

The 'Hindu Rashtra' and the 'Jewish State': the Ideological Foundations of Ethnic  
Democracy in India and Israel

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## Introduction

Just a few months prior to the September 2019 Israeli snap election, a ten-story banner was unfurled from the side of the Likud party headquarters in Tel Aviv, emblazoned with a photo of Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu shaking hands with Indian prime minister Narendra Modi. Part of a campaign strategy aimed at highlighting Netanyahu's close personal relationships with world leaders including Modi, Donald Trump, and Vladimir Putin, the banner is emblematic of a more fundamental, deep-seated affinity between the two leaders and their respective countries—when Modi visited Israel in 2017, making him the first Indian prime minister to do so since diplomatic ties were established between the two nations in 1992, Netanyahu welcomed him as a “kindred spirit,” proclaiming that “we have been waiting for you for a long time, almost 70 years.”<sup>1</sup>

This close relationship also extends to the financial and military spheres—today, Israel is India's second-largest arms supplier and India is Israel's largest buyer, accounting for some 46 percent of Israel's total arms exports,<sup>2</sup> and bilateral cooperation between the two countries encompasses “such areas as counterterrorism, cyber security, border management, intelligence sharing, science and technology.”<sup>3</sup> However, the close linkages between India and Israel are not just limited to the countries' official relationship. Rather, the affinity between the two countries can be traced back even more fundamentally to the basic foundations of their respective political regimes, and the ideologies that

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<sup>1</sup> “In Run up to Election, Banners of Modi-Netanyahu Make an Appearance in Israel,” *The Wire*, July 29, 2019, <https://thewire.in/diplomacy/israel-election-banners-modi-netanyahu>.

<sup>2</sup> Somdeep Sen, “India's Alliance With Israel Is a Model for the World's Illiberal Leaders,” *Foreign Policy*, September 10, 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/09/10/indias-alliance-with-israel-is-a-model-for-the-worlds-illiberal-leaders/>.

<sup>3</sup> Vinay Kaura, “Indo-Israeli relations in the Modi era: a transformative shift,” *Israel Affairs* 25, no. 2 (2019): 217.

motivate them—Hindutva, which was first developed by V.D. Savarkar and M.S. Golwalkar, and Revisionist Zionism, which was first developed by Vladimir Jabotinsky.

In this paper, I aim to examine the ideological themes and political dynamics that underlie this affinity, building on the framework of ethnic democracy first articulated by Sammy Smootha in order to advance a more nuanced understanding of how nationalist ideological foundations can influence the development of ethnic democracy in differing societal and political contexts. In so doing, I hope to answer the question: How do the parallel themes found in Hindutva and Revisionist Zionist ideology influence the contemporary nationalist right and shape the construction and perpetuation of ethnic democracy in India and Israel?

I preface my comparative study of the two countries with an overview of the ethnic democracy framework, tracing the origins of this model from its development by Sammy Smootha and outlining its key principles before examining its application to the Israeli and Indian cases by Smootha and other scholars. Following this framework discussion, I turn to an analysis of the primary themes that are common to both Hindutva and Revisionist ideology<sup>4</sup>—the construction and mobilization of national identity, the question of national minorities, the deployment of historical narrative, the politics of

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<sup>4</sup> A note on methodology—in my ideological analysis of Hindutva, I rely primarily on two key texts: *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?* by Savarkar, written during his imprisonment by the British and originally published in 1923 as *Essentials of Hindutva*, and *We, or Our Nationhood Defined* by Golwalkar, published in 1939. While I make reference to other speeches and essays by both figures, it is these two texts that form the primary philosophical backbone of Hindutva ideology and are most frequently invoked by its contemporary adherents, and thus serve as manifestos from which its fundamental principles can be distilled. For Revisionist Zionism, however, the massive corpus of writing generated by Jabotinsky throughout his life means that there are not one or two texts that can conveniently serve as manifestos for this ideology. As a result, while I do utilize primary sources wherever possible, my analysis of the main principles of Revisionist Zionism does rely on secondary scholarship to a considerably greater extent than my analysis of Hindutva ideology.

national renewal, and the articulation of maximalist territorial claims. I examine these themes one at a time, first discussing their basic tenets in Hindutva ideology and how they manifest in contemporary Indian politics before doing the same for Revisionist Zionist ideology and contemporary Israeli politics, and finally concluding my discussion of each theme with a comparative analysis of the two cases. Finally, I examine and compare the invocation and rehabilitation of Savarkar, Golwalkar, and Jabotinsky's legacies in contemporary Indian and Israeli politics, and discuss the implications of this rehabilitation for the legitimization and perpetuation of ethnic democracy.

### **Contribution to the literature**

This paper's primary contributions to the existing literature on ethnonationalism and ethnic democracy are twofold. The first contribution lies in its comparison of the Indian and Israeli regimes within the analytical framework of ethnic democracy. While this framework, which I discuss in greater detail below, was originally applied to Israel by Sammy Smooha and has been extended to the Indian case by Christophe Jaffrelot and others, no study thus far has pursued an in-depth comparative analysis between the two countries of the scope and complexities of ethnic democracy in each context. However, I argue that the ethnic democracy model is in fact the best framework with which to compare the two countries, as other frameworks fall short in their applicability to both cases and ability to capture the full array of factors which influence the nature of their respective regimes. For example, the settler-colonial lens through which the Israeli state is often analyzed does not easily apply to the Indian case (with the arguable exception of India's policies in Kashmir), while the framework of authoritarian populism which is often used to compare the two governments under Modi and

Netanyahu places too narrow an emphasis on individual leaders while ignoring the structural factors and politics of ethnic majoritarianism that underlie these leaders' particular brands of authoritarian populism. The ethnic democracy paradigm, by contrast, can be applied to both the Indian and Israeli contexts without obscuring such critical complexities.

In addition to being the first in-depth comparative study of ethnic democracy in India and Israel, this paper's second contribution to the literature lies in its examination of the ideological dimensions of these two ethnic-democratic regimes. Most of the existing literature on ethnic democracy emphasizes the ways in which this paradigm manifests at a real-world level in the contemporary era, in both a *de jure* and a *de facto* sense. Much ink has been spilled on the defining characteristics and political implications of ethnic democracies, as well as the real-world factors which contribute to the emergence and endurance of such regimes. Thus far, however, relatively little scholarly attention has been paid to the role of these regimes' underlying ideologies in shaping their ethnic-democratic nature in a modern context. By specifically examining the ideological foundations of ethnic democracy in India and Israel, this paper thus contributes to a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the ways in which real-world ethnic democracies and their leaders invoke and apply the tenets of historical ideologies in order to legitimize and perpetuate their regimes.

## **Background**

Hindutva, which as a term is often used interchangeably with 'Hindu nationalism', can best be understood as the particular brand of Hindu nationalism espoused by the 20th-century ideologues V.D. Savarkar and M.S. Golwalkar. The primary bastion of Hindutva in India today is the Rashtriya

Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS)—a volunteer-based paramilitary organization which was founded in 1925 by K.B. Hedgewar—and its complex network of affiliated organizations, which are collectively known as the Sangh Parivar. The parliamentary face of this movement, through which Hindutva exerts the greatest political force, is the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which is the direct descendant of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh party that formed in 1951 as the parliamentary wing of the RSS.<sup>5</sup> Under the leadership of Narendra Modi, the BJP took power in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections and was re-elected in 2019. With Modi at its helm, the BJP in power has pursued an increasingly aggressive politics of Hindu majoritarianism that closely reflects the key tenets of Hindutva ideology in its quest to transform India into a full-scale ethnic democracy.

In the Israeli context, the term ‘Revisionist Zionism’ refers specifically to the form of political Zionism developed by Vladimir Jabotinsky (also known as Ze’ev Jabotinsky), the Russian Jewish thinker who was active in the Zionist movement throughout the first part of the 20th century.

Revisionist ideology is politically represented in modern Israel by the Likud party, which was founded in 1973 as the successor to the Herut party that was itself founded by Menachem Begin in 1949 as a direct offshoot of the Irgun Zvai Leumi (the Revisionist paramilitary commanded by Jabotinsky from 1937 to 1940).<sup>6</sup> Under Benjamin Netanyahu, who had previously served as prime minister from 1996 to 1999, the Likud took power once again in 2009 and retained at the helm of government for twelve more years, making Netanyahu the longest-serving prime minister in Israeli history until his ouster in 2021 following a tumultuous series of back-to-back elections and a 2020 indictment on corruption

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<sup>5</sup> Christophe Jaffrelot, *Hindu Nationalism: A Reader* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 16-17.

<sup>6</sup> Colin Shindler, *The Rise of the Israeli Right: From Odessa to Hebron* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 1.



charges.<sup>7</sup> Netanyahu's tenure as prime minister had a considerable influence on the politics of the Israeli right, and his strategic repackaging of Revisionist ideology for the 21st century has, as I discuss below, played a major role in shaping the nature of ethnic democracy in Israel.

### **The 'ethnic democracy' framework**

#### **Ethnic democracy: an overview**

The concept of 'ethnic democracy' was first developed by the Israeli sociologist Sammy Smooha as a contribution to the dominant typology of democracies in comparative politics. "The current literature on comparative politics," according to Smooha, "distinguishes three types of democracy: liberal, consociational, and *Herrenvolk*."<sup>8</sup> In liberal democracies, "ethnicity is privatized" as the state "forges a homogeneous nation-state" and "provides conditions for acculturation and assimilation, but also allows ethnic groups to remain socially separate and culturally distinct."<sup>9</sup> In consociational democracies, "ethnicity is accepted as a major principle in the organization of the state" but "[t]he state is not identified with any of the constituent groups and tries to reconcile the differences between them," and "[e]thnicity is thus institutionalized and ethnic identities and institutions are usually kept separate."<sup>10</sup> Both liberal and consociational democracies, according to Smooha, "share a set of democratic institutions, an extension of equality and citizenship for all, and an ethnically neutral

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<sup>7</sup> "Benjamin Netanyahu, Israel's unseated long-term leader," *BBC News*, June 13, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-18008697>.

<sup>8</sup> Sammy Smooha, "Ethnic Democracy: Israel as an Archetype," *Israel Studies* 2, no. 2 (Fall 1997): 198.

<sup>9</sup> Smooha, "Ethnic Democracy," 199.

<sup>10</sup> Smooha, "Ethnic Democracy," 199.

state.”<sup>11</sup> Finally, in *Herrenvolk* democracies—which, as Smooha notes, are democratic in name only—“democracy is confined to the master race or group and is forcibly denied to other groups” in an apartheid-like model.<sup>12</sup>

Noting the limited applicability of this typology to many multi-ethnic, ostensibly ‘democratic’ states, Smooha proposes ethnic democracy as being “located somewhere in the democratic section of the democracy-non-democracy continuum,” and defines it as a “system that combines the extension of civil and political rights to individuals and some collective rights to minorities, with institutionalization of majority control over the state,” in which “the state is identified with a ‘core ethnic nation,’ not with its citizens” and “practices a policy of creating a homogenous nation-state, a state of and for a particular ethnic nation.”<sup>13</sup> Although they are afforded the basic rights of citizenship, including the right to vote, minorities in ethnic democracies “are treated as second-class citizens, feared as a threat, excluded from the national power structure, and placed under some control” while simultaneously being “allowed to conduct a democratic and peaceful struggle that yields incremental improvement in their status.”<sup>14</sup> Thus, the term ‘ethnic democracy’ denotes a system that seeks to balance the conflicting principles of democratic governance and ethnic majoritarianism, and is forced to reckon with the internal contradictions that arise from this tenuous balance.

Smooha identifies four primary conditions for the emergence of an ethnic democracy. First is the “pre-existence of ethnic nationalism and the ethnic nation”—if, he writes, “the idea of an ethnic

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<sup>11</sup> Smooha, “Ethnic Democracy,” 199.

<sup>12</sup> Smooha, “Ethnic Democracy,” 199.

<sup>13</sup> Smooha, “Ethnic Democracy,” 199-200.

<sup>14</sup> Smooha, “Ethnic Democracy,” 200.

nation precedes the creation of the state or the political system, it is likely that it would shape the new state, and the ethnic nation would take precedence over the state.”<sup>15</sup> Second is “the existence of a threat (real or perceived) to the ethnic nation that requires mobilisation of the majority in order to preserve the ethnic nation,” allowing for the rise of ethnic democracy as “an effective means of mobilisation.”<sup>16</sup> The third condition Smootha identifies is “the majority’s commitment to democracy, without which a non-democracy would emerge” and which is thus crucial for distinguishing ethnic democracy from, say, a *Herrenvolk* democracy.<sup>17</sup> Finally, the fourth condition for the emergence of ethnic democracy is “a manageable size of the minority”—“[w]hen the minority is either small or disorganised, the majority can opt for a workable ethnic democracy without renouncing its domination,” whereas a more substantial or politically powerful minority may lead the majority to opt for a non-democratic system instead.<sup>18</sup> When some combination of these four criteria are met, according to Smootha, the conditions are ripe for ethnic democracy to emerge.

### **Ethnic democracy and Israel**

Rejecting the conventional notion in comparative politics that “Israel is a liberal democracy with certain consociational elements and some shortcomings,”<sup>19</sup> Smootha notes that “there is no separation in Israel between religion and nationality, religion and ethnicity (that is, a person belonging to the Jewish people or born a Jew cannot simultaneously be a member of any religion other than

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<sup>15</sup> Sammy Smootha, “The model of ethnic democracy: Israel as a Jewish and democratic state,” *Nations and Nationalism* 8, no. 4 (2002): 478.

<sup>16</sup> Smootha, “The model,” 479.

<sup>17</sup> Smootha, “The model,” 479.

<sup>18</sup> Smootha, “The model,” 479.

<sup>19</sup> Smootha, “Ethnic Democracy,” 201.

Judaism), and religion and state—facts that prevent Israel from being a liberal democracy.”<sup>20</sup> Similarly rejecting the characterization of Israel as either a consociational or *Herrenvolk* democracy, Smooha instead argues that Israel should be understood as an example of ethnic democracy, as the state is fundamentally identified with a “core ethnic [in this case, Jewish] nation” and national minorities, while granted basic citizenship rights, are nevertheless seen as a threat and treated as second-class citizens.

Israel’s status as an ethnic democracy, he argues, is evidenced by its “claim to being both a democratic and a Jewish state,”<sup>21</sup> and this supposed “[c]ompatibility between the democratic and Jewish-Zionist character of the state” is all but universally accepted in mainstream Israeli political culture.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, the difficulty in placing Israel within the traditional typology of democracies does not, as conventional wisdom holds, indicate that it is a unique case, but rather that it should be understood as a separate type of democracy altogether—an ethnic democracy, in which democratic values and institutions are balanced against political majoritarianism and the preservation of ethnic dominance.

### **Ethnic democracy and India**

Following Smooha’s conception of ethnic democracy as it relates to the Israeli case, multiple scholars have applied the ethnic democracy framework to India, which is frequently described as the ‘world’s largest democracy’. Gurharpal Singh, for example, notes that the Indian model of democracy

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<sup>20</sup> Smooha, “Ethnic Democracy,” 203.

<sup>21</sup> Smooha, “Ethnic Democracy,” 205.

<sup>22</sup> Smooha, “Ethnic Democracy,” 207.

does not easily conform to the ‘privatization of ethnicity’ inherent in “secularized majoritarianism” (which he defines along the same lines as Smootha’s conception of liberal democracy), as the Hindu majority has staked out “a hegemonic position” within “the shell of Westminster-style democracy,” and neither does it “resemble ethnically accommodative consociationalism,” as “the minority veto has been practically non-existent” since Partition.<sup>23</sup> Instead, he argues, the Indian model most closely resembles that of an ethnic democracy in which national minorities “have been granted individual and, in some cases, collective rights,” but the recognition of these rights has been based on a tactical accommodation with hegemonic Hinduism.”<sup>24</sup>

In conjunction with Singh’s characterization of India as an ethnic democracy, Christophe Jaffrelot argues that India—particularly since Prime Minister Narendra Modi came to power in 2014—represents a “specific variant” in which “the *de jure* aspect of ethnic democracy is virtually absent” due to “the fact that the 1950 constitution continues to embody the ideals of secularism (and therefore multiculturalism) and equal citizenship for all,” but “the *de facto* aspect...is omnipresent” and clearly visible in contemporary Indian public life.<sup>25</sup> As will be discussed at greater length below, however, the Modi government’s erosion of secularist values and pursuit of policies that entrench the dominance of the Hindu majority threaten the officially liberal-democratic nature of the Indian polity,

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<sup>23</sup> Gurharpal Singh, “Reassessing ‘Conventional Wisdom’: Ethnicity, Ethnic Conflict, and India as an Ethnic Democracy,” in *Ethnic Conflict in India: A Case-Study of Punjab* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000), 45-46.

