Bringing IR theory to Contentious Politics: Arab Israeli Demobilization after the al-Aqsa Intifada (2001-2010)

Hillel Frisch

Abstract
The major theoretical paradigms in contentious politics hardly take into account the effect of external variables on the relationship between a state, its dominant community and the ethnic groups in that state that seek a change in the status quo. One, however, can easily hypothesize the salience of foreign factors in the many cases where the states are heterogeneous and are located in hostile regional environments (Israel, Serbia/Kosovo, Lebanon, Syria, Yemen and Jammu/Kashmir). The following article on the Arab Israeli demobilization after the second Intifada presents evidence that, albeit with an important modification from IR theory, supports the political opportunities model, which demonstrates that the unity and fragmentation of the state elite is often linked to perceived external threats which then affect the behavior of the contesting national minority. When threatened externally the state elite coalesces and its readiness to make concessions decreases while the costs of contentious politics rise and mobilization decreases for the aggrieved ethnic minority.

Keywords
Political Opportunity Model; Second-image Reversed; Ethnic Mobilization; External Threats; Israeli Arabs; Israel.

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Introduction

Although the importance of external influences on domestic protest is widely acknowledged, it is rarely discussed theoretically since none of the major theoretical paradigms that deal with contentious politics take into account the effect of external variables on the relationship between the state, its dominant community and the ethnic groups that are seeking to change the status quo. While this is true of the models that are based on political opportunities, frustration-aggression, relative deprivation and mobilization, one can easily hypothesize the salience of the effect of foreign factors on the quality of the relationship in the many cases where the states are both heterogeneous and located in hostile regional environments (Israel, Serbia/Kosovo, Lebanon, the Syria, Yemen and Jammu/Kashmir amongst many other cases).

This oversight can be found in the extensive analyses made of Israeli Arab protest patterns. The four following theories and explanations exclusive to the within-the-state political arena have been advanced to explain Israeli Arab protest patterns: 1. the frustration-aggression paradigm (The Orr Report); 2. The proposition that protest is a function of the intensity of mobilization by local inciters (Karsh); 3. that protest is a reaction to Israeli state policy – in that it increases when the state represses and decreases as the state appeases; and 4. the political opportunities model, which claims that protest increases when there are growing divisions amongst the state political elite.

This article on the Arab Israeli demobilization after the second Intifada presents evidence that supports the political opportunities model, albeit with an important modification from IR theory which demonstrates that unity and fragmentation of the state elite is often linked to perceived external threats which, in turn, affects

the behavior of the contesting national minority. When externally threatened the state elite coalesces and the readiness to accede to demands decreases while, for the aggrieved ethnic minority, the costs of contentious politics rise and, since they are rational actors, their mobilization decreases. When the external environment improves for the state, inner state elite tensions arise, the readiness to accede to demands increases and this all results in increased mobilization as the ethnic minority perceives an increase in its gains for their efforts. Thus, during the Oslo peace process, Arab Israeli mobilization increased and reached its apogee during the first days of the Second Intifada and subsequently decreased in the face of, not only a more united state elite but also a more dominant community, which became more united because of the unprecedented lethal violence of both the Second Intifada and the perceived rising power of Iran and its proxies. This, of course, not to deny the importance of indigenous civil and religious variables that might also promote protest.

The article’s intention is not to explain why Israeli Arabs protest but to explain the factors that caused the trends and relative magnitude of the protest in the first decade of the new century. In this regard it should also be clearly stated that Israel’s Arab citizens, as a whole, protest extensively, probably at higher levels than publics in other mature democracies, not only because of their subjective feelings of grievance but because the state guarantees their right to protest as is proved by the yearly Land Day and October commemorations and the annual Islamist rally “Al-Aqsa is in Danger”.

The article begins with a review of the major paradigms of contentious politics from which the key hypotheses are generated and then goes on to analyze the patterns of unity and disunity amongst the state elite and the dominant community before and after the Second Intifada. The next section is devoted to the dependent variable – Israeli Arab mobilization in the decade after the mass riots of October 2000. Following this in the fourth section, one is then in a position to test the robustness of the major paradigms against mobilization patterns that have prevailed amongst Israel’s Arab citizens. The article ends with a discussion of the findings and their causal links in the fifth and final section.
Generating hypotheses from the literature about contentious politics

Why people protest or rebel has engendered a vast array of rational, biological, psychological, and economic theories and this article tests the validity of the two prominent paradigms of the psychological “frustration–aggression” hypothesis, including its offshoots, and the “political opportunity model” (POM), which is itself an amalgam of the mobilization of resources model and the rational actor theory of political action.

The frustration-aggression model, originally argued that frustration causes aggression and when the source of the frustration cannot be challenged, the aggression is displaced onto an innocent target. This theory was then applied to explain riots and revolutions as the function of discontent amongst the poorer and more marginalized segments of society who might be marginalized due to racial, ethnic or class factors as a result of which those deprived might express their bottled up frustration and anger through violence.

This theory has largely been discredited for intrinsic and methodological reasons since it is not only hard to measure frustration but the model does not provide accurate thresholds and conditions that can satisfactorily predict the intensity duration of protest and violence. The theory is, however, probably the most widely employed framework used to describe the protest of Israel’s Arab citizens. An excellent example of this theory’s pervasiveness may be found in the report of the “Orr Commission” which was the official government commission headed by a former Justice of the High Court of Justice to investigate the role of Israel’s Arab citizens in the riots during the first days of the Second Intifada and the police response to this.

As this [first] chapter will demonstrate, the processes of amplification of the problems of the Arab sector and the discontent it engendered increased towards the events of October [in which the violent protests broke out] ...

