the minister direct authority over investigative policy, political interference was effectively entrenched through changes across the entire chain of command, including the appointment of a police commissioner perceived as personally loyal to the minister. Over the past three years, this has included systematic political interference with law enforcement restricting freedom of expression and protest. Thus, under the cover of the war with Iran in March-April 2026, the police not only suppressed legitimate civilian protest but also sought to create a deterrent effect (via the use of water cannons, mounted units, and anti-riot troops). Further evidence of the police's gradual transformation into an executive arm serving the regime's goals can be seen in the lack of enforcement against public corruption and ideologically-motivated violence by right-wing and far-right offenders, as well as in the application of discriminatory policies, particularly vis-a-vis the Arab public, amounting to a steady erosion of Israel Police's independence and the principles of the rule of law and democracy. All of these signal both the intent and the range of actions the police may take in the context of the elections, as outlined below:

-  **Selective Enforcement Against Opposition, Criminalization and Delegitimization of Opposition Political Activity**
 Deliberate use of police powers against opposition parties, activists, and candidates, as well as leaders of anti-government protest. Framing protest, campaign propaganda, or opposition party activities as criminal or security offenses, thereby casting a chilling effect on political participation.
-  **Overlooking Violence, Harassment, and Threats by Pro-Government Activists and Militia Like Groups**
 Non-enforcement or weak responses to political violence, threats, intimidation, and harassment of activists, journalists, and voters in order to create a climate of fear and deter political participation.
-  **Raids and 'Visits' to Opposition Party Headquarters, Homes, and Offices of Activists**
 Searches, confiscation of signs, flags, and campaign material, and summonses for baseless interrogations under vague allegations of incitement or support for terrorism that undermine the ability to run a free and effective political campaign.

-  **Restrictions on Opposition Protests and Political Events Ahead of Elections**

Reliance on police "situational assessments" or unsubstantiated security claims to ban or restrict opposition protests and events, use of political considerations disguised as enforcement of public order.
-  **Intimidating Deployment of Police Troops Around Polling Stations on Election Day**

Placement of large numbers of policemen near voting sites to sow fear and deterrence, especially near polling stations where most voters are Arab.
-  **Enforcement Operations on Election Day**

Deployment of checkpoints, vehicle inspections, and heightened enforcement on Election Day, particularly in Arab and mixed communities or in areas identified with the opposition to impede voters from getting to the polling stations on time, thereby leading to voter suppression.
-  **Impeding Political Participation of Arab Public**

Use of security-based arguments, directives, and severe restrictions targeting Arab communities, activists, and voters to create deterrence, hinder voting, and reduce turnout, compounded by the formulation of unfounded legal opinions against Arab candidates and parties in order to help the government to disqualify them.
-  **Echoing Government's Inciteful Rhetoric and 'Poison Machine'**

Enforcement operations conducted amid reiteration of unfounded pronouncements by government officials and the so-called "poison machine" about security threats, anarchy, or terrorism to generate public legitimacy for infringing on the rights to vote and to be elected.
-  **Undermining Public Trust in Fairness of Elections**

Eroding public trust by opening or threatening to open baseless investigations into alleged fraud, irregularities, or election interference without any real evidentiary grounds. Such investigations, especially when selectively focused on Arab communities or specific political activists, would delegitimize the voting process and cast doubt on the legitimacy of the election results.

Misuse of Shin Bet Powers

Following the appointment of Netanyahu's confidante David Zini to the sensitive position of head of the Shin Bet, there is real concern that the agency may be used to advance political interests. This would be an especially dangerous development given the Shin Bet's extraordinary powers under the 2002 General Security Service Law, its direct subordination to the Prime Minister, and the vague definition of its mandate to protect the "order of the regime," which allows the use of intrusive intelligence measures even in the civilian and political arena. This marks a significant juncture in Israel's democratic backsliding: the introduction of political considerations into the work of such a powerful body creates a tangible risk for suppressing the opposition, impairing public protest, and undermining the democratic process, particularly during an election period.