<sup>24</sup> Singh, “Reassessing ‘Conventional Wisdom,’” 47.

<sup>25</sup> Christophe Jaffrelot, “A De Facto Ethnic Democracy? Obliterating and Targeting the Other, Hindu Vigilantes, and the Ethno-State,” in *Majoritarian State: How Hindu Nationalism Is Changing India*, ed. Angana P. Chatterji, Thomas Blom Hansen, and Christophe Jaffrelot (London: Routledge, 2011), 43.

and indicate a tacit desire on the part of the contemporary Hindu right to transform India into a *de jure* ethnic democracy along the lines of Israel.

### **Why ethnic democracy?**

In both the Indian and Israeli cases, the adoption and perpetuation of an ethnic-democratic model by the nationalist right when in power reflects a desire to enforce the dominance of the majority community, while simultaneously balancing this dominance with the need to maintain democratic legitimacy—especially in the eyes of the international community—by conforming to modern political norms that emphasize democratic governance and the rule of law. Both India and Israel have a clear interest in maintaining such legitimacy—India due to its status as a rising power on the world stage, and Israel due to its close relationship with the United States and reliance on the latter for military and other support. Ethnic democracy thus becomes the preferred model for enforcing ethnic dominance due to its nominal commitment to democratic norms, in contrast to the *Herrenvolk* model’s “non-democratic, extreme form of rule,” which beyond being “rare and unstable,” is also “opposed to universal norms and international public opinion” and thus unsuited to the interests of the contemporary right.<sup>26</sup>

Given this motivation in both cases, the influence of historical ideologies on the contemporary nationalist right in both India and Israel must therefore be read in light of these ideologies’ applicability to a modern-day ethnic-democratic framework. As we shall see, while Hindutva and Revisionist Zionist ideology exert a clear and significant influence on the politics of the contemporary

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<sup>26</sup> Smooha, “Ethnic Democracy,” 234.

right in both countries, this influence is not always uniform, and certain principles hold greater sway in the present day than others. I argue that the contemporary influence of these historical ideologies is strongest for the principles that are most conducive to the construction (in the Indian case) and perpetuation (in the Israeli case) of a *de jure* and *de facto* ethnic-democratic regime. However, when certain tenets of the ideology in question are less compatible with a 21st-century ethnic democracy—in particular, when they are fundamentally irreconcilable with democratic norms—we are more likely to see contemporary political actors either repackage these principles, or turn away from them altogether. This dynamic becomes especially apparent in the comparative analysis of the shared themes between Hindutva and Revisionist Zionism that follows.

### **Parallel themes between Hindutva and Revisionist Zionism**

#### **The construction and mobilization of national identity**

##### *In Hindutva ideology*

Central to the visions of Hindutva articulated by both Savarkar and Golwalkar is the construction of a unitary national identity. The end goal of this identity construction is the establishment of a ‘Hindu Rashtra’ in India, broadly defined as an independent polity in the ancestral homeland of the Hindu nation that protects and preserves the rights of a Hindu majority. Savarkar defined Hindu identity on the tripartite basis of “a common nation...a common race...and a common civilization.”<sup>27</sup> A Hindu, he wrote, is someone who has an ancestral connection to the land extending “from the Indus to the Seas,” who “inherits the blood of that race whose first discernible source could

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<sup>27</sup> V.D. Savarkar, *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?* (Nagpur: V.V. Kelkar, 1923; New Delhi: Hindi Sahitya Sadan, 2005), 115. Citations refer to the Hindi Sahitya Sadan edition.

be traced to the Vedic Saptasindhus and...has come to be known as the Hindu people,” and “who has inherited and claims as his own the culture of that race.”<sup>28</sup>

Savarkar summarized this definition of a Hindu with two criteria that emphasize a connection to the land east of the Indus River: a true Hindu, according to Savarkar, is one for whom Hindustan<sup>29</sup> “is at once a Pitribhu and Punyabhū—fatherland and a holy land.”<sup>30</sup> These criteria, however, are clearly defined so as to explicitly exclude Muslims and Christians, about whom Savarkar wrote that “though Hindusthan to them is Fatherland as to any other Hindu,” the “holyland” for these communities “is far off in Arabia or Palestine. Consequently,” he wrote, “their love is divided,” and as such they can never be considered ‘true’ members of the Hindu nation.<sup>31</sup> As Aparna Devare notes, Savarkar’s true intention of ensuring that Muslims are excluded is betrayed by his inclusion of Parsis within the Hindu fold as well, even though “their religion, Zoroastrianism, is not ‘indigenous’ to India, based on Savarkar’s criterion.”<sup>32</sup> This inconsistency reflects the extent to which Hindutva’s ideological founders were willing to sacrifice the consistency of their arguments in the process of defining national identity in order to ensure that Muslims would be excluded from the ‘Hindu Rashtra’.

To a greater extent than with Savarkar, Golwalkar’s definition of Hindu nationhood is rooted in an explicit claim to indigeneity—according to Golwalkar, Hindus “are indigenous children of the

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<sup>28</sup> Savarkar, *Hindutva*, 115.

<sup>29</sup> In *Hindutva*, Savarkar refers to ‘Hindustan’ at various points as both ‘Hindusthan’ and ‘Sindhusthan’.

<sup>30</sup> Savarkar, *Hindutva*, 113.

<sup>31</sup> Savarkar, *Hindutva*, 113.

<sup>32</sup> Aparna Devare, *History and the Making of a Modern Hindu Self* (London: Routledge, 2011), 196.



soil always, from times immemorial and are the natural masters of the country.”<sup>33</sup> He posited five universal criteria, which he referred to as “the famous five ‘Unities’,” for defining a nation: “Geographical (country), Racial (Race), Religious (Religion), cultural (Culture), and linguistic (language).”<sup>34</sup> It is worth noting here that Golwalkar, who wrote this passage in 1939, nine years before the establishment of the State of Israel, approvingly cited “[t]he reconstruction of the Hebrew Nation in Palestine” as “an affirmation of the fact that Country, Race, Religion, Culture and Language must exist unavoidably together to form a full Nation idea.”<sup>35</sup>

Applying these five criteria to the Hindu context, Golwalkar concluded that “in this country, Hindusthan, the Hindu Race with its Hindu Religion, Hindu Culture and Hindu Language...complete the Nation concept,” and therefore, “in Hindusthan exists and must needs exist the ancient Hindu nation and nought else but the Hindu nation.”<sup>36</sup> Unlike Savarkar, whose ambivalence towards religion as a marker of national identity compelled him to establish criteria excluding Muslims and Christians, Golwalkar dispensed with the need to do this altogether by including the Hindu religion as one of his five criteria for defining Hindu nationhood—thereby excluding members of all other faiths by definition.

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<sup>33</sup> M.S. Golwalkar, *We, or Our Nationhood Defined*, facsimile with introduction and commentary by Shamsul Islam (Nagpur, Bharat Publications, 1939; fac. New Delhi: Pharos Media & Publishing, 2011), 8-9. Citations refer to the 1939 edition.

<sup>34</sup> Golwalkar, *We*, 18.

<sup>35</sup> Golwalkar, *We*, 30.

<sup>36</sup> Golwalkar, *We*, 43.

*In contemporary Indian politics*

Hindutva's project of constructing a Hindu national identity by delineating the boundaries of nationhood can be observed in both the rhetoric and policies of the contemporary nationalist right in India. Echoing both Golwalkar's "famous five 'Unities'" and Savarkar's tripartite conception of a common nation, race, and civilization, the "Our Philosophy" page of the BJP's website asserts that "[n]ation emerges from the union of land, people and culture" and proclaims "faith in cultural nationalism."<sup>37</sup> In a more explicit expression of Hindu national identity, during his speech at the August 5, 2020 dedication ceremony for the highly controversial Ram Mandir in Ayodhya, Narendra Modi cited the Hindu god Ram as "the basis of our culture" and a paragon of "Indian virtues", referring to the temple as a "symbol...of our nationalist feeling" and even comparing the significance of the event to that of India's Independence Day.<sup>38</sup>

Language such as this, which has become a staple feature of the rhetoric deployed by Modi and his fellow BJP leaders, privileges Hindu culture as a central tenet of Indian national identity and reflects the mobilization of Hindu nationhood that is characteristic of Hindutva ideology. Not only is this constructed equivalency between Hindu and Indian national identity fundamentally antithetical to the secular, multicultural pluralism envisioned by India's early leaders and enshrined in the Constitution, but it is also integral to the construction of ethnic democracy in India, as such a

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<sup>37</sup> "Our Philosophy," Bharatiya Janata Party, accessed October 22, 2021, <https://www.bjp.org/philosophy>

<sup>38</sup> Pankaj Shah and Arshad Afzaal Khan, "At bhoomi puja, PM Modi likens mandir campaign to freedom movement," *The Times of India*, August 6, 2020, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/at-bhoomi-pujan-pm-modi-likens-mandir-campaign-to-freedom-movement/articleshow/77382581.cms>.

conflation opens the door for both the *de facto* and *de jure* relegation of national minorities to the status of second-class citizens.

The construction of an Indian national identity that is synonymous with Hindu identity can be observed in the BJP's policy as well, most notably through the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), which "provides an accelerated path to Indian citizenship to Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi and Christian refugees" fleeing persecution in neighboring countries while excluding Muslim refugees from these same protections, and the proposed National Register of Citizens (NRC), which has already been implemented in the northeastern state of Assam and planned for expansion to the entire country in order to aid the government in identifying and deporting undocumented immigrants.<sup>39</sup> The combination of these two policies, which were taken up by the BJP as its *causes célèbres* in late 2019 and early 2020, have raised fears that they may be used to strip Muslims of their citizenship and further the creation of a 'Hindu Rashtra' by entrenching the power of the Hindu majority, thus further entrenching India's status as a *de jure* ethnic democracy.

These fears seem to be substantiated by the admission of Himanta Biswa Sarma, Assam's Chief Minister, who told a BJP national council meeting in January 2019 that the CAA's purpose is to "check the demographic change" caused by Muslim migration and is aimed at "protecting identity and development" in the region.<sup>40</sup> This position reflects the Hindu right's broader obsession with the

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<sup>39</sup> Christophe Jaffrelot and Gilles Verniers, "A new party system or a new political system?," *Contemporary South Asia* 28, no. 2 (2020): 143.

<sup>40</sup> Kangkan Kalita, "Citizenship Bill only way to check demographic change: Himanta Biswa Sarma," *Times of India*, January 13, 2019, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/citizenship-bill-only-way-to-check-demographic-change-himanta-biswa-sarma/articleshow/67507079.cms>

supposed threat posed to the Hindu majority by a growing Muslim population—a politicization of demographic balance and the size of the national minority that, as Smootha articulates, is characteristic of an emerging ethnic democracy. Indeed, fearmongering about these demographic shifts has become a signature rhetorical move of many BJP politicians, and BJP governments in multiple states have pushed population-control legislation amid a higher fertility rate for Muslim women, which Uttar Pradesh’s firebrand Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath warned in 2015 “will cause a dangerous demographic imbalance” if left unchecked.<sup>41</sup>

More broadly speaking, the primary concern about policies such as the CAA and NRC is that they bring India closer to the ‘Hindu Rashtra’ envisioned by Savarkar and Golwalkar, and it is this concept that represents the most direct way in which Hindutva ideology retains influence in India today. The fears surrounding this concept make it easy ammunition for contemporary opposition politicians, who have on multiple occasions accused the Hindu right of stoking communal hatred in order to bring about this Hindu nationalist vision. In January of 2020, for example, former Congress Party Finance Minister P. Chidambaram decried the Modi government’s CAA-NRC push as a “sinister and mischievous plan” designed to target Muslims and construct a “Hindu Rashtra.”<sup>42</sup> At the same time, however, senior BJP officials, RSS leaders, and other right-wing figures in India have at

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<sup>41</sup> Gerry Shih, “In India, a debate over population control turns explosive,” *The Washington Post*, August 29, 2021, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2021/08/29/india-population-hindus-muslims/>.

<sup>42</sup> Special Correspondent, “CAA-NPR-NRC is sinister plan to divide country, says Chidambaram,” *The Hindu*, January 6, 2020, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/national-register-of-citizens-is-a-mischievous-plan-to-divide-india-says-chidambaram/article30495158.ece>.

various points both invoked and distanced themselves from the ‘Hindu Rashtra’ concept over the last several years.

As Satadru Sen argues, this apparent inconsistency can be better resolved with the understanding that ‘Hindu Rashtra’ is an intentionally ill-defined concept—if, he writes, the term is used to refer to “a state that possesses a Hindu majority, has borrowed most of its symbols from the majority and engages actively in the Sanskritisation of national culture, but that has not formally excluded minorities from fundamental claims and contributions, then a Hindu rashtra already exists.”<sup>43</sup> If, however, the term is taken to mean “exclusive and permanent control of the state by an organised Hindu nation,” to the direct exclusion of minorities, then the Hindu Rashtra is still a “fantasy.”<sup>44</sup>

Within the framework of ethnic democracy, I argue that the ‘Hindu Rashtra’ can be understood, in real-world terms, as denoting the “specific variant” of ethnic democracy that Jaffrelot has observed as already existing in India, in which a strong emphasis is placed on the model’s *de facto* aspects while its *de jure* aspects are constrained by the constitutionally-enshrined pluralism and secularism of the Indian state. At the same time, however, the term is also aspirational in the latter sense outlined by Sen, reflecting a potential future—made more likely by the BJP government’s pursuit of exclusionary policies such as the CAA and NRC—in which the Hindu majority’s dominance is enshrined at both the *de jure* and *de facto* levels. Thus, as Sen argues, the two understandings of ‘Hindu Rashtra’ are not mutually exclusive, but should rather be understood as “two Hindu-nationalist

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<sup>43</sup> Satadru Sen, “Ethnocracy, Israel, and India,” *History and Sociology of South Asia* 9, no. 2 (2015): 120.

<sup>44</sup> Sen, “Ethnocracy, Israel, and India,” 120.

poles—one maximally ethnocentric, the other minimally so—between which Indian majoritarianism continuously moves.”<sup>45</sup>

*In Revisionist Zionist ideology*

For Jabotinsky and his Revisionist counterparts, the purpose of understanding and delineating the boundaries of national identity was not, as with Savarkar and Golwalkar, to construct a national identity from the ground up, but rather to articulate an idealized version of the existing Jewish nation and strive towards it. In a 1913 essay entitled “Race,” Jabotinsky described this “ideal type of an ‘absolute nation’” as one “distinguished by a specific racial spectrum,” inhabiting “from time immemorial a territory with clear cut frontiers,” speaking a unique language “created by the nation itself and reflecting all phases of its thought and emotion,” practicing “a national religion...of its own creation from the earliest times,” and possessing “an historic unbroken tradition common to all its arts from remotest antiquity.”<sup>46</sup> While Jabotinsky admitted that such an “absolute nation” does not actually exist in reality—rather “[t]here exist only nations which in degree approach more or less the ideal type”—this concept nevertheless served as an ideal toward which, according to Revisionist ideology, the Jewish nation can and must strive. To this end, Jabotinsky’s primary goal was to mobilize Jewish national identity by “[turning] the Jewish masses into a machine that operated harmoniously according to the collective will of the group”—a goal which would be achieved by the construction of a

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<sup>45</sup> Sen, “Ethnocracy, Israel, and India,” 120.

