Episode Book

EPISODE #6324

Why Israeli Youth Moved Right

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SYNOPSIS

The assumption that younger generations naturally tilt liberal breaks down in Israeli politics, where up to three-quarters of new voters identify with the right. An examination of recent election polling, cohort research by Liran Harsgor, and insights from Alon Yakter explores what drives this political shift. It unpacks the roles of physical separation, changing media habits, and differential fertility rates across secular and religious communities, looking closely at how demographic realities reshape the boundaries of governance.

TRANSCRIPT



Corn

A country can want cheaper housing and still spend an election arguing about who belongs in the country. That's the tension in Hannah's prompt this morning, with Israel's election count still unfinished. She's watched most elections here move away from the future she wanted, apart from that brief Yesh Atid period when government suddenly seemed capable of getting things done. Now she's asking what actually makes a country change direction when conflict, demographics, education and political identity appear to reinforce each other.



Herman

The count makes that particularly uncomfortable to answer. A very right-wing incoming generation, a heavily mobilized electorate, and still no clear governing majority.



Corn

Hannah's starting point is that ordinary people probably want something fairly recognizable. Safety, prosperity, affordable lives, enough room to raise children, fewer wars. Yet agreeing on that destination doesn't seem to produce a majority capable of reaching it. The younger electorate makes the frustration sharper, because the familiar Western expectation that the next generation will be more liberal doesn't hold here.



Herman

Although the expectation itself deserves suspicion. Young people inherit a particular country, not a universal political instruction booklet.



Corn

Ours arrived without the assembly diagram.



Herman

The provisional parliamentary arithmetic is Netanyahu's bloc on roughly fifty-five or fifty-six seats, Eisenkot's opposition bloc on forty-nine, and the Arab parties on fifteen or sixteen. Those are changing projections, not a final result.



Corn

Sixty-one gets you a majority. Unfortunately, the seats don't come with compatible coalition partners attached.



Herman

Turnout exceeded seventy-seven percent, the highest in more than two decades. That matters because this wasn't simply one camp staying home while the other reproduced its way to victory. Both camps mobilized. The first-time-voter polling had three-quarters identifying with the right, yet one version of the partial count gives parties opposed to Netanyahu a combined sixty-four seats.



Corn

Opposed to Netanyahu doesn't mean willing to govern together. Some of those politicians would rather share a dentist than a coalition agreement.



Herman

Nor does right-wing mean pro-Netanyahu. Someone can favor strong military deterrence, oppose territorial withdrawal, dislike religious coercion and want a different prime minister. Those positions fit inside one person perfectly comfortably, even if the party system makes the combination awkward.



Corn

This is already a warning against interpreting an identity label as a complete government program. Someone says right-wing, and we imagine we know their position on school funding, civil marriage, housing permits and whether the finance minister should keep his job. We don't.



Herman

Corn, does that weaken Hannah's concern for you? If the electoral majority can change without everybody changing their identity?



Corn

It weakens the strongest version, that the future is already booked. It doesn't dissolve the concern. A government can lose an election while its assumptions keep winning. If every viable replacement accepts more of the same political boundaries, changing the prime minister won't necessarily change the direction.



Herman

There's also a distinction between changing policy and changing what voters consider imaginable. The second takes longer. A coalition might pass a budget in months while trust between communities barely moves.



Corn

You can replace a minister faster than a childhood.



Herman

The older youth data helps here. Before October seventh, almost three-quarters of Jewish respondents in the youngest adult bracket identified as right-wing. Among respondents over retirement age, it was under half. That is an enormous gap, and it cannot have originated in a war that hadn't happened.



Corn

The earlier Democracy Index had the same broad pattern. Roughly two-thirds of younger Jewish adults on the right, against under half of older adults. Different age brackets, different survey, same direction. Anyone treating this as a sudden reaction is arriving late.



Herman

The current polling also needs careful handling. One survey puts first-time voters identifying with the right at seventy-five percent, against sixty-eight percent among veteran voters. Another puts young adults at fifty-six percent. Those aren't interchangeable measurements.



Corn

Apparently even the right has a sampling problem.



Herman

Wording, age ranges, religious composition and whether centre-right is included all matter. More than sixteen percent of new voters planning to support Ben-Gvir or Smotrich is a separate observation again. Broad right identification and support for those particular parties should never be collapsed into one number.



