



Journalist Fellowship Paper

# The Patriots effect: Israel's shifting civil discourse under Netanyahu

By **Daide Lerner**

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## Introduction

On 16 January 2009, Israel's large-scale Operation Cast Lead was still raging in Gaza. Palestinian doctor Izzeldin Abuelaish was living in the north of the strip. Having worked in Israeli hospitals, he was well known in Israel and spoke fluent Hebrew.

Journalist Shlomi Eldar from Channel 10, today's Channel 13, had taken to calling Dr Abuelaish for updates from inside the strip. He wanted to share human stories from the Palestinian side with his audience in Israel.

On that fateful Friday, however, it was Dr Abuelaish who placed a call to Eldar. Israeli tank fire had hit the doctor's apartment. Three of his daughters and one of his nieces were killed. With his relatives' remains strewn around the room, still in a state of shock, Dr Abuelaish dialled Eldar's number.

Eldar was live on air at the time: about to interview Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni. Acting on a gut feeling, he decided to pick up and then [put Dr Abuelaish on speaker](#) for everyone at home to hear.<sup>1</sup> The doctor's anguished wails – “*My God, what have we done?*” – shook the Israeli public.

Two days later, the war came to an end.

At a conference in London towards the end of 2024, I had the opportunity to ask former Prime Minister Ehud Olmert if the incident played a role in convincing him to stop the operation. He said he did not stop the war because of it, but that it had left a profound impression on him.

Replicating such coverage on Israeli television today would be “absolutely impossible”, according to Eldar. Amid the 2023 Israel– Hamas war, he told me, “Israeli TV and media don't show anything from Gaza.”

He has a point: human stories of Palestinians from Gaza were nowhere to be seen on Israeli TV during the conflict. In wake of the 7 October attacks, Israeli journalists were absorbed in their own domestic drama. An estimated 1,200 Israelis were killed

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<sup>1</sup> Middle East Monitor (MEMO), 2017. Gaza father on phone with Israeli TV as tank shells kill his 3 daughters. [video online] Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LodLfrMckus> [Accessed 15 Jan. 2025].

on 7 October 2023, with around 250 taken into Gaza as hostages. Since then, more than 46,000 Palestinians – one in 50 people in Gaza – have been killed and 22,500 received life-altering injuries in a brutal offensive, according to the United Nations. The conflict also spilled over into the West Bank and surrounding states.

The lack of Palestinian voices, like Dr Abuelaish’s back in 2009, has a second, more practical explanation. In my 2024 book, *[Il sentiero dei dieci, una storia fra Israele e Gaza](#)*, (“The path of the ten, a story between Israel and Gaza”), I document decades of growing separation between the two populations involved in this conflict.<sup>2</sup> Growing structural and political blockades have meant many connections have simply been lost.

After 17 years of near-total blackout since the Hamas takeover of Gaza in 2007, few Israelis still retained contacts inside the strip on the eve of the war. Even some journalists, who are more likely to develop such relations for work, admit to having grown apart from their sources. Whatever the relative weight of these factors, ultimately the outcome is that today many Israelis lack a full picture of what’s going on in the war. Social media can help to an extent, but is easily dismissed in an age of online misinformation and algorithmic bias.

Some observers might say these circumstances are not surprising: a nationalist spirit impacting coverage during wartime is inevitable – “rally around the flag” is not uniquely Israeli. But the disconnect of today’s coverage with the rest of the world’s has grown wider and many voices – and facts – have been left behind.

This project examines an extreme example of nationalist coverage over the past year: Channel 14’s current affairs show, *Hapatriotim* (“The Patriots”). By identifying recurring themes across eight episodes and incorporating insights from journalists and media researchers, this analysis examines the show’s ideological narrative and its implications for Israeli media and public discourse.

Asked for their response to the findings that follow, Channel 14 did not respond.

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<sup>2</sup> Lerner, D. (2024) *Il sentiero dei dieci: Una storia fra Israele e Gaza*. Milano: Piemme.

# The rise of Channel 14

Created in 2014 as a niche Jewish heritage outlet, [Now 14](#) (colloquially known as Channel 14), is a fast-rising, government-aligned commercial TV channel.<sup>3</sup>

Originally called “Channel 20”, the station was rebranded in 2021 and began gaining traction. By early 2023, it had established itself as an influential player with soaring ratings for its prime-time programming.

Its controlling shareholder is Yitzchak Mirilashvili, a Russian Israeli tycoon and co-founder of VK, the Russian equivalent of Facebook. His father, Mikhael Mirilashvili, is also a billionaire, with diverse business interests ranging from real estate to renewable energy.

