

## Theoretical Approaches on Religion, Ideology, and Governance in Israel's Political Landscape

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47175/rissj.v6i2.1146>

| Yaron Katz |

Holon Institute of Technology

[aron@ykatz.com](mailto:aron@ykatz.com)



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

### ABSTRACT

*This paper explores the conflict between conservatism and modern society in Israel, focusing on the ideological divide between secular and ultra-Orthodox (Haredi) communities. Drawing on conservatism theory, modernization theory, and conflict theory, the study analyzes how these forces shape political, social, and cultural landscapes. The persistence of Haredi conservatism, rooted in traditional values and religious autonomy, contrasts with the progressive demands of a modernizing Israeli society, creating tensions that manifest in governance challenges, military service exemptions, and debates over public policy. The analysis highlights how conservatism provides stability and identity while resisting transformative pressures, while modernization drives gradual integration through workforce participation, education, and economic shifts. Conflict theory underscores the societal polarization and competition for power between ideological groups, complicating efforts to foster inclusivity and unity. By examining the Israeli context, the paper offers broader insights into the global dynamics of conservatism and modernity, emphasizing the importance of adaptive governance, equitable representation, and inclusive dialogue to address these tensions and promote societal cohesion. By examining the interactions between tradition and progress, these frameworks underscore the necessity of finding a balance between preserving cultural identity and embracing the demands of modernity to achieve long-term stability and inclusivity.*

### KEYWORDS

*Conservatism; modernity; religion; politics; governance*

### INTRODUCTION

This paper examines the intricate interplay between conservatism and modern society in the Israeli context, exploring the ideological tensions between the ultra-Orthodox (Haredi) community and secular groups. By analyzing conservatism, modernization, and conflict theories, the study examines how religious conservatism shapes and is shaped by Israel's evolving political, social, and cultural frameworks. The research identifies the Haredi community's adherence to traditional values, which is manifested in policies such as military service exemptions, control over family law, and resistance to educational reform, as a stabilizing force that preserves religious and cultural identity. Simultaneously, these traditionalist tendencies pose challenges to the progressive aspirations of a modernizing society characterized by globalization, economic development, and democratization.

Modernization theory highlights how societal shifts, such as increased participation of Haredi men in the workforce and academia, signal gradual integration into broader societal structures. These changes illustrate the dual pressures of preserving longstanding traditions while navigating the demands of a modern, pluralistic society. Conflict theory further

frames the ideological divide as a struggle for power and influence, emphasizing the impact of this polarization on public policy, governance, and societal cohesion. The political clout of religious parties within Israel's coalition system underscores the tension between conservatism's demand for stability and modern society's drive for inclusivity and reform.

Through a mixed-methods approach, this study analyzes key areas of contention, including the exemption of Haredi men from military service, their impact on economic productivity, and the broader implications of these issues on Israel's identity as both a Jewish state and a liberal democracy. The paper aims to establish that the interplay between conservatism and modernity in Israel is not merely a national phenomenon but also a lens for understanding similar tensions in global contexts. It argues for adaptive governance and inclusive dialogue to reconcile traditional values with the progressive demands of modern society, fostering a framework where cultural preservation and democratic ideals coexist. This research contributes to broader debates on religion, identity, and societal transformation, offering insights into navigating ideological divides in diverse and evolving societies.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

This research examines the interplay between conservatism and modernity within Israeli society, focusing on the socio-political divide between secular and religious communities. The study employs a multidisciplinary theoretical framework, to understand how traditional values interact with modern societal dynamics. The primary theoretical approaches utilized include Conservatism Theory, Modernization Theory, and Conflict Theory, each offering unique insights into the tensions and opportunities inherent in balancing tradition and progress.

This theoretical framework underscores the dual pressures facing Israeli society: the need to preserve its Jewish heritage while adapting to modern, democratic principles. The persistence of religious exemptions, electoral instability, and socio-economic divides reflects conservatism's influence, while incremental societal shifts illustrate modernization's impact. By examining these dynamics through a conflict theory lens, the study highlights the challenges of achieving a cohesive national identity amid competing ideological priorities.

### ***Conservatism Theory***

Conservatism theory emphasizes the preservation of long-standing institutions, values, and social norms, often rooted in religious or cultural traditions (Scruton, 2017). The conservatism theory focuses on maintaining stability and continuity within society by preserving its traditional institutions, values, and norms. It emphasizes the importance of existing systems and practices that have developed over time, often considering them a product of collective wisdom passed down through generations.