Corn

That distinction changes the political task. Persuading a security-minded young voter that your government can protect them is different from persuading a committed religious nationalist to abandon a territorial project. Calling both voters the same thing makes the challenge look cleaner and more hopeless than it is.



Herman

The intuitive explanation is repeated violence. Terrorism, military service, wars. Those experiences plainly matter, especially now. Yet Alon Yakter makes an awkward historical observation. The post-Intifada generation grew up during comparatively safe years for Israelis, while also growing up more isolated from Palestinians.



Corn

Safe compared with the Intifada, not safe by some imaginary Scandinavian standard. Still, that punctures the tidy story. Less direct violence didn't automatically produce more willingness to compromise.



Herman

Separation changed what young people encountered. The barrier, restrictions around Gaza, settlement geography and separate daily routines reduced ordinary contact. Palestinians could become something encountered through security coverage, military service or political argument rather than through ordinary civilian relationships.



Corn

I don't want to slide from that into saying the barrier was a mistake because contact is nice. Preventing attacks was a real purpose, and people remember why it was built. A security measure can work at its immediate task while changing political culture in ways nobody puts on the procurement sheet.



Herman

Yes... the causal claim needs narrowing. Separation may help explain the attitudes. It doesn't prove that removing a security measure would create trust. Frightening contact can harden attitudes. Unequal contact can too. Simply placing people near each other isn't a peace policy.



Corn

You were about to prescribe a conversation and a bus route.



Herman

I was about to distinguish types of contact.



Corn

A very well-footnoted bus route.



Herman

You can keep the bus. My point is that reducing violence and making another population legible as ordinary people are different achievements. One does not automatically deliver the other.



Herman

The classroom account from Odeliya Matter in Beersheba makes that concrete. She describes having reached adulthood without access to Palestinian perspectives, then finding her own students markedly further right than her generation. That is one educator's experience, not a national measurement, but it identifies something worth



Herman (continued)

understanding.



Corn

What goes missing can matter as much as what gets taught. You don't need a textbook ordering a child to dislike anyone. A whole childhood in which the other population appears only during an emergency can do plenty of work.



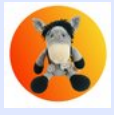
Herman

Liran Harsgor's work is particularly useful because she doesn't pretend the mechanism is solved. Generational differences in conflict attitudes were relatively small until the early two-thousands, then younger Jewish cohorts became more hawkish. Demographic composition and differences in hope for peace explain some of it, but not all.



Corn

Meaning we have evidence of the drift and plausible contributors, not a machine with every gear labeled.



Herman

She separates cohort replacement from everybody reacting to the same moment, and from people changing as they age. That's difficult because a young person belongs to all three stories simultaneously.



Corn

You have the delighted expression you get when a problem needs three models.



Herman

Two would leave something out.



Corn

There it is.



Herman

Religion is another large part. Religiosity strongly predicts vote choice. Higher fertility among Haredi and religious families changes the composition of younger cohorts, even if no individual changes their mind.



Corn

The cited fertility estimates run from six point six children among Haredi women, to three point nine among Orthodox women, to two among secular women. Those are substantial differences. They are also children, not pre-filled ballot papers.



Herman

Children grow up, some change religious identification, parties change, turnout varies, and voting age arrives much later than the maternity ward. A large preschool cohort tells you something important about the future, but considerably less about the next coalition negotiation.



Corn

You spent years examining children, Herman. I assume very few arrived with a recommendation for prime minister.



Herman

Their parents sometimes supplied one without being asked.



Corn

A familiar feature of the waiting room.



Herman

Religious identity also isn't one policy. Haredi politics and religious-Zionist politics have different histories, priorities and relationships to the state. Grouping them can be useful for some electoral questions and misleading for others.



Corn

The demographic pressure is real, then, but the question remains whether Israel's direction is a ratchet or a pendulum, and what actually makes a society swing back.

L

Larry

Friends, are you tired of your country's political direction feeling like a ratchet that only clicks one way? Then you need Pendulum-in-a-Box, the monthly subscription that reverses demographics, conflict and education for you, delivered to your door. For one easy payment of forty nine shekels a month you get the Basic Tier, which includes one small pendulum and a pamphlet explaining that younger voters are actually older voters in disguise.