<sup>46</sup> Vladimir Jabotinsky, “Race,” in *Nation and Society*, ed. Elazar Pedhazur (Tel Aviv: Shilton Betar—Department of Education, 1961), 11-12.

‘new Jew’ whose renewed fortitude and national pride would help to bring about the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine.<sup>47</sup>

Importantly, Jabotinsky rejected the notion that “the absence of a Jewish national territory for so many years” had “destroyed the Jewish nation-race”—rather, he argued, “it had guarded the purity of Jewish culture.”<sup>48</sup> Nevertheless, he argued that “[t]he architect of the Jewish nation-race was...the Land of Israel” itself, which he described as “the true kernel of our national uniqueness.”<sup>49</sup> Adopting “the atavistic view that the formative characteristics of a race were preserved indefinitely, even if foreign elements “encased” these features like husks,” Jabotinsky’s Zionism was therefore rooted in the conviction that “[t]he development of the nation-race was possible, therefore, only under those natural conditions in which the nation was born.”<sup>50</sup>

In Jabotinsky’s view, not only the establishment of this Jewish state but the very existence of the Jewish nation itself hinged upon the creation and preservation of a Jewish majority in Palestine. Rejecting the notion that establishing Jewish outposts in Palestine can be sufficient for “a national life [to] be freely developed” in the face of an Arab majority, Jabotinsky argued in “The Fundamentals of the Betarian World-Outlook”—the ideological manifesto of Betar, the Revisionist youth movement that Jabotinsky founded in 1923—that “any national position, however strong and important cannot be safeguarded as long as the nation which built it does not constitute a majority,” and thus “that deed

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<sup>47</sup> Eran Kaplan, *The Jewish Radical Right: Revisionist Zionism and Its Ideological Legacy* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005), 27.

<sup>48</sup> Raphaella Bilski Ben-Hur, *Every Individual, a King: The Social and Political Thought of Ze’ev Vladimir Jabotinsky* (Washington: B’nai Brith Books, 1993): 119.

<sup>49</sup> Bilski Ben-Hur, *Every Individual, a King*, 125.

<sup>50</sup> Bilski Ben-Hur, *Every Individual, a King*, 125.

without which there can be no Zionism, or a Jewish state, or a real Jewish nation, is the creation of a Jewish majority in Eretz Yisrael on both sides of the Jordan.”<sup>51</sup> Importantly, the purpose of this majority was not to win political power through democratic avenues, but rather “to create such a formidable majority that, as Jabotinsky claimed in his speech before the Zionist Congress, ‘it would imprint on the land its national character’.”<sup>52</sup>

### *In contemporary Israeli politics*

The contemporary Israeli right has somewhat of a complicated relationship with Jabotinsky’s approach to national identity, arguably due in large part to the Netanyahu-led Likud’s drift away from a strict adherence to ideological dogma in the 1990s and early 2000s—as Eran Kaplan notes, “[a]lthough Netanyahu and his supporters have attempted to revive some elements of the revisionism of the prestatehood period, when the political debate focused primarily on the social and cultural identity of the future state,” they have for the most part prioritized political expediency and the ability to form alliances with diverse parties over ideological purity.<sup>53</sup> The last several years of Netanyahu’s tenure as prime minister, however, have seen a retreat from this moderated stance, and a shift back in the direction of the more hardline Revisionist ideology represented by the likes of Menachem Begin. This shift can be observed in numerous aspects of the Likud government’s policy priorities, the most relevant of which to this question is the highly controversial “Basic Law: Israel as the Nation-State of the Jewish People,” commonly known as the ‘Nation-State Law’.

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<sup>51</sup> Vladimir Jabotinsky, “The Fundamentals of the Betarian World-Outlook,” 1934, <https://www.wzo.org.il/index.php?dir=site&page=articles&cop=item&cs=3360&langpage=eng&>.

<sup>52</sup> Kaplan, *The Jewish Radical Right*, 49.

<sup>53</sup> Kaplan, *The Jewish Radical Right*, 167.



Passed by the Knesset in a 62-55 vote in July 2018, the Nation-State Law officially defines Israel as the nation-state of the Jewish people, and grants them exclusive nationhood status within the state—while the law, which Netanyahu described as “a pivotal moment in the annals of Zionism and the State of Israel,”<sup>54</sup> does not alter the state’s official stance of equal rights for all citizens, Clause 1C states that “[t]he right to exercise national self-determination in the State of Israel is unique to the Jewish people.”<sup>55</sup> This law, as well as Netanyahu’s 2019 assertion in a cabinet meeting that Israel “respects the individual rights of all its citizens – Jews and non-Jews alike” but nevertheless “is the nation-state, not of all its citizens, but only of the Jewish people,”<sup>56</sup> reflects a distinctly Jabotinskian perspective—in his 1931 speech to the 17th Zionist Congress, Jabotinsky similarly distinguished between national identity and political citizenship, asserting that “[w]e were never guilty of confusing concepts...in arguing that nationalism is by any means related to citizenship.”<sup>57</sup> In this sense, the Nation-State Law reflects the fundamental tension, inherent to the ethnic-democratic model, between the preservation of the majority’s dominance and the democratic state’s ostensible commitment to equal citizenship—a tension that, as this law highlights, is made even more difficult when the state endeavors to further entrench this dominance at the *de jure* level.

In addition to reviving Revisionist principles through policy, the contemporary Israeli right generally shares Jabotinsky’s belief that a Jewish majority is the *sine qua non* for Israel to exist as a

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<sup>54</sup> “Knesset passes Jewish nation-state bill into law,” The Knesset, July 19, 2018, [https://main.knesset.gov.il/EN/News/PressReleases/Pages/Pr13979\\_pg.aspx](https://main.knesset.gov.il/EN/News/PressReleases/Pages/Pr13979_pg.aspx)

<sup>55</sup> “Basic Law: Israel—the Nation-State of the Jewish People,” The Knesset, accessed December 17, 2021, <https://main.knesset.gov.il/EN/activity/Documents/BasicLawsPDF/BasicLawNationState.pdf>

<sup>56</sup> Raoul Wootliff, “Defending nation-state law, PM says Israeli Arabs have 22 other countries,” *Times of Israel*, March 11, 2019, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/defending-nation-state-law-pm-says-israeli-arabs-have-22-other-countries>.

<sup>57</sup> Kaplan, *The Jewish Radical Right*, 48.

Jewish state—a perspective that is reflected in the frequent deployment of fearmongering rhetoric about the supposed “demographic threat” posed by a growing Palestinian population, and which further underscores Israel’s status as an ethnic democracy. In 2003, then-Finance Minister Netanyahu sparked considerable controversy when he claimed in a speech that the Arab population in Israel posed a “demographic problem,” warning that if the Israeli Arab population grew to 35-40 percent, Israel’s character as a Jewish state would be threatened.<sup>58</sup> Netanyahu deployed similar rhetoric as prime minister in 2010, when he told government officials that the loss of a Jewish majority in the Negev region would constitute “a palpable threat” to Israel’s Jewish character as “different elements will demand national rights within Israel.”<sup>59</sup> Statements such as these are far from the only instances in which Netanyahu and other senior right-wing figures in Israel have referenced a “demographic threat”, and they reflect the continuance of Jabotinsky’s insistence that without a Jewish majority in Israel, “there can be no Zionism, or a Jewish state, or a real Jewish nation.”

### Comparative analysis

The definition and mobilization of national identity are central to the political project of both Hindutva and Revisionist ideology, and this emphasis on national identity can be observed in the contemporary politics of both the Indian and Israeli right. This parallel can be observed especially clearly in the criteria used by both movements’ ideologues to define what constitutes a nation—Golwalkar’s “famous five ‘Unities’” of country, race, religion, culture, and language closely

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<sup>58</sup> Gideon Alon and Aluf Benn, “Netanyahu: Israel’s Arabs Are the Real Demographic Threat,” *Ha’aretz*, December 18, 2003, <https://www.haaretz.com/1.4802179>.

<sup>59</sup> Harriet Sherwood, “Israel criticised over demolition of ‘unrecognised’ Bedouin villages,” *The Guardian*, August 3, 2010 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/aug/03/israel-criticised-demolition-bedouin-villages>.

mirror Jabotinsky's five criteria of race, territory, language, religion, and historic tradition that constitute the idealized "absolute nation".<sup>60</sup> Similarly, both ideologies draw a sharp distinction between citizenship and nationhood—just as Jabotinsky told the 17th Zionist Congress that "nationalism is by [no] means related to citizenship," Savarkar stressed that even a citizen of India who "has not adopted our culture and our history...cannot get himself incorporated into the Hindu fold,"<sup>61</sup> and Golwalkar likewise unequivocally rejected the "amazing theory that the Nation is composed of all those who, for one reason or the other happen to live at the time in the country."<sup>62</sup> This decoupling of citizenship and nationality is key to the construction and perpetuation of an ethnic democracy in which citizenship is seen as "separate from nationality, neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for membership in the ethnic nation," and in which "[t]he ethnic nation, not the citizenry, shapes the symbols, laws and policies of the state for the benefit of the majority."<sup>63</sup>

In a modern context, the nationalist right in both India and Israel have sought to mobilize Hindu and Jewish national identity through their policy priorities—in India with the implementation of CAA-NRC, which is seen by many as the first step towards establishing the 'Hindu Rashtra' envisioned by Savarkar and Golwalkar, and in Israel with the passage of the Nation-State law, which explicitly affirms that Israel is the exclusive nation-state of the Jewish people. Similarly, the politics of language reflect this same ideological imperative, as all three ideologues emphasized the centrality of

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<sup>60</sup> Interestingly, while Golwalkar cites the Jews in Palestine as an example of the successful marriage of these five principles, Jabotinsky holds that they have never been met in reality by the Jewish nation or by any other nation, reflecting Jabotinsky's more exacting standards for these criteria.

<sup>61</sup> Savarkar, *Hindutva*, 84.

<sup>62</sup> Golwalkar, *We*, 59.

<sup>63</sup> Smooha, "The model," 477.

language to national identity. Just as Savarkar described Sanskrit as “the cherished and sacred possession of our race, contributing most powerfully to the fundamental unity of our people”<sup>64</sup> and Golwalkar described it as “the dialect of the Gods” of which the “many ‘languages’ [found throughout India] are mere offshoots,”<sup>65</sup> so too did Jabotinsky view Hebrew as “the only and eternal language of the Jewish people” which “must become the only language in all phases of life”<sup>66</sup> and thus did he “[attribute] more importance to the Hebrew language than to Judaism as a link between the individual and the people” in his nation-building project.<sup>67</sup> In the modern day, this linguistic nationalism can be observed in both countries’ politics as well—the 2019 BJP manifesto promised to “ensure that the teaching of Sanskrit is expanded and popularised at the school level” in the interests of “Preserving Bharatiya Linguistic Culture,”<sup>68</sup> and the Nation-State Law in Israel enshrined Hebrew as the official language of the Jewish state while giving Arabic a “special status” and stipulating that “arrangements regarding the use of Arabic in state institutions or vis-à-vis them will be set by law.”<sup>69</sup>

In both contexts, we can similarly observe a emphasis on demographics at the ideological level as well as in contemporary politics—just as Savarkar, Golwalkar, and Jabotinsky all share a commitment to the notion that Hindus and Jews must maintain majority status in their respective states, the nationalist right in both India and Israel today views the growth of minority populations as a

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<sup>64</sup> Savarkar, *Hindutva*, 40,

<sup>65</sup> Golwalkar, *We*, 43.

<sup>66</sup> Jabotinsky, “The Fundamentals of the Betarian World-Outlook.”

<sup>67</sup> Bilski Ben-Hur, *Every Individual, a King*, 135.

<sup>68</sup> Bharatiya Janata Party, *Sankalp Patra: Lok Sabha 2019* (New Delhi: Bharatiya Janata Party, 2019), 36.

<sup>69</sup> “Basic Law: Israel—the Nation-State of the Jewish People.”

threat to the state's national character—a key pillar of ethnic democracy—and frequently deploys fearmongering rhetoric about shifting demographics within the country.

Despite these many similarities, however, the differences in the two movements' approaches to the question of national identity reveal a great deal about the very different contexts in which each movement is situated, both historically and in the present. As noted above, whereas Hindutva seeks to construct a Hindu national identity where one did not previously exist, Revisionist Zionism as expressed by Jabotinsky seeks to mobilize an *existing* Jewish national identity for the purposes of establishing a Jewish state while simultaneously reconstructing it in the model of an idealized “absolute nation”.

This key difference reflects a corresponding difference in each movement's historical context. In the early 20th century, Hindu identity remained a largely religious and cultural notion—save for some early efforts by 19th-century figures such as Bal Gangadhar Tilak to marry this identity with a more concretely politicized anti-colonial Indian nationalism, the “Hindu nation” as a political entity did not yet exist. Jabotinsky and the Revisionists, on the other hand, endeavored to establish a new ideological current within the existing Zionist movement, which predated Revisionism by several decades and had already, for the most part, established both the existence and statehood claim of a Jewish nation. As a result, the Revisionist project remains to this day less about delineating the boundaries of Jewish national identity, and more about mobilizing this identity to shape the nation's political fate.

This difference in the political context of the two movements is reflected in both countries' contemporary politics as well, most notably in the very different stages of development for the analogous concepts of 'Hindu Rashtra' and 'Jewish State'—as Sen notes, whereas “[t]he Jewish state is a done deed with overwhelming support from the nation...Hindu rashtra [*sic*] is perched on thinner ice, not least because its meanings are still open to debate,” and as a result, the establishment of a ‘pure’ Hindu Rashtra in India faces considerably greater challenges, despite the best efforts of the Hindu right.<sup>70</sup> These diverging contexts can help to explain the observed differences in the scope and nature of ethnic democracy in India and Israel, not least because the formation of a *de jure* ‘Hindu Rashtra’ along the lines of the ‘Jewish State’ is limited in India by legal and constitutional constraints which do not exist in Israel.

### **The question of national minorities**

#### *In Hindutva ideology*

For both Savarkar and Golwalkar, Hindutva ideology takes a decidedly exclusionary view towards national minorities, and towards Muslims in particular. As outlined above, both figures rejected any inherent link between citizenship and nationhood, and Savarkar argued that “we would be straining the usage of words too much—we fear, to the point of breaking—if we call a Mohammedan a Hindu because of his being a resident of India.”<sup>71</sup> In *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?*, Savarkar devoted little attention to the question of how the Muslim minority might be treated in a ‘Hindu Rashtra,’ other than noting that without assimilating into the Hindu nation by “[rendering] whole-hearted love

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<sup>70</sup> Sen, “Ethnocracy, Israel, and India,” 120.

<sup>71</sup> Savarkar, *Hindutva*, 83.

to our common Mother and recognize her not only as Fatherland (Pitribhu) but even as a Holyland (Punyabhu)...they cannot be recognized as Hindus.”<sup>72</sup>

Savarkar’s view on this question, however, can be more clearly observed in the positions he took as president of the Hindu Mahasabha (the Hindu nationalist organization that he led for several years in the 1930s and 1940s)—in a 1938 speech to the organization’s 20th session, Savarkar emphatically asserted that “we must watch [the Muslim minority] in all its actions with the greatest distrust possible. Granting them on the one hand every equitable treatment which an Indian citizen can claim...we must sternly refuse them any the least preferential treatment in any sphere of life.”<sup>73</sup> Savarkar viewed Muslims as a potential fifth column within India, and argued that the country’s northern frontiers must be “well guarded by staunch and powerful Hindu forces to avoid the possible danger of the Indian Moslem going over to the alien Moslem nations across the Indus and betraying our Hindusthan to our non-Hindu foes.”<sup>74</sup>

Golwalkar’s vision of Hindutva takes a similarly exclusionary approach to the question of minorities but goes a step farther than Savarkar, arguing that minorities who do not assimilate should be denied even the rights of citizens. For Golwalkar, anyone who fell “outside the five-fold limits of [the national] idea...cannot but be only foreigners” and “can have no place in the national life, unless they abandon their differences, adopt the religion, culture and language of the Nation and completely

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<sup>72</sup> Savarkar, *Hindutva*, 115.