This perspective argues that societal stability and continuity depend on adherence to established frameworks that resist rapid change. It emphasizes preservation of institutions such as the family, religion, government, and education systems are seen as foundational to social order. The values of these structures provide stability and a framework for moral and social guidance with long-standing traditions that are viewed as essential because they represent a society's historical identity and values (Steven, 2023).

Conservatism often aligns closely with religious principles, seeing them as a source of ethical and moral guidance. In the Israeli context, ultra-Orthodox (Haredi) communities exemplify this principle by prioritizing Torah study, traditional family structures, and

religious autonomy. Their political influence and demand for policies reflecting these values highlight conservatism's role in shaping state identity and governance. This theoretical lens provides a foundation for understanding the reluctance of Haredi groups to embrace reforms that challenge their way of life, such as mandatory military service or integration into the modern workforce.

### ***Modernization Theory***

Modernization theory explores how societies transition from traditional to modern systems through economic, social, and cultural evolution (Inglehart & Norris, 2020). This approach emphasizes the transformative power of industrialization, urbanization, and globalization in reshaping societal norms, often creating tensions with conservative elements. Modernization processes such as increased workforce participation, technological innovation, and shifts in public education challenge the entrenched norms of religious conservatism. The theory helps contextualize the gradual integration of ultra-Orthodox communities into modern society, evidenced by rising participation in higher education, employment, and even military service (Ami, 2022). The conflict of tradition versus modernisation is evident throughout Israeli society. Modernisation affects formal and informal support systems, affects family lifestyles, has resulted in changes in the treatment of elderly people and has seen modern ideas of health and wellness incorporated with traditional values and ideals.

### ***Conflict Theory***

Conflict theory, rooted in the works of Karl Marx and later expanded by scholars like C. Wright Mills and Pierre Bourdieu, examines power struggles between competing groups over limited resources and ideological dominance (Collins, 2009). This theory is particularly relevant to the ideological polarization between secular and religious communities in Israel. It highlights how power dynamics manifest in policy debates, such as exemptions from military service or control over education funding. August (2024) explains how conflicts can create stronger bonds within groups (intergroup cohesion) or spark disputes within groups (intragroup conflict), arguing that this depends on how people perceive and interpret conflicts. Religious political parties leverage their coalition influence to secure policies favorable to their constituents, often creating resentment among secular groups who view such policies as inequitable (Cohen, 2019). Conflict theory therefore illuminates the broader societal consequences of these struggles, including political instability and fractured national identity.

### ***Intersectionality of Theories***

The interplay between conservatism and modernity cannot be fully understood through a single theoretical lens. Instead, this study integrates insights from conservatism theory, modernization theory, and conflict theory to provide a holistic understanding of the complexities in Israeli society. While conservatism theory explains the preservation of traditional norms, modernization theory sheds light on the forces driving change, and conflict theory uncovers the tensions arising from these competing dynamics. For example, while the ultra-Orthodox community's resistance to military service reflects conservative values, their growing engagement with higher education and the workforce suggests an ongoing negotiation with modernity. Simultaneously, the political conflicts arising from these tensions highlight the need for systemic reforms to bridge ideological divides.

## RESEARCH METHODS

The relationship between conservatism and modernity reflects broader global patterns of tension between traditional values and progressive change. This dynamic interplay highlights how cultural identity, political stability, and social integration are continuously reshaped in the face of evolving societal norms. Religion and politics influence domestic policy and serve as a microcosm for examining global challenges in balancing the preservation of tradition with the demands of a modern, pluralistic society. As Inglehart and Norris (2020) note, the clash between traditionalist worldviews and modernity often revolves around differing priorities, with conservatism focusing on stability, order, and continuity, while modern society emphasizes innovation, inclusivity, and individual rights. The research investigates the intersections of religion, politics, and society in Israel. This methodology enables a nuanced exploration of ideological conflicts between secular and religious communities and their effects on governance. Rosenthal (2024) emphasized that the rise of religious conservatism in public life poses significant challenges to liberal democratic ideals, necessitating deliberate political and societal efforts to address these complexities.