While maintaining a traditional religious element, with time Channel 14 shifted strategically toward news and politics – aligning itself with the far right and Benjamin Netanyahu, Israel’s current and longest serving prime minister.

Netanyahu has long vied for media supportive of his policies, frequently accusing mainstream outlets of bias against him. After losing elections in 1999, he famously lamented: “I need my own media”. And his ongoing corruption trials include allegations of direct interference with the media for more favourable coverage.

To counter this alleged bias and support Netanyahu’s political comeback, in 2007, the late American tycoon Sheldon Adelson launched the free newspaper *Israel Hayom*, often nicknamed *Bibiton*, meaning “Bibi’s newspaper”.

*Israel Hayom* became the most-read newspaper in Israel but, “Netanyahu really wanted a [supportive TV] channel,” said Dr Ayala Panievsky, a Presidential Fellow at City University of London and a specialist in Israeli media research. “Adelson deemed it too expensive at the time; Netanyahu has been waiting for this moment for years.”

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<sup>3</sup> Now 14, 2025. Homepage. [online] Available at: <https://www.now14.co.il/> [Accessed 15 Jan. 2025].

## ‘The Patriots’: propaganda in prime time

Channel 14’s flagship daily current affairs show is *Hapatriotim* (“The Patriots”). Airing Saturday to Thursday at 9pm Israel time for 60 to 90 minutes, the programme features a rotating host and a panel of six commentators, predominantly far-right pundits or former liberals turned nationalists, who discuss current events.

As Ruth Margalit observed in a recent essay for [The New Yorker](#), “They seem to spend more time picking apart social-media posts by liberal activists than they do discussing policy.”<sup>4</sup> The panel discussions combine news coverage with satirical segments and are widely discussed and often contested in public, academic, and professional circles.

Filmed in front of a studio audience, the show’s set is dominated by a futuristic blue arc-shaped desk: the host seated at its centre with panellists to either side. Surrounding the desk, a semi-circle of red vertical columns evokes a modern Parthenon. The studio is bathed in dramatic red and blue lighting, while background screens project prominent patriotic visuals, including large Israeli flags and nationalist slogans such as, “With God’s help, together we will win”.

Understanding the prevailing discourse on this show provides a glimpse into the worldview of an increasingly influential outlet, and provides some context to the broader disconnect between the perception of the war inside and outside Israel. It is also mirrors the ideology of Israel’s current political elite, although it should be noted – from this perspective – that a gap exists between Channel 14 and other, more moderate Israeli TV channels.

To document narrative themes, I reviewed a sample of eight episodes that aired between May and August 2024, covering about 12 hours of footage.<sup>5</sup>

### Dehumanisation of the enemy

Key to all of the themes that emerged in this review was the lack of coverage of civilian suffering inside Gaza. In all episodes reviewed for this project, journalists on *The Patriots* reported no stories from inside Gaza, showed no images of those killed

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<sup>4</sup> Margalit, R., 2025. Netanyahu’s media poison machine. *The New Yorker*, [online] 20 Jan. Available at: <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2025/01/20/netanyahus-media-poison-machine> [Accessed 15 Jan. 2025].

<sup>5</sup> The broadcast dates of shows reviewed are 16 and 21 May, 1 and 6 June, 17 and 25 July, and 17 and 20 August. All are available online at <https://www.youtube.com/@now14>

or injured by Israel Defense Forces (IDF) attacks, showing no empathy or acknowledgement of civilian loss of life in the strip.

For several months during the war, Channel 14's website displayed a counter showing the total number of Palestinians killed in Gaza – including children – under the banner “Terrorists we eliminated”.

Indeed, acknowledging civilian casualties in Gaza seems to be a taboo topic on the show, and public statements that do so are framed as a form of treason. The *New Yorker* report notes how Itamar Fleischmann, one of the anchors, said of Gazans, “I think the more humane solution is to starve them”, while Inon Magal, the face of the show, commented in June, “Wipe those people out. As far as I'm concerned, let 500 civilians remain there.”