Examples of measures the Shin Bet could employ in the electoral context include:

- 🚫 Deterrence, Criminalization/Threat of Criminalization, Political Repression Under Security Guise**
 Use of the Shin Bet's powers to summon, question, or caution political activists, protest organizers, and opposition figures without clear evidentiary grounds and for the purpose of political deterrence, citing fears for "state security," "subversion," or potential future offenses, thereby casting a chilling effect on legitimate political activity.
- 🚫 Restrictions on Protest and Demonstrations**
 Providing unfounded "security assessments" to the police and the government to justify extraordinary restrictions on anti-government and anti-Netanyahu protests and events, including through the agency's authority to set the security arrangements for the Prime Minister and state institutions.
- 🚫 Surveillance and Information-Gathering on Government/Prime Minister's Political Rivals**
 Exploiting extensive intelligence and technological capabilities to collect information on elected officials, candidates, activists, and civil society organizations, with the potential for unlawful or coercive use of such information, particularly by means of leaks to the media aimed at damaging the campaigns of political rivals.
- 🚫 Interference in Public Debate, Undermining Public Trust in Electoral Process**
 Selective leaks or inundation of the public arena with vague and unsubstantiated "security information," such as claims of meddling by foreign actors allegedly funding or controlling the opposition and civil society in Israel in order to generate fear, confusion, and delegitimization of the electoral process.
- 🚫 Impeding Political Participation of Arab Public**
 Using unsubstantiated "security" narratives and information, as well as disinformation, incitement, and intimidation to justify heightened surveillance, investigations, or extraordinary restrictions on Arab political activity during the election period, and to support the disqualification of candidates and lists representing the Arab public, thereby contributing to voter suppression and weakening its electoral power, compounded by the use by Netanyahu and his supporters of unsubstantiated information from the Shin Bet in a broader campaign to delegitimize Arab parties as potential partners in a future coalition, should the current coalition fail to secure a majority.

Weakening of Supreme Court

Undermining the independence of the Supreme Court has been one of the hallmarks of the transition to a competitive authoritarian regime. The government has made every effort to change the rules of the game through legislation and appointments that weaken the judiciary and limit its ability to critique its actions in line with the principle of separation of powers, while dragging its feet on naming new judges and shifting the authority to select the Judiciary Ombudsman to the Minister of Justice. This has been compounded by public campaigns of incitement and delegitimization against the justices aimed at eroding public

trust, intimidating the judiciary, and weakening the Supreme Court's status as an independent body that protects human rights and the rule of law. This corrosion takes on particular significance in the context of elections, as the Supreme Court plays a critical role in overseeing the fairness of the process, protecting the fundamental rights of voters and candidates, and intervening in cases of misuse of state resources or serious violations of electoral equality. Below are examples of how a weakened judicial system will serve the government during the election period:

 **Reduced Protection of Right to Vote and Be Elected**

A Supreme Court with curtailed independence will make it easier to advance measures that hinder candidates, party lists, or entire population groups from exercising their rights to vote and stand for election, such as disqualifications, administrative barriers, or changes to the rules of the game, without any effective judicial review. For example, the incitement and disinformation campaign by government ministers and the "poison machine," claiming that the justices are responsible for the events of October 7 and that they support terrorism, is also meant to impede their ability to overturn the disqualification of Arab candidates and parties.

 **Limited Protection Against Last-Minute Changes to Election Rules**

A weakened Supreme Court will hinder any effective judicial oversight of legislative changes or new interpretations of existing law in favor of the government introduced close to the elections on such issues as the electoral threshold, grounds for disqualification, and rules governing campaigning or financing.

 **Diminished Oversight of Use of State Resources**

An enfeebled judiciary will reduce the legal risks to the government for using budgets, official publications, appointments, and state mechanisms for political campaign purposes. It will allow the powers-that-be to skew competition using state resources, without fear of judicial intervention.

 **Less Protection Against Attempts to Disrupt Elections Using Police and Shin Bet**

A diminished Supreme Court will limit any effective judicial review of the government's efforts to disrupt the elections using the police and the Shin Bet, particularly with regard to freedom of protest and political organization (as described above).

 **Staging Disinformation Campaign on Election Disruption**

The Chief Justice has the authority to appoint judges as heads of regional election committees, and it is the Supreme Court that would hear any appeals on the election results. A debilitated Supreme Court will allow the government to challenge unfavorable results with unsubstantiated claims of disruption, fraud, or "improper judicial intervention," as well as to reduce its ability to defend the integrity of the results. The government is especially likely to direct such accusations at the President of the Supreme Court, who already is a central target of its incitement campaign.