Abstaining from this effort [to solve the problems], or

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doing so in an inadequate manner, engenders feelings of deprivation, which will get worse as the time goes on.\(^7\)

The very same report quotes an estimate by the National Security Council that is also committed to the same paradigm:

Just before the events [the outbreak of widespread violence], the National Security Council identified a similar problem. In the document dated September 7, 2000...it was mentioned as a working goal to “decrease the alienation and feeling of deprivation of the Arab population as a group and as individuals and as a means of action against the government and its institutions.”\(^8\)

Such concessions made in the context of Israel’s Arab citizens range from minor to major structural changes and involve pressing charges against Israeli policemen for the violent deaths of Israeli Arab citizens, fulfilling government commitments to increase the numbers of Arabs in senior civil service positions proportionate to their numbers in the population, the number of social and health workers to demands for control of the educational system in the Arab sector, changes in the public symbols of the State (the flag and the national anthem) and the establishment of a “regional” Arab parliament that would enhance Arab autonomy within the state.

**The hypothesis this theory yields is straightforward:**
H1 The more civic and economic grievances the minority has against the state and the predominant community, the greater the tendency is to protest.

Davies’ J-curve theory of revolution and Ted Gurr’s theories are further refinements of this basic psychologically rooted model. Davies claims that protest, and even revolution, do not take place when people are down and out, as Marx assumed, but rather at a downturn

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\(^7\) Vaadat HaHakira HaMamlachtit leBirur HaItnegshuyot beyn Kohot Habitahun levine Ezrahim Israeliim beOctober 2000 (Commission of Inquiry into the Clashes between Security Forces and Israeli Citizens in October 2000), section 18.

\(^8\) Ibid, section 19.
that is experienced after prolonged periods of rising prosperity when reality conflicts with rising expectations.\footnote{James C. Davies, “Toward a Theory of Revolution,” \textit{American Sociological Review}, Vol. 27, No. 1(1962), pp. 5–7.} To support his argument Davies marshals evidence from the Dorr’s rebellion in Rhode Island and from the Russian and Egyptian revolutions.

Gurr and others tried to explain why the Afro-American riots had taken place in North America and California, where Afro-Americans were better off both materially and politically than their counterparts in America’s south\footnote{Ted Gurr, \textit{Why Men Rebel} (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1970), p. 12.} by arguing that protest and violence is a function of relative rather than absolute deprivation. While in New York, where Harlem borders on the swanky Upper East Side, there were riots, in the south, where poor Afro-Americans lived side-by-side with poor white southerners, there was quiet.

Davies’ theory would be more robust if the riots had taken place in the wake of a downturn after a prolonged rise in prosperity.\footnote{Charles Tilly, \textit{From Mobilization to Revolution} (Boston: Addison-Wesley, 1979), pp. 9-14, http://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/dspace/bitstream/2027.42/50931/1/156.pdf (accessed: June 22, 2017).}

\textbf{H2} The longer the period of rising prosperity and the sharper the downturn are, the greater the protest and violence are.

From Gurr, one can draw the third hypothesis:

\textbf{H3} The greater the relative inequality is between the minority group, in this case Israel’s Arab citizens, and the predominant Jewish community, the greater the tendency will be to protest and rebel.

There is also a vast literature that claims that protesters and rebels are rational actors embedded in institutional and environmental circumstances that can act either as constraints or opportunities. How well the contender can mobilize resources is often regarded as crucial in determining outcomes of protest and rebellion against the state.\footnote{An argument stressing human agency, advanced by Karsh and others (including Israel’s security establishment), focuses on the...} Writ large, the more resources in persons and such that the rebellious movement can command, the better it can manage these resources and the more specialized the rebel manpower becomes relative to the advances made by the state, the better the chances are that the rebellion will succeed.
role played by the protestors' national and local leadership and the argument even uses the generic name of “mesitim” (instigators). There are two aspects to be considered regarding this role: 1) the quality and continuity of the leadership and 2) the moves taken by the authorities against them to prevent the mobilization of protesters. The hypothesis generated from this argument is the following:

**H4** Protest will decrease as moves to obstruct leaders in the Arab sector from mobilizing protest increase.

The limitations of purely structural models, such as the “strong state”, or purely rational actor models that once stressed human agency, have led to the emergence of the political opportunities model. Over fifty years ago, Coser pointed out that rifts within one side can instigate aggressive behavior by the opponent while, according to Darrow, divisions provide ‘volatile’ opportunities for the rebel to exploit.” Alimi builds on the political opportunity model to analyze the propensity of Palestinians over the green line to rebel and shows how in the 15 years before the outbreak of the first intifada, the Israeli polity became highly polarized over the future of the territories. The Palestinians, he claims, viewed the crises produced by such polarization as signs of weakness which they felt provided opportunities for collective action against Israeli rule to take place and which culminated in the First Intifada. Frisch makes a similar argument to explain why the Palestinians were relatively more successful in the First Intifada than in the second. The model can easily be applied to Israeli Arabs within the following hypothesis:

**H5** The greater the rift within Israel’s state elite and the predominant community, the greater the propensity of Israel’s Arab citizens to protest in the expectation that the payoffs (concessions) of that protest will be greater.