Palestinians were portrayed as [worse than Nazis](#) on a 25 July episode when one member of the panel argued, “[Germans] came with a culture based on which it was possible to redevelop, [with Palestinians] this is not the case.”<sup>6</sup> On the [17 July 2024](#) episode, humanitarian aid amid an unprecedented crisis in Gaza was dismissed as delivering “Nutella, mangoes or bananas, while we [Israelis] are fighting for our existence”.<sup>7</sup>

### **Reframing international outcry: Nazis and antisemites**

Biden and the American Democrats, despite fully backing Israel throughout the war, are portrayed as hostile on [1 June 2024](#) and in several other episodes.<sup>8</sup> In a similar vein, international bodies criticizing the IDF's conduct in the war are labelled “antisemitic”, such as in the [21 May 2024](#) show.<sup>9</sup>

The same episode tackles the news of ICC Chief Prosecutor Karim Khan's recommendation to issue arrest warrants for Netanyahu and then Defense Minister Gallant, citing insufficient evidence that Israeli courts were investigating the alleged violations. Rather than prompting a discussion on IDF conduct in Gaza or ways to

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<sup>6</sup> Channel 14, 2024. The Patriots – 25 July 2024. [video online] Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RMABKhSioUo> [Accessed 16 Jan. 2025].

<sup>7</sup> Channel 14, 2024. The Patriots – 17 July 2024. [video online] Available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9jN-\\_xyBgL4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9jN-_xyBgL4) [Accessed 16 Jan. 2025].

<sup>8</sup> Channel 14, 2024. The Patriots – 1 June 2024. [video online] Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8psKeOzPFLk> [Accessed 16 Jan. 2025].

<sup>9</sup> Channel 14, 2024. The Patriots – 21 May 2024. [video online] Available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LP\\_-\\_I-NyL4&t=26s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LP_-_I-NyL4&t=26s) [Accessed 16 Jan. 2025].

minimise civilian harm, Yotam Zimri, a prominent personality on *The Patriots*, compared the ICC to “a Nazi court” and called the chief prosecutor “an antisemite”.

“If you think that this court will ever come out against Biden or Britain, you live in a fantasy world,” he told other panellists, accusing the court of double standards. “It’s antisemitism and [as such] it will happen only to Jews.” Zimri also claimed Biden was the main person responsible for the ICC initiative, since he “created an atmosphere” where such a step could be considered. “With Trump, it would have never happened,” he said.

In the [June 1 episode](#), Biden is described as “not a friend of Israel” and criticised for releasing a statement on Shabbat, which is portrayed as showing a lack of respect toward Jews.

One of the reasons Biden and the Democrats were often bashed on *The Patriots* is their perceived restraining influence on Israel’s use of military force. For example, Biden was criticised for pressuring Israel not to wage a military campaign on Rafah without addressing humanitarian concerns. (Israel eventually moved on with the operation anyway.)

The Biden administration’s support of a hostage ceasefire deal between Israel and Hamas was another target for anti-American rhetoric on the show, since the far right in Israel has long opposed such agreements.

After an initial hostage ceasefire deal in November 2023, where over 100 Israelis were released, the two sides only reached a new, long-delayed deal in mid-January 2025. The far right fears a ceasefire will offer Hamas an opportunity to regroup, that negotiating with them gives them legitimacy, and that a deal may be seen as capitulation, among other arguments.

On *The Patriots*, negative framing of deals is expressed both implicitly and explicitly. Over several rounds of negotiations, Netanyahu claimed Israel could not afford to leave the so-called Philadelphi corridor, a narrow strip of land on the border between Gaza and Egypt, in case hostages were deported to Iran via Egypt. This argument, widely believed to be flawed by Israel’s own security establishment, was framed credibly on *The Patriots*’ [25 July 2024](#) episode.



In the same episode, Biden was criticised over his long-standing request that Israel come up with a post-war strategy for the strip. Alluding to Biden's old age, Zimri argued that, "Showing Biden the plan for the day after is like buying him green bananas [that he will not be able to eat]."

*The Patriots'* tune on Trump had changed by [January 2025](#), when the new U.S. president pressured Netanyahu to accept the ceasefire deal. "All his people have been lying," said Yotam Zimri. "It's a big disappointment."<sup>10</sup>

### **Hosts, humour and hubris**

Although the host of *The Patriots* rotates between episodes, Yinon Magal has become the face of the show. Prior to joining *The Patriots*, he was an established journalist and had a short stint in politics: he was elected to the Knesset as part of Naftali Bennett's Jewish Home party in 2015. Magal's term, however, was cut short in the wake of sexual harassment allegations against him. After returning to journalism, he joined Channel 20 (as Channel 14 was known at the time) in 2018.

The other two presenters featured on the episodes under review were Yotam Zimri, who feeds his large social media followers a mix of news commentary and jokes, and Itamar Fleishman, a Communications graduate from Ariel University in the West Bank, and a former political spokesperson.

Reaction shots reveal a studio audience wearing T-shirts with nationalist slogans or with Israeli flags draped across their shoulders. They burst into seemingly spontaneous and rapturous rounds of applause after video clips of Netanyahu or strong statements by members of the panel.