Persecution of Attorney General

The persecution of Attorney General Gali Baharav-Miara, one of Israel's key gatekeepers, has been a major landmark in the attack on the country's rule of law. Amid a campaign of incitement and delegitimization to promote legislation aimed at ripping apart her powers and undermining her independence, as well as attempts to fire her that were pronounced unlawful by the Supreme Court, the government and Prime Minister Netanyahu continued to ignore her authority even after those efforts were struck down. All these carryings-on were intended to reduce oversight and enforcement against the misuse of governmental power and state resources for political purposes. In the context of elections, a weakened Attorney General will affect the ability to prevent unlawful government propaganda, bribery, political appointments, and legal violations. Therefore, this is a key mechanism for disrupting the electoral process, creating a built-in advantage for the incumbent government, and impairing the ability of citizens to fully exercise their right to shape their future and the fate of the state. Key consequences of the persecution and weakening of the Attorney General during the election period:

Neutralization of Central Gatekeeper of Electoral Integrity

The Attorney General is a key factor for enforcing election laws on the government and cautioning against their violation, as well as for issuing guidance interpreting the relevant legal framework. Continued persecution, delegitimization, or threats of dismissal will weaken her ability to act and will effectively remove the primary safeguard against the misuse of governmental power for electoral purposes.

Use of Government Apparatus for Electioneering, Enabling Systematic Legal Violations by Government and Ministers

In the absence of political or public support for the Attorney General's directives, ministers and government offices will feel freer to violate explicit prohibitions, such as unlawful propaganda, use of state resources, handout of perks, political appointments, and pre-election budgetary promises. Thus, persecution of the Attorney General will deliberately blur the line between legitimate governance and partisan politics. The government will devote its time to electioneering, civil servants will be enlisted for campaign purposes, and the public will have a hard time distinguishing between the state and its institutions and the ruling party.

Facilitation of Selective Enforcement and Politically Motivated Sham Investigations Against Opposition Candidates and Parties

An Attorney General with weaker legal oversight and filters at her disposal will enable the use of criminal investigations as a form of political deterrence. The very opening of an investigation without a solid evidentiary and legal basis will harm candidates, disrupt campaigns, and sow fear about political participation. It will also enable selective enforcement during the election period, with harsher treatment of the opposition and minorities alongside refraining from investigating offenses, incitement, and corruption by government and coalition actors.

Creating Faits Accomplis in Real Time, Paralyzing Entire Legal Advisory System

The attacks on the Attorney General's authority will undermine her ability to intervene swiftly on urgent matters during the election period, thereby enabling the government to create faits accomplis before any legal review can occur, in such areas as budgets, appointments, and agreements. Moreover, the campaign against her will send a clear signal to the civil service legal advisers under her supervision, creating a chilling effect that may deter them from raising concerns or blocking unlawful actions for fear of jeopardizing their status and livelihood. Even if the Attorney General and legal advisers sound the alarm, the Supreme Court may struggle to contend with a deluge of potentially unlawful actions within the limited timeframe preceding the elections.

Impairment of Right to Run for Office and To Be Elected

A weaker Attorney General will make it easier to disqualify candidates and party lists, particularly those representing the Arab public, without a solid factual and legal basis. Her legal opinions opposing such disqualifications could be used by the government to claim that she herself supports terrorism and is trying to interfere with the elections and determine their outcome.

Erosion of Public Trust in Integrity of Elections

Portraying the Attorney General as a political, hostile, or "election-disrupting" actor will weaken public confidence that uniform and fair rules apply to all political players, making it easier to challenge election results retroactively through unsubstantiated claims of fraud or interference.

Control of Civil Service and Government Companies

The corruption mechanisms characteristic of competitive authoritarian regimes are consistently accompanied by efforts to bring the civil service and state-owned enterprises under political control, eroding principles of professionalism and nonpartisanship in favor of loyalty. In Israel, the government has advanced structural, legislative, and administrative measures that weaken the independence of the professional echelon, diminish the status of ministerial legal advisers, and expand the direct control exercised by Netanyahu and cabinet ministers over government ministries and state-owned companies. At the same time, there has been a rise in political appointments to key positions (including that of Civil Service Commissioner), often bypassing professional vetting and established procedures, alongside mounting pressure on officials deemed insufficiently loyal, at times leading to dismissal or forced resignation. Control over appointments and budgets, coupled with the rewarding of loyalists, has undermined the civil service's ability to serve the public interest. As a result, internal oversight and accountability have weakened, creating conditions conducive to greater corruption and inefficiency.

This process of politicization, which has concentrated the power of the civil service in the hands of the government, will adversely impact equality and the rule of law during the election period, as detailed below:

Systematic Mobilization of State Resources for Government's Campaign

Public budgets, spokespersons, official publications, campaigns of state-owned companies, formal events, and government outreach activities used to promote clearly political messages; selective and manipulative publication of data, reports, and government "achievements"; flooding of public discourse with official messaging that drowns out criticism - all of these grant the ruling power a built-in advantage not available to opposition rivals and undermine the principle of electoral equality.