The research underscores that resolving these tensions is critical to ensuring Israel's long-term stability, unity, and adherence to democratic values. Similar to other nations grappling with the interplay of conservatism and modernity, Israel's experience illustrates the need for inclusive and adaptive governance frameworks. As Goldstein (2022) highlights, such frameworks must prioritize both the preservation of cultural identity and the cultivation of progressive, equitable societies. Addressing the challenges posed by entrenched conservative practices requires not only political will but also sustained efforts to promote mutual understanding and societal cohesion.

To navigate these challenges, Israel must develop policies that balance the preservation of its Jewish heritage with the principles of democratic inclusivity. This requires fostering dialogue between secular and religious communities, promoting equitable representation in governance, and addressing structural issues such as education reform, military service, and workforce participation. Hossain (2023) argues that inclusive policymaking is essential in bridging ideological divides and mitigating the polarization that often characterizes debates between conservatism and modernity.

Gradual societal changes within the ultra-Orthodox community highlight the potential for integrating traditionalist groups into the broader fabric of modern society without eroding their core values. Ami (2022) notes that such integration reflects a pragmatic response to external pressures, including economic demands and demographic shifts, while still respecting the community's cultural and religious identity.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### *Conservatism and Modernity Clash*

The interplay between conservatism and modern society underscores the persistent tension between the preservation of traditional values and the rapid evolution of contemporary social, political, and cultural landscapes (Enyedi, 2024). This dynamic is particularly evident in societies grappling with competing influences from globalization, digitalization, urbanization, and progressive social movements.

Conservatism, rooted in a commitment to long-standing institutions, customs, and moral values, often intersects with religion as a cornerstone of identity (Hossain, 2023). In contrast, modernity advocates for inclusivity, pluralism, and the continuous reexamination of societal norms, creating inevitable conflicts between these worldviews. These tensions are amplified in states where religion holds significant sway over governance, particularly

when ethno-religious majorities assert their norms through institutional power, often marginalizing minority groups (Goldstein, 2022).

One critical arena where conservatism and modernity clash is in the public domain, particularly over the role of religion and secularism. Religious symbols, policies, and practices frequently become flashpoints for deeper struggles over national identity and societal power dynamics. Van der Tol and Gorski (2022) observe that controversies surrounding religious symbols often reflect broader cultural anxieties, with majority groups sometimes framing minority practices as threats to national cohesion. Altemeyer and Hunsberger (2004) add that conservative religious movements often perceive modernization as an existential challenge, prompting them to leverage political systems to safeguard their traditions. Simultaneously, Fisher (2016) highlights that some fundamentalist groups strategically engage with secular frameworks to advance their agendas, further complicating the balance between tradition and modernity.

In Israeli politics, the intersection of conservatism and modernity manifests in the profound ideological divide between secular and ultra-Orthodox (Haredi) groups. This divide is emblematic of broader global challenges where traditionalist forces seek to preserve established norms while modern societies push for inclusivity and reform. The dominance of identity politics, particularly the influence of ultra-Orthodox political parties, shapes critical policies on education, family law, and cultural affairs, reinforcing religious authority while limiting the scope for progressive change (Shalev, 2019). These dynamics stabilize traditional social structures but constrain societal adaptation, creating friction within a rapidly evolving global context.

The influence of Haredi political parties highlights how religious conservatism navigates and shapes contemporary politics in Israel. These parties wield disproportionate power in Israel's coalition-based political system, leveraging their influence to secure state funding for religious institutions and to resist reforms that challenge their interests (The Jewish Federations of America, 2022). This power dynamic often results in political stagnation, as mainstream parties prioritize coalition stability over addressing contentious issues such as education reform, military service, and gender equality.

However, modern pressures are increasingly challenging this status quo. Security concerns, international diplomatic pressures, and internal societal changes are compelling even conservative groups to adapt. Within the ultra-Orthodox community, rising participation in the workforce, higher education, and military service, signal a slow but meaningful integration into broader society (Ami, 2022). Stadler (2020) argues that these changes reflect the dual pressures faced by conservative communities: the need to preserve traditional values while responding to the economic and social demands of a modern state.

This complex interplay between conservatism and modernity offers a compelling case study for understanding how traditionalist ideologies negotiate with contemporary societal expectations. Efforts to reconcile these forces are evident in legislative attempts to curtail the disproportionate influence of religious parties and initiatives to promote societal integration. However, progress remains uneven, as entrenched interests and ideological polarization continue to shape Israel's political and social landscape. As Laurence and Vaisse (2006) suggest, achieving balance requires a nuanced approach that respects traditional identities while fostering adaptability and inclusivity in an increasingly interconnected world.