The show does not try to conceal its right-wing inclinations; it is rather explicit about them. [In academic circles](#), it's what might be described as "political alternative media" – that is, a media that is not obeying traditional notions of objectivity and neutrality but is very direct about its political orientation and its criticism of competing ideologies and news outlets.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Levinson, C. (2025) 'Trump's Mideast envoy forced Netanyahu to accept a Gaza plan he repeatedly rejected', Haaretz, 13 January. Available at: <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2025-01-13/ty-article/.premium/trumps-mideast-envoy-forced-netanyahu-to-accept-a-gaza-plan-he-repeatedly-rejected/00000194-615c-d4d0-a1f4-fbfdce850000> (Accessed: 15 January 2025).

<sup>11</sup> Strömbäck, J. (2023). Political Alternative Media as a Democratic Challenge. *Digital Journalism*, 11(5), 880–887. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2023.2178947>

Reports on the war are most often compiled from IDF operational footage accompanied by catchy, glorifying music. In the [July 17](#) episode, for example, the footage is accompanied by the militaristic hip-hop song *Harbu Darbu*. The song refers to “a bunch of fucking rats coming out of the tunnels” and calls Palestinians “children of Amalek”.<sup>12</sup> Critics have denounced the song as a call for genocide.<sup>13</sup>

The show is fast-paced and uses humour and satire in an entertaining and engaging way. This is in stark contrast to the start of each episode, when there is devout silence as the names of the day’s fallen soldiers are read out.

### **Guests with extremist views**

Toward the end of each episode, a guest from civil society is invited for an interview with the main presenter. The choice of guests often sends a strong message, too.

On [16 May 2024](#), Itzik Buntzel was the guest: the father of late Staff Sergeant Amit Buntzel who was killed during military action in Gaza.<sup>14</sup> Buntzel is an outspoken activist and a fierce critic of mainstream Israeli media as part of the Heroism Forum, a collection of bereaved families of deceased soldiers who call for a continuation of the operation in Gaza until “complete victory”.

Buntzel spoke against the possibility of returning Gaza to Palestinian control. “Could it be that our children were killed in vain, and we paid the price for the Palestinian Authority, or other murderers, to rule Gaza?”, he asked. Buntzel also called on Netanyahu to fire then Defense Minister Yoav Gallant, whom he called a “coward”. Gallant, a relatively independent voice within the government, was seen as too moderate in far-right circles, and was fired in November 2024.

The guest on [6 June 2024](#) was Hezi Nehama, an IDF reserve officer campaigning for the army to take a harsher approach in its fighting in Gaza.<sup>15</sup> Rather than aiming for a narrow victory, he said, “We need a result of 5-0, 7-0... it doesn’t matter, but it

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<sup>12</sup> Children of Amalek is a reference to a tribe whom God instructs Israelites to wipe from earth’s memory in religious texts.

<sup>13</sup> Al Jazeera English, 2023. Israeli pro-war song condemned as ‘genocidal’ tops the chart. [video online] Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kwfb0Jo0Sxc> [Accessed 16 Jan. 2025].

<sup>14</sup> Channel 14, 2024. The Patriots – Full Broadcast, 16 May 2024. [video online] Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CtMr-iZS2Ww> [Accessed 16 Jan. 2025].

<sup>15</sup> Channel 14, 2024. The Patriots – Full broadcast, 6 June 2024. [video online] Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8psKe0zPFLk> [Accessed 16 Jan. 2025].

must be clear,” he said. IDF officers, he complained, “do not know how to lead the war to a decisive victory”.

On [17 July 2024](#) *The Patriots* platformed Shlomo Yehezkel Hai Sarid, a founding member of the radical Israeli movement Tzav 9. In June, the U.S. Department of State announced sanctions against the group describing it as “a violent extremist Israeli group that has been blocking, harassing, and damaging convoys carrying lifesaving humanitarian assistance to Palestinian civilians in Gaza [...] by blockading roads, sometimes violently, along their route from Jordan to Gaza, including in the West Bank”.

The guest, a target of these sanctions, arrived wearing a T-shirt featuring the name and logo of his movement and received a hero’s welcome from the panel and the public. “If the Americans say about you that you endanger the Middle East for the fact that you are fighting against the importation of boxes of Nutella, mangoes or bananas, while we are fighting for our existence, I just want to take my hat off [to honour you]”, one of the leading commentators said.