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In many cases of ethnic conflict, however, the cohesiveness of state elites is often only an intervening variable. Frisch, in his book, *Israel’s Security and its Arab Citizens*, has made the claim that the state’s political behavior towards an ethnic minority challenger is often a function of the external security predicament of the state, especially in those states whose restive minorities have a national and religious affinity to the states that threaten it.16 His thesis builds on the works of Otto Hintze and Peter Gourevitch’s argument that, while threatened states in the European continent were usually centralized, autocratic and characterized by large standing conventional armies as a means of coping with their competitors, a more isolated Britain could handle security threats by making do with the more democratic approach of self-government and local militias.17 Frisch goes on to argue that, just as geostrategic factors can influence regime-type, it can also influence the relationship between a state and its ethnic minority.

So far we have dealt with how geo-strategic settings determine state behavior towards ethnic minorities. The importance of geostrategic factors also influences how a particular minority may react or mobilize people against the state. Here we wed the insights of Heintze and Gourevitch with the political opportunities model (POM). Combining the two frameworks helps clarify which is the key independent variable and which is the intervening variable. For instance, if elite and majority group cohesiveness is a function of the external geostrategic setting then the propensity to mobilize related to the cohesiveness of the state elite is the intervening variable. Israel’s Arab citizens mobilized most actively during the Oslo peace process, which was a time when the Israeli Jewish public was most divided following the decline of the inter-state conflict that reached its apogee in the early 1990s with the containment of Iraq and the dismemberment of the Soviet Union. In the recent decade, however, Israel’s geo-strategic situation has once again deteriorated in the

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face of a growing Iranian threat and the Israeli public, which has closed ranks, is reducing the effectiveness of Arab protest. One therefore can hypothesize:

H6 – The more threatened the state will perceive itself to be as a result of external forces, the more the state elite and predominant community will become more cohesive and unified and less willing to make concessions, thus reducing the net payoffs of protest and therefore protest itself.

Unity/disunity in the Jewish elite and electorate before and after the Second Intifada

Before the First Intifada - Israel ostensibly faced the first intifada unified under a unity government which, contrary to the predictions of many observers, survived its full four-year term. The government was, however, not really unified since the partisanship over the Taba land issue in the Sinai, which was the last vestige of peace-making with Egypt, had failed and, more critically, so had relations with the Palestinians. It became more and more evident that, during the last two years of the unity government, the parties that made up the unity government were literally working at cross-purposes.

The situation went from bad to worse after the November 1988 elections held at the height of the intifada in which the right-wing Likud and left-of-center Labor almost tied, with 40 seats to the right-wing party and 39 to Labor, reflecting the split over the future of the territories in Israeli public opinion. The Likud received 709,305 votes against 685,363 for the Alignment. Under the newly formed unity government, the minister of finance was Shimon Peres, who accepted the position reluctantly in order to financially bail out institutions historically linked to his party, and continued to engage in foreign policy to the dismay of both Likud prime-minister Shamir and the minister of defense Yitzhak Rabin. The cleavage between the non-territorially based autonomy plan and Labor’s “Generals’ Plan” that called for partition of the Land of Israel/Palestine ultimately led to the downfall of the unity government in April 1990 together.

with the fact that, one month previously, Labor had accepted the Five Point Baker Plan and Shamir had rejected it.¹⁹

For a brief moment after the 1992 general elections, there was a sense that Israel had finally extricated itself from the curse of polarization. A sizeable percentage of the Israeli public, weary of the tensions emanating from its deeply divided political elite, punished the Likud and voted for Labor, thereby removing Shamir and replacing him with Rabin. The respite however, was short lived as the two largest camps of the left and right emerged almost equal in strength which led to them to, once again, debate the same partition/settlement expansion divide first within the context of the Camp David and Washington talks and subsequently within the “Oslo’ negotiation track. Nothing reflected the polarization of the Israeli elite more than the narrow support given to the Declaration of Principles Accords in 1993 in which 61 members of Knesset voted for the document, 50 opposed it and there were abstentions, all of which leaned more towards rejecting the accords.²⁰

Israel’s Arab citizens and the Palestinians beyond the Green Line mobilized protest activity and received the most concessions when Israel’s political elite and the electorate were most polarized. After a series of setbacks to Israel’s policy of liberalization which, to a large measure, was linked to Israel’s deteriorating security posture during and after the October 1973 war, Israel again embarked on a further spurt of liberalization after the rollback of Iraq from Kuwait, the fall of the Soviet Union, which deprived the radical Arab states of its major patron, and the Oslo peace process.²¹ Solingen demonstrates how Israel’s elite, (which had since integrated into the global economy), argued that Israel’s improved security position as a result of the Soviet Union’s dissolution should be used to resolve the Palestinian problem as a prelude to even greater economic globalization of the Israeli

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It was no coincidence that Rabin’s second government from 1992-95 is widely acknowledged to have been a period in which Israel’s Arab citizens made its greatest strides. Even though the Rabin government refrained from bringing Arab parties into the coalition, the Israeli Arabs benefitted from many achievements. For the first time a committee made up of the directors-general of various ministries, chaired by the Director-General of the Prime Minister’s Office, was established to set benchmarks and ensure that commitments made to Arab citizens were actually met. The post of Advisor on Arab affairs, in the prime minister’s office was abolished in order to place Arab citizens on an equal footing with Israel’s Jewish majority, budgets for the Arab and Druze sectors tripled in four years and the gap between budget allocations for education and child allowances was almost completely erased (ibid). The Rabin government even appointed the Israel’s first Arab ambassador (to Finland) in 1995.

Rabin’s largess/generosity paid off handsomely and, in October 1995, Arab Knesset members cast the crucial vote to narrowly secure Knesset approval for the interim agreement that expanded the Palestinian Authority’s rule to the major cities and towns in Judea and Samaria/West Bank, despite increasing Palestinian terror. Expanding the Palestinian Authority’s reach in Judea and Samaria beyond Jericho was one of the main policy goals of the Rabin government.

