

Israel's future rests on the electoral shoulders of Tel-Avivians

by

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Think your vote doesn't matter? In Tel-Aviv alone, eligible voters who remained at home during the last elections were responsible for four Knesset seats going down the drain. In the upcoming election, these are four seats that can decide whether our grandchildren's Tel-Aviv will look like today's Jerusalem. Think that's an exaggeration? It's time you got to know the real Israel, the one behind the veil of spins and superficial public discourse.

Israel's GDP per hour – which determines whether it's possible to pay a high hourly wage – is steadily receding from that of the leading G7 countries. Despite being home to the “Start-up Nation”, the gap between the G7 and us has more than tripled since the 1970s. Israel is on an economic trajectory that will become unsustainable in a few decades – with all of the existential implications this has for the country's future.

Knowledge in core subjects (mathematics, science and reading) among about half of Israel's children – those belonging to the fastest-growing sections of the population – is at the level of third world countries. As adults, these children will not be able to maintain a modern economy, which is a necessary condition for modern health and welfare systems – not to mention mandatory for the defense of Israel in the world's most violent region. The ultra-Orthodox, Haredi, schools' level of education in the core fields is so low that the majority (53 percent of women and 76 percent of men) of the very few who even attempt the academic track, eventually drop out. One-fifth of Israeli children today are Haredim. According to the Central Bureau of Statistics, one-half of Israel's children will be Haredim in just two generations.

Already today, half of Israel's adult population is so poor that they do not pay any income tax at all. In 2000, just 20 percent of the adult population footed the bill for 83 percent of the country's entire income tax revenue. This burden on the top two income deciles has since climbed to 92 percent today, with the gross income of the average income earner in the ninth income decile only 18,800 shekels per month (\$68,300 annually). Keep in mind that these 20 percent comprise Israel's most educated and skilled persons, many of whom have options abroad. On these ever-narrowing shoulders sits a steadily increasing burden that will eventually bring down the house if we don't begin providing the tools and conditions to population sectors that we so desperately need to include in the modern, global economy.

Israel's upcoming election is not the place for cynicism and niceties. Not all politicians lie on the most important issues, and even if it's difficult to find your ideal candidate, grow up. Israel is facing a demographic-democratic point of no return. Laws to save the country's future that are already difficult to pass in the Knesset today will be impossible to pass after we cross that Rubicon.

For once, this is not an election between right and left, religious and secular or Jews and Arabs. This is the first time that political constellations – inconceivable in the past – are possible. If we don't act today, these constellations, which have the ability to return Israel to a sustainable route, may become impossible to bring together again in the future.

Tel-Avivians, remove your blinders. This may be one of the final opportunities – perhaps the last one – for the four Knesset seats perennially sitting on your couch to save Israel's future. And for those tuning in from Givatayim, Ramat Gan and the Sharon towns, you're housing three

additional seats that sat at home last time, seats that can be attached to those from Tel-Aviv and can make all the difference that's needed.

In a slight alteration of the common expression in Anglo-Saxon weddings abroad: Vote now, or forever hold your peace.