Budgetary Promises Without Professional or Legal Oversight

Reforms, programs, grants, budgets, and benefits announced in close proximity to Election Day, including pledges targeted to specific audiences, local authorities, or sectors politically aligned with the government to create a perceived link between voters' choices at the ballot box and the fulfillment of those promises. In addition, use of debates, statements, and leaks about future budgets for propaganda purposes, even before professional or legal approval, in order to shape public opinion ahead of elections.

Use of Public Budgets and Services as Political Tools

Permits, funding, and services expedited for groups aligned with the government, while services, budgets, support, and funding to local authorities or organizations associated with the opposition are delayed (or threatened with delay) to exert electoral pressure and skew competition.

Turning Civil Servants Into Political Instruments

Direct or indirect pressure applied on public employees to act according to political interests; recruiting them into covert campaign activity; creating expectations of political loyalty as a condition for promotion or continued employment; making explicit or implicit promises to activists and supporters regarding jobs in the civil service, government companies, and statutory corporations in exchange for political or electoral support. In addition, public employees fearful of dismissal, demotion, or disciplinary proceedings may refrain from enforcing the law or reporting violations during the election period.

Paralysis and Weakening of Internal Oversight and Enforcement Mechanisms

Emasculation of the Civil Service Commission, internal auditors, and legal counsels will lead to election-law violations not being stopped in real time, as effective remedies may no longer be possible by the time these are reported to relevant authorities and the public.

Selective Enforcement of Election and Disciplinary Laws

Stricter enforcement against employees and bodies associated with the opposition, alongside leniency or willful ignorance of violations by actors aligned with the government.

Improper Use of Government Databases for Campaign Targeting

Exploiting access to citizens' data to target political messaging, confuse voters, influence voting choices, or deter participation in elections, thereby creating a sense of obligation and exerting indirect pressure on voters.

Use of Government Companies as Covert Electoral Arm

Using state-owned companies to channel resources, appointments, and political campaigns, particularly taking advantage of their databases on employees and their families to stage "social" activities with an embedded political message.

Violation of Operational Neutrality on Election Day

Deliberate malfunctions or shortcomings resulting from the politicization of transportation, accessibility, information systems, and other essential services that may impair realization of the right to vote, particularly by disadvantaged populations and minorities.

Disruption Through Mainstream Media, Social Networks, & Disinformation

Attacks on the free media are one of the most effective tools for consolidating a competitive authoritarian regime, both in Israel and worldwide, with a semblance of pluralism maintained as the space for effective criticism of the government steadily shrinks. In recent years, the Israeli government has taken steps to weaken critical media outlets via legislation, regulatory threats, budgetary pressure, and attempts to influence appointment mechanisms. At the same time, sympathetic media outlets have been openly legitimized and given preferential access to government funding, creating a divide between "loyal" and "hostile" media, and portraying censorious journalists and outlets as enemies of the people. This has been compounded by the systematic use of disinformation, incitement, intimidation, and defamation lawsuits aimed at eroding public trust in state institutions, undoing people's ability to distinguish between truth and falsehood, and undermining confidence in the democratic process and in elections. The combination of a weakened free press and the spread of misleading information is particularly lethal, as it severely impairs the public's ability to assess government performance based on accessible and reliable information.

Below are examples of how the attacks on the free media and its weakening could affect the elections:

Control of Media's Agenda, Restricted Access to Media Platforms, Silencing of Criticism

Gaining control over the media's agenda and flooding it with pro-government messaging; pressuring outlets to systematically exclude opposition candidates or cover them in a hostile manner, reduce their airtime, and portray them as illegitimate or dangerous; exerting regulatory or financial pressure on critical media outlets that provide a platform to the opposition; silencing criticism, investigative reporting, and coverage of government failures or violations of election laws by means of regulatory, budgetary, and legal pressure, threats, and defamation lawsuits against censorious journalists and outlets.

Delegitimization of Critical Media and Journalists

Portraying critical journalists and media outlets as traitors and as threats to Israel's security and survival as a Jewish and democratic state. Normalizing rhetoric delegitimizing journalists and media outlets that undermines their ability to freely cover the elections, alongside an escalation in intimidations and physical attacks as Election Day approaches.