After the Second Intifada

During the Second Intifada, and in its aftermath, the situation reversed itself as the Israeli political public became more united. Conclusive proof of the degree of unity within the Israeli public can be found in the results of the two elections held at the height of the al-Aqsa intifada. In the February 2001 elections for the office of prime-minister, Ariel Sharon, head of the Likud, won a landslide victory over the incumbent Ehud Barak, with Sharon garnering 62.4 per cent of the vote compared to only 37.6 per cent of the vote secured by Barak.

by the incumbent. In the 2003 general elections, the Likud under Sharon’s leadership made a major comeback jumping from 19 seats in the 1999 elections to 38, against a meager 19 seats for Labor, the lowest representation the Labor movement had ever secured since the establishment of the state. This, we believe, can be put down to the fact that the Labor movement had been the major force behind the insistence on creating a Palestinian state.

No less telling were the results of the 2003 general elections with the unprecedented gains made by the centrist Shinui party, which won a staggering 15 seats even though it was a party noted for focusing on religious coercion with little interest in the Palestinians or the peace process. Equally important was the emergence of Kadima as a party that was more center-right than the Likud, the former home of both its leader and future Prime minister Ariel Sharon and most of its representatives. Kadima was now easily able to lead the right and Shinui into an agreement that was characterized by considerable consensus over the Palestinians and which enabled it to form the widest coalition to date short of a unity government. As Steinberg and Rynhold point out

> [W]hile different approaches to the peace process continue to be espoused in Israel, public opinion has been characterized by consensus more than at any time since 1967, Israelis wanted, first and foremost, security as quickly as possible with some long terms prospects of a peace process with the Palestinians.

Cohesiveness in the Jewish electorate deepened in the following two general elections in 2006 and 2009 with the rise of centrist parties at the expense of the bi-polarity that had characterized the system before and during the Oslo years. This centrism was fueled by three processes: the decline of Labor and the Likud, the rise of

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more centralist alternatives and the general weakening of the left.\textsuperscript{26} Regarding the first, although Labor only won 19 Knesset seats in the 2003 elections, it nevertheless remained the second largest party despite the great success of the centrist party Shinui (which won 15 seats). In 2006, Labor still remained the second largest party with 19 seats (largely due to the contraction of the Likud in the 2006 elections to 12 seats). In 2009, however, Labor further contracted to an unprecedented low of 13 Knesset seats to become the fourth largest party with no possibility of replacing the existing Kadima-led government, which was based on a wide coalition.

From 2003-2009 the dominance of Kadima, supported by the Shinui centrist party, reflected the second trend. Labor’s willingness to join the government as a \textit{junior} partner for the first time in its history, reflected to what extent it was now accepting the new reality of centrism.\textsuperscript{27} The marginalisation of the Left and its dovish approach continued in 2009, with the combined results of Labour and Meretz reaching a new nadir of 16 seats, compared to 56 seats in 1992. In addition, the underlying centrist approach of the public also remained in place.

\textbf{The mobilization of Israeli Arabs after the Second Intifada}

Following the massive Israeli Arab participation in the often-violent demonstrations against the state over a period of ten days in October 2000, many analysts and scholars felt that the politics of Israel’s Arab citizens would take a more radical route characterized by continuous mobilization against the state and its institutions.\textsuperscript{28}

These expectations were not realized in the first decade of the 21\textsuperscript{st} century. Instead of increasing mobilization, there was a declining willingness to engage in public protest. Not only was there

a decline in the number of participants and the frequency of major mechanisms being used to promote the interests of the Arab citizens, such as the general strike, whenever a demonstration did take place it was usually coordinated with the state to ensure its peaceful nature. Despite the use of symbols and chants denoting opposition to what the state stands for, there was an increasing acceptance by the organizers and participants that they must abide by the rules of the game negotiated with the state.\(^\text{29}\) Most of the peaceful protest commemoration events took place in central Galilee, fewer in the triangle and almost none at all elsewhere. This was even true of the more radical Balad-led events commemorating the al-Aqsa riots in October 2000 and the more moderate DFPE-led Land Day commemoration events (see Tables 1 and 2).\(^\text{30}\)

When violent demonstrations did take place, they remained local, episodic and had no common denominator, which suggests that they stemmed from grievances or the dynamics of confrontation. Thus, even though Arabs rioted in Akko during the Day of Atonement in September 2008, the violence did not spread elsewhere nor was it repeated.\(^\text{31}\) In October 2007, residents of the Druze village of Peqi’in fought with police in an incident involving a cellular antenna which the residents, fearful of its deleterious consequences for their health, wanted removed. Once again, this proved to be one-time event and violence did not spread elsewhere. In 2010, there were Arab protests against attempts to lower the decibel levels of the calls to prayer of the Muazin and the ringing of church bells in Jaffa.\(^\text{32}\) The Arab residents claimed that the demand to lower the volume reflected religious discrimination while many of the Jewish inhabitants claimed that these calls violated an existing law governing decibel levels that was legislated to limit raucous partying.

