The former Soviet immigrants to Israel have emerged as the central obstacle to achieving peace in the Middle East. An increasing number of the young people in the IDF are the children of Russians and settlers, the hardest-core people against a division of the land. This presents a staggering problem. It's a different Israel. 16% of Israelis speak Russian.1

--Former U.S. President Bill Clinton, September 21, 2010

Introduction

Indeed, since mass emigration from the former Soviet Union (FSU) began, Israel has changed a great deal. There have been two large immigration “waves” from the FSU to Israel, differing in both scale and character. The first wave in the 1970s was largely a result of Zionist conviction.2 The second wave was triggered by the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989 and was more pragmatic in nature. Afraid and uncertain about the future, this second wave exemplified the phenomenon of “panic immigration.”3

Today almost one million FSU immigrants comprise the single largest minority ethnic group in Israel. In turn, their presence has greatly changed the political landscape of Israel and Israeli-Palestinian Peace Process negotiations. Their political position is staunchly right-wing and secular, and their opposition to peace talks and land concessions has proven to be even more aggressive than that of veteran (i.e. have lived in Israel prior to the immigration wave in then1970s, or have assimilated to mainstream Israeli culture and viewpoints) Israelis.

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1 Glasser, 2010.
3 Ibid., p. 96.
This raises the question: how have FSU immigrants created such popular, ultra-right nationalist parties in Israel? First, experts posit that former Soviets are susceptible to mass ideological manipulation, and this vulnerability has been skillfully exploited by the Israeli right. Moreover, the conservative, nationalist, iron-fisted approach used by the right has historically appealed to the former Soviets. Second, the Arab uprising (Intifada Al Aqsa) in 2000 seems to have startled most FSU immigrants, leading to consistent support of a right-wing agenda. Third, FSU Israelis are mostly secularists. They tend to put priority on growing, industrializing cities over religious issues. In turn, they tend to ally themselves with secular parties, such as the right-wing nationalist Likud. In fact, the negative attitude towards Arabs and hard-line position regarding peace negotiations is not usually based on religious views. Rather, negative attitudes towards Arabs are more likely to be a result of common prejudices in the FSU immigrants’ home countries, or because of their post-immigration experience in Israel. Thus, the Israeli government may be able to change FSU immigrants’ extreme political views by changing their experiences in Israel, which could in turn make the Israel-Palestinian peace process more likely to be successful.

The First Wave of FSU Immigration to Israel

Two waves of mass Soviet immigration to Israel occurred in the 1970s and 1990s. These two waves differ in important respects. The first wave was motivated by religion, tradition and disaffection. There was a higher proportion of professing Zionists, who were “pulled” to Israel for ideological reasons. The peak of the first wave was from 1971 to 1974. It consisted of about 170,000 people, with the majority hailing from the periphery of the USSR.

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7 Ibid., p. 98.
8 Ibid.
A quarter of the immigrants came from Georgia, and a third from the Baltic countries and other areas annexed by the USSR.\(^9\)

**The Second Wave**

The amount of FSU immigrants significantly rose in the second wave (1989 to 1993).\(^{10}\) Although this wave has sharply subsided over the past few years, it is ongoing. From 1989 to 2003, 950,000 Jews and their non-Jewish relatives migrated from the FSU to Israel.\(^{11}\) Israel has been by far the most popular destination for FSU immigrants during this period of time. Since 1989, more than 70% of those who left the FSU have gone to Israel, where they now make the single largest “ethnic group” in the Jewish population.\(^{12}\)

The second wave is marked not only by being larger in scale, but also by a shift in motivations for immigration “from Zionist and Jewish reasons to more pragmatic and family motivations.”\(^{13}\) This shift can be explained by the unique socio-political context in which the immigration took place. The second wave was triggered by the collapse of the USSR and is often referred to as “panic immigration.”\(^{14}\) From its onset, immigrants were driven by fear and uncertainty associated with the collapsing Soviet political system, the failing economy, and rising social and ethnic tensions.\(^{15}\) Today, most leave the FSU not because of fear of prolonged chaos, but because of prolonged political and social stagnation in the former Soviet Republics.\(^{16}\) In both cases, though, the decision to migrate is based on pragmatic calculations, not religious ones.