Systematic Disinformation in Mainstream Media and Social Networks

Spreading false, misleading, or distorted information about candidates and party lists, the Central Elections Committee, and the voting process itself, in order to confuse voters, influence voting decisions, or deter participation. Flooding the public sphere with conspiracy theories about fraud, election theft, or a "deep state" to cast doubt in advance on the legitimacy of the process, its outcome, and any opposition success.

Non-Transparent Use of Social Networks for Propaganda

Operating internet bots, fake accounts, and coordinated campaigns to create the false impression of broad public support for the government, silence criticism, and polarize the political discourse. Disseminating sponsored content, campaigns, and "news" disguised as journalistic reporting or user-generated content, circumventing transparency and campaign finance rules.

Impeding Access to Public of Arab Representatives and Parties

Systematically excluding Arab voices from Hebrew-language media, alongside incitement and delegitimization of outlets that give them a platform. Reducing media exposure, blocking accounts on social media, and imposing lop-sided restrictions on the political campaigns of candidates and parties representing the Arab public. Undermining freedom of discussion in Arabic-language media through regulation, control, intimidation, and threats of economic sanctions.

Campaigns on Mainstream and Social Media Targeting Arab Public

Portraying Arab citizens, their elected representatives, and their parties as a security threat, subversive elements, or supporters of terrorism, in order to question the very legitimacy of their participation in elections and justify the infringement of their political rights. Spreading false claims of election fraud in Arab communities to undermine the legitimacy of Arab voting and pave the way for enforcement actions, disqualifications, or deterrent measures. Promoting narratives that "the Arab vote does not count anyway" or that Arab political participation is meaningless in order to suppress turnout and foster political despair.

Persecution of Opposition Candidates and Parties

Systematic weakening of the opposition is a central and defining objective in competitive authoritarian regimes. While an opposition formally exists, its restricted maneuvering room precludes effective and fair competition for power. Accordingly, in Israel as well, the government has taken steps to restrict the latitude of opposition parties, elected officials, and political activists. It has sought to limit the very ability of political actors to compete by means of legislation, used enforcement tools selectively, and portrayed the opposition and its supporters as internal enemies or foreign agents in order to enable and justify exceptional enforcement measures and to deter and curtail critical civic and political activity. In this context, the government has placed particular emphasis on disqualifying Arab parties and candidates by branding them hostile elements and casting doubt on their legitimacy. This conduct, which may further intensify in the lead-up to the elections, has one clear aim: to weaken the opposition's electoral strength and prevent it from forming an alternative coalition after the elections.

Examples of measures against opposition parties and candidates, especially from the Arab public, include:

- 🚫 Broad Interpretation of Speech Offenses and Criminalization of Political Activity**

Invoking the offenses of incitement, support for terrorism, and public-order violations and extending a broad interpretation of these offenses to legitimate political expression by opposition candidates and parties; sham complaints filed by the government and its supporters to trigger investigations or criminal proceedings in order to create a chilling effect, divert resources, and undermine the public legitimacy of opposition contenders.
- 🚫 Intimidation and Deterrence Via Official and Unofficial Messaging**

Explicit or implicit threats and statements by ministers, coalition MKs, and associates regarding surveillance, punishment, or "handling" of opposition candidates and activists; overt or veiled threats of retaliation carrying professional or personal repercussions; disciplinary measures against opposition activists in workplaces, educational institutions, and academia; economic pressure or threats to withdraw funding from anyone employing opposition activists – all of it aimed at creating a climate of fear and confusion, persuade candidates to withdraw, and convince citizens to avoid political activity during the election period.
- 🚫 Undermining Opposition's Organization and Campaign Efforts**

Imposing restrictions on opposition gatherings, protests, and campaign events; setting draconian conditions for holding events or canceling them at the last minute citing security or public-order reasons; imposing fines retroactively; detentions and arbitrary arrests of activists and candidates. These steps will undermine the ability to mobilize support, motivate voters, and run an effective campaign.
- 🚫 Using State Apparatus to Disqualify Candidates and Party Lists**

Promoting or threatening disqualification of candidates and lists with bogus accusations. Even if these ultimately do not pan out, the process itself will shift the public discourse from party programs to legal defense and will serve to delegitimize and deter opposition candidates, especially those from the Arab public.
- 🚫 Targeted Attacks Against Key Figures in Arab Society**

Initiating sham criminal proceedings against elected officials, local authority heads, educators, journalists, social activists, and public figures in the Arab community, portraying them as acting unlawfully or engaging in incitement, in order to disrupt their organizing, outreach, and mobilization efforts and to create a leadership vacuum, particularly during the election period.
- 🚫 Creating Chilling Effect by Framing Arab Voting and Political Participation as Major Personal Risk**

Promoting a public message that political participation, including running for office, voting, or engaging in campaign activity, may expose Arab citizens to negative consequences such as dismissal, disciplinary action, surveillance, interrogations, or harm to personal security. Building on the punitive, silencing, and enforcement actions experienced during the Gaza war period, this message could serve as an effective deterrent in the elections as well.