*The same pattern prevailed.*

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30 Of course, these commemoration events do not represent all the forms of protests that took place, but they were probably the major protest events. For analysis of other forms of protest, see Hitman, pp. 126-129.
### Table 1: Participation in al-Aqsa Commemoration Events (October) 2001-2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Location of Central Event(s)</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>UF, Nazareth, Sakhnin, Arrabeh, and Kfar Manda, Jatt, Kafr Kana</td>
<td>17,000 Violence in UF (5,000 in Sakhnin, 5000 in Arrabeh)</td>
<td>Haaretz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Nazareth, UF</td>
<td>Low participation. In UF, where three were killed, 100 attended</td>
<td>Haaretz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Sakhnin</td>
<td>2,000 in Sakhnin</td>
<td>Haaretz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Arrabeh</td>
<td>3,000 in Arrabeh</td>
<td>Haaretz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Sakhnin</td>
<td>Several hundred in Sakhnin</td>
<td>Haaretz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Kafr Kana</td>
<td>1,000 in Kafr Kanna</td>
<td>Haaretz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Shfaram</td>
<td>Several hundred</td>
<td>Y-net</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Arrabeh</td>
<td>No number. But “a hurt and tired national movement”. General Strike</td>
<td>Haaretz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Kafr Kanna</td>
<td>6,000 in Kafr Kanna</td>
<td>Haaretz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Sakhnin</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>Al-Quds</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 2: Participation in Land Day Commemoration Events 2001-2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Location of Central Event(s)</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
<th>External Events</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Sakhnin and Arrabeh</td>
<td>10,000</td>
<td>First massive raids into J&amp;S/ WB</td>
<td>Haaretz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>North Negev, Arrabeh, Kafr Kanna</td>
<td>5,000 in main event in Arrabeh, + several thousand, + several thousand in North Negev. Tens of youth violent in Narzareth</td>
<td>Beginning of Defensive Shield Offensive</td>
<td>Haaretz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Location of Central Event(s)</td>
<td>Number of Participants</td>
<td>External Events</td>
<td>Source</td>
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<tr>
<td>------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Sakhnin</td>
<td>Tens of thousands</td>
<td>US offensive in Iraq, March 13</td>
<td>Haaretz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Arrabeh</td>
<td>Several thousand</td>
<td>Assassination of Hamas leader Ahmad Yassin March 22.</td>
<td>Haaretz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Not in H-Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Sakhnin</td>
<td>3,000</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Haaretz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Sakhnin and Taibeh</td>
<td>A few thousand</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Haaretz,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Sakhnin</td>
<td>3,000 +</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Haaretz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Not in H-Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Sakhnin</td>
<td>10,000</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Haaretz</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Testing the Competing hypotheses**

*The Frustration-Aggression argument* - H1 The more grievances the minority has against the state and the predominant community the greater the tendency to protest.

Were this hypothesis robust/viable, one would have seen a clearly steep rise in protest and violence during the first decade following the Arab citizens’ participation in the al-Aqsa intifada riots that were a result of the actions of the state directed at both its Arab citizens and their fellow Palestinians across the Green line.\(^{33}\)

Probably the most dramatic move taken against Israel’s Arab citizens was the decision on November 7, 2001 to remove Azmi Bishara’s parliamentary immunity which was the first time in the history of the Knesset that the immunity of a member of the Knesset was being suspended for political reasons.\(^{34}\) Voting took place over three issues: his praise for the terrorist organizations that participated in the Umm al-Fahm rally on June 5, 2000; his attendance and speech

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\(^{33}\) On the importance of ties with the Palestinians as a source of grievance, see, Hitman, “Israel’s Arab leadership in the Decade Attending the October 2000 Events,” pp. 122-123.

at the memorial service for the late Syrian leader, Hafez al-Asad in Kardaha in Syria in summer 2001 (a direct violation of the Prevention of Terrorism Ordinance that forbade travel of Israeli citizens to enemy states); and finally for arranging visits by Arab citizens in Israel to Syria. At Kardaha, when referring to Israel’s withdrawal from southern Lebanon, he declared that “Hizbullah has won and for the first time since 1967 we have tasted the sweet taste of victory”.

The members of Knesset from the Jewish parties, both Zionist and non-Zionist, were overwhelmingly in favor of removing Bishara’s parliamentary immunity so that he could face charges regarding his vocal support for terrorist organizations with 61 members of Knesset voting in favor, 30 voting against and 2 abstaining. The vote pattern was similar for the motion to remove his immunity over arranging (nineteen) illegal visits to Syria with 65 voting in favor of lifting the immunity, 24 voting against and 2 abstaining.

At the start of the subsequent trial, Bishara claimed he had merely organized family reunions for elderly Israeli Arabs, who had been separated from their families since Israel’s creation in 1948. He argued that he should be supported for engaging in a humanitarian act rather than be condemned. This statement was the opening salvo in a publicity campaign in which Bishara’s supporters tried to create parallels between Bishara’s trial and the infamous Dreyfus trial held in France. A poster portraying Bishara with the caption “J’accuse” was distributed by his party, Adalah (an Arab legal rights organization) that mobilized to defend him and the campaign challenged the ethno-nationalist basis of the state. A year and a half later the Nazareth Magistrate’s Court dismissed the indictment against MK Azmi Bishara (Balad) for organizing trips for Israeli Arabs to Syria on procedural grounds. Despite the fact that Bishara was facing a harsher time regarding the speech he had made in Syria and the Jerusalem Magistrate’s Court’s finding him guilty of supporting a terrorist organization, this ruling was subsequently overruled by the High Court of Justice which judged that the speech he had made

fell under the protective canopy of his parliamentary immunity and subsequently dismissed all criminal charges against him.\textsuperscript{36}

Bishara was not the only MK who had to face moves made against him during this period. The Knesset’s Committee of Etiquette also banned ‘Isam Makhoul, the DFPE MK from attending sessions for a week in May 2002 after he had called Prime-Minister Sharon a Nazi during the battle that took place in Jenin in March, and forbade Ahmad Tibi from entering the West Bank and Gaza after he was filmed taking part in an altercation with soldiers (during the offensive in which Israel reoccupied most of the towns in the West Bank in March-April 2002).\textsuperscript{37}