L

Larry

Upgrade to the Premium Tier for two hundred and thirty shekels and we throw in a generation-replacement kit, a wall you can separate yourself from your own family with, and a guaranteed swing toward prosperity, safety and affordable living within six to eight business years. Cancellation is openly hostile: you must call during a national election, speak only in Hebrew to a donkey, and your subscription auto renews for the next demographic era. Pendulum-in-a-Box. Because nothing says lasting political change like a monthly box.



Corn

Does the basic one fit on a windowsill?



Herman

Corn, it won't reverse demographics, and you already have enough things obstructing that window. The actual political feedback operates through institutions, status and communication. Giving Ben-Gvir National Security and Smotrich Finance didn't just allocate offices. It made their political camps governing actors with platforms and authority.



Corn

An appointment tells people that a position belongs inside normal government. Even voters who don't follow the minister's work absorb that.



Herman

Ben-Gvir's prison videos also show an ability to communicate in the formats young people actually encounter. Short, confrontational, immediately understandable. A display of power reaches a feed much more easily than an administrative improvement.



Corn

The sewage upgrade rarely gets a threatening soundtrack.



Herman

Media habits reinforce that imbalance. Political content arrives through social feeds and messaging apps without the user deciding to read a political publication. Earlier, Israel Hayom's reach helped alter the newspaper environment. Now the distribution is more fragmented and more continuous.



Corn

I would resist saying the phone simply manufactures the voter. People choose friends, follow politicians they like, forward things that fit their experience. The feed reinforces demand as well as creating it. Otherwise we'd explain every election by whoever bought the best camera.



Herman

Education works in both directions too. Governments influence curriculum, appointments and funding. Families and communities influence which schools exist and what they expect those schools to do. Political culture isn't delivered from a ministry to passive children.



Corn

That's what makes the cycle stubborn. A change at the top meets households, institutions and fears that haven't changed. Equally, a government doesn't control every conversation at the kitchen table, however enthusiastically it might wish to.



Herman

More than half a million people have joined the voter rolls since the previous election. That is a substantial new electorate, but it is still entering a much larger one. The next generation affects the result without owning it.



Corn

Today's partial count is a useful interruption to fatalism. Parties opposed to Netanyahu can collectively reach a majority despite that incoming cohort. The arithmetic gives you an opening, although not a government.



Herman

Palestinian Arab parties were projected in some early reporting to rise substantially from their previous representation, with estimates reaching as high as eighteen seats. Later partial-count estimates are lower. Either way, mobilization outside the Jewish electorate changes the national arithmetic.



Corn

Demographic stories often quietly discuss Jewish society and then announce a conclusion about the whole country. Arab citizens haven't agreed to be background scenery.



Herman

Nor have older voters disappeared. A relatively small movement among a larger existing group can outweigh a dramatic identity figure among first-time voters. Elections happen across the whole electorate at once.



Corn

Here is my doubt about the supposed less ideological majority, though. Safety and affordable living are aspirations so broad that almost everyone can claim them. Agreement stops precisely where the expensive decisions begin.



Herman

What would count as a meaningful shared platform for you, rather than a collection of pleasant nouns?



Corn

Something with choices attached. Housing supply requires decisions about land, infrastructure and density. Better schools require decisions about common skills and public funding. Security requires decisions about force, diplomacy and acceptable risk. A broad movement has to say which sacrifices it expects from its own supporters, not only from the people they dislike.



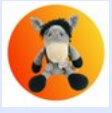
Herman

That makes it harder to launch.



Corn

It makes it possible to govern.



Herman

A coalition united only by removing one leader can reach office and then discover that its members disagree about the state's basic obligations. Yet such coalitions can still make real improvements. The Bennett-Lapid government passed a budget after a prolonged period without one, and showed that parties from very different political traditions could administer together.



Corn

Including an Arab party. That mattered institutionally, regardless of whether a voter liked the arrangement. It tested something people had described as impossible.



Herman

Yesh Atid held seventeen seats. Lapid's own premiership lasted one hundred and eighty-one days, so remembering that entire period as a Yesh Atid government compresses a more complicated partnership.