A central issue in the socio-political divide between secular and ultra-Orthodox (Haredi) communities is the exemption of Haredi men from mandatory military service. This exemption, grounded in the tradition of full-time Torah study, has become emblematic of broader ideological rifts. It contributes to political instability, electoral deadlock, and

difficulties in coalition formation. Secular groups often view this policy as inequitable, arguing that it perpetuates low employment rates among ultra-Orthodox men and exacerbates socio-economic disparities. These critiques align with research by Stadler (2020), which highlights how conservative religious practices can sometimes hinder broader societal integration when institutionalized in state policies.

The issue gained renewed prominence following the events of October 7, 2023, when escalating military conflicts with Gaza and Lebanon intensified public calls for greater Haredi participation in national defense. This debate underscores the broader tension between preserving religious traditions and addressing practical national security concerns. As Laurence and Vaïsse (2006) observe, similar tensions in other democracies reveal the challenges of reconciling religious conservatism with the demands of modern governance.

### ***Balancing Conservatism and Modernity in Policy***

This research focuses on the intricate interplay between religion and state and its profound impact on governance, societal norms, and national identity. The analysis highlights the influential role of religious ideologies, particularly those upheld by ultra-Orthodox groups, in shaping political agendas and policy decisions. Despite representing a minority of the population, ultra-Orthodox factions wield disproportionate political power, particularly in Israel's coalition-based political system, where their leverage often determines the success or failure of government initiatives.

One of the central themes of the study is the persistent tension between secular and religious factions, a conflict that extends beyond politics to shape the cultural and ideological fabric of Israeli society. This ideological struggle reflects broader global trends, where conservatism clashes with the demands of modern pluralistic societies. In Israel, religious-nationalist agendas, bolstered by legislative support prioritizing Jewish identity, have led to increased polarization. The reluctance to challenge Israel's religious status quo stems from the entrenched power of religious parties, which often use their influence to block reforms perceived as threats to their interests. This dynamic complicates Israel's dual identity as both a Jewish state and a liberal democracy, creating friction between efforts to promote inclusivity and the preservation of traditional religious values (Shalev, 2019).

Ram (2008) noted a significant evolution in Israeli political culture, transitioning from an emphasis on secular nationalism to the rising prominence of religious conservatism. This shift intensifies the struggle to balance traditional religious values with the realities of a modern, pluralistic society. For example, the ultra-Orthodox community's significant political clout has shaped national policies on military service exemptions, education, and family law. These policies reinforce their societal autonomy but also challenge secular principles and contribute to societal fragmentation (Dödtmann, 2023).

The contrast between conservatism and modernity is particularly evident in the cultural and economic arenas. Haredi communities resist integration into secular education systems, preferring curricula focused on religious studies (Cohen & Malach, 2020). This preference for insular educational and cultural practices highlights the challenge of balancing religious autonomy with broader societal needs. At the same time, rising modernist currents within Israeli society demand greater gender equality, inclusivity, and secular governance, creating ideological friction. The tension is reflected in contentious debates over issues such as civil marriage, LGBTQ+ rights, and public transportation on the Sabbath, areas where religious norms often dominate public policy (Halbental & Margalit, 1992).

Religious parties' influence on public policy extends to areas such as family law, where the Orthodox Rabbinate maintains exclusive control over marriage and divorce. This

control has profound implications for personal freedoms and often alienates secular and non-Orthodox Jewish communities. The dominance of these parties in shaping legislation creates significant barriers to reform, perpetuating a system that often excludes or marginalizes minority and progressive voices (Kingsbury, 2020).

However, the tension between conservatism and modernity also presents opportunities for adaptation and innovation. Emerging movements within Israeli society advocate for a more inclusive interpretation of Jewish identity, one that balances respect for tradition with the values of a democratic, multicultural state. Such movements, including secular and progressive religious groups, aim to bridge ideological divides by fostering dialogue and advocating for shared societal goals. Scholars suggest that these efforts could play a critical role in mitigating the polarizing effects of religious conservatism while preserving Israel's unique cultural heritage (Sasson, 2014).

The interplay between conservatism and modern society underscores the complexity of Israeli politics, where deep ideological divisions are both a source of tension and a driver of innovation. Balancing traditional values with the demands of a dynamic, pluralistic society remains one of Israel's most significant challenges, requiring creative solutions that honor its dual identity as a Jewish and democratic state.