By letting aid into Gaza, Sarid claimed Israel was losing negotiating power for a hostage release deal. He also said the IDF should control the aid all the way to its final beneficiaries, rather than handing it over to Palestinians inside the strip. Sarid had been suspended from reserve duty in the wake of his extremist activism but was about to be reinstated in the army and return to fight in Gaza. “Did someone from the government, from the state, from the justice ministry, from the foreign ministry, speak to you?,” host Itamar Fleischman asked him, referring to the American sanctions. “Did anyone try to understand the situation – support, help?”

On [20 August 2024](#), *The Patriots* hosted Elhanan Gruner from Yitzhar, an Israeli settlement widely considered to be the most violent in the West Bank. Gruner, who has been arrested for his radical anti-Palestinian activism in the past, was presented as a journalist for *Kol HaYehudi*, a local settler run online magazine. “In the West Bank we feel like it’s the 6 of October,” he said, alluding to the eve of the 7 October terror attacks. He called on the army to act against Palestinians preventatively, rather than waiting “for the person to carry out an attack”.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Channel 14, 2024. The Patriots – Full Broadcast, 16 May 2024. [video online] Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lGcIT4cODsA> [Accessed 16 Jan. 2025].

# The political economy of Channel 14's rise

In September 2024, three Israeli organisations – the Democratic Bloc, Zulat for Equality and Human Rights, and Hatzlacha: Movement for the Promotion of a Fair Society – compiled a report about Channel 14, accusing it of racism and incitement to war crimes.<sup>17</sup>

The groups documented 50 statements made during coverage since the start of the war that called for genocide or supported genocide against the Palestinians. They also listed 150 statements they viewed as calling for the commission of crimes against humanity and war crimes or endorsing the commission of such crimes. In a response issued to the [Guardian](#) via its US-based lawyers, Channel 14 dismissed the report as “baseless and highly defamatory” and noted a complaint had been dismissed by the high Court in August 2024.<sup>18</sup>

On its website, the [Zulat organisation](#) delves into the political economy behind Channel 14's rise. It details how a 2018 legal amendment allowed Channel 14 to be branded as a “microchannel”, and paved the way to boosted state support because, “significant benefits [are] given to the so-called microchannels”.<sup>19</sup>

Zulat further notes that, “Channel 14's flagship programme currently enjoys ratings that exceed those of Kan 11 and occasionally those of Channel 13 as well,” making the denomination as “microchannel” questionable. The complaint argued the good ratings make “clear that the far-reaching concessions to Channel 14 are intended to conserve it as the government's propaganda channel [...]”

These and other regulatory benefits are impactful, yet they can be difficult to keep track of as they come as part of complicated legislative bills. As such they can fall off the radar of observers and commentators.

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<sup>17</sup> Cohen, I.D., 2024. Israel's Channel 14 has repeatedly called for genocide against Palestinians in Gaza. Haaretz, 24 September. [online] Available at: <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2024-09-24/ty-article-magazine/.premium/israels-channel-14-has-repeatedly-called-for-genocide-against-palestinians-in-gaza/00000192-1f2e-d515-a1fa-5f3e99550000> [Accessed 16 Jan. 2025].

<sup>18</sup> Borger, J., 2024. Ultranationalist TV Channel 14 becomes most-watched news source in Israel. The Guardian, [online] 3 November. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/nov/03/ultranationalist-tv-channel-14-most-watched-news-source-israel> [Accessed 23 January 2025].

<sup>19</sup> Zulat, 2024. Government uses regulatory benefits to establish Channel 14 as propaganda arm. Zulat for Equality and Human Rights. [online] Available at: <https://en.zulat.org.il/government-uses-regulatory-benefits-to-establish-channel-14-as-propaganda-arm/> [Accessed 16 Jan. 2025].

On [16 January 2025](#), an appeal was lodged with the Attorney General's office by Israel's Journalists' Association.<sup>20</sup> It asks why, under Netanyahu's administration, the volume of government advertising on Channel 14 has jumped by 280%, while other channels have suffered cuts. The complaint said the budgetary changes were not in line with ratings.

Netanyahu has shown support for Channel 14 in other ways. His first interview with Israeli media since the 7 October attack was given to *The Patriot* on 23 June 2024, and, despite granting interviews only rarely, he bestowed the honour on Channel 14 again later on in the war. When he allows time for questions after press conferences, Channel 14 journalists are often given priority.

Netanyahu also supports Channel 14 by sharing its content on his social media channels. By comparison, other mainstream outlets are the target of his vitriolic rhetoric. Panellists on *The Patriots* embrace Netanyahu's anti-media rhetoric, often referring critically to "[the media](#)" as if they were not part of the industry. This is somewhat reminiscent of Netanyahu's tendency to bash Israel's "elites" despite having been in power for many years.