According to a study conducted by Majid Al Haj, when asked about the main factors that affected their decision to immigrate, 67.2% of respondents said that anxiety about their

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\(^9\) Gitelamn, 2004, p. 98.
\(^{10}\) Gitelman, 2006, p. 8.
\(^{11}\) Ibid.
\(^{12}\) Ibid.
\(^{13}\) Gitelman, 2004, p. 97.
\(^{14}\) Ibid., p. 96.
\(^{15}\) Ibid.
\(^{16}\) Gitelman, 2006, p. 8.
children’s future in the FSU was the paramount influence, and only 24% said it was their desire to live in a Jewish state.\textsuperscript{17} In this sense, second wave immigrants were “pushed” from the FSU rather than “pulled” to Israel.\textsuperscript{18} They have come to Israel not out of Zionist conviction, but because it was the most sensible thing to do.\textsuperscript{19}

Another important distinction of the second wave was “chain migration.”\textsuperscript{20} This refers to the phenomenon whereby the steady departure of Jews left the remaining Jews in the FSU more lonely and insecure, and encouraged them to follow their family and friends to Israel.\textsuperscript{21} This chain migration to Israel reached its peak in the 1990s, which coincides with one of the most unstable periods in Russia and the former Soviet Republics. This chain migration continues today and is unlikely to stop until the pool of potential immigrants dissipates.\textsuperscript{22} In many cases, the immigrants are relatives of Jews in Israel, but are non-Jews themselves. In other words, much of the second wave migration has been spurred not by Zionist ideology, but by family reunification.\textsuperscript{23}

\textbf{Military, Economic, and Cultural Consequences of FSU Immigration in Israel}

Regardless of motivation, the immigration from the FSU has been massive, and it has had a great impact on the Israeli military, economy, and culture. In the military, for example, “the Israeli Defense Forces have been able to be more selective in the draft because the manpower pool has increased so dramatically. Reservists have been called up less frequently as well.”\textsuperscript{24} The economic impact of the immigration has also been remarkable, as the immigrants

\begin{itemize}
\item [\textsuperscript{17}] Al Haj, 2004, p. 101.
\item [\textsuperscript{18}] Gitelman, 2004, p. 96.
\item [\textsuperscript{19}] Ibid.
\item [\textsuperscript{20}] Ibid., p. 97.
\item [\textsuperscript{21}] Gitelman, 2006, p. 11.
\item [\textsuperscript{22}] Gitelman, 2004, p. 97.
\item [\textsuperscript{23}] Gitelman, 2006, p. 7.
\item [\textsuperscript{24}] Gitelman, 2004, p. 96.
\end{itemize}
from the FSU have provided enormous economic potential: nearly 55% of them have higher education.\textsuperscript{25} The immigrants that arrived consisted of:

\begin{quote}
13,000 scientists, 80,000 engineers or technicians, and 16,000 in the medical profession. In the period 1989-1992, the number of engineers in Israel more than doubled while the number of physicians rose more than 70%.\textsuperscript{26}
\end{quote}

However, the absorption of the mass of highly educated and skilled immigrants is a short-term problem for the Israel and its economy. But in the long term, “the enormous aliyah [immigration] will stimulate Israel’s economy, especially in housing, infrastructure reconstruction, and the expansion of technology-based industries.”\textsuperscript{27}

Besides transforming Israel’s economy, the strong presence of immigrants from the former Soviet Union is evidenced by a well-developed Russian-language subculture. There are Russian language nightclubs, theaters, libraries, bookstores, newspapers, and magazines that appeal to all generations.\textsuperscript{28} “There are four Russian-language dailies, eleven weeklies, five monthlies, and about fifty local newspapers. They have a weekly circulation of about 250,000.”\textsuperscript{29} In sum, immigrants from the former Soviet Union have created a large cohesive community in Israel, and have deeply penetrated military, economic, social and cultural spheres of the country’s life.