### ***Military Service Exemptions: A National Debate***

The exemption of ultra-Orthodox men from mandatory military service remains one of the most contentious issues in Israeli society, reflecting deeper tensions between conservatism and modern societal demands. This policy, rooted in the historical compromise made during the early years of the state to preserve religious traditions, allows ultra-Orthodox men to pursue full-time Torah study in lieu of military service. While supporters of the policy argue that the preservation of Torah study is integral to Jewish identity and the spiritual foundation of the nation, critics contend that it exacerbates societal divisions and undermines principles of equality and shared responsibility (Cohen & Malach, 2020).

Secular groups and modernist factions emphasize that these exemptions not only contribute to inequities in national service but also perpetuate economic disparities. Haredi communities often prioritize religious study over secular education and workforce participation, resulting in lower employment rates among ultra-Orthodox men. This economic disengagement places a disproportionate burden on the broader population to sustain the welfare systems supporting these communities (Ben-David, 2018). From a modern perspective, this arrangement challenges the state's ability to balance respect for religious traditions with the practical needs of a dynamic economy and national defense.

The interplay between conservatism and modernity is especially evident in the context of national security. The October 7, 2023, escalation of military conflicts brought this debate into sharper focus, underscoring the need for broader societal participation in national security efforts. Critics argue that exempting a significant portion of the population from military service during times of heightened security threats undermines national cohesion and weakens the shared sense of responsibility essential to Israel's survival (Weiss, 2023). Meanwhile, proponents within ultra-Orthodox communities argue that their spiritual contributions provide a form of national service that strengthens the nation's moral and religious fabric (Cahana, 2019).

The debate also reflects broader ideological struggles between traditionalism and the demands of a pluralistic, modern state. Secular and progressive groups advocate for reforms to integrate ultra-Orthodox men into military or alternative national service programs, seeing this as a step toward fostering a more inclusive and equitable society. However, ultra-Orthodox leaders resist such changes, viewing them as an existential threat

to their communities' way of life and religious integrity (Stadler, 2020). This resistance highlights the challenge of reconciling deeply entrenched conservative values with the evolving expectations of a modern democratic society.

Efforts to address the issue have sparked intense political debates, particularly within coalition governments that depend on the support of ultra-Orthodox parties. These parties often wield significant influence, using their legislative power to block reforms and preserve the status quo. This dynamic not only perpetuates the exemption policy but also complicates broader efforts to bridge societal divides and promote equality. Scholars suggest that finding a sustainable resolution will require innovative approaches that balance respect for religious traditions with the practical demands of contemporary society (Sasson, 2014).

The issue of military service exemptions for ultra-Orthodox men encapsulates the broader tensions between conservatism and modernity in Israeli society. It reflects the challenges of integrating a deeply traditional community into the fabric of a modern state while respecting their religious identity. Addressing this debate will require creative, inclusive policies that promote shared responsibility and national cohesion without compromising the cultural and religious diversity that defines Israel's identity.

### ***Ideological Polarization and Political Instability***

Israel's political landscape is characterized by frequent elections and unstable coalition governments, a consequence of unresolved ideological debates and the complex interplay between conservatism and modernity. Religious parties, particularly ultra-Orthodox factions, wield significant bargaining power within coalition politics, using their leverage to secure budget allocations for religious institutions and block reforms that challenge their traditionalist agenda. This political dynamic perpetuates the status quo, undermining efforts to create a more inclusive and adaptable democratic framework while deepening societal divisions (Tepe, 2005).

The impact of this ideological polarization extends beyond politics, influencing key areas such as education reform and economic development. For example, ultra-Orthodox communities often prioritize Torah study over secular education and workforce participation, creating significant challenges for integrating these groups into Israel's modern economy (Ben-David, 2018). This educational disparity contributes to economic inefficiencies and widens the gap between religious and secular communities, complicating efforts to achieve a cohesive national identity. Furthermore, the focus on preserving traditional values often comes at the expense of addressing modern societal needs, such as advancing technological innovation and improving social infrastructure (Stadler, 2020).

The intertwining of religion and politics also exacerbates political instability, as coalitions frequently cater to narrow sectarian interests at the expense of broader national priorities. Scholars like Sasson (2014) argue that this instability is not merely a byproduct of coalition politics but a symptom of deeper ideological divides within Israeli society. As these divisions intensify, the ability to build consensus on pressing issues such as education reform, economic modernization, and housing development becomes increasingly difficult.