Positioning itself as an underdog in opposition to mainstream outlets is another reason why Channel 14 may be considered "[an alternative political media](#)". One way of doing so is using the slogan "We have no other television," which echoes the Israeli slogan "We have no other land".

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<sup>20</sup> The Seventh Eye, 2024. Netanyahu government significantly increases public advertising budgets for Channel 14. [online] Available at: <https://www.the7eye.org.il/540663> [Accessed 16 Jan. 2025].

# The slow creep of extremism to mainstream

Channel 14's sustained growth in ratings earned it the [Guardian](#) headline, "The ultranationalist TV channel fast becoming Israel's most-watched news source". However, focusing solely on this development risks overlooking the broader tectonic shift in Israel's media landscape.

While Channel 14 remains in a world of its own compared to other Israeli channels, the so-called "rally around the flag" effect has impacted coverage in more traditional outlets, too. For her upcoming book [The New Censorship](#), Israeli academic Dr Panievsky conducted research on Channel 12, Israel's largest TV station.<sup>21</sup> She found that it paid little attention to victims of IDF operations in Gaza.

Dr Panievsky reviewed more than 700 news items from 50 editions of prime-time Channel 12 news bulletins aired during the first six months of the war and found that only four included mentions of civilians killed in Gaza. Of these, only two included images.

"The situation is worrying both on the level of information, and of moral cues," Dr Panievsky said in an interview for this project. "Large Israeli audiences are not exposed to many of the horrors that we see because they consume Hebrew-speaking news on the Israeli TV. But it's also about the signals that the Israeli journalists convey: even if you do run into horrific visuals of civilian casualties in Gaza, you won't believe it – because the people you trust told you that's not true," she said. Under these circumstances, criticism of Israel abroad is more easily perceived as unfair singling-out by hostile actors.

Data from Israeli media watchdog Seventh Eye also provides insight on how Israeli media have changed during the war. In a joint venture with media research company Yifat and the Berl Katznelson Foundation, [Seventh Eye](#) keeps track of how Israel's Arab minority is represented in Israeli media in *Madad Hayitzug* ("Representation Index").<sup>22</sup> Statistics for the first half of 2024 showed that, of 72,000 speakers who appeared in the mainstream media, only 1.5% were Arab. It is a disproportionate

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<sup>21</sup> Panievsky, A. (2025) *The New Censorship*. London: Footnote Press.

<sup>22</sup> The Seventh Eye, "Representation Index," available at: <https://www.the7eye.org.il/topic/%D7%9E%D7%93%D7%93-%D7%94%D7%99%D7%99%D7%A6%D7%95%D7%92> [accessed 16 January 2025].

fraction considering the Arab-Israeli minority accounts for about 22% of the country's population.

Channel 12's Arab-Israeli representation scored even lower: 0.8%, the lowest figure of any mainstream broadcast channel since measurements began eight years ago.

This is a stark contrast to 15 years ago, when Palestinian doctor Izzeldin Abuellaish's shocking interview took place on prime-time Israeli TV. Go back another 15 years to the Israeli news ecosystem of the 1990s, during the so-called Oslo Process, and the disparity is starker still. Back then, Palestinian officials were featured regularly on Israeli television. Representatives such as the Palestine Liberation Organization's top politician Saeb Erekat or former Secretary General of the Fatah Central Committee, Jibril Rajoub, appeared frequently, speaking to Israelis in fluent Hebrew.

# Self-censorship and press freedom in Israel

An interesting aspect in the ongoing transformation of Israel's media discourse is that it is not happening under the duress of state censorship or outright interference by the authorities. Historically, freedom of expression in Israel has been robust, with journalists critical of the government mostly able to do their work.

Censorship in Israel exists but is limited to military affairs. Defence-related reports must be submitted to a military censor, who can block publication of details deemed damaging to state security. Outlets do have the ability to appeal and argue for the release of such information, and sometimes succeed.

Subtler processes, like self-censorship, can also shape news content, however. Journalists may withhold information they deem uncomfortable for the state or the army – such as the high number of civilian casualties caused by IDF strikes in Gaza, or unethical conduct by troops in the strip.

Self-censorship is partly a response to audience pressure. With the trauma of the 7 October attacks, and the ensuing hostage crisis, much of the Israeli public is unwilling to absorb coverage about the tragedies affecting the Palestinians. Societal pressure thus quietly shapes the journalists' choice of news.

In the wake of the 7 October attacks, a fraction of Gaza's population participated in the looting of Israeli border communities, and videos showed some Palestinians celebrating the attack on Israel. This fed into a perception that the civilian population was complicit, further eroding empathy toward Palestinian civilians in the ensuing war.