<sup>73</sup> V.D. Savarkar, “Presidential Address at the 20th Session of the Hindu Mahasabha” (1938), in *Hindu Rashtra Darshan* (Bombay: L.G. Khare, 1949; Poona: Maharashtra Prantik Hindusabha, n.d.), 32, <https://savarkar.org/en/pdfs/hindu-rashtra-darshan-en-v002.pdf>. Citations refer to the Maharashtra Prantik Hindusabha edition.

<sup>74</sup> Savarkar, “Presidential Address,” 32.

merge themselves in the National Race.”<sup>75</sup> Golwalkar wrote favorably about the “ancient Nations i.e. all those who had a well developed National life even before the Great War,” who he believed exemplified this approach, and whose policy of requiring so-called “foreigners” to become “‘Naturalized’ in the country by being assimilated in the Nation wholly” meant that there were no minorities to “tax the generosity of the Nation by demanding privileges, as ‘Minority communities’ in the State.”<sup>76</sup>

Drawing upon this “experience of shrewd old nations,” Golwalkar applied this logic to minorities in India (especially Muslims), writing that “the foreign races in Hindusthan must either adopt the Hindu culture and language, must learn to respect and hold in reverence [*sic*] Hindu religion, must entertain no idea but those of the glorification of the Hindu race and culture...and must lose their separate existence to merge in the Hindu race.”<sup>77</sup> Otherwise, he argued, they “may stay in the country, wholly subordinated to the Hindu Nation, claiming nothing, deserving nothing, deserving no privileges, far less any preferential treatment—not even citizen’s rights.”<sup>78</sup> Thus, it is clear that both Savarkar and Golwalkar saw the Muslim minority as a dangerous Other which must be contained—for Savarkar, that meant treating them with “the greatest distrust possible,” and for Golwalkar, it meant keeping them “wholly subordinated to the Hindu Nation” without even the basic rights of political citizenship.

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<sup>75</sup> Golwalkar, *We*, 45.

<sup>76</sup> Golwalkar, *We*, 46.

<sup>77</sup> Golwalkar, *We*, 47.

<sup>78</sup> Golwalkar, *We*, 47-48.



*In contemporary Indian politics*

These exclusionary attitudes run deep in the politics of the contemporary Indian right, and the persistent Othering and demonization of the country's Muslim minority by Hindu nationalist politicians reflects Hindutva's basic proposition that regardless of residency or citizenship status, Muslims can never fully be accepted into the Hindu nation. Indian Muslims continue to be viewed with suspicion by Hindu nationalists, suspected of harboring anti-Indian sentiments and acting as a fifth column for Pakistan—a suspicion which reflects Smootha's proposition that minorities in ethnic democracies are often perceived as “a serious threat to the survival and integrity of the ethnic nation” that is “reinforced by the ethnic affiliation of the non-core group to an external entity (a country, a homeland or a population) that serves as its patron.”<sup>79</sup> This suspicion is frequently reflected in the rhetoric of BJP politicians and supporters alike, a dynamic which was put on full display during the 2020 anti-CAA protests. At the height of the demonstrations, local BJP leader Kapil Mishra stoked widespread outrage when he described protesters as “Pakistani hooligans” and referred to the Muslim-majority neighborhood of Shaheen Bagh, which was at the center of the protests, as a ““mini-Pakistan.”<sup>80</sup> Mishra's virulent rhetoric surrounding the CAA protests has been cited as causing the February 2020 Delhi riots, which killed 25 people in “the worst Hindu-Muslim violence in India in years.”<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Smootha, “The model,” 478.

<sup>80</sup> “‘Pakistan has entered Shaheen Bagh’: BJP's Kapil Mishra raises political temperature in Delhi,” *Hindustan Times*, January 23, 2020, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/assembly-elections/delhi-assembly-elections-2020-pakistan-has-entered-shaheen-bagh-bjp-s-kapil-mishra-raises-political-temperature-in-delhi/story-tqbMPPrksrxXLfvqIezRmqK.html>.

<sup>81</sup> Jeffrey Gettleman, Suhasini Raj and Sameer Yasir, “The Roots of the Delhi Riots: A Fiery Speech and an Ultimatum,” *The New York Times*, February 26, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/26/world/asia/delhi-riots-kapil-mishra.html>.

In addition to the fifth-column accusation, which echoes similar rhetoric by both Savarkar and Golwalkar, Indian Muslims have also been targeted by the “Love Jihad” conspiracy theory, which alleges a “strategy by Muslim fundamentalists to lure Hindu and Christian girls literally into their arms” by seducing them into marriage, “thus swelling their numbers in an ongoing demographic war.”<sup>82</sup> The BJP has weaponized this conspiracy theory, which reflects the Hindu right’s obsession with Hindu-Muslim demographics through policy—anti-“love jihad” laws have been introduced or passed in more than half a dozen states, and BJP candidates have made such laws a signature campaign promise in state elections across the country.<sup>83</sup>

The prevalence of conspiracy theories such as these, as well as the more recent “Corona Jihad” conspiracy theory which alleges that Muslims have intentionally sought to spread COVID-19 in India, indicates that Savarkar’s vision of Muslims being watched with “the greatest distrust possible” has very much come to pass. Importantly, such conspiracy theories are rooted in the majority’s fears about “biological dilution, demographic swamping, cultural downgrading, security danger, subversion and political instability,” all of which drive a “sense of threat” that, as Smootha argues, is characteristic of ethnic democracy.<sup>84</sup>

For his part, Modi contributes significantly to this Othering of Indian Muslims. In his insightful analysis of Islamophobia in Modi’s rhetoric, Prashant Waikar argues that “[w]hile Hindutva explicitly frames Muslims as the irreconcilable Other to its conception of a Hindu, Modi’s otherization

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<sup>82</sup> Mohan Rao, “Love Jihad and Demographic Fears,” *Indian Journal of Gender Studies* 18, no. 3 (2011): 425.

<sup>83</sup> Lauren Frayer, “In India, boy meets girl, proposes — and gets accused of jihad,” *National Public Radio*, October 10, 2021, <https://www.npr.org/2021/10/10/1041105988/india-muslim-hindu-interfaith-wedding-conversion>.

<sup>84</sup> Smootha, “The model,” 478.

of Muslims is comparatively subtle—at times, done through the defense of Muslims.”<sup>85</sup> While Modi has tended to steer clear of the more openly anti-Muslim rhetoric deployed by some of his less politically savvy counterparts, even referring to Muslims as “loyal and patriotic citizens who ‘will live for India’ and ‘die for India,’” this seemingly conciliatory language is intended to conceal an anti-Muslim animus that underlies Modi’s politics.<sup>86</sup> Waikar’s analysis reveals that when Modi speaks favorably of Indian Muslims, he does so by implying that “the Indian brand of Islam” is uniquely “nonviolent and humanitarian” and, importantly, “blossomed in India’s openness and pluralism” (itself synonymous with Hinduism), thereby advancing the claim that India’s Muslims are peaceful patriots only “because they are believers of a Hinduized Islam” and their “violent Islamic inclinations have been tamed by Hinduism.”<sup>87</sup>

This rhetorical strategy reflects a strategic repackaging of the more explicitly Islamophobic approach found in Savarkar and Golwalkar’s writings and speeches in order to comport with the democratic norms necessary to sustain an ethnic democracy. At the same time, this repackaging subtly advances the narrative that were it not for Hinduism’s influence, India’s Muslims would succumb to their “violent Islamic inclinations.” Given the many anti-Muslim policies enacted by Modi’s government, the more openly anti-Muslim rhetoric of many of his ministers and key allies, and his own alleged complicity in the deadly 2002 anti-Muslim riots in Gujarat that killed over 1,000,<sup>88</sup> it is clear

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<sup>85</sup> Prashant Waikar, “Reading Islamophobia in Hindutva: An Analysis of Narendra Modi’s Political Discourse,” *Islamophobia Studies Journal* 4, no. 2 (Spring 2018): 173.

<sup>86</sup> Waikar, “Reading Islamophobia in Hindutva,” 171-172.

<sup>87</sup> Waikar, “Reading Islamophobia in Hindutva,” 173.

<sup>88</sup> Amelia Gentleman, “Bloodshed in ’02 Shadows Indian Politician in Race That Tests Nationalist Party,” *The New York Times*, December 11, 2007, <https://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/11/world/asia/11gujarat.html>.

that the politics of the contemporary Hindu right, with Modi at its helm, are animated by the same exclusionary views towards Muslims that characterize Hindutva as an ideology.

While both Savarkar and Golwalkar's views on minorities remain influential for the contemporary Hindu right, it is important to note that the contemporary approach much more closely resembles that of Savarkar than that of Golwalkar. Even the most virulently exclusionary policies pursued by the BJP do not go nearly as far as Golwalkar's proposed treatment of Muslims, which called for the Indian state to wholly subordinate them and deny them even the basic rights of citizenship, but rather more closely resemble Savarkar's call to grant them "every equitable treatment which an Indian citizen can claim" while simultaneously regarding them "with the greatest distrust possible." This must be understood in light of India's status as an ethnic democracy—while Golwalkar's proposed denial of rights to the national minority is incompatible with the 'democratic' element of this model (rather, it is more akin to what one might find in a *Herrenvolk* system), Savarkar's proposal for state-sanctioned Othering of minorities without denying them citizenship altogether conforms much more closely to Smootha's conception of a true ethnic democracy. As such, it should come as no surprise that the Othering of Muslims by the contemporary Hindu right more closely reflects Savarkar's view.

#### *In Revisionist Zionist ideology*

Jabotinsky's views about the Arabs in Palestine and what was to be done with them can be discerned most clearly in his 1923 essay "The Iron Wall," in which he presented the Arab population less as a threat to be removed, and more as a problem to be managed. In this essay, Jabotinsky disputed his reputation as an "enemy of the Arabs," arguing that because "[t]here will always be two nations in

Palestine,” it would therefore be “utterly impossible to eject the Arabs.”<sup>89</sup> Characterizing the Zionist aim as a “peaceful credo,” he nevertheless argued that whether or not this “peaceful aim” can be achieved by “peaceful means” depended “not...on our attitude to the Arabs; but entirely on the attitude of the Arabs to us and to Zionism.”<sup>90</sup> This qualification forms the basis of Jabotinsky’s argument—openly admitting the colonial nature of the Zionist settlement enterprise, Jabotinsky argued that Arab hostility to Zionism was to be expected on the grounds that “native populations, civilised or uncivilised, have always stubbornly resisted the colonists.”<sup>91</sup> Therefore, he argued, “it is utterly impossible to obtain the voluntary consent of the Palestine Arabs for converting ‘Palestine’ from an Arab country into a country with a Jewish majority.”<sup>92</sup>

Given this supposed futility of pursuing a voluntary agreement with the Arab population, Jabotinsky instead advocated for a far more authoritarian and militaristic position, writing that “Zionist colonisation...can proceed and develop only under the protection of a power that is independent of the native population – behind an iron wall, which the native population cannot breach.”<sup>93</sup> To Jabotinsky, this “iron wall” meant “the imposition—either by a show of force or, if necessary, by actual physical force—of a series of political conditions that would prevent the Arabs from interfering with the Zionist enterprise” in order to “leave no doubt whatsoever in the Arab mind that in Eretz Israel the Jews, and only the Jews, would be sovereign.”<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Vladimir Jabotinsky, “The Iron Wall,” November 4, 1923, <http://en.jabotinsky.org/media/9747/the-iron-wall.pdf>.

<sup>90</sup> Jabotinsky, “The Iron Wall.”

<sup>91</sup> Jabotinsky, “The Iron Wall.”

<sup>92</sup> Jabotinsky, “The Iron Wall.”

<sup>93</sup> Jabotinsky, “The Iron Wall.”

<sup>94</sup> Yaacov Shavit, *Jabotinsky and the Revisionist Movement, 1925-1948* (London: Frank Cass, 1988), 254.

Hailing as he did from a classical liberal political tradition, Jabotinsky professed an ostensible commitment to protecting the rights of the Arab minority in a future Jewish state, writing in “The Iron Wall” that “I am prepared to take an oath binding ourselves and our descendants that we shall never do anything contrary to the principle of equal rights.”<sup>95</sup> In practice, however, this commitment was consistently subordinated to what Jabotinsky saw as the political realities of the moment—although “between 1938 and 1940 [Jabotinsky] formulated a most explicit formal platform on the Arab question” which guaranteed “complete equality of rights to the Arabs of Eretz Israel,” he stressed “[t]ime and time again...that this plan depicted an optimal situation, and that its implementation was dependent upon the prevailing conditions,” which would require the Arabs to submit to the Jewish majority and forfeit all competing national claims within Palestine before a negotiated settlement could even be considered.<sup>96</sup> So long as the Arabs resisted Zionist colonization or the establishment of a Jewish state, however, Jabotinsky’s position was firm—the Iron Wall would remain standing, and the Arab population would be brought to heel by any means necessary.

*In contemporary Israeli politics*

In many ways, Jabotinsky’s approach to the Arab minority is alive and well in Israel today—as Avi Shlaim argues, “the history of Israel can be seen as a vindication of [the Iron Wall] strategy.”<sup>97</sup> Palestinians designated as ‘Arab citizens of Israel’, who make up around 20 percent of the population, are officially guaranteed equal civil rights under the law, but the legal enshrinement of Israel as the

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<sup>95</sup> Jabotinsky, “The Iron Wall.”

<sup>96</sup> Shavit, *Jabotinsky and the Revisionist Movement*, 262.

<sup>97</sup> Avi Shlaim, “The Iron Wall Revisited,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 41, no. 2 (Winter 2012): 86-87.

exclusive nation-state of the Jewish people effectively means that the civil rights and equality guaranteed by political citizenship have come at the expense of any national claims for Palestinian citizens—as one Arab former Knesset member put it, “in 1948, we lost a country and gained citizenship.”<sup>98</sup> To this day, while Israel recognizes its Arab population as “an ethnic, linguistic, religious and cultural minority,” it simultaneously “denies them the status of a national Palestinian-Arab minority” and the rights that would come with such a status, as the state “does not recognise their national leadership, does not grant them cultural autonomy and discourages their ties with the Palestinian people.”<sup>99</sup>

This subordination of national claims creates an ethnic-democratic dynamic in which Palestinians are essentially treated as second-class citizens. Arabs in Israel are viewed as both “a security and demographic hazard”<sup>100</sup> and are “placed under security and political control,”<sup>101</sup> in addition to facing widespread discrimination and unequal treatment—a situation summed up by the government-appointed Or Commission’s finding in October 2000 that “Israeli democracy is not democratic towards the Arabs to the same extent that it is democratic towards the Jews.”<sup>102</sup>

For those Palestinians living in the Occupied Palestinian Territories of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, the situation is far more dire. Palestinians in the West Bank are governed by Israeli military law which severely curtails their rights to freedom of speech, movement, and association, along with other

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<sup>98</sup> Human Rights Watch, *A Threshold Crossed: Israeli Authorities and the Crimes of Apartheid and Persecution* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2021): 151, [https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media\\_2021/04/israel\\_palestine0421\\_web\\_0.pdf](https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2021/04/israel_palestine0421_web_0.pdf).

<sup>99</sup> Smooha, “The model,” 488.

<sup>100</sup> Smooha, “The model,” 486.

<sup>101</sup> Smooha, “The model,” 489.