The tension between maintaining Israel's Jewish identity and upholding democratic values is a persistent theme in the nation's political discourse. The deep ideological divide between secular and religious communities underscores the challenges of reconciling traditional conservatism with the demands of a modern, pluralistic society. The dominance of religious parties in political decision-making complicates this balance, as their influence often prioritizes sectarian interests over inclusive governance (Cohen & Malach, 2020).

Efforts to bridge these ideological gaps must contend with the broader societal impact

of religious conservatism. For example, the ultra-Orthodox community's growing demographic influence raises questions about the sustainability of current policies, particularly those that exempt Haredi men from military service and allow for separate educational systems with minimal secular curriculum. These policies, while preserving religious autonomy, challenge the state's ability to promote social and economic integration, highlighting the friction between conservatism and modernity (Dödtmann, 2023).

Miller (2014) emphasizes the necessity of establishing clear boundaries between religion and state to uphold democratic principles while respecting Israel's Jewish heritage. This involves implementing reforms that reduce the disproportionate influence of religious parties and encourage greater participation from secular and moderate voices in shaping national policies. Such measures could include revising the electoral system to limit sectarian bargaining power, promoting secular education within ultra-Orthodox schools, and introducing alternative national service programs to foster a sense of shared responsibility.

Achieving this balance will require comprehensive strategies that address both ideological polarization and practical governance challenges. These strategies must promote societal integration, strengthen democratic institutions, and ensure equitable representation of diverse perspectives. By embracing a flexible yet principled approach, Israel can navigate the complexities of its dual identity as both a Jewish state and a liberal democracy, fostering a more harmonious coexistence of conservatism and modernity (Ram, 2008).

### ***Analysis: How Theoretical Frameworks Relate to the Paper***

The interplay between **conservatism** and **modern society** within Israeli socio-political dynamics can be effectively analyzed using the selected theoretical approaches. This section demonstrates how each theory supports and explains the key issues explored in the paper, with references to academic sources.

#### **1. Conservatism Theory and Religious-Political Dynamics**

Conservatism theory underscores the persistence of traditional values and institutions, which is evident in the policies and practices of Israel's ultra-Orthodox (Haredi) communities. The exemption of Haredi men from mandatory military service reflects their prioritization of Torah study and resistance to secular integration. This exemption illustrates how religious conservatism prioritizes stability and continuity over adaptation to broader societal expectations (Scruton, 2017).

Religious political parties, such as Shas and United Torah Judaism, exert considerable influence in maintaining the status quo by leveraging coalition politics to block reforms. This phenomenon aligns with Huntington's (1996) assertion that conservatism often manifests as a defense mechanism against perceived encroachments by modernity. This theoretical lens explains how ultra-Orthodox political actors negotiate power within Israel's coalition governments, influencing education funding, military policy, and social norms. Additionally, conservatism theory highlights the broader cultural implications of preserving religious identity in a modern state. This tension underpins the ideological divides between secular Israelis advocating for a pluralistic society and religious communities seeking to uphold a Jewish state defined by Halakhic principles (Shalev, 2019).

## **2. Modernization Theory and Societal Change**

Modernization theory sheds light on the pressures for socio-economic and cultural transformation within Israeli society, driven by globalization, technological innovation, and urbanization. The integration of ultra-Orthodox men into the workforce and academia, albeit gradual, reflects modernization's influence in shaping societal norms (Inglehart & Norris, 2020).

The research discusses how economic pressures and demographic shifts have prompted greater Haredi participation in higher education and employment, challenging the strict boundaries between religious and secular spheres. For instance, government policies encouraging workforce inclusion, such as vocational training programs for Haredi men, demonstrate the dual pressures of tradition and modernization (Ami, 2022).

This theoretical lens contextualizes the political instability caused by unresolved ideological tensions. Modernization theory suggests that as societies evolve, traditional structures often resist change, leading to conflict. In Israel, this is evident in the backlash from ultra-Orthodox communities against reforms that threaten their autonomy, such as military service obligations or curriculum standardization in religious schools.

## **3. Conflict Theory and Ideological Polarization**

Conflict theory emphasizes the competition between groups for resources and ideological dominance, providing a framework to analyze the political and social struggles between secular and religious communities in Israel. The paper highlights the centrality of power dynamics in shaping policy debates, such as the allocation of state funds to religious institutions and the exclusion of ultra-Orthodox men from military service.