**Political Consequences of FSU Immigration in Israel**

Perhaps most importantly, FSU Immigrants have penetrated the nation’s political sphere. Israeli immigration law facilitates speedy access to the Israeli political system: “the Law of Return allows Jewish immigrants to acquire full citizenship, including suffrage and the right to run for the office, from the day they arrive in Israel”.\textsuperscript{30} Thus, it is likely that FSU

\begin{footnotes}
\item[27] Ibid.
\item[28] Ibid., 99.
\item[29] Ibid.
\end{footnotes}
immigrants will have an impact on Israeli politics for many years to come.\textsuperscript{31} In the present political context, their impact is already significant—the exclusion of Arabs has given the FSU immigrant voting bloc surplus value beyond their proportional size.\textsuperscript{32} For example, in 1996 FSU immigrants shifted their support from the centrist Labor to the right-wing Likud party. This was enough to get Likud's candidate for prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, 53\% of their votes and a victory.\textsuperscript{33} In the 1999 elections, the immigrants then supported the opposition leader Ehud Barak, who was subsequently elected prime minister.\textsuperscript{34} Some say that in Israel, FSU Jews appoint the new prime ministers and fire the old ones. Because of their political clout, “both the right-wing and left-wing Zionist camps have become highly dependent on [FSU immigrants], which [has] allowed [FSU immigrants] to up the ante in political bargaining.”\textsuperscript{35}

**Right Wing Political Orientation**

Because they can shift the course of Israeli politics, it is important to understand the political orientation of FSU immigrants. Different studies reflect the immigrants’ basic orientation: right wing, secular, and unbending on the issue of land concession to Palestine.\textsuperscript{36} There is more continuity than fluctuation in their orientation and voting patterns,\textsuperscript{37} so this trend seems unlikely to change in the near future. In fact, the immigrants from the FSU are more conservative than veteran Israelis. According to a poll, 66.3\% of FSU immigrants view themselves as moderate or extreme-rightist, as opposed to 53.3\% of veteran Israelis.\textsuperscript{38} Only

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{31} Gitelman, 2004, p. 102.
\textsuperscript{32} Al Haj, 2004, p. 136.
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{36} Al Haj, 2004, p. 147.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{38} Halperin, Canetti-Nisim, Hobfoll, & Johnson, 2009, p. 1003.
\end{flushright}
4.3% of immigrants describe their attitudes as left wing, as opposed to 18.5% of veteran Israelis.\(^{39}\)

Furthermore, the two most successful “Russian” parties in Israel—Yisrael Baaliyah and Yisrael Beiteinu—are right wing. Yisrael Baaliyah was created in 1996 by a former Soviet refusnik and prisoner Nathan Sharansky.\(^{40}\) Initially formed as a centrist party, it gradually drifted to the right, until it merged with the right-wing Likud party in 2003.\(^{41}\) Yisrael Beiteinu leans even farther to the right, and is an ultra-right nationalist party. It was formed in 1997 by a Soviet-born politician Avigdor Lieberman, who sought to create a political platform for FSU immigrants that supported a hard-line position in negotiations with the Palestinian authority.\(^{42}\) The party takes a hard-line position on the peace process, which was reflected in their 2009 election slogan: “No Loyalty, No Citizenship.”\(^{43}\) Today, Lieberman is the Israeli foreign minister.