Political Violence by Militia Groups Associated with Government/Coalition Members

Political violence by militias and regime supporters is not a random phenomenon. It is a process that has deepened under Netanyahu's governments, alongside the continuing erosion of law enforcement institutions and the normalization of incitement and delegitimization against political opponents. This discourse has been accompanied by turning a blind eye, and at times even encouragement, to the use of violence against protesters, civil society activists, and opposition representatives, which has gradually become a legitimate tool in the struggle for power. The widespread acquisition of firearms by civilians and the blurring of lines between official law enforcement and "popular enforcement" have further aggravated the situation.

These circumstances have enabled violent groups to function as an unofficial arm used for election disruption (among other things, by intimidating voters, harassing activists, and upsetting political events) and may directly undermine the right to vote and be elected, as detailed below:

- 👤 Use of Extrajudicial Violence and Intimidation as Government's Complementary Arm**

The use of militias, far-right activists, and "civilian guards" aligned with the government and coalition members for the purpose of physical violence, threats, surveillance, and constant harassment of activists, candidates, volunteers, journalists, voters, and polling staff, with the aim of exhausting, paralyzing, and deterring citizens from political participation, with the police systematically turning a blind eye. The violence need not be widespread, as creating a sustained sense of personal danger will be enough to discourage participation across a broad range of political and civic activities.
- 👤 Intimidating Presence Around Polling Stations on Election Day**

The deployment of militias and violent or armed activists near polling stations, especially in Arab communities and opposition strongholds, to create a climate of fear and deterrence. The combination of such groups with increased police presence may significantly suppress voter turnout.
- 👤 Violent Disruption of Opposition's Campaign**

Attacks on campaign headquarters, vandalism of campaign materials, tearing down posters, violent dispersal of rallies and political events, and harassment of activists and volunteers. Such actions will undermine the opposition's ability to run an effective campaign, mobilize supporters, and turn out voters.
- 👤 Tailwind for Violence from Government and Coalition MKs**

Relentless delegitimization of the opposition, the Arab public, journalists, and civil society organizations by means of rhetoric portraying them as "internal enemies," "subversive," or a "security threat." Such rhetoric enables and encourages violence by extremist supporters of the government.
- 👤 Blurring Responsibility and Institutional Lack of Acknowledgment**

Framing the violence in these events as "local," "spontaneous," "mutual clashes," or "legitimate civilian responses," or attributing them to a "small fringe," while refusing to recognize it as a systematic pattern. This lack of acknowledgement allows the government to go on using violence as an effective political tool for election disruption without openly acknowledging or taking responsibility for it.

Conclusion

The upcoming elections are more decisive than ever, and their importance for the future of the State of Israel is critical. Competitive authoritarian regimes, including Israel's current one, act systematically to instill a sense of foreboding and to identify enemies allegedly endangering the nation's future, and they do so all the more intensely when the future of the regime hangs on the line at the ballot box. In Israel, there is an additional concern about the use of security justifications to silence and suppress civic activity, as well as the possibility of preserving or creating a state of war in order to avoid holding elections. Therefore, preventing election disruption requires more heightened vigilance than in the past from the media, the civil service, civil society organizations, and from the public at large.

The greatest enemy of democracy is the loss of faith in it, along with feelings of despair, helplessness, and resignation. At the same time, as has been repeatedly demonstrated, Israel's civil society is resilient and proactive: there are few examples worldwide of sustained protests on the scale and continuity of those led by opposition supporters in Israel over recent years. The central challenge, therefore, is to preserve civic engagement and maintain public trust in democratic institutions.

Finally, even if elections are held on schedule and the opposition succeeds in forming a government, it is likely that the current government will promote a false narrative questioning the results, exert pressure on the Central Elections Committee, and mobilize its supporters in response to an electoral defeat. The competitive authoritarian regime will not simply disappear on its own, and the new government will need to take a long series of steps to restore Israel to a democratic path.

Zulat institute works to promote a policy of equality and human rights and to restore the legitimacy of the human rights discourse in Israel.

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