According to Bourdieu's (1991) concept of cultural capital, the ultra-Orthodox community uses its influence within coalition governments to secure material and symbolic advantages, often at the expense of broader societal cohesion. The recurring electoral deadlock and fragmented coalitions discussed in the paper reflect this power struggle, as religious parties wield disproportionate influence over national policy, creating resentment among secular groups. Furthermore, the conflict theory lens reveals how competing narratives of identity of Jewish religious tradition versus democratic inclusivity exacerbate societal divisions. These tensions are not merely ideological but have tangible implications for governance, education reform, and economic productivity (Collins, 2009).

## **4. Integration of Theories: Bridging Conservatism and Modernity**

The interaction of these theories provides an understanding of Israel's socio-political landscape. While conservatism theory explains the resistance to change within ultra-Orthodox communities, modernization theory highlights the inevitable societal shifts driven by external and internal pressures. Conflict theory, meanwhile, illuminates the power struggles and inequities that arise as these forces collide.

The paper's analysis of the Haredi exemption from military service reflects conservatism's emphasis on preserving religious autonomy, modernization's focus on societal inclusion, and conflict theory's insight into resource allocation and ideological dominance. Together, these frameworks capture the complexities of Israeli society, where competing visions of national identity and governance are both stabilizing and destabilizing forces.

## **CONCLUSION**

The interplay between conservatism and modern society in Israel exemplifies a broader global tension between preserving traditional values and adapting to the demands of a

rapidly evolving world. This paper examines how religious conservatism, embodied by the ultra-Orthodox (Haredi) community and its political influence, coexists and collides with the progressive and secular currents of Israeli society. Drawing on conservatism theory, modernization theory, and conflict theory, the analysis highlights the complex dynamics at play, including ideological polarization, societal integration, and governance challenges.

### **Conservatism's Role in Shaping Stability and Resistance**

Conservatism emphasizes continuity, evident in the Haredi community's prioritization of Torah study and traditional family structures. This philosophy has played a stabilizing role, providing a sense of identity and moral direction for segments of Israeli society (Scruton, 2017). However, its resistance to societal change has also led to friction with secular and progressive groups advocating for modernization, as seen in debates over education reform and military service (Shalev, 2019).

### **Modernization and Societal Integration**

Modernization theory provides a lens to understand the pressures driving change, including globalization, economic demands, and shifts in demographic patterns. The growing participation of Haredi men in higher education and the workforce signifies the transformative power of modernization, though this transition is gradual and uneven (Inglehart & Norris, 2020). These changes illustrate the dual pressures of adapting to modern norms while preserving cultural and religious identity.

### **Conflict and Ideological Polarization**

Conflict theory explains how competing groups of secular and religious fight for power, resources, and societal dominance. Religious parties leverage coalition politics to block reforms, perpetuating a sense of inequality among secular Israelis and hindering broader societal progress (Collins, 2009). The paper demonstrates that these ideological divides are not merely theoretical but manifest in tangible governance issues, such as budget allocations, military policy, and electoral deadlock.

### **Explaining the Interplay Between Conservatism and Modern Society**

The analysis reveals that conservatism and modern society are not inherently oppositional but exist in a dynamic and evolving relationship. In Israel, the interaction between these forces is marked by negotiation, compromise, and conflict, shaped by the unique socio-political landscape. The influence of Haredi political actors highlights conservatism's ability to assert dominance in a pluralistic society, while the gradual integration of ultra-Orthodox individuals into secular institutions underscores modernization's transformative potential.

This interplay is shaped by external pressures, such as globalization and security challenges, which often exacerbate existing divisions. As Norris and Inglehart (2020) argue, modernization does not entirely displace traditional values but reshapes them, creating hybrid models of identity and governance. In Israel, this is evident in policies that attempt to balance religious autonomy with the demands of a democratic and economically integrated state.

To reconcile these tensions, the paper suggests fostering dialogue between secular and religious communities, strengthening democratic institutions, and promoting equitable representation. As Huntington (1996) notes, addressing ideological divides requires understanding the cultural and historical context in which they arise, as well as the economic and political systems that sustain them.