**Finding Political Unity via Fear: Intifada Al Aqsa**

The right-wing political affiliation of FSU immigrants is clear through observance of voting patterns. This is no secret. However, before 2000, FSU immigrants had displayed inconsistent and reactive voting patterns, and especially so during the 1990s. The immigrants had been voting according to their perceived interests.\(^{44}\) They tended to vote “against the party in power, probably because it [was] judged to be responsible for whatever difficulties they encountered in the absorption process.”\(^{45}\) The turning point in FSU immigrants’ political orientation was the uprising called Intifada Al Aqsa in 2000. After this Arab uprising, there was

\(^{41}\) Ibid., p. 139.
\(^{42}\) Ibid.
\(^{43}\) Alfon, n.d.
\(^{44}\) Al Haj, 2004, p. 135.
\(^{45}\) Ibid.
a radicalization in the attitudes of FSU immigrants against Arabs and a strong, systematic shift towards the right-wing political camp.46

Since the events of 2000, FSU immigrants have consistently demonstrated their preference for right-wing parties. In the 2001 parliamentary elections, the immigrants voted in favor of the right-wing Likud and their leader Ariel Sharon, who was elected prime minister with 63% of the vote.47 Likewise, in the 2003 parliamentary elections FSU immigrants voted for the right-wing parties: Likud gained 30% of the votes; National Union, 26%; Shinui, 20%; and Yisrael Baaliyah, 12%. The left wing and centrist parties, mainly Meretz and Labor, gained only 6%; religious and other parties also gained 6% as well.48 The 2009 parliamentary elections were consistent with this voting pattern, as most of the immigrants voted for the right-wing parties— Yisrael Beiteinu, 44.8%; and Likud, 31.1%, respectively. The centrist Kadima, which comprised 10.8% of the vote, lagged behind the right bloc by a large margin.49 In sum, a common enemy further reinforced FSU immigrants to vote as a single, unified bloc after the 2000 uprising.

Finding Political Unity in Secularism, not Judaism

Though many FSU immigrants to Israel are Jewish, a common religion does not seem to be a unifying factor in political terms. The FSU immigrants’ secular orientation is quantified by the findings of Dr. Majid Al Haj. According to self-identification, attitudes, and actual behavior, the vast majority (74%) are secular, 24.6% are traditional, and only 1.4% are religious.50 The secular orientation of Israelis from the FSU takes root in (1) the official policy toward Jews in the Soviet Union, and (2) in the modern Israeli immigration policy, which allows non-Jewish relatives of Jews to immigrate to Israel.

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48 Ibid., p. 147.
49 Finkel, n.d.
In the Soviet Union, “Jewish religious identity and institutions were suppressed. On the other hand, the regime encouraged secular Jewish culture, including support for Yiddish schools, theaters, and literature.”\(^{51}\) Publications in Hebrew were considered Zionist propaganda and banned.\(^{52}\)

Thus the Jews of the Soviet Union came to be described as “Jews of silence.” They were defined by their Jewish identity, but this definition was only formal, since they were not permitted to build their own social and cultural institutions.\(^{53}\)

Because of these policies, the Soviet Jews became deeply assimilated into the Russian culture and, at the same time, increasingly alienated from Jewish national culture and tradition. To provide evidence of acculturation of the Soviet Jewish community, Majid Al Haj refers to the 1979 census: only 14.24% of Soviet Jews claimed a Jewish language (Yiddish) as their mother tongue, and 5.35% claimed it as their second language.\(^{54}\) At the same time, 97.03% of Soviet Jews spoke Russian, which made them “the most Russified minority in the USSR.”\(^{55}\) The Jewish culture and identity in the Soviet Union were largely Russian. They were deeply detached from religion and defined by society.\(^{56}\)

According to another explanation, the strong secular orientation of the immigrant voters is a result of Israeli immigration law. A 1970 amendment to the Law of Return accords the right to immigrate to non-Jewish (according to the Jewish religious law “Halakhah”) relatives of Jews.\(^{57}\) As a result, a large proportion of non-Jewish immigrants who have Jewish relatives in Israel have migrated to Israel during the last two decades. These immigrants were motivated to relocate mostly because of uncertainty about the future, desire for stability, and family reunification, but not so much for religious reasons. The influx of non-Jewish immigrants to Israel has dramatically increased over time. According to official Israeli statistics, the

\(^{53}\) Markowitz, 1995, as cited by Al Haj, 2004, p. 73.
\(^{54}\) Al Haj, 2004, p. 74.
\(^{56}\) Al Haj, 2004, p. 75.
\(^{57}\) Bard, 2010.
proportion of non-Jews among immigrants rose from 6% in 1989 to 39% in 1998,\textsuperscript{58} and as much as 58% in 2002.\textsuperscript{59} In other words, more than half of the FSU immigrants in Israel are not Jewish.