Corn

Hannah's memory of unusual activity is still important. A short government can do actual work. I just wouldn't assume visible work becomes a durable political identity. People may appreciate a policy and vote against its authors for an entirely different reason.



Herman

Durability requires implementation, organizations capable of defending the policy, and sometimes beneficiaries who realize what they would lose. Passing a measure is one stage. Surviving the next coalition is another.



Corn

A reform can have a shorter shelf life than the minister's business cards.



Herman

The electoral system complicates the broad platform. Proportional representation gives distinct communities a route into parliament. The threshold permits smaller parties to survive, though falling below it can waste a bloc's votes. Coalition bargaining then gives concentrated groups influence beyond their raw size.



Corn

It also means the supposedly sensible centre can't just declare the other groups unnecessary. A majority government needs partners. If your platform begins by telling a community that its entire way of life is the obstruction, don't be astonished when its representatives decline the invitation.



Herman

Would you change the electoral rules first, Corn? A higher threshold, bigger parties, more pressure to consolidate?



Corn

I'd be wary. Larger parties can contain their own uncompromising factions, only with less visibility. A threshold can eliminate fragmentation or eliminate representation. The political relationships have to improve somewhere. You can't keep asking the ballot paper to perform marriage counseling.



Herman

There's no clean historical playbook for making a hawkish generation soften. The adjacent work on reversals in democratic decline includes Brazil, Zambia and the Maldives. Those cases establish that apparently entrenched directions can reverse. They don't establish that voters changed their views on conflict.



Corn

A party can be removed through an alliance of people who disagree about almost everything except that party. Democratic restoration, economic recovery and ideological moderation are different outcomes. Treating one as proof of the others makes history look far more cooperative than it was.



Herman

Harsgor's point about generational replacement is conditional in the same way. Replacement can move opinion in different directions. There's no biological mechanism making the next cohort permanently more hawkish than the last.



Corn

Nor does getting older necessarily do the job. Today's young voter might buy a home, have children and worry more about stability, but stability could mean compromise or a harder security line. Life stages don't come with party membership.



Herman

What could create a different direction? A credible period of security could reduce the urgency of immediate threat. Economic conditions could make housing, taxes and public services more politically decisive. Leadership could offer a different interpretation of familiar events. Schools could broaden what students know.



Corn

Each of those can also go the other way. Quiet can be understood as evidence that the existing hard line works. Economic pressure can make people demand punishment rather than redistribution. A charismatic leader can organize fear just as efficiently as hope.



Herman

Educational reform is slow, and a curriculum imposed without legitimacy may provoke resistance rather than reflection. A peace initiative needs credible partners and enforceable arrangements, not merely a more persuasive Israeli campaign.



Corn

That part gets lost in domestic analysis. Israelis don't determine Palestinian politics, Iranian strategy or whether an armed organization attacks. A political movement that promises to change the atmosphere has to account for actors who would like the atmosphere considerably worse.



Herman

Supporting a strong Israel and asking whether particular policies improve Israeli security belong in the same conversation. The right should be capable of evaluating its own instruments, just as the left should be capable of evaluating the outcomes of concessions.



Corn

Otherwise every event becomes supporting evidence. An attack proves your policy necessary, quiet proves it successful, and a failed negotiation proves you should never negotiate. That's a remarkably comfortable position for a policy.



Herman

Can ordinary competence break through that, though? Suppose a government makes daily life visibly better without first asking people to revise their entire understanding of the conflict.



Corn

Sometimes. It gives voters a reason to retain the government that doesn't require ideological conversion. The difficulty is security credibility. If people think the competent administrators will expose their families to danger, the cheaper grocery bill loses.



Herman

Then the alternative needs a credible security position before the election, not an assurance that security will be handled by someone impressive after coalition talks.



Corn

It also needs to stop treating right-wing identity as a confession. You can ask people to change a vote without demanding they apologize for their parents, their military service or their neighborhood.



Herman

That sounds less like moving everyone left and more like changing which distinctions decide the election.



Corn

Sometimes changing the direction of government does mean that. A voter remains conservative but prioritizes institutional competence, equal obligations or fiscal responsibility. There's nothing counterfeit about that shift.



Herman

Organization matters here as much as language. Local activists, candidates people know, institutions that persist between elections. A compelling slogan can attract attention without producing anybody who can negotiate a school budget.