Upsetting the audience and losing ratings has the knock-on effect of lost advertising revenues. In this sense, following popular sentiment is a response to the commercial need to remain afloat amid a general slump in economic activities – even if comes at the cost of sacrificing journalistic ethics.

Many Israelis are aware of the destruction and loss of life in Gaza and some among the deeply traumatised public may even express satisfaction with it – reflecting a need for more time and cognitive resources to develop empathy for the suffering in the enemy camp.



However, large chunks of the public who don't seek out information actively end up not having a full picture of what's happening around them, missing some of the most gruesome incidents involving Palestinian civilians in the strip. Social media are easy to dismiss as misinformation and tend to create bubbles, feeding us what confirms our biases.

These dynamics increase the disconnect between the ways in which the war is reported on in Israel and abroad. As one prominent Israeli journalist told me: "We're seeing completely different things. We're reading completely different things. The images that we are bombarded with are completely different. Everything about our understanding of what's happening – both intellectually and emotionally – is completely different."

### **Risk of censorship**

While policy threats to freedom of information have yet to be formalised in Israel, there are worrying signs that this could change. Communications Minister Shlomo Karhi has proposed a bill to privatise the national public broadcaster, Kan, leaving the market to commercial channels. A law proposed in the Knesset would ban criticism of Israeli soldiers and could be leveraged to curtail free speech. And left-leaning newspaper *Haaretz*, as described in the next section, has been targeted through the withdrawal of state advertising.

Netanyahu's cabinet has also targeted foreign media. It banned [Al Jazeera](#)'s operations in the country, accusing the channel of being an arm of Hamas.<sup>23</sup> In May, Israeli authorities confiscated equipment from U.S. news agency the [Associated Press](#), claiming its footage of the Gaza strip constituted a security hazard. The equipment was eventually returned following an outcry.<sup>24</sup>

Arab-Israeli journalists have [lost work](#) after voicing opinions amid the war, leading to a climate of intimidation that may silence dissenting minority voices.<sup>25</sup> One

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<sup>23</sup> Jeffery, J. and Gambrell, J., 2024. Israel accuses six Al Jazeera journalists in Gaza of being Palestinian militants. AP News, 24 October, updated 1:14 AM GMT. Available at: <https://apnews.com/article/al-jazeera-journalists-hamas-islamic-jihad-israel-983215f9904bffa7f3d5518235e19e86> [Accessed 16 Jan. 2025].

<sup>24</sup> Federman, J. and Kirka, D. (2024) 'Israel says it will return video equipment seized from AP', Associated Press, 21 May. Available at: <https://apnews.com/article/live-transmission-israel-associated-press-57e8f662907334ba3599156276381190> (Accessed: 16 January 2025).

<sup>25</sup> Haaretz, 2024. Israeli channel fires anchor after insensitive comments about rescued hostage's appearance. Haaretz, 9 June. Available at: <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2024-06-09/ty-article/israeli-channel-fires-anchor-after-insensitive-comments-about-rescued-hostages-appearance/0000018f-fc17-d93d-abbf-fe377a200000> [Accessed 16 Jan. 2025].

exception is the outlet [+972 Magazine](#), known as *Sicha Mekomit* in Hebrew, which provides a wide variety of voices and opinions from writers with different backgrounds. A journalist in Haifa told me the outlet tries to provide an alternative to “the vast majority of Israeli journalists, who are somehow part of the war effort”. She added that, in general, Israeli journalism, “is vibrant, trying to be diverse, and doing relatively a very good job on corruption matters, both political and non-political corruption, speaking truth to power. But when it comes to the Palestinian issue, they adopt the state’s agenda, whether it’s in peace or in war.”

Israel’s hope to brand itself as a champion of freedom of expression is also hardly compatible with its treatment of journalists inside Gaza. The [Committee to Protect Journalists](#) says at least 166 journalists and media workers have been killed since the beginning of the war – the overwhelming majority Palestinians from the strip.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Committee to Protect Journalists, 2024. Full coverage: Israel-Gaza war. CPJ. Available at: <https://cpj.org/full-coverage-israel-gaza-war/> [Accessed 16 Jan. 2025].

## The case of Haaretz

On 27 October 2024, the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* – whose English edition editor, Esther Solomon, hails from Britain – hosted a conference in London for local readers. The event featured prominent guests, including former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and former Palestinian Authority Foreign Minister Nasser al-Qudwa, alongside relatives of hostages still held in Gaza at the time, and victims of the 7 October attack.