Notably, the Israeli Law of Return allows non-Jewish immigrants to acquire citizenship, to vote, and to run for office on equal terms with Jewish citizens. Therefore, it is likely that religious parties are going to be even less influential in future Israeli politics. FSU immigrants will not vote for religious parties and will thus weaken their representation in the Knesset, and perhaps in future coalitions as well.\textsuperscript{60} But one can conclude that FSU immigrants’ hard-line attitude toward peace talks and territorial compromise with Palestinians is not solely attributable to religion, if at all.

**The FSU Immigrant Position on the Arab-Israeli Conflict**

Scholars indicate that FSU immigrants generally adhere to political exclusionism, and their take on Arabs is no exception. A group of scholars headed by Eran Halperin revealed that FSU immigrants score higher than veteran Israelis on all measures of exclusionist attitudes toward the Palestinian Israelis.

61.6% of FSU immigrants (as compared to 37.6% of veteran Israelis) support the statement that Palestinian Israelis should be sent out of Israel.\textsuperscript{61} 59% of FSU immigrants, as compared to 41.8% of veteran Israelis, oppose awarding equal rights to Palestinian Israelis.\textsuperscript{62} Also, 80% of FSU immigrants oppose allowing Palestinian Israelis to bring members of their immediate family to Israel, as compared to 72.3% of veteran Israelis.\textsuperscript{63} 87.5% of FSU immigrants support the denial of citizenship to Israeli Palestinians deemed disloyal to the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{58} Al Haj, 2004, p. 88.
\item \textsuperscript{59} Steinberg, 2010.
\item \textsuperscript{60} Gitelman, 2004, p. 106.
\item \textsuperscript{61} Halperin, Canetti-Nisim, Hobfoll, & Johnson, 2009, p. 1004-1005.
\item \textsuperscript{62} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{63} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
state. This is slightly higher than the 86.9% of veteran Israelis who support the denial of citizenship to Israeli Palestinians in the same circumstance. In sum, the community of FSU immigrants is generally the largest and most hostile group towards Arabs in Israeli society.

These attitudes inevitably have political effects. Findings support the statements made by former President Clinton (quoted above on p. 1) and reveal that FSU immigrants tend to be hardliners in their attitudes toward territorial compromise with Palestine. A survey of FSU immigrants revealed that 5.9% of Jewish respondents and 3.7% of non-Jewish respondents think that Israel should return all the territories or a significant part, 9.9% of Jewish respondents and 11.1% of non-Jewish respondents think Israel should make some territorial concessions in return for peace, and 84.4% of Jewish respondents and 85.2% of non-Jewish respondents think Israel should return nothing to the Palestinians.

Elephants Never Forget: Conservatism Caused by the Soviet Experience

The intolerant attitudes harbored by FSU immigrants towards Arabs and peace negotiations are not without irony. Yelenevskaya and Fialkova remark:

[Anti-Semites have always claimed that there is no place for Jews in Russia, and shouts of “Go to your precious Israel!” could be frequently heard in street brawls. Today, it is not unusual to hear former Soviet Jews “sending” Israeli Arabs to go join their brethren in Jordan, Syria or other Arab countries.

An examination of FSU immigrants’ past proves useful in determining how FSU immigrants leaned towards such an extreme position. The ultra-conservative orientation has roots in FSU immigrants’ lives back in the Soviet Union.