<sup>102</sup> Jaffrelot, “A De Facto Ethnic Democracy,” 43.

basic civil and political rights,<sup>103</sup> and resistance is met with extreme force—“Israeli forces routinely use excessive force, including live ammunition, against Palestinian demonstrators, rock-throwers, suspected assailants, and others in policing situations when lesser means could have been deployed.”<sup>104</sup> The Gaza Strip, which was militarily occupied by Israel until 2005, is subjected to a paralyzing land, air, and sea blockade as well as draconian restrictions on freedom of movement,<sup>105</sup> and repeated Israeli military offensives in 2008-09, 2012, and 2014 have killed “well over 2,000 Palestinian civilians” as “Israeli forces regularly used excessive and vastly disproportionate force, at times deliberately [targeting] civilians or civilian infrastructure.”<sup>106</sup>

While these heavy-handed policies towards both Palestinians have continued throughout a succession of governments from across the Israeli political spectrum, they remain an especially important aspect of the governing platform of right-wing parties such as the Likud, who frequently invoke “security” as a justification for adopting such positions. In every sense, they represent the modern continuation of Jabotinsky’s attitudes towards the Arab population—extending civil and political rights at the expense of national rights for Palestinian citizens of Israel, and adopting an authoritarian, militaristic “Iron Wall” approach to Palestinians in the Occupied Territories.

Given the strong influence of Revisionist ideology on the contemporary politics of both Netanyahu and the Likud, it is no surprise that Netanyahu has repeatedly invoked the rhetoric of the “Iron Wall” in the context of defending Israel’s national security. As Shlaim argues, “[Netanyahu’s]

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<sup>103</sup> Human Rights Watch, *A Threshold Crossed*, 84-88.

<sup>104</sup> Human Rights Watch, *A Threshold Crossed*, 90.

<sup>105</sup> Human Rights Watch, *A Threshold Crossed*, 128.

<sup>106</sup> Human Rights Watch, *A Threshold Crossed*, 131-132.



version of the iron wall [does] not see Jewish military power as a means to an end, but sometimes as a means to achieving security and sometimes as an end in itself.”<sup>107</sup> This can be clearly observed in Netanyahu’s remarks at an April 2016 memorial service for Jabotinsky, in which the prime minister emphatically stated that “[t]he Iron Wall is the ability to repel attacks by our enemies [and] is the factor that compels them, sooner or later, to accept our existence”—indeed, according to Netanyahu, “[t]he Iron Wall is the State of Israel” itself.<sup>108</sup> He invoked this concept again in May 2018, warning that Israel’s “enemies who threaten us with destruction should know that they will encounter an iron wall,” in remarks that many interpreted as being directed towards Iran.<sup>109</sup>

It is important to note that in both instances, Netanyahu frames the “Iron Wall” as an outwardly-focused policy of defense against Israel’s *external* enemies, rather than what it was originally intended to be—a strategy of complete military control and domination directed against the country’s *internal* Palestinian minority. Given the Israeli state’s ongoing subjugation of Palestinians both within its borders and in the Occupied Territories, Netanyahu’s omission of this crucial context in his invocation of the “Iron Wall” can thus be read as yet another strategic repackaging of Jabotinsky’s vision to suit 21st-century mores, perhaps to avoid raising potentially uncomfortable questions about the status and treatment of the Arab minority under Israel’s ethnic-democratic regime.

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<sup>107</sup> Shlaim, “The Iron Wall Revisited,” 91.

<sup>108</sup> Benjamin Netanyahu, “Remarks at the Official Memorial Service for Zeev Jabotinsky at Mount Herzl” (speech, Jerusalem, April 8, 2016), Prime Minister’s Office, <https://www.gov.il/en/departments/news/speechzhabotinsky040816>.

<sup>109</sup> Yaniv Kubovich, “Israel Tries to Reduce Tension Amid Preparations for Iranian Retaliation,” *Ha’aretz*, May 8, 2018, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-israel-tries-to-reduce-tension-amid-fear-of-iranian-retaliation-1.6070302>.

### Comparative analysis

\_\_\_\_\_ Just as the definition and mobilization of national identity are central to both Hindutva and Revisionist Zionist ideology, so too is the adoption of a hostile and authoritarian stance towards national minorities. In particular, Golwalkar's assertion that "foreign races" (namely Muslims) should be "wholly subordinated to the Hindu Nation" until and unless they opted to completely assimilate into the Hindu culture, religion, and way of life closely mirrors the view held by Jabotinsky, who argued that the "Iron Wall" could be lifted and "practical questions, such as a guarantee against Arab displacement, or equal rights for Arab citizens, or Arab national integrity" could be discussed only after the Arabs gave up all hope of resisting the Zionist project.<sup>110</sup>

Nevertheless, it is important to note that the disparate historical and political contexts of the two movements necessarily gave rise to key differences in their respective approaches to national minorities—whereas Hindutva's approach is based on the subjugation of the Muslim minority by a Hindu population that has enjoyed majority status for centuries, Revisionist Zionism as articulated by Jabotinsky is explicit in its intention to "[convert] 'Palestine' from an Arab country into a country with a Jewish majority." The Zionist approach, therefore more closely reflects that of settler colonialism with its emphasis on the "superfluity of the native,"<sup>111</sup> and the subordination of the Palestinians has thus manifested in the Israeli state's "policies of 'Judaizing' a land that would otherwise be 'Arab'—a central tenet of Revisionist ideology."<sup>112</sup> This approach is integral to ethnic democracy insofar as

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<sup>110</sup> Jabotinsky, "The Iron Wall."

<sup>111</sup> Sen, "Ethnocracy, Israel, and India," 112.

<sup>112</sup> Sen, "Ethnocracy, Israel, and India," 109.

Palestinians (or at least those classified as ‘Arab citizens of Israel’) are granted nominal citizenship rights while simultaneously being relegated to second-class status.

Whereas the openly settler-colonial nature of the Zionist enterprise manifests in the relegation of Palestinians to be second-class citizens at best and victims of an iron-fisted military occupation at worst, the subjugation of India’s Muslim minority occurs in more subtle and complex ways, in no small part due to the Indian state’s constitutional commitment to secularism and democratic norms. While Indian Muslims ostensibly enjoy the same civil and political rights guaranteed to all Indian citizens, they are nevertheless subjected to persistent demonization and Othering at the hands of the Hindu right. This manifests in the incitement of communal violence, the promulgation of anti-Muslim conspiracy theories, and the subtle but insidious targeting of Muslims through policies such as anti-“love jihad” laws, bans on cow slaughter, and, of course, CAA-NRC, among other policies.<sup>113</sup>

In both countries, non-state actors—specifically, vigilante groups representing the dominant majority—play a key role in contributing to the Othering and marginalization of national minorities. Christophe Jaffrelot has written at length about the rise of Hindu vigilantes who violently target Muslims, frequently working “hand in glove” with state authorities despite the flagrant illegality of their activities, and enjoying “a degree of legitimacy in the eyes of the majority because they claim that they are acting in defence of the dominant religion.”<sup>114</sup> The murky relationship between the BJP and

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<sup>113</sup> India, “India: Government Policies, Actions Target Minorities,” Human Rights Watch, February 19, 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/02/19/india-government-policies-actions-target-minorities#>.

<sup>114</sup> Jaffrelot, “A De Facto Ethnic Democracy,” 65.

the RSS, which plays a major role in forming and inciting these vigilante groups, allows the BJP to offer tacit support to Hindu vigilantes while simultaneously keeping them at arm's length so that “the government [can remain] ‘clean’, exterior to illegal forms of cultural policing...which [are] in tune with its ideology,” while “the Sangh Parivar [can] resort to its favourite modus operandi for disciplining society, at the grassroots level, without fearing state intervention.”<sup>115</sup>

A similar dynamic can be observed in Israel, and particularly in the Occupied West Bank, where Jewish settlers routinely engage in vigilantism and violence against the region's Palestinian inhabitants. Settler groups, which especially under right-wing governments have enjoyed considerable support from the Israeli state, are often tacitly or overtly sanctioned by Israeli authorities in these activities, and particularly in “remote and isolated settlements, where small groups of soldiers are stationed inside the settlements, soldiers and settlers often patrol the area together.”<sup>116</sup> Indeed, a recent sharp increase in anti-Palestinian violence in the West Bank has likely been driven by “‘a permissive atmosphere’ for extremists in the area” caused by the IDF Central Command's hands-off policy of “‘permitting the settlers to ‘let off steam’” in an “effort to avoid confrontations with the settlers”<sup>117</sup>—a far cry from Israeli authorities' repressive policies towards Palestinians in the Occupied Territories.

As with Hindu vigilantes in India, this vigilante violence serves an important purpose in the Israeli state's “Iron Wall” approach towards the Palestinian minority—by acting as “informal agents of

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<sup>115</sup> Jaffrelot, “A De Facto Ethnic Democracy,” 57.

<sup>116</sup> Nir Gazit, “State-sponsored Vigilantism: Jewish Settlers' Violence in the Occupied Palestinian Territories,” *Sociology* 49, no. 3 (June 2015): 445.

<sup>117</sup> Yaniv Kubovich, “Violence Against Palestinians on the Rise Amid Israel's ‘Hands-off’ Approach in West Bank,” *Ha'aretz*, October 3, 2021, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-sharp-increase-in-anti-palestinian-settler-violence-amid-israel-s-hands-off-policy-1.10260260>.

the state,” vigilantes fill a “governmental void” caused by “the ambiguity surrounding the formal status of the Israeli state” in the Occupied Territories, and “[generate] ad hoc ‘effective control’ over Palestinian territory and population even in the absence of state officials” while simultaneously legitimizing the Israeli state’s role as “protectors of the local civilian population” in the instances where Israeli forces *do* intervene to prevent harassment of Palestinians.<sup>118</sup> Thus, non-state vigilante violence in both India and Israel plays an important role in perpetuating and reifying the exclusionary stance towards national minorities that is articulated by both Hindutva and Revisionist Zionist ideology, while allowing the state to ‘outsource’ (to a certain extent) the extralegal violence that is necessary to maintain such an approach. In both cases, this allows the state to retain a veneer of democratic legitimacy even as it condones this violence and implements exclusionary policies—a tenuous and often self-contradictory balancing act that is necessary in an ethnic democracy.

### **The deployment of historical narrative**

#### *In Hindutva ideology*

The strategic use of historical narrative is central to both Savarkar and Golwalkar’s articulations of Hindutva ideology, and the two thinkers frequently deploy historical references in service of two primary objectives—justifying exclusionary territorial claims, and justifying an antagonistic stance towards the Other. In order to justify Hindutva ideology’s exclusionary definition of Hindu nationhood and concurrent claims to the national territory, both Savarkar and Golwalkar found it necessary to establish their claims of Hindu indigeneity to the land known as ‘Hindustan’. For Savarkar

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<sup>118</sup> Gazit, “State-sponsored Vigilantism,” 450.

especially, whose “world-view was framed around the primacy of the Hindu nation,” the importance of history “rested in its ability to show the development of this nation over time, and in particular in the assimilation of various races into a Hindu rashtra”<sup>119</sup>—a position summed up in Savarkar’s succinct assertion that “Hindutva is not a word but a history.”<sup>120</sup>

Savarkar asserted the indigeneity of the Hindu nation in poetic language, writing that long before the ancient Egyptian or Babylonian civilizations, “the holy waters of the Indus were daily witnessing the lucid and curling columns of the scented sacrificial smokes and the valleys resounding with the chants of Vedic hymns.”<sup>121</sup> Indeed, Savarkar’s emphasis on historical roots as the basic driver of nationhood likely shaped his de-emphasis on the role of religion in shaping Hindu national identity—Hindutva, for Savarkar, “was conceived and argued primarily on historical grounds,” and thus it was this “discourse of history” that “allowed him to imagine a Hindu collective nationalist identity that flowed seamlessly from the ancient past into the present” without the need for the distractions of religious justification.<sup>122</sup>

Golwalkar took a similar approach to Hindu history, explicitly tying the antiquity of Hindu civilization to a claim of indigeneity in his assertion that “the very first page of history records our existence as a progressive and highly civilized nation—the only nation...in this land, which, therefore, came to be known as Hindusthan, the land of the Hindus”<sup>123</sup>—a position which he reiterated later in the book, citing Hindu texts to demonstrate that “[t]he word Rashtra...is as old as the Vedas” and

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<sup>119</sup> Devare, *History*, 169-170.

<sup>120</sup> Savarkar, *Hindutva*, 3.

<sup>121</sup> Savarkar, *Hindutva*, 5.

<sup>122</sup> Devare, *History*, 153.

<sup>123</sup> Golwalkar, *We*, 6.

conclude that “[e]vidently the ancient masters had in mind the Religious and cultural unity of the people living as a Rashtra in the country.”<sup>124</sup> These passages illustrate the fundamental motivation at the heart of both figures’ deployment of historical narrative—establishing an ancient linkage between nation and land so as to justify Hindutva’s exclusionary claims over the land they term ‘Hindustan’.

In addition to justifying exclusionary claims through the affirmation of Hindu indigeneity, both ideologues also used history to justify their antagonistic stance towards the Muslim Other. Both Savarkar and Golwalkar justified this stance by presenting a hypernationalist historical narrative in which the history of the Hindu nation was defined in terms of cyclical episodes of subjugation (usually at the hands of Muslims) and resistance by heroic Hindu leaders. Savarkar, for example, characterized all of Indian history as an unending “conflict of life and death” which played a key role in shaping Hindu identity.<sup>125</sup> Mahmud of Ghazni’s 11th-century invasions of the subcontinent, according to Savarkar, sparked a “ghastly conflict” which continued “[d]ay after day, decade after decade, century after century” as “India single-handed kept up the fight morally and militarily” and continued to advance the “triumphant Hindu banner.”<sup>126</sup> “Nothing,” he wrote, “can weld peoples into a nation and nations into a state as the pressure of a common foe,”<sup>127</sup> and it was through “this prolonged furious conflict” that “our people became intensely conscious of ourselves as Hindus and were welded into a nation to an extent unknown in our history.”<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Golwalkar, *We*, 53.

<sup>125</sup> Savarkar, *Hindutva*, 42.

<sup>126</sup> Savarkar, *Hindutva*, 44.

<sup>127</sup> Savarkar, *Hindutva*, 43.

<sup>128</sup> Savarkar, *Hindutva*, 44-45.

Later in his career, Savarkar expanded on this subject in his *Six Glorious Epochs of Indian History*, completed in 1966 and published posthumously in 1971, in which he divided Hindu history into “six epochs, each marked by one or a set of ‘brave’ Hindu rulers who fought valiantly and defeated foreigners.”<sup>129</sup> This nationalist history, which defines Hindu identity in opposition to a marauding Other, is first and foremost anti-Muslim in its orientation—both texts, as well as Savarkar’s other personal and political writings, reveal that “[i]n any mention of conversations with Muslims, Savarkar held each Muslim as representative of the historical ‘incursions’ and ‘injustices’ of the Muslim community in India as a whole.”<sup>130</sup> In Savarkar’s conception of Indian—which, according to the basic tenets of Hindutva, is synonymous with Hindu—history, the Muslim thus serves as “an open, floating signifier on which any kind of Hindu communalised histories can be freely inscribed.”<sup>131</sup>

A similar presentation of Hindu history can be observed in the writings of Golwalkar, who wrote that “[e]ver since that evil day, when Moslems first landed in Hindusthan, right upto the present moment the Hindu Nation has been gallantly fighting on to shake off the despoilers.”<sup>132</sup> Rejecting what he perceived as externally-imposed versions of history, which “teach us that we never were a nation” and “that our real history begins with the Moghul rulers,” he contended instead that “our history is the story of our flourishing Hindu National life for thousands of years and then of a long unflinching war continuing for the last ten centuries, which has not yet come to a decisive close,” and argued that an accurate history of India would present Hindus as “a free nation of illustrious heroes

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<sup>129</sup> Devare, *History*, 171.

<sup>130</sup> Devare, *History*, 159.

<sup>131</sup> Tanika Sarkar, “How the Sangh Parivar Writes and Teaches History,” in *Majoritarian State*, 157.

<sup>132</sup> Golwalkar, *We*, 12.



fighting the forces of destruction for the last thousand years...with ever-increasing zeal and unflagging national ardour.”<sup>133</sup> For both thinkers, the framing of Hindu history as a succession of episodes of resistance against invaders and occupiers—first Muslims, followed by the British— “allows the ideologues to establish temporal continuity between the golden and dark ages of Hindu nationhood” by “[emphasizing] the notion of an underpinning Hindu national consciousness and spirit” which is manifested in the Hindu nation’s ‘heroic’ resistance to foreign domination.<sup>134</sup> This framing of Hindu history, coupled with the use of history to advance a specific claim of Hindu indigeneity, are crucial to Hindutva’s nationalist project, as they form the justifications for the exclusionary territorial claims and antagonistic stance towards the Muslim minority that are visible in Hindu nationalist politics to this day.