Corn

You need someone willing to attend the meeting after the exciting speech.



Herman

Precisely the meeting you avoid.



Corn

I read the documents. You explain the documents until the meeting becomes a residency requirement.



Herman

Somebody has to explain the drainage allocation.



Corn

The drain generally gets there first.



Herman

A movement also needs ways for people to join without abandoning their community. Religious conservatives, secular security hawks and Arab citizens won't all enter through the same argument. They may still agree on particular government obligations.



Corn

Shared projects can precede shared identity. You can build support for functioning transport or safer streets without settling every constitutional argument. I wouldn't oversell it... Some disputes are about incompatible principles, and no improved bus timetable resolves sovereignty.



Herman

The size of those practical openings is hard to judge from national political coverage. A local agreement can be common and still remain politically invisible.



Hilbert

I think that's right. The small changes were much more common than the dramatic ones. I used to count households for a municipal planning office in the Negev. New addresses, children reaching school age, families moving out. This was in the early two-thousands. My neighbour Moshe worked at the next desk. He had come from Britain years before. He brought an extra orange because he knew I wouldn't bring lunch.



Corn

A sensible response to working beside you.



Hilbert

He had a chart of children by age. People would look at the youngest group and start predicting the next election. Moshe would put his finer on the school-leaving group instead. Herman, you did his whole explanation earlier, although he didn't need the three models. My job was checking the addresses behind the totals. Most changes were one family at a time. The report made them look like a procession.



Herman

A new neighborhood can fill quickly while its children remain years away from voting.



Hilbert

We went back to one building because the caretaker said six families had left. Two had moved upstairs. One had moved across the road. Three had actually gone. Moshe knew which flat had the sticking front door and took a screwdriver. I had a clipboard with strips of black tape covering every square except the line I was checking. The clerks disliked it. They kept trying to peel the tape off.



Corn

You had installed a smaller workload.



Hilbert

Same workload. Less looking at the wrong line. Moshe took the clipboard when I left. His daughter used it for drawing. The last address we checked that afternoon was across the road.



Herman

Across the road is important. Residential movement, school enrollment and eventual voting aren't the same measurement. The long-term composition changes are real, but interpreting every movement as political transformation can make the present disappear.



Corn

Likewise, somebody can remain in the same flat and change their political priorities. A demographic projection won't detect that until an attitude survey or an election does. It gives you the population to persuade, not the result of persuading them.



Herman

The short horizon matters for leadership. If you believe every coming election is predetermined by future births, you stop noticing voters who can change a result now. If you ignore the longer horizon, you can mistake a temporary coalition for a durable settlement.



Corn

That suggests separate standards for success. A government can improve lives now without claiming to have permanently redirected the electorate. A movement can build a broader political culture without pretending that tomorrow's budget will complete the job.



Herman

Economic improvement also needs to be experienced, not merely announced. People need to see that their rent, commute or child's school has improved, and connect that improvement with a governing choice.



Corn

Preferably before the next minister renames it.



Herman

Continuity becomes part of the appeal. Not every incoming government dismantling everything because the previous minister's name appears on the sign. That takes restraint from politicians and tolerance from their voters.



Corn

There is a difficult emotional demand underneath Hannah's question. How do you stay engaged when the direction keeps disappointing you? Understanding the timescales doesn't remove the disappointment, but it stops one election carrying the entire weight of the country's future.



Herman

Today's uncertainty demonstrates the distinction. A cohort can lean strongly right while the current parliamentary outcome remains contested. Even a final seat total won't tell us whether a workable governing agreement exists.



Corn

The common misconception is that demographic trends make a particular government inevitable.



Herman

They change the composition of the electorate over time. Leadership, turnout, competing priorities and coalition compatibility still determine what that electorate produces. Right-wing identity alone doesn't settle any of those.



Corn

The thing to watch is whether a political vehicle emerges that can connect improvements within reach now to a credible longer-term future, without waiting for the electorate to become a different population.



Herman

Our thanks to Hilbert Flumingtop for producing the show.



Corn

If you enjoyed this one, try episode sixty seventy-three, Israel Votes, Part four. This has been My Weird Prompts.



Herman

If the conversation gave you something to think about, leave us a review wherever you listen. It helps other curious people find us.



Corn

See you tomorrow.

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