Attendees making their way into the conference hall had to navigate through a vocal protest outside. Pro-Palestinian demonstrators had gathered, chanting anti-Israel slogans, some calling for further attacks on Israeli targets by Lebanese, Yemeni, and Palestinian armed groups.

The protesters may not have realised – or perhaps they deemed it irrelevant – that *Haaretz* is one of the few Israeli newspapers to have consistently condemned civilian massacres in Gaza, and are among the only media to frequently criticise, and even expose, alleged war crimes by the IDF.

Founded three decades before the establishment of Israel, *Haaretz* is the country's oldest newspaper. While its non-conformist coverage has limited its circulation, it still wields notable influence. A testament to its legacy is that during the paper's centenary celebration in 2019, when I worked in its Tel Aviv newsroom, it showcased archival photos of every Israeli prime minister holding a copy of the newspaper. I recall helping Ofer Aderet, the journalist collecting them, to locate the hardest image to find: one of Netanyahu.

Inside the London conference, as the protests continued outside, *Haaretz* owner Amos Schocken delivered a speech that would soon ignite controversy back in Israel. His remarks were sharply critical of the Netanyahu government: “The Netanyahu government wants to continue and intensify illegal settlement in territories meant for a Palestinian state. It doesn't care about imposing a cruel apartheid regime on the Palestinian population. It dismisses the human cost – on both sides – of defending the settlements while fighting Palestinian freedom fighters, whom Israel calls terrorists.” He further argued, “The only recourse with such a disastrous government is to ask other countries to bring pressure to bear, as they did to end apartheid in South Africa.”

Schocken's strong language was likely of little surprise to this audience, composed largely of left-leaning members of London's Jewish community. After all, the paper is well known for its positions, and for publishing outspokenly pro-Palestinian journalists like Amira Hass and Gideon Levy.

The speech only became a flashpoint days later, when the footage was aired by Channel 14 – a vehement opposer of *Haaretz's* politics. The broadcast triggered a fierce public backlash. Several of the paper's journalists, who typically hold more moderate views than the ones expressed by Schocken, distanced themselves from his remarks in an [op-ed](#).<sup>27</sup>

The controversy escalated further when Communication Minister Shlomo Karhi decided to take action against *Haaretz*. Netanyahu's cabinet voted to end all government advertisements and tender notices in *Haaretz*, both in print and online – a significant financial blow. In an editorial, *Haaretz* noted that the official justification for the boycott was Schocken's speech in London, but Karhi had been advocating for such measures for over a year.

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<sup>27</sup> Haaretz Editorial, 2024. Terrorists are not freedom fighters. Haaretz, [online] 4 November. Available at: <https://www.haaretz.com/opinion/editorial/2024-11-04/ty-article/.premium/terrorists-are-not-freedom-fighters/00000192-f3d9-d9d0-a996-f3fd6b7a0000> [Accessed 23 January 2025].

## Conclusion

Throughout the war, Israel's news industry has prioritised catering to the public's needs and respecting its sensitivities. Too often, however, this has come at the expense of providing the public with a comprehensive view of the conflict's tragic consequences beyond Israel. With rare exceptions, many outlets have shunned coverage of suffering and civilian casualties in Gaza.

The stark shift in media discourse is most evident on Channel 14, a right-wing outlet that has gained prominence under the current government. An analysis of its broadcasts, which are increasingly competing in the ratings with mainstream outlets, provides valuable insight into the direction Israel's media landscape is taking, and into the thinking of Israel's far-right.

Specifically, this project looked at *The Patriots*, the channel's flagship programme, which, if current trends continue, may become the most influential in Israel.

Individuals who, only a few years ago, were considered outside the bounds of acceptable public discourse in Israel get a voice on *The Patriots*. The issue of aid to Gaza is mocked on the programme, despite the dire humanitarian situation in the strip, with rescue packages dismissed in one episode as comfort goodie bags of "Nutella, mangoes, and bananas". International actors are frequently dismissed as Nazis and antisemites – an easy way to deflect their criticisms of Israel. Palestinians are dubbed "terrorists" – wholesale – their personal stories in wartime ignored.

While Channel 14 may be an extreme example, information blackouts and shifting discourse also affect mainstream channels. The risk is that many Israelis end up lacking the context to develop informed opinions.

Even during conflict, outlets should strive to incorporate the other side's narratives and vicissitudes into their coverage. Israeli media have achieved this in the past, and as society slowly heals from the wounds of the war, a more open and inclusive coverage may make a come-back. But as things stand, too many voices – and facts – are being left unheard.