### *In contemporary Indian politics*

The weaponization and tactical deployment of historical narrative to push a nationalist agenda remains alive and well in the political strategy of the contemporary Hindu right. Historical narrative has become a critical battleground in many aspects of Indian politics, most notably in the writing of state-sponsored textbooks, which has become “an issue of increasing controversy in recent years” as “[b]oth the Hindu right-wing and the secularists accuse each other of writing and promoting ‘tainted’ histories whenever their respective political parties come to power.”<sup>135</sup> In her detailed analysis of textbooks published through the government’s National Curriculum of Education and Research

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<sup>133</sup> Golwalkar, *We*, 13.

<sup>134</sup> Sammyh S. Khan, Ted Svensson, Yashpal A Jogdand, and James H. Liu, “Lessons From the Past for the Future: The Definition and Mobilisation of Hindu Nationhood by the Hindu Nationalist Movement of India,” *Journal of Social and Political Psychology* 5, no. 2 (2017): 494.

<sup>135</sup> Devare, *History*, 1.

Training (NCERT), Tanika Sarkar demonstrates how the RSS' educational wing, Vidya Bharati, has exerted influence during years of BJP rule to present “an RSS version of the past at official and popular levels”<sup>136</sup> which closely mirrors the narrative put forward by Savarkar and Golwalkar. This narrative serves to “implant an aggressive Hindu supremacism and hatred for the non-Hindu” and “exalt Hindu heroes who fought against Muslims”<sup>137</sup>—especially Shivaji, the Hindu king and founder of the Maratha Empire who is celebrated and almost deified by Hindu nationalists (including Savarkar and Golwalkar) for his military campaigns against the Mughals. Beyond influencing government-sponsored curricula, the Sangh Parivar also pushes this Hindutva narrative through its own educational efforts throughout the country, including in states where the BJP has never held power—Vidya Bharati runs 12,828 formal schools throughout India teaching over 3.4 million students,<sup>138</sup> as well as 11,353 ‘informal education centres’ teaching over 152,000 students “residing in slums and distant places.”<sup>139</sup>

Beyond the politicization of educational curricula, Hindutva's nationalistic deployment of historical narrative can also be observed in the rhetoric of right-wing political actors. Nowhere is this tendency more clearly visible than in the BJP's mobilization around the Ayodhya dispute in Uttar Pradesh, which centers on the Babri Masjid, a sixteenth-century mosque that many Hindus have long claimed was constructed on the ancient birthplace of the divine Hindu king Ram. In 1989, the BJP under Advani rallied its supporters around the ‘Ram Janmabhoomi’ campaign to construct a temple at

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<sup>136</sup> Sarkar, “How the Sangh,” 152.

<sup>137</sup> Sarkar, “How the Sangh,” 161.

<sup>138</sup> “Formal Schools,” Vidya Bharti Akhil Bhartiya Shiksha Sansthan, Accessed November 5, 2021, <https://vidyabharti.net/formal-schools>.

<sup>139</sup> “Informal Education Units (11,353),” Vidya Bharti Akhil Bhartiya Shiksha Sansthan, Accessed November 5, 2021, <https://vidyabharti.net/informal-education-units-11-353>.

the site, and this “Hindu mobilization and polarization of the electorate through violence” resulted in the BJP increasing its number of seats in the Lok Sabha from 2 to 88 in that year’s elections.<sup>140</sup> The large-scale communal rioting instigated by the Babri Masjid’s 1992 destruction by a mob of Hindu nationalists at a BJP-led rally forced the party to moderate its stance on the Ayodhya dispute, but the construction of a Ram temple in Ayodhya has been included in BJP election manifestos since 1996,<sup>141</sup> and the movement has been given a renewed focus by Modi, who in August 2020 laid the temple’s foundation stone and delivered a speech peppered with references to Hindu religion.<sup>142</sup>

In a direct continuation of the historical narrative articulated by Savarkar and Golwalkar, the Ayodhya dispute and demolition of the Babri Masjid thus “marked a turning point in bringing ‘history’ center stage in Indian public life”<sup>143</sup> as the ‘Ramjanmabhoomi’ campaign to “‘liberate’ the site” came not only to symbolize “Hindu resistance against the enduring oppression of Islam in the subcontinent but also the mission of restoring Hindu nationhood to its former glory.”<sup>144</sup> In this sense, the Ayodhya campaign not only represents modern Hindutva’s strategic incorporation of religion into political life, but it also represents a renewed focus on history and historical narrative as a key political battleground of the contemporary Hindu right. Both this campaign, as well as the Hindu right’s broader effort to advance a nationalistic historical narrative which exalts the ‘heroic’ Hindu rulers who

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<sup>140</sup> Jaffrelot, *Hindu Nationalism*, 280-281.

<sup>141</sup> Preetha Nair, “BJP Stuck To Its Core Agenda, Promise Of Ram Mandir Nothing New, Say Analysts,” *Outlook*, April 8, 2019, <https://www.outlookindia.com/website/story/india-news-bjp-stuck-to-its-core-agenda-promise-of-ram-mandir-nothing-new-say-analysts/328380>.

<sup>142</sup> Shah and Khan, “At bhoomi puja.”

<sup>143</sup> Devare, *History*, 1.

<sup>144</sup> Khan et al., “Lessons from the Past,” 500.

fought against Muslim ‘invaders’, reflect Savarkar and Golwalkar’s presentation of Hindu history as an ongoing, cyclical struggle between the native Hindu population and a threatening, foreign Muslim Other. Such a narrative serves the purpose of constructing and maintaining an ethnic democracy by continually stoking a “sense of threat” among the Hindu majority in order to mobilize them around ethnic-democratic principles and policies.

In addition, the rhetoric of Modi and the BJP routinely emphasizes the ancient roots of Hindu culture in the subcontinent while ignoring Muslims altogether, echoing the claims of ancient indigeneity advanced by both Savarkar and Golwalkar—for example, the preface to the BJP’s 2014 election manifesto, which highlights “India’s contribution to the march of civilization” over thousands of years, makes reference to the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Buddha, and Mahavira,<sup>145</sup> while entirely ignoring the cultural contributions of Muslims throughout Indian history.<sup>146</sup> A similar approach can be observed in the rhetoric of Modi himself, who frequently invokes a Hinduized narrative of Indian history as a “nostalgic nodal point which manufactures a longing for a return.”<sup>147</sup> In his August 2016 speech marking the 70th anniversary of Indian independence, for example, he stated that “[w]e have a history of thousands of years and our cultural heritage is also millennia old,” going on to invoke examples of this ancient heritage “[r]ight from the Vedas to Vivekananda, from the Upanishads to the

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<sup>145</sup> This inclusion of Buddhist and Jain holy figures is not surprising within the framework of Hindutva—both Savarkar and Golwalkar saw Buddhism and Jainism as Dharmic faiths which sprang out of Hinduism, and held that these traditions were indigenous to India and thus closer to the Hindu nation than “foreign” Islam. As such, their inclusion in this list alongside Hindu scriptures nevertheless still represents Hindutva’s privileging of ‘indigenous’ Hindu culture over ‘foreign’ Muslim culture.

<sup>146</sup> Bharatiya Janata Party, *Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat: Election Manifesto 2014* (New Delhi: Bharatiya Janata Party, 2014), 1.

<sup>147</sup> Waikar, “Reading Islamophobia in Hindutva,” 171.

satellites...from the Bhim of Mahabharat to the Bhimrao [Ambedkar]”<sup>148</sup>—again, leaving out any mention of contributions that Muslims have made to this heritage.

This rhetoric, which emphasizes Hindus’ ancient roots in India while erasing those of the Muslim community, represents a direct continuation of the way that Savarkar and Golwalkar deployed a Hinduized historical narrative to justify exclusionary claims to ‘Hindustan’, and reflects the ongoing influence of Hindutva’s deployment of historical narrative on the political strategy of the contemporary Hindu right.

### *In Revisionist Zionist ideology*

While the nationalistic deployment of historical narrative does play an important role in Revisionist Zionist ideology, Jabotinsky’s relationship to history is somewhat more complicated than that of Savarkar and Golwalkar. By no means did Jabotinsky ignore the Jews’ ancient roots in Palestine when advancing his national claims—in a 1922 article entitled “The Justice of the Jewish Claim,” he emphatically asserted that the ancient connection between the Jewish nation and the Land of Israel, dating “[f]rom the days of King David until the ultimate dispersion of the Jewish people by the Romans,” was “one of the most widely known facts of universal history” and was “recognized by the conscience of all civilized peoples of the world.”<sup>149</sup> Nevertheless, as Yaacov Shavit notes, Jabotinsky took “an entirely unfundamentalist view of the Jewish historical past” which eschewed Biblical

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<sup>148</sup> Narendra Modi, “Address on the 70th Anniversary of Indian Independence” (speech, New Delhi, August 15, 2016), Narendra Modi, <https://www.narendramodi.in/preliminary-text-of-prime-minister-shri-narendra-modi-s-address-to-the-nation-from-the-ramparts-of-the-red-fort-on-the-70th-independence-day-511827>.

<sup>149</sup> Vladimir Jabotinsky, “The Justice of the Jewish Claim,” *The Canadian Jewish Chronicle* (Montreal), May 12, 1922, <https://news.google.com/newspapers?id=OwEfAAAAIIBAJ&sjid=0WEEAAAAIIBAJ&pg=2250%2C3168710>.

accounts of Jewish history and instead held that “the Hebrew nation had been created in Eretz Israel out of a fusion of the Hebrew tribes with fragments of other nations, consisting of both autochthonous inhabitants and peoples who had entered the country in the course of sundry waves of immigration.”<sup>150</sup>

Perhaps as a result of this “unfundamentalist view,” Jabotinsky shied away from basing the Jewish claim to Palestine “solely and exclusively on historic rights”—instead, he opted for the approach of hardheaded rationalism, writing in 1922 that “[h]istoric rights can only be valid when they are supported by actual necessity” and that the Jewish claim was thus primarily justified by “the undeniable fact that the Jews have no land at all and the Arabs have more than they need.”<sup>151</sup> Jabotinsky similarly played down the significance of ancient history in his discussions of how the Jewish state was to be won. While national heroes and symbols from ancient Jewish history played an important role for many leaders and thinkers in the existing Zionist movement, Jabotinsky himself made “virtually no use of historical symbols or parallelisms” in his writings, and even despite his militaristic politics, “neither the wars of the Maccabees, the Great Revolt, the Bar-Kochba War, or any of the other struggles for an independent Jewish existence are mentioned” in his work—instead, as Shavit notes, “references to Jewish history in general as an inspiration and a model for present political behaviour were a mere marginal feature of his prolific and many-sided writings throughout the years.”<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> Shavit, *Jabotinsky and the Revisionist Movement*, 119.

<sup>151</sup> Jabotinsky, “The Justice of the Jewish Claim.”

<sup>152</sup> Shavit, *Jabotinsky and the Revisionist Movement*, 120.

This de-emphasis on ancient history as a basis for the national claim, which can be observed throughout Jabotinsky's writings, reflects a rationalist approach to the deployment of historical narrative that emphasizes the primacy of the here and now and prioritizes the ability of a renewed and revitalized Jewish nation to take control of a historical narrative that had long been deployed against them. To Jabotinsky, the defining characteristic of the Jewish Diaspora throughout its history was its unfailing resilience in the face of oppression—"I believe (and I am proud of this belief)," he wrote in 1937, "that at the root of our two thousand years of suffering is our refusal to surrender."<sup>153</sup> Despite this spirit of resilience, however, Jabotinsky held firm in his belief that the Jews could never achieve liberation so long as they remained a diasporic people, and that the Zionist goal of establishing a Jewish state in Palestine was the only way for the Jews to become masters of their own destiny. He contrasted the historical experience of the Jews in the Diaspora with the future experience of the liberated Jewish nation, stating in a 1936 speech that "[t]he Diaspora means that others create and control our history; Zionism means that the Israeli nation begins, as an independent nation, to make its own history."<sup>154</sup> In this sense, the deployment of historical narrative in Jabotinsky's Revisionist Zionist ideology primarily focuses not on invoking history to justify a national claim, but rather on situating the national movement within a broader historical narrative—a narrative that, with the realization of the Zionist dream, the Jewish nation would finally be able to command for itself and on its own terms.

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<sup>153</sup> Quoted in Bilski Ben-Hur, *Every Individual, a King*, 157.

<sup>154</sup> Quoted in Kaplan, *The Jewish Radical Right*, 139.

*In contemporary Israeli politics*

While historical narrative is less of a battleground in contemporary Israeli politics than it is in India, the deployment and weaponization of history by Netanyahu and his counterparts on the Israeli right closely mirrors that of Jabotinsky writing nearly a century earlier. Throughout his career, Netanyahu has echoed Jabotinsky's call for the Jewish people to take control of their own destiny, and has presented his own brand of nationalist politics as essential to ensuring this control. Such rhetoric can be observed as far back as the formation of the first Netanyahu-led government in 1996, which he described in his Presentation of the Government to the Knesset as a "turning point in our history"—this coalition, he asserted, inherited the responsibility to "secure, re-establish, and develop the homeland we got back" after "more than 2,000 years of exile" during which "generations of Jews fought and struggled," and by doing so would "carry the age-old hope of generations into the next century."<sup>155</sup> This rhetoric strongly reflects Jabotinsky's conception of Jewish national history, in which the present generation of Zionists inherit a legacy of Jewish resilience dating back millennia and are tasked with carrying the torch forward to seize command of the Jewish nation's historical narrative.

This ethos has continued to influence Netanyahu throughout his career, and can be observed in his more contemporary rhetoric as well—in his remarks at the 2010 Herzliya Conference, for example, Netanyahu reiterated this theme of the Jewish state and nation commanding its own destiny, emphasizing that "the fate of the Jewish people is the fate of the Jewish state" and asserting that "[o]ur

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<sup>155</sup> Benjamin Netanyahu, "Presentation of the Government to the Knesset" (Speech, Jerusalem, June 18, 1996), Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, <https://mfa.gov.il/mfa/mfa-archives/1996/pages/pm%20netanyahu-%20presentation%20of%20government%20-%20june%2018.aspx>.



ability as a collective to determine our own destiny is what grants us the tools to shape our future - no longer as a ruled people, defeated and persecuted, but as a proud people with a magnificent country.”<sup>156</sup>

Both speeches clearly reflect Jabotinsky’s influence—the contrast of the Jewish nation’s historical status as a “ruled people” throughout “2,000 years of exile” with its contemporary status as a “proud people with a magnificent country” strongly echoes Jabotinsky’s 1936 assertion that while the “Diaspora means that others create and control our history,” the realization of the Zionist dream “means that the Israeli nation begins, as an independent nation, to make its own history.” Indeed, Netanyahu himself has explicitly acknowledged this influence—in his 2017 Jabotinsky Day memorial speech, he declared that “[o]ur strength allows us to control our own destiny,” and asserted that “[t]his is all in line with Jabotinsky’s doctrine: to always increase strength, while at the same time nurturing the spirit.”<sup>157</sup>

Beyond this emphasis on “[controlling] our own destiny,” he direct invocation of the Jewish nation’s historical connection to the Land of Israel has generally remained more peripheral in the politics of the Israeli right—this connection is certainly invoked to justify policies and political stances, but perhaps owing to the fact that the establishment of a Jewish state in the ancient homeland has long been a *fait accompli*, it rarely forms the primary basis of the right’s arguments. One key area, however, in which the historical past *does* serve as a battleground (in a quite literal sense) is the contested status of Jerusalem, which is holy in Judaism and Islam and is claimed by both Israelis and Palestinians as

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<sup>156</sup> Benjamin Netanyahu, “Address at the Herzliya Conference” (Speech, Herzliya, February 3, 2010), Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, [https://www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/pressroom/2010/pages/pm\\_netanyahu\\_herzliya\\_conference\\_3-feb-2010.aspx](https://www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/pressroom/2010/pages/pm_netanyahu_herzliya_conference_3-feb-2010.aspx).