The campaign to reign in Arab politicians and movements also took a legislative turn. In May 2002, the Knesset passed an amendment to the law governing the immunity of Members of the Knesset that stated that parliamentary immunity did not include immunity for any statement of opinion or actions made that included the rejection of Israel as the state of the Jewish people, support for armed struggle by an enemy state or an act of terror against Jews or Arabs because they were Jews or Arabs".\textsuperscript{38} A second law against incitement to violence or terror imposed a five year sentence upon those calling for committing an act of violence and for even expressing praise for such an act provided, however, that “there is a real possibility that it will bring about the committing of an act of violence.”\textsuperscript{39} Although the law sounds draconian, the latter proviso gave ample discretion to the HCJ to significantly dilute its substance when cases were brought before it. A third law added yet one more justification to prevent a party that supported armed conflict perpetrated by a terrorist organization or an enemy state from participating in the elections.\textsuperscript{40} Once again,


\textsuperscript{38}Immunity, Rights and Duties of Knesset Members Law (Amendment no. 29), 5762- 2002.

\textsuperscript{39}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{40}The Law for the Prevention of Infiltration: (Offenses and Judgment). The Ordinance Regarding the Prolongation of the Emergency Regulations (Departure Abroad –1948), article 5 – Permission to Travel to Certain Countries (Amendment: 2002) (in Hebrew).
any decision made by the Central Elections Committee would have to come under court scrutiny, which would probably cancel out its effects entirely. Two months earlier, in March 2002, a law had been passed extending the emergency regulations prohibiting visiting an enemy state such as Syria to bearers of diplomatic passports that, of course, included Members of the Knesset.41

During the following three years attempts to reign in Arab Knesset members declined commensurate with the declining lethality of Palestinian violence in the territories only to increase again when other regional security challenges appeared on the horizon. In April 2007, Azmi Bishara refused to return to Israel to face charges of serious security violations committed during the Israeli-Hezbollah war in the summer of 2006 which included providing assistance to Hezbollah in a time of war, passing information to an enemy and having contacts with a foreign agent. He subsequently announced his resignation from the Knesset in the Israeli embassy in Cairo and, in effect, became a fugitive of justice.42

After the Israeli offensive into Gaza and the 2009 general elections, the following bills passed at least the first hurdle (approval to submit a bill by the relevant parliamentary committee) in the process of becoming law: The Commemoration of the 1948 Nakba (catastrophe), The Requirement for Would-be Citizens to Take an Oath of Loyalty to Israel as a “Jewish, Zionist and Democratic State” and the bill to criminalize the making of public statement that denied Israel’s right to exist as a Jewish state.43

There can be little doubt that the Israeli elites, both in government and parliament, were responding to the perceived threats of the Israeli Jewish public. A survey conducted during these trying times found that the overwhelming majority of Israeli Jews believed that Arabs might assist enemies of the state (78 per cent), might launch a popular revolt (72 per cent), experienced fear of Israel’s Arab

41 Ibid.
citizens for their support of the Palestinian people (84 per cent) and that Israeli Arabs would be more loyal to a Palestinian state, were such a state to emerge, than to Israel (66 per cent).  

These, of course, were years of unprecedented violence directed against the State of Israel and its Jewish citizens by Palestinians from across the Green Line. Over the years there had been a surge in the number of deaths of Israelis which reached a dramatic peak in 2002 when the number of Israeli deaths nearly doubled. This was, however, followed by a drop of more than fifty percent in 2003 and another fifty percent decline in the subsequent year (See Table 3). In contrast, during the First Intifada, only 91 Israelis were killed over a similar period of five years.

Table 3: Israeli fatalities of Palestinian violence in Gaza, the West Bank and Israel

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Gaza</th>
<th>West Bank</th>
<th>Israel</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>207</td>
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<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>452</td>
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<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>214</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>38*</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Including two deaths in Israel as a result of Qassam rocket attacks from Gaza


Israel’s punitive moves in Judea and Samaria/the West Bank and Gaza in an effort to contain and reduce the violence could have only increased the frustration of Arab citizens. These included the massive 2002 Protective Shield Offensive against the Palestinian Authority which effectively put an end to the terrorist sanctuaries in the major Arab towns, massive daily preemptive arrests made throughout the

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West Bank, large-scale penetrations into Gaza in 2003 and 2004 (in which tens of Palestinians were often killed in a single day of fighting) as well as the extrajudicial killings of prominent founders of Hamas, Ahmad Yassin in 2003 and Abd al-Aziz Rantisi in 2004 and still later the 2008-9 offensive against the Hamas government a year and a half after it took over Gaza from the Palestinian Authority.

Despite the Arab frustration from all these moves, the number of protest activities actually declined over the years rather than increased as can be seen in the lower estimated number of participants in the Land Day and October commemorations and their non-violent nature.

*The J-Curve Hypothesis* - Perhaps the hypothesis derived from the Davies Curve is more robust?

H2 states that the longer the period of rising prosperity and the sharper the subsequent downturn are, the greater the protest and violence will be.