By examining the case of Israel, this paper sheds light on the broader global phenomena of how conservatism and modernity intersect in shaping society. The Israeli experience highlights both the challenges and opportunities inherent in this interplay, offering valuable insights for other nations grappling with similar tensions. The balance between preserving cultural identity and embracing modern values remains a critical challenge for Israel and societies worldwide, emphasizing the need for inclusive, adaptive approaches to governance and societal integration.

## REFERENCES

- Ami, I. (2022). *Shifting Norms: Ultra-Orthodox Participation in Israeli Society*. Israel Democracy Institute.
- Altemeyer, B., & Hunsberger, B. (2004). Fundamentalism and authoritarianism. In *The Psychology of Religion: An Empirical Approach*. Guilford Press.
- August, V. (2024). Understanding democratic conflicts: The failures of agonistic theory. *Communication and the Public*, 23(2).
- Bourdieu, P. (1991). *Language and Symbolic Power*. Harvard University Press.
- Ben-David, D. (2018). *The Economic Costs of Israel's Social Divisions*. Taub Center for Social Policy Studies.
- Cahana, A. (2019). "Religious Identity and National Service in Israel." *Journal of Israeli Studies*, 14(2), 45–62.
- Cohen, N., & Malach, G. (2020). *The State of Ultra-Orthodox Society in Israel*. Israel Democracy Institute.
- Cohen, J. L. (2019). Populism and the Politics of Resentment. *Jus Cogens* 1, 5–39
- Cohen, N., & Malach, G. (2020). *The State of Ultra-Orthodox Society in Israel*. Israel Democracy Institute.
- Collins, R. (2009). *Conflict Sociology: Toward an Explanatory Science*. Academic Press.
- Dödtmann, T. (2023). Educational Autonomy and Religious Conservatism in Israel: A Case Study of Ultra-Orthodox Communities. *Journal of Education and Religion*.
- Enyedi, Z. (2024). *Conservatism in the Modern Era: Global Challenges and Local Responses*. Oxford University Press.
- Fisher, L. (2016). *Religious Politics in a Secular Age: Strategies of Resistance and Adaptation*. Cambridge University Press.
- Goldstein, J. (2022). *Majoritarian Politics and Minority Rights: The Global Struggle for Representation*. Princeton University Press.
- Halbertal, M., & Margalit, A. (1992). *Idolatry*. Harvard University Press.
- Hossain, M. (2023). *Conservatism: A Global Perspective*. Routledge.
- Huntington, S. P. (1996). *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. Simon & Schuster.
- Inglehart, R., & Norris, P. (2020). *Cultural Backlash: Trump, Brexit, and Authoritarian Populism*. Cambridge University Press.
- Kingsbury, S. (2020). The Orthodox Rabbinate and Personal Status Laws in Israel. *Journal of Legal Studies*.
- Laurence, J., & Vaïsse, J. (2006). Religion and minority integration.
- Miller, Y. (2014). Religion and State in Israel: A Framework for Democratic Governance. *Democracy and Religion Quarterly*.
- Ram, U. (2008). Israeli Political Culture: The Intersection of Nationalism and Religion. *Israeli Studies Review*.
- Rosenthal, J. (2024). Religious Conservatism and National Identity: Impacts on Israeli Democracy. *Political Science Perspectives*.

- Sasson, T. (2014). *The New American Zionism*. NYU Press.
- Scruton, R. (2017). *Conservatism: An Invitation to the Great Tradition*. All Points Books.
- Shalev, M. (2019). Religion and Politics in Contemporary Israel: Power Dynamics and Ideological Conflicts. *Israel Studies Review*.
- Stadler, N. (2020). *Yeshiva Fundamentalism: Piety, Gender, and Resistance in the Ultra-Orthodox World*. NYU Press.
- Steven, M. (2023). The right and religion in European Union politics: from 'confessionalism' to 'conservatism.' *Religion, State and Society*, 51(4–5), 331–344
- Weiss, T. (2023). "Military Service and Social Solidarity in Israel's Changing Landscape." *Contemporary Jewish Studies Quarterly*, 32(1), 21–38.
- Tepe, S. (2005). Religious Parties in Democracies: Challenges to Liberal Values. *Comparative Politics Journal*.
- The Jewish Federations of America. (2022). *Religious Parties and Coalition Politics in Israel: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*.
- Van der Tol, C., & Gorski, P. (2022). *Symbols of Belief: Religious Identity and Public Spaces in Contemporary Societies*. Routledge.