<sup>157</sup> Netanyahu, “Remarks at the Memorial Service for Ze’ev Jabotinsky.”

their capital. Since its founding, the Likud has long maintained that the Jewish nation has an exclusive claim to the holy city, and that Jerusalem should be the exclusive and undivided capital of Israel—in 1980, the government of Menachem Begin enacted the Jerusalem Law, which unequivocally proclaimed that “Jerusalem, complete and united, is the capital of Israel.”<sup>158</sup> Nevertheless, the city has remained contested and Israel’s claim has remained highly controversial, and it was not until 2017 that the United States recognized Jerusalem as Israel’s capital in what would come to be one of the most significant political victories of Netanyahu’s career.

In his remarks at the opening ceremony for the American embassy in Jerusalem, Netanyahu portrayed the move as the fulfillment of the Jews’ ancient claim to the city, stating that “[i]n Jerusalem, King David established our capital three thousand years ago” and affirmed that for the entirety of Jewish history, “the truth is that Jerusalem has been and will always be the capital of the Jewish people, the capital of the Jewish state” despite the exile of the Jews and the ancient destruction of the First and Second Temples.<sup>159</sup> As protests and sporadic violence broke out in response to the United States’ decision, Netanyahu invoked Biblical history to justify the Jewish claim to Jerusalem, saying that the city had “never been the capital of any other people” and that Palestinians must “come to grips with this reality” if peace was to be at all possible.<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> “Basic Law: Jerusalem, Capital of Israel,” Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, accessed November 11, 2021, <https://www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/mfa-archive/1980-1989/pages/basic%20law-%20jerusalem-%20capital%20of%20israel.aspx>.

<sup>159</sup> Benjamin Netanyahu, “Remarks at the opening of the US embassy in Jerusalem” (Speech, Jerusalem, May 14, 2018), Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, <https://mfa.gov.il/MFA/PressRoom/2018/Pages/PM-Netanyahu-s-remarks-at-the-opening-of-the-US-embassy-in-Jerusalem-14-May-2018.aspx>.

<sup>160</sup> “Netanyahu: Palestinians must face reality over Jerusalem,” *BBC News*, December 10, 2017, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-42301004>.

Even as he invokes ancient history to justify his position—a tactic which, as Shavit shows, Jabotinsky tended to minimize—Netanyahu’s matter-of-fact assertion of the Jewish claim as an incontestable reality with which the Palestinians “must come to grips” does echo Jabotinsky’s assertion that the Jewish claim to Palestine is “one of the most widely known facts of universal history.” In other words, in both Revisionist Zionist ideology and in the politics of the contemporary Israeli right, the Jewish nation’s historical claim to the Land of Israel and its holy sites is unique, exclusive, and most importantly, is not up for debate. This invocation of history enables the perpetuation of ethnic democracy in Israel by providing the state with a historical justification for policies such as the Law of Return, which “provides Jews with free admission to and settlement in the country” at the same time as the state denies the right of return to “3.5 million Palestinian refugees and their descendants.”<sup>161</sup>

### Comparative analysis

At the levels of ideology and contemporary politics alike, the strategic deployment of historical narrative to serve a nationalist political agenda plays a crucial, albeit variant role in both the Hindutva and Revisionist Zionist movements. For Savarkar and Golwalkar, the Hindu nation’s indigeneity and ancient spiritual connection to the land they termed ‘Hindustan’ formed the primary intellectual basis upon which they justified their exclusionary claims to the territory. In addition, the portrayal of Hindu history as a cyclical pattern of subjugation by a foreign (usually Muslim, and later British) Other and resistance by heroic Hindus served to justify the ideologues’ antagonistic stance towards the Muslim minority, who were thus portrayed as unwanted invaders and agents of foreign oppression. In both

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<sup>161</sup> Smooha, “The model,” 485.

cases, a great emphasis was placed on ancient history and the repetition of these narratives over the course of millennia. For Jabotinsky, on the other hand, ancient history was less important—while he did acknowledge the Jewish nation’s ancient claim to Palestine, his relationship to history instead focused primarily on the here and now, with a greater emphasis on empowering the Jewish people to become the masters of their own destiny and seize control of a historical narrative that had not only been out of their control for the past 2,000 years, but had frequently been weaponized against them.

As with other themes discussed in this paper, this diverging approach to the deployment of historical narrative can arguably be attributed to the different context in which each movement operated. Whereas Hindutva is fundamentally a project of constructing a Hindu national identity where one did not previously exist—therefore necessitating Hindutva’s emphasis on a shared history to unify the constructed Hindu nation—Revisionist Zionism, as previously discussed at length, sought to mobilize and radicalize a Jewish national identity that *already* existed. As a result, there was less of a need for Jabotinsky to justify his claims with ancient references, thereby leaving him free to articulate how the Zionist movement could harness and weaponize history for its own purposes—conveniently bolstering the conviction, repeated throughout Jabotinsky’s life and works, that Revisionist ideology represented a modernizing force for Jewish progress, in contrast to other currents within Zionism that he perceived as being insufficiently forward-looking.

The shared deployment of historical narrative between Hindutva and Revisionist Zionism, as well as the two movements’ diverging approaches to it, can be clearly observed in the politics of the contemporary right in both India and Israel. Whereas history serves as a key battleground in

contemporary Indian politics, as evidenced by the fierce contention over history curricula in school textbooks and the frequent invocation of the historical past in the rhetoric of right-wing actors, it is less of one in Israel. In the latter case, the deployment of history by the Israeli right more closely resembles Jabotinsky's approach of situating the present moment amid a broader historical narrative in order to present the Zionist vision as essential to ensuring that the Jewish nation can control its own destiny.

As with the ideological writings of the two movements' founders, this contemporary divergence can be understood in terms of the two countries' different political contexts—whereas the struggle to transform India into a 'Hindu Rashtra' is ongoing and incomplete, necessarily rendering the question history more fraught as secularists and nationalists struggle over control of the historical narrative, Israel has been a Jewish state since its founding, and even the liberal wing of mainstream Israeli politics generally accepts the Zionist historical narrative of exile and return. Thus, while history remains a valuable tool in the arsenal of India's Hindu right, there is less of a need for the Israeli right to weaponize the historical past, except for when historical claims of Jewish indigeneity to Israel are used to justify the unequal treatment of Palestinians within Israeli ethnic democracy.

One important area in which history *does* serve a similar purpose for the nationalist right in India in Israel is the role of contested sites (namely, Ayodhya and Jerusalem) as a political battleground. As Roger Friedland and Richard Hecht highlight, “[b]oth sites are doubly sacred, holy within two different religions, and thus contested centers,” and both “have repeatedly been sites of violent conflict over who will control them.”<sup>162</sup> Moreover, and perhaps more importantly, the sites have each come to

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<sup>162</sup> Roger Friedland and Richard Hecht, “The Bodies of Nations: A Comparative Study of Religious Violence in Jerusalem and Ayodhya,” *History of Religions* 38, no. 2 (November 1998): 111.

signify not just individual geographical locations, but in fact symbolize the broader “territorial collectivities” of ancient Israel in the first case and the ‘Hindu Rashtra’ in the second.<sup>163</sup> As a result, “the state connects the memorialization of the sacrifices of the collectivities in whose name it speaks to this same site.”<sup>164</sup> In this process, the sites themselves, which “stand as collective representations of the historical conflicts out of which these nations were originally formed,”<sup>165</sup> thus come to symbolize historic narratives of dispossession and reclamation. In other words, Ayodhya and Jerusalem respectively represent a physical manifestation of the historical narrative that underpins the politics of both the Hindu and Israeli right, and they become literal battlegrounds in the nationalist right’s ongoing struggle for control of the historical narrative in order to legitimize and perpetuate ethnic democracy.

### **The politics of national renewal**

#### *In Hindutva ideology*

Just as both Savarkar and Golwalkar invoked a grand historical narrative of the Hindu nation’s cyclical subjugation and resurgence, so too did both figures see and articulate the need for a regeneration and revitalization of Hindu national consciousness and identity in order to carry the nation forward into the new era of the ‘Hindu Rashtra’. This politics of national renewal can be most clearly observed in the final pages of both *Hindutva* and *We, or our Nationhood Defined*, where it serves as a rallying cry that both ideologues use to conclude their manifestos. Hindus, wrote Savakar,

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<sup>163</sup> Friedland and Hecht, “The Bodies of Nations,” 112.

<sup>164</sup> Friedland and Hecht, “The Bodies of Nations,” 112.

<sup>165</sup> Friedland and Hecht, “The Bodies of Nations,” 117.

must “[s]trengthen every tie that binds you to the main organism, whether of blood or language or common Motherland.”<sup>166</sup> By renewing the strength of Hindu national consciousness and “[letting] this ancient and noble Hindu blood flow from vein to vein,” he wrote, the national unity necessary for constructing a ‘Hindu Rashtra’ will be achieved as “the Hindu people [will] get fused and welded into an indivisible whole” and “our race [will get] consolidated and strong sharp as steel.”<sup>167</sup> When this unity is achieved, according to Savarkar, the Hindu nation “bound together by ties of a common blood and common culture can dictate their terms to the whole world,” and “[a] day will come when mankind will have to face the force” of the renewed Hindu nation.<sup>168</sup>

While Savarkar generally did not address this theme until the latter pages of his pamphlet, Golwalkar bookended his text with calls for a renewal of Hindu national consciousness (what he termed the ‘Race-Spirit’—following his discussion of Hindu history in the beginning of *We*, Golwalkar described his faith in the Hindu nation’s regeneration in highly evocative language: “The Race Spirit has been awakening. The lion was not dead, only sleeping. He is rousing himself up again and the world has to see the might of the regenerated Hindu Nation strike down the enemy’s hosts with its mighty arm.”<sup>169</sup> He echoes this call again in the final pages of the book, writing that the Hindu race “is in truth the phoenix which in new youthful vigour rises from its very ashes...All we have to do to remount our throne is to respond to the awakened Race-spirit and re-rouse our national consciousness, and victory is in our grasp.”<sup>170</sup> It is important to note that for Golwalkar, the project of

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<sup>166</sup> Savarkar, *Hindutva*, 139.

<sup>167</sup> Savarkar, *Hindutva*, 139.

<sup>168</sup> Savarkar, *Hindutva*, 141.

<sup>169</sup> Golwalkar, *We*, 12.

<sup>170</sup> Golwalkar, *We*, 66-67.

national renewal necessitated a renewed commitment to religious principles—steadfastly rejecting secularist politics, Golwalkar argued that a “true Religion” which “affords opportunities for the development of each to the fullest stature of his manhood...cannot be ignored in individual or public life”—excluding religion from the “National life,” he wrote, “would mean degeneration on all hands” and would signal “that we have turned faithless to our Race-Spirit, to the ideal and mission for which we have lived for ages.”<sup>171</sup> This religious commitment stood in contrast to Savarkar’s aforementioned aversion to the intermixing of religion and politics, which was rooted in an emphasis on the primacy of real-world historical narrative rather than abstract “notions of mysticism, piety, [and] divinity as well as notions of non-humans as agents.”<sup>172</sup>

For both Savarkar and Golwalkar, the ability of the Hindu nation to revitalize its national consciousness and rise again with newfound force represents the culmination of the grand historical narrative which runs throughout both writers’ work—for both figures, the only way for Hindus to revive their past glory and shake off the centuries-old chains of foreign domination was to unite around the shared national identity constructed by Hindutva’s nationalist project. While they may have differed in their views regarding the place of religious piety in this politics of national renewal, they agreed on a key fundamental principle: without a sustained reawakening of Hindu national identity and consciousness, Hindutva’s dream of a ‘Hindu Rashtra’ could not be realized.

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<sup>171</sup> Golwalkar, *We*, 24.

<sup>172</sup> Devare, *History*, 153-154.



*In contemporary Indian politics*

Perhaps the single most important way in which Hindutva's politics of national renewal manifests in contemporary Indian politics is the massive role that the RSS plays in shaping the politics of the Hindu right. The organization was founded in 1925 by K.B. Hedgewar, who took inspiration from Savarkar and consulted with him extensively before forming it, and whose primary goal was "to reform Hindus and Hindu culture from the grassroots in the face of rising Muslim nationalism"<sup>173</sup> by "not only [propagating] the Hindutva ideology but also [by infusing] new physical strength into the majority community."<sup>174</sup> In addition to the rise of Muslim nationalism and pan-Islamist campaigns such as the Khilafat movement, Muslims were perceived by early Hindu nationalists as "more aggressive and better organized" than the Hindus, "who remained effete and divided into many castes and sects."<sup>175</sup> This perceived weakness of the Hindu nation relative to the supposedly stronger Muslim minority, according to Hindu nationalists, necessitated a renewal of national strength. To this end, the RSS was founded with the intention of constructing a new, militarized Hindu identity through a regime of strict discipline, paramilitary uniforms, and military-style drills—an organizational structure that was directly inspired by and modeled on various organs of the Italian Fascist movement, with whom key Hindu nationalist leaders at the time had extensive contact.<sup>176</sup>

The RSS itself is open about its goals of national renewal—the mission statement on its website describes the organization as "a movement for national reconstruction totally nurtured by the

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<sup>173</sup> Khan et al., "Lessons From the Past," 482.

<sup>174</sup> Jaffrelot, *Hindu Nationalism*, 16.

<sup>175</sup> Jaffrelot, *Hindu Nationalism*, 16.

<sup>176</sup> Marzia Casolari, "Hindutva's Foreign Tie-Up in the 1930s: Archival Evidence," *Economic and Political Weekly* 35, no. 4 (January 22-28, 2000): 219-221.

people” and states that such a project “demands the fostering of a national character, uncompromising devotion to the Motherland, discipline, self-restraint, courage and heroism” rather than the “self-oblivion” that the organization believes has taken hold of the Hindu nation<sup>177</sup>—a direct reference to the vision of national renewal espoused by Golwalkar (who himself served as the organization’s second *sarsanghchhalak*, or chief, from 1940 until his death in 1973).

Today, the RSS is easily the most powerful political organization in India, spreading Hindutva ideology and a message of national renewal to over 5 million *swayamsevaks* (volunteers) who attend the thousands of *shakhas* (branches) spread throughout the country.<sup>178</sup> In addition to its sheer size, the reach of the RSS extends deep into the upper echelons of the Hindu right—not only have “most leaders of the organisations that comprise the Sangh Parivar have been members of the RSS since early adolescence and have previously held leadership positions within the RSS,” but “every president of the BJP, including its current president, Amit Shah<sup>179</sup>, has served as an RSS *swayamsevak*,” and “both BJP’s first Prime Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, and its present Prime Minister, Modi, were leading RSS activists in their youth.”<sup>180</sup>

That so many of the BJP’s top leaders are themselves former RSS members and leaders becomes quite apparent in the party’s rhetoric and political strategy, which closely mirrors the politics

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<sup>177</sup> “Vision and Mission,” Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, accessed November 14, 2021, <https://www.rss.org/Encyc/2012/10/22/rss-vision-and-mission.html>.

<sup>178</sup> Lauren Frayer, “The Powerful Group Shaping The Rise Of Hindu Nationalism In India,” *National Public Radio*, May 3, 2019, <https://www.npr.org/2019/05/03/706808616/the-powerful-group-shaping-the-rise-of-hindu-nationalism-in-india>.

<sup>179</sup> Shah was succeeded as President of the BJP in January 2020 by J.P. Nadda, who himself was a former leader in the RSS’ student wing, the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad.