The evidence, however, does not support this. There was indeed an economic downturn after a period of unprecedented prosperity and the Palestinian insurgency did not only cost lives but had a major economic impact on Israel. For the first time since the 1948 war, hostilities and war had led to an absolute contraction of the Israeli economy. In the 1948 war, the contraction lasted only one year but, during the hostilities being discussed, it continued for over two years. Because of the large-scale violence within the green line Israel, from being a fast-growing country (in 2000, the GDP increased eight percent, double the world average), was being transformed into one characterized by absolute contraction during the first two years of the conflict when Israeli casualties from Palestinian violence reached its peak (See Table 3). The effects were even more dramatic when measured on a per capita basis, with per capita GDP dropping more than six percent from 2000 – 2002 ($18,358 to $17,359 US dollars). (See Table 4)

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45 Even in the 1948 war, GDP declined (by 3.1 percent) but almost double the following year in the following year as a result of mass immigration. See Haim Barkai ‘Hapeilut ha-Kalkalit Ha-Realit shel Milhemet Ha-Hatzmaut’, in Alon Kadish (ed.) *Milchemet Ha-Hatzmaut Tashah-Tashat: Diyun Mehudash* (Tel-Aviv: Misrad Habitachon, 2005), p. 767.
Table 4: The World economy and the Israeli economic performance 2000-2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>World</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP growth (annual %)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP per capita growth (annual %)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Israel</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP growth (annual %)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>-0</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP per capita (constant 2000 $US)</td>
<td>18,358</td>
<td>17,868</td>
<td>17,395</td>
<td>17,298</td>
<td>17,752</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP per capita growth (annual %)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-3</td>
<td>-3</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: World Development Indicators database

This downturn came in the wake of seven years of unprecedented prosperity. According to the J-curve theory, Israeli Arab protest should have increased between 2001 and 2003 but the opposite occurred while Israeli Arab protest, as measured by the indicators of participation in the Land Day and October 2000 commemorations, shows a considerable decline. (See Tables 1 and 2).

Relative Deprivation – The larger the socio-economic gap between Arab citizens and the predominant Jewish community is, the greater the tendency of Arab citizens to protest and rebel will be. In a recent study they made of income inequality in Israel Cornfeld and Danieli show that income inequality for both the overall population and the major sub-groups with a higher incidence of poverty, i.e. the Arabs and the ultra-Orthodox, increased in the first decade of the new century.\(^{46}\) They also point out that the inequality curve began in the early 1990s and that, tellingly, the curve was far steeper in the 1990s than in the following decade.

Such a finding flies in the face of the relative deprivation theory and, although, at first glance, it suggests the theory’s robustness, the robustness of a theory has to be tested against long-term trends. Even though the growth of inequality abated in the second decade,

whether this is measured by the income gap between the top decile and the mean or, more significantly, between the mean and the lowest decile, or by the general Gini-coefficient, the theory is at a loss to explain the decline in protest over time. This is especially true when inequality in hourly wage rates spiked from 2004 to 2007 as the Israeli economy made a quick recovery from the effects of the Second Intifada, which benefited the higher paying segments of society that were mostly Jewish. According to the theory this spike should have shown up in increased protest as it was also accompanied by a decrease in government social transfers yet there was no spike in protest patterns.

The role of leadership (the instigators model)

H4 Protest will decrease as moves to obstruct leaders in the Arab sector from mobilizing protest increase.

It is methodologically difficult to plot the intensity of moves by the authorities to obstruct the Arab leadership from mobilizing the masses because the state, as a general rule at least over the past two decades, has rarely seen fit to do this. There have, however, been two major exceptions in the decade of mobilization under analysis. The first were the arrests of 15 leaders of the (northern) Islamic Movement in 2003 including Ra’id Salah, the leader and founder, and moves made under the relevant anti-terrorist laws to reduce their funding from external Islamist sources. The second was the filing of charges in 2007 against Member of Knesset Azmi Bishara, the then charismatic leader of Balad, a radical Arab nationalist party, for providing Hizbullah with information during the Lebanese War. Bishara, however fled the country before he was tried. Preventive detentions could conceivably have acted as another indicator to test the relationship between policing and protest but the numbers in question have been too small to assume that this variable has

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48 Ibid, p. 79.
49 Laurence Louër, To Be an Arab in Israel (London: C. Hurst and Co., 2007), pp. 75-76.
any importance since, between 2005 and 2015, only 56 preventive detentions were made amongst Israel’s Arab citizens.\textsuperscript{50}

Looking at the two commemorations, the dependent variables for which we measure the magnitude of protest, shows no spike or decrease in protest in the relevant years (2003-2004 or 2007-2008). Moreover, the steep decline in protest took place in 2001 and 2002 before these two moves against some of the Arab leadership were made. Contrary to Karsh’s theory the attack on the leadership and, even more so, the flight abroad of one of the most charismatic Arab political leaders in 2007 had little effect on protest patterns. Gadi Hitman’s analysis of divisions in the leadership might provide a partial explanation for the reduction in protest that, as we shall see, might supplement the lost opportunities model and the strategic factor.\textsuperscript{51}

The political opportunities model and the geo-strategic factor

H5 The greater the rift within Israel’s state elite and the predominant community is, the greater the propensity of Israel’s Arab citizens will be to protest in the expectation that the payoffs of that protest will be greater.

H6 The more threatened the state is perceived to be as a result of external forces, the more cohesive and unified the state elite and predominant community will become and the less willing to make concessions that will, in turn, reduce the net payoffs of protest and therefore the frequency of protest itself.

