



Terrorists Determining Israeli Elections?

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With hostilities continuing to escalate between Israel and its neighbors, the question is being asked whether terrorists and the governmental response to them are becoming determining factors in Israeli elections. Claude Berrebi and Esteban F. Klor make very valid points about how attacks by terrorists in Israel influence voters to vote for candidates leaning toward the right at a rate of 1.35 percent higher than they would probably vote otherwise. This is understandable as the electorate in Israel is very closely split and the toll terrorists and their actions pose on the economy and quality of life can tip the electorate scale. However, this model does not necessarily hold over to the Palestinian community living in Israel. There are, though, definitive similarities between this Israeli model and that of the Palestinian communities living in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

During the 2006 war between Israel and Hezbollah, approximately 165 Israelis were



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killed, however this number does not indicate if any of these Israelis were the Palestinian minority living in Israel. It is approximated that 23 percent of the nearly 4,000 rockets that Hezbollah fired had hit cities in the north. One of these cities is Haifa, where several rockets hit businesses on Ben Gurion Street that were and are owned by Palestinians. Several other rockets hit Palestinian residential areas in Haifa as well. Despite this obvious threat to their lives and businesses, Palestinians living in Israel did not side with Israel, neither is there evidence that there was widespread support for Hezbollah either.

The lack of support for Hezbollah could have come as a concern for their own lives and livelihood and their lack of support for Israel was likely due to their exclusion from being allowed entrance into bomb shelters. A clear distaste for both sides arose because the Palestinian community in Israel felt penalized by both sides. While there are little statistics that show specifically how the Palestinians living in Israel voted after the 2006 war, It seems unlikely that they voted for the right, seeing as the Israeli right have increased speculation about the loyalty of Palestinians living in Israel.

On the contrary to the above argument, after Operation Cast Lead in 2008, Palestinian support for Hamas, the more extreme alternative to Fatah, rose significantly. Prior to 2008, Hamas’ influence on the Palestinians in Gaza had begun to flounder, as Hamas cracked down on several media outlets and imprisoned those that questioned their authority. The increased support for Hamas falls in line with Berrebi and Klor’s argument. However, in the case of Hamas, support for the group again flounders as many Palestinians blame them for Israel’s blockade of the Gaza Strip and as Hamas struggles to hold onto its authoritative legitimacy.

In terms of impact, it is difficult to distinguish how single and sporadic attacks by terrorists differ from wars or a series of ongoing hostilities. The institution of a war-time mindset in the electorate is essentially the same in either case. There are certainly differences in the influence terrorists have over a civilian population and even more of a difference in the way a government’s actions influence a minority or marginalised population. In that way, it is more than possible that terrorists are, indeed, able to exert some influence in determining Israeli elections.

By Hebatullah Issa

Sources:
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