First, FSU immigrants will likely never forget the memory of being a suppressed minority in their home country. Consequently, FSU immigrants tend to imitate a similar pattern

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64 Ibid.
65 Ibid.
66 Fein, 1995, as cited in Al Haj. 2004, p. 120.
67 Al Haj. 2004, p. 121.
of interaction with Palestinians, and this time the sides have switched. This “powerful-versus-powerless” pattern of interaction also underpins their desire to live in a mono-ethnic society. In turn, FSU immigrants’ tend to have an extreme dislike for Arabs, though the animosity also stems from Soviet foreign policy that was biased in favor of Arab states. Soviet Jews viewed the Soviet Union’s financial support of some Arab countries as waste at the expense of domestic need. Additionally, Soviet propaganda used to portray Arabs as allies and Israelis as aggressors. Because of the FSU immigrants’ past exposure to this media manipulation, they began to resent Arabs, and even associate Arabs with anti-Semitism.

FSU immigrants’ concept of state and expectations of leaders are also derived from their experience in their homeland: “Russian patriotism is love for the Fatherland, the state, government, and the leader (as these are listed, the intensity of emotions increases).” A strong leader is willing to fight enemies and protect the interests of a strong nation at any cost. A conservative, nationalistic, iron-fisted approach, (which is now being used by the right in Israel) has historically appealed to Russians. Also, “the Israeli sociologist Alek Epstein asserts that in spite of the high average educational level, former Soviets are susceptible to mass ideological manipulation, which has been successfully used by the Israeli right.” For the above reasons, many FSU immigrants are predisposed to have right-wing political orientation prior to arrival in Israel.

The Development of FSU Immigrants’ Extreme Views after Immigration

There are two primary explanations for FSU immigrants’ conservative transformation after immigrating to Israel. First, they have low socio-economic status in Israel. Competition for scarce resources is closely related to the emergence of hostility and xenophobic attitudes.
Secondly, there is great fear associated with terrorism in Israel. This fear affects immigrants more deeply than veteran Israelis, as it enhances uncertainty and instability already present in post-immigration life.\(^\text{75}\)

Post-immigration motivations for FSU immigrants were and are more socioeconomic and psychological. From the socioeconomic perspective, the exclusionist attitudes of the immigrants from the FSU are caused by “status-inconsistency”—possessing high education but low income. This imbalance became a common problem among FSU immigrants.\(^\text{76}\) The issue of status inconsistency reflects the inability of the Israeli economy to absorb the immigrants. This challenge has troubled the Israeli government for more than two decades. The influx of the Soviet immigrants has been a double-edged sword for the country’s economy. Admittedly, highly educated and skilled immigrants have been a crucial source of human capital for Israel. But in the recent past, immigrants have burdened an Israeli economy that is struggling with the integration of one million new Israelis.

This conflicting dynamic is illustrated by the following statistics: more than 55% of the Soviet immigrants have some university-level education, as opposed to 40.4% of the veteran Israelis.\(^\text{77}\) However, despite this higher level of university education, immigrant status puts this group at a disadvantage: as many as 63% of the Soviet immigrants earn less than the average wage, compared to 37.8% of veteran Israelis.\(^\text{78}\) “The 36,000 teachers who have migrated [from the FSU] make up over one-quarter of the number of the Israeli teachers– but only about 6,000 have found work as teachers.”\(^\text{79}\) The majority of highly educated immigrants who had reputable jobs in their home countries must settle for low-paying, menial jobs.