Israelis in the first decade of the new century not only showed a yearning for the politics of the center – something that could even be seen in the 1999 general elections – but also its realization. Israel’s political polarization between left and right first gave way to a landslide victory for Sharon over the incumbent Prime Minister Ehud Barak. Then, for the first time in Israel, a centrist party, Kadima formed a government at the expense of the two major parties, Likud and Labor, both of which had previously contributed so much to the


\textsuperscript{51} Hitman, “Israel’s Arab leadership in the Decade Attending the October 2000 Events,” pp. 131-134.
state of polarization. By 2009, the Likud had made a comeback but the emaciated Labor party and its left-wing ally, Meretz, only had a combined representation of 16 seats and seemed too weak to offer any credible challenge to the right and centrist parties. Thus, whether led by either Kadima or Likud, the Israeli Jewish electorate appeared to be more united than ever before.

This united front was augmented by the relative contraction of Shas, which was the Jewish ethnic party of social and religious protest that had fallen from a high of 17 seats in the 1999 elections to 11 in most of the following elections, and by the decline of the NRP to three seats in the 2006 general elections as voters turned to the Likud, and this proved to be daunting to any force that wished to challenge the status quo. There is no doubt, however, that it was Israel’s Arab electorate and the Arab parties it overwhelmingly voted for, that were the leading constituency seeking change in the status quo.

In spite of all the changes taking place in the Jewish electorate Arab extra-parliamentary protest declined, and only one of the theories that this study has attempted to test, can provide an answer to why this happened. As aforementioned, the POM theory, more than anything else, argues that opportunities, chiefly those created by fissures in the dominant political elite, present opportunities for change for the weaker side in the political conflict and that this is especially true when the weaker side also shows signs of increased organizational strength. It has, apparently, been the unity of the ruling Jewish political elite and the Jewish electorate that has made Arab protest less worthwhile despite their continued relative disadvantage and their grievances.

The unity of the Jewish political elite and electorate has, however, only been an intervening variable fueled by the perception of Israel’s geostrategic vulnerability to external actors be they the Second Intifada, the suicide bombings within the Green Line, the rise of Iran and the military support it provided to Hezbollah that culminated in the 2006 war and the subsequent Hamas takeover of Gaza, whose security ramifications for Israel culminated in the three week Israeli-Hamas military confrontation in December 2008-January 2009. Annual surveys that plot subjective fears amongst Israel’s
Jewish public saw a sharp rise in the fear of terrorism from 2000 to 2004 and an equally sharp rise in the feelings of vulnerability from a foreign actor, mainly in the Lebanese arena.\(^{52}\) Israel's transition from a predominantly two-party rivalry to a centrist-dominated party configuration in the early years of the first decade of the new century followed by a right-wing dominated coalition at its end, reflected the renewed vulnerability the Israeli electorate was feeling and the subsequent rallying-around- the- flag effect. This all translated into diminishing returns for Arab protest with Israel's Arab citizens rationally understanding the writing on the wall which led to protest consequently diminishing. The graph below depicts the causal flow between Israel's geo-strategic setting, the cohesiveness of Israel's Jewish public, the expected payoff of Arab protest and the declining willingness to engage in it.

The Revised Political Opportunity Model: The Geo-Strategic Factor

![Graph showing the causal flow between Israel's geo-strategic setting, the cohesiveness of the Israeli Jewish public, the extent of strategic opportunity for Israel's Arab Citizens, and the level of mobilization/demobilization.]

**Conclusion**

Theories of contentious politics are traditionally weak about taking geo-strategic factors into account. This oversight is especially stark in the numerous ethnic-state contexts in which the role played by external actors is strong, and even more so in cases where the state is

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identified with a majority while, both as a state and as a community, it is identified as a minority in the broader regional setting.

Israel is an excellent example of a case in which analysis favors internal factors that are identified in the literature on comparative politics over external factors. This article, by building on previous theoretical and empirical work, has tried to demonstrate the robustness of wedding the political opportunities model with the second-image-reversed paradigm in international relations. The former focuses on the need of the weaker party in asymmetrical conflicts to create fissures in the ruling state elite or the dominant public which create opportunities for the protesting minority to extract concessions from the fractured state elite provided that this elite is characterized by both moderates and hardliners. The latter model partially identifies how likely it is for fissures to develop, at least for states in threatened environments. Threatened states will tend to rally around the flag and centralize their politics while less threatened states will be more likely to be characterized by more pluralistic and liberal politics.

Israeli politics reflect this interplay well. In the 1990s Israel’s geo-strategic setting was unrivaled in its short and contested history. The Soviet Union, a foe of long standing and the patron of powerful local states at war with Israel, was disintegrating; Iraq, after the rollback in Kuwait, was being effectively contained by United States military might and Yasser Arafat and the PLO were suffering from the vengeance of the Arab Gulf states for supporting the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and the enmity of the United States.

This is what made it possible for the Israeli leadership to take the gamble offered in the Oslo process at a period in which internal fissures in the country between both the left and right and the religious and secular sectors reached their apogee. When seen in the light of the two theories it becomes clear that it was no coincidence that this period was also the most tellingly liberal moment in the interaction between the state and its Arab citizens.

When Israel’s Arab citizens turned violent in 2000, at a time when Israel was facing unprecedented violence, this was also the moment that the Jewish electorate made its reckoning and moved towards
centrism, in a rally-around-the –flag response. Israel’s Arab citizens took note of this and, at least in their political protest patterns, demonstrated less forcefully than in their recent past since they knew that the payoffs would be either small or non-existent.

About the author
Hillel Frisch is a professor in the Departments of Political Studies and Middle East Studies at Bar-Ilan University, Israel and a Senior Research Scholar at the BESA Center for Strategic Studies. His latest books are *Israeli Security and its Arab Citizens* (Cambridge University Press, 2011) and *Palestinian Armies and Militias* (Routledge 2008). He has also written numerous articles on Palestinian and Arab politics and security issues in the Middle East in leading and regional political science journals.