\(\text{\textsuperscript{75}}\) Halperin, Canetti-Nisim, Hobfoll, & Johnson, 2009, p. 1008.  
\(\text{\textsuperscript{76}}\) Ibid., p. 1000.  
\(\text{\textsuperscript{77}}\) ibid., p. 1003.  
\(\text{\textsuperscript{78}}\) Ibid.  
\(\text{\textsuperscript{79}}\) Gitelman, 2004, p. 96.
The status inconsistency between educational level and earnings correlates with intolerance and exclusionist attitudes towards minorities.80 A marginalized group’s extreme intolerance to other marginalized groups has been recognized as the “realistic group conflict theory.” The theory holds that “competition over scarce resources and socioeconomic pressure posed by one group toward another are substantial determinants of negative attitudes.”81

The pattern described in the realistic group conflict theory precisely reflects the causes of FSU Israelis’ intolerance towards Palestinians. It shows that the lack of personal and social resources leads FSU immigrants to regard Palestinians as competitors, toward whom they display open hostility. Those FSU immigrants that fail to make expected resource gains tend to turn to such intolerant “coping mechanisms.”82 Conversely, studies show that once the immigrants manage to increase their levels of resource gains, they appear to be less exclusionist.83

Socioeconomic vulnerability is also closely connected to psychological vulnerability among immigrants. Psychological vulnerability may explain FSU immigrants’ hostility toward Palestinians in terms of fear of terrorism. “Personal perceived threat of terror is a powerful antecedent of ethnic exclusionism.”84

According to Terror Management Theory, threats to mortality result in increased in-group/out-group distinctions, and discrimination, prejudice or intolerance toward relevant out-groups. One form of defending oneself from threat and mortality salience is to artificially create intimacy with others on the basis of shared fears, nationalism and hatred of out-groups. Psychological distress resulting from ongoing terrorism has been found to foster hostility towards minorities.85

Of course, one could argue that every Israeli is exposed to terrorism, and it is therefore pointless to cite terrorism as a cause of FSU immigrant hostility towards Palestinians. Yet,

81 Ibid.
83 Ibid., p. 1006.
84 Ibid., p. 1005.
85 Ibid., p. 1009.
studies have shown that terrorism particularly radicalizes immigrants, as it adds to the sense of uncertainty and insecurity already present in their post-immigration life. As Halperin puts it, “when immigrants are faced with two possible sources of trauma, i.e. immigration and exposure to terrorism, intolerance may be further heightened.”86 Terrorism enhances the impact of the economic loss associated with immigration. Immigrants interpret terrorist threats as a physical danger and an interference with their group’s main desire– to achieve a larger share of resources and wealth.87 Such interference deeply affects immigrants, as they are a very psychologically and economically vulnerable group. As a result, former Soviet immigrants typically display higher levels of hostility towards Arabs than the assimilated veteran Israelis.88

Conclusion: Changing FSU Immigrants’ Perception

Gitelman did not exaggerate when he stated, “massive immigration of Jews from the Soviet Union has changed Israel forever.”89 The influx of immigrants from the former Soviet Union to Israel in the 1970s and 1990s has turned into the single largest ethnic group in Israel today. FSU immigrants carry great influence over the country’s economic, social, and cultural life. Most importantly, they have become politically active. Their votes have come to affect the course of Israeli public policy and peace negotiations with Palestine. These FSU immigrants display higher levels of exclusionism and intolerance toward Arabs than veteran Israelis.90 Some of these immigrants have held these views for a long time, while others develop hard right attitudes after immigration.

If the Israeli government sets out to address the issue of intolerance towards Arabs and toward territorial compromise, it would be best to address the causes of these attitudes that have developed after immigration, such as the issue of absorption and status inconsistency, as long

86 Ibid., p. 1008.
87 Ibid., p. 1000.
88 Ibid., p. 1009.
held ideological beliefs inherited from the Soviet Union are unlikely to change. The viewpoints are too deeply embedded. However, addressing the socio-economic issues of FSU immigrants may be feasible. The Israeli government could change some FSU immigrants’ perspectives via gradual integration of FSU immigrants into the nation’s economy. Admittedly, this is a task easier said than done. It remains to be seen whether the Israeli government can rein in the extreme right-leaning FSU immigrants, and if it can, whether the government is even interested in changing the FSU immigrants’ opposition to compromise with the Palestinians.
**References**