<sup>180</sup> Khan et al., “Lessons From the Past,” 485.

of national renewal articulated by Savarkar and Golwalkar and espoused by the RSS. The preface to the BJP's 2014 election manifesto echoed the RSS' contrast between "self-oblivion" and "national reconstruction"—under the "weak and spineless leadership" of the Congress-led government, the manifesto claimed, "the country has not been able to discover its innate vitality," resulting in its being thrust into crisis.<sup>181</sup> The manifesto promised that the BJP under Modi would rectify this failure by "[taking] lessons from history, [recognizing] the vitality and resilience of India, the power of its world-view and [utilizing] its strength" to "[p]ick up the thread from the point where the continuum of our civilizational consciousness was lost and reorient the polity in consonance with those strong points of Indian psyche" so that "Mother India would rise in her full glory."<sup>182</sup> Modi repeated this theme in his victory speech, telling a rally in his home state of Gujarat that "a new foundation has been laid and will build a new shining India in the coming days."<sup>183</sup>

The BJP's rhetoric in the 2019 election campaign echoed these same themes, claiming that Modi had delivered on his promises of rejuvenating and revitalizing 'Mother India'. At the September 2018 meeting of the party's national executive, the body passed a resolution outlining the campaign theme for the 2019 elections, which hailed Modi's achievements and established the party's commitment to building a "new India" by 2022<sup>184</sup>—a slogan that the party repeated throughout its

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<sup>181</sup> Bharatiya Janata Party, *Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat*, 2.

<sup>182</sup> Bharatiya Janata Party, *Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat*, 2-3.

<sup>183</sup> Annie Gowen and Rama Lakshmi, "Modi promises a 'shining India' in victory speech," *The Washington Post*, May 16, 2014,

[https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/hindu-nationalist-narendra-modis-party-heads-to-victory-in-indian-polls/2014/05/16/c6eaccaea-4b20-46db-8ca9-af4ddb286ce7\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/hindu-nationalist-narendra-modis-party-heads-to-victory-in-indian-polls/2014/05/16/c6eaccaea-4b20-46db-8ca9-af4ddb286ce7_story.html).

<sup>184</sup> Lalmani Verma, "BJP frames 2019 battle: Our New India vs their 'Modi roko abhiyan'," *The Indian Express*, September 10, 2018,

<https://indianexpress.com/article/india/bjp-frames-2019-battle-our-new-india-vs-their-modi-roko-abhiyan-amit-shah-bjp-frames-2019-battle-our-new-india-vs-their-modi-roko-abhiyan-5347773/>.

2019 manifesto, which characterized the election as “an election to dissipate the negativity that makes us oblivious of our glorious past and our cultural roots and values”<sup>185</sup> and proclaimed that under Modi’s leadership “New India has broken from the shackles of the past.”<sup>186</sup> Read in the context of a Hindu majoritarian ethos which, as we have observed, fundamentally conflates Indian national identity with the Hindu national identity espoused by Hindutva, it is therefore clear that this rhetoric of a ‘New India’ is little more than a 21st-century repackaging of the politics of national renewal that is central to Hindutva ideology—hardly surprising, given that the party’s top leaders all got their political start in the RSS. As highlighted above, such a conflation of Indian and Hindu national identity—in this case, within the context of Hindutva’s politics of national renewal—aids in the emergence of ethnic democracy by identifying the state with the ‘core ethnic nation’ rather than with the citizenry at large. The politics of national renewal espoused by Modi and the BJP, which is little more than a repackaged version of that articulated by Savarkar and Golwalkar, thus serves to bring India’s ethnic democracy one step closer to Hindutva’s ultimate goal of a ‘Hindu Rashtra.’

#### *In Revisionist Zionist ideology*

As with Savarkar and Golwalkar, a politics of national renewal and regeneration stands at the culmination of the national-historical narrative articulated in Revisionist Zionist ideology, which sought to empower the Jewish nation to control its own destiny. In order to bring about the transformation of the Jewish nation from the passive subjects of history into its active agents, Jabotinsky called for the creation of a ‘new Jew’ to replace the subordinated status of the Diasporic

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<sup>185</sup> Bharatiya Janata Party, *Sankalp Patra*, 6.

<sup>186</sup> Bharatiya Janata Party, *Sankalp Patra*, 4.

Jew—a project which sought to “change habits and traits that had developed during nearly two thousand years of national homelessness.”<sup>187</sup> Over the course of 2,000 years in the Diaspora, he argued in Betar’s manifesto, “the Jewish nation lost the habit of concentrating its willpower on an all-important task, lost the habit of acting in unison as a people, lost the ability to defend itself.”<sup>188</sup> Thus, he wrote, the aim of the movement was to “create that type of Jew which the nation needs in order to better and quicker build a Jewish state.”<sup>189</sup> This ‘new Jew’ would be, in Jabotinsky’s words, “proud and generous and cruel,” would “lead a life of *hadar* [glory/dignity],” would “act in defiance of reality, ‘including every inhibition and impediment,’” and “would be willing even to sacrifice its life for the attainment of the national goal.”<sup>190</sup>

Central to this image of the ‘new Jew’ was the negation of the Diaspora—Jabotinsky defined the ideal Jew by “[taking] as our starting point the typical Jew of our time—and [attempting] to describe his antithesis’.”<sup>191</sup> Contrasting this image to that of “the typical European Jew, whom he described as ‘homely and powerless and imageless...cowering and degraded...despised by all,’” Jabotinsky exalted the “‘courageous heart and strong spirit’” of the Diasporic Jew’s antithesis<sup>192</sup>—traits which he saw as being exemplified by Theodor Herzl, the father of political Zionism whose writings served as the inspiration for the entire Zionist movement, Revisionism included.

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<sup>187</sup> Kaplan, *The Jewish Radical Right*, 73.

<sup>188</sup> Jabotinsky, “The Fundamentals of the Betarian World-Outlook.”

<sup>189</sup> Jabotinsky, “The Fundamentals of the Betarian World-Outlook.”

<sup>190</sup> Arye Naor, “Jabotinsky’s New Jew: Concept and models,” *The Journal of Israeli History* 30, no. 2 (September 2011): 144.

<sup>191</sup> Quoted in Bilski Ben-Hur, *Every Individual, a King*, 142.

<sup>192</sup> Bilski Ben-Hur, *Every Individual, a King*, 142-143.

Jabotinsky viewed the Betar movement, of which he was officially elected *Rosh Betar* (head of Betar) in 1931, as having a crucial role to play in regenerating the Jewish nation along the lines outlined above. The movement would, according to Jabotinsky, accomplish this goal by cultivating a strict sense of discipline among Jewish youth. “The building of Betar,” he wrote, is founded upon the principles of discipline,” and the organization’s aim “is to make Betar such a world organism which, at a sign from the center, will be able simultaneously to move tens of thousands of hands in the cities of all countries”<sup>193</sup>—a goal which the organization would accomplish through imposing a strict disciplinary regime on its members that included three levels of training, “[e]xaminations based on a comprehensive syllabus of Zionist history and culture,” firm rules governing smoking and prohibiting the consumption of alcohol, and a uniform which corresponded to members’ rank in the organization.<sup>194</sup> By instilling this strict sense of discipline in its members, Jabotinsky believed that the Betar movement would serve as a model for constructing the ‘new Jew’ that he held was necessary for the regeneration and renewal of the Jewish nation.

### *In contemporary Israeli politics*

The emphasis that Revisionist Zionist ideology places on achieving national renewal from a position of strength and fortitude can be clearly observed in the rhetoric deployed by Netanyahu during his time as prime minister. Numerous speeches made throughout Netanyahu’s career reveal an obsession with national strength—in the same speech at the 2010 Herzliya Conference where he emphasized the ability of the Jewish nation to control its destiny, Netanyahu asserted that “[t]he weak

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<sup>193</sup> Jabotinsky, *The Fundamentals of the Betarian World-Outlook*.

<sup>194</sup> Shindler, *The Triumph of Military Zionism*, 119-120.

do not survive in the geographically difficult space we live in, nor is peace made with the weak,” and therefore that “we must continue nurturing and strengthening our military force.”<sup>195</sup> He echoed this sentiment, albeit in more zealous language, in 2018, when he sparked controversy by saying that “[t]he weak crumble, are slaughtered and are erased from history while the strong, for good or for ill, survive. The strong are respected, and alliances are made with the strong, and in the end peace is made with the strong”—remarks which many critics saw as insensitive to those who were murdered in the Holocaust.<sup>196</sup> Netanyahu has directly attributed this sentiment, which echoes Jabotinsky’s disdain for the supposed weakness of the ‘typical European Jew,’ to Jabotinsky himself, stating at the 2016 Jabotinsky memorial ceremony that “Herzl, and Jabotinsky after him, knew that alliances are not made with the weak, but rather with the strong.”<sup>197</sup>

Concomitant with this obsession with national strength is Netanyahu’s conviction, reflected in his rhetoric throughout the years, that the modern State of Israel represents the revitalization of Jewish strength and the transformation of the Jewish nation from a powerless nation into a powerful one. This conviction can be observed most clearly whenever Netanyahu discusses the Holocaust, which he described in his January 2020 address at the fifth World Holocaust Forum as “the ultimate symbol of Jewish powerlessness” and “the culmination of what can happen when our people have no voice, no land, no shield.”<sup>198</sup> Since the Holocaust and the establishment of the State of Israel, however,

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<sup>195</sup> Netanyahu, “Address at the Herzliya Conference.”

<sup>196</sup> Jewish Telegraphic Agency and Marcy Oster, “Erased From History:’ Twitter Mocks Hawkish Netanyahu Speech Excerpts,” *Ha’aretz*, September 3, 2018, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/twitter-mocks-a-hawkish-speech-by-netanyahu-1.6445020>.

<sup>197</sup> Netanyahu, “Remarks at the Official Memorial Service for Zeev Jabotinsky at Mount Herzl.”

<sup>198</sup> Benjamin Netanyahu, “Speech at the World Holocaust Forum 2020 at Yad Vashem” (Speech, Jerusalem, January 23, 2020), Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs,

Netanyahu asserted in his 2015 Holocaust Remembrance Day address that “[t]he Jews have changed” from “a powerless people begging others to protect us” into “an independent and sovereign people in our ancestral homeland,” able to “protect ourselves and defend our freedom.”<sup>199</sup>

Netanyahu repeated this refrain again in his March 2015 address to the United States Congress, emphatically asserting that “[t]he days when the Jewish people remained passive in the face of genocidal enemies...are over,” and proclaiming that “[f]or the first time in 100 generations, we, the Jewish people, can defend ourselves” with the “boundless courage” of the soldiers serving in the Israel Defense Forces.<sup>200</sup> Just a few months later, he tied this “boundless courage” to Jabotinsky’s legacy in his remarks at the annual state memorial service for Jabotinsky, asserting that “[t]he legacy that [Jabotinsky] nurtured and bequeathed to our people, of resistance to submission and subjugation, was passed to the underground organizations which fought for our independence and subsequently to the IDF.”<sup>201</sup>

Netanyahu’s repetition of the idea that “peace is made with the strong” and his frequent assertion that the Jewish people have abandoned their previous powerlessness and assumed a position

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[https://mfa.gov.il/MFA/AboutTheMinistry/Conferences-Seminars/World\\_Holocaust\\_Forum\\_2020/Pages/PM-Netanyahu-s-speech-at-the-World-Holocaust-Forum-2020-at-Yad-Vashem-23-January-2020.aspx](https://mfa.gov.il/MFA/AboutTheMinistry/Conferences-Seminars/World_Holocaust_Forum_2020/Pages/PM-Netanyahu-s-speech-at-the-World-Holocaust-Forum-2020-at-Yad-Vashem-23-January-2020.aspx).

<sup>199</sup> Benjamin Netanyahu, “International Holocaust Remembrance Day Address at Yad Vashem” (Speech, Jerusalem, January 28, 2015), Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs,

<https://mfa.gov.il/MFA/AboutIsrael/History/Holocaust/Pages/PM-Netanyahu%E2%80%99s-International-Holocaust-Remembrance-Day-address-28-January-2015.aspx>.

<sup>200</sup> Benjamin Netanyahu, “Address to a Joint Session of the United States Congress” (Speech, Washington, March 3, 2015), *The Washington Post*,

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2015/03/03/full-text-netanyahus-address-to-congress/>.

<sup>201</sup> Benjamin Netanyahu, “Remarks at the State Memorial Ceremony for Ze’ev Jabotinsky” (Speech, Jerusalem, July 16, 2015), Prime Minister’s Office, <https://www.gov.il/en/departments/news/speechjabohar160715>.



of strength through the establishment of Israel reflects the clear influence of Revisionist Zionism's politics of national renewal. Netanyahu himself has attributed this emphasis on national strength to Jabotinsky's influence, and his rhetoric, which contrasts the fortitude of the Jews in Israel with the powerlessness of the Jews in exile, closely mirrors Jabotinsky's negation of the Diaspora through contrasting the "homely and powerless and imageless" European Jew with the "courageous heart and strong spirit" of the 'new Jew.' In this sense, Netanyahu's rhetoric clearly exemplifies the politics of national renewal shared between Jabotinsky's thought and the contemporary Israeli right and demonstrates Jabotinsky's continuing influence on contemporary politics.

### Comparative analysis

The politics of national renewal runs strong as a central theme through both the Hindutva and Revisionist Zionist movements, and it plays a key role in both ideologies' strategic deployment of historical narrative—in both cases, the renewal of national consciousness and the regeneration of national fortitude herald the dawn of a new era of national glory and thus represent the culmination of each movement's historical narrative. The nature of this regeneration, however, varies in a crucial regard. Whereas Hindutva focused on reviving a national consciousness that had been forgotten in a process of "gradual denationalisation" as the Hindu nation "[let] our race spirit to fall asleep,"<sup>202</sup> Revisionist Zionism sought to discard the perceived passivity and effeteness of the Diaspora Jew and instead create a 'new Jew' altogether—as Raphaella Bilski Ben-Hur notes, "Jabotinsky was rather

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<sup>202</sup> Golwalkar, *We*, 63.

extreme in speaking about the creation of a new psychological race, rather than the sloughing off of the layers to reveal the original racial core of the Jew and cultivating it.”<sup>203</sup>

This divergence in the two movements’ particular versions of national regeneration reflects their fundamentally different approaches to the deployment of historical narrative—as previously observed, the historical narrative deployed in Hindutva is more backward-looking than that deployed by Revisionist Zionism, which places a greater emphasis on the future. As a result, the politics of national renewal articulated by Savarkar and Golwalkar emphasizes a return to the lost glory of the Hindu nation’s past, while that articulated by Jabotinsky focuses more on bringing the Jewish nation forward into a new age of empowerment and liberation. Similarly, while both ideologies emphasize the perceived weakness of the respective ethnic nations as a justification for the politics of national renewal, Hindutva’s ideologues viewed the Hindu nation’s effeteness in contrast to the perceived strength and aggressiveness of the Muslim minority, whereas Jabotinsky contrasted the Diaspora Jew’s supposed weakness with the as-yet unrealized fortitude of the ‘new Jew’ that had yet to emerge.

In order to begin the process of national regeneration, the early leaders of both movements created institutions and organizations to foster a renewed and fortified Hindu and Jewish national identity—the RSS in the case of Hindutva, and the Betar movement and Zionist paramilitaries in the case of Revisionist Zionism. Interestingly, both organizations drew direct inspiration from the Italian Fascist movement. As previously mentioned, early Hindu nationalist leaders had close contact with their Fascist counterparts in Italy—in 1931, B.S. Moonje, Hedgewar’s mentor who had a “declared

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<sup>203</sup> Bilski Ben-Hur, *Every Individual, a King*, 147.

intention to strengthen the RSS and to extend it as a nationwide organisation,” visited Italy, where he personally met with Mussolini.<sup>204</sup> During this trip he visited several Fascist institutions including several military schools “and, most important, the Balilla and Avanguardisti organisations,” which he described approvingly at great length in his diary and whose structure was “strikingly similar to that of the RSS.”<sup>205</sup>

Jabotinsky and the Betar Movement took similar inspiration from Mussolini’s movement—in 1922, Jabotinsky sent a letter to Mussolini in which he “[compared] the vitality to the Jewish nation to that of the Italian fascists” and “expressed his interest in Mussolini’s personality and his movement,”<sup>206</sup> and in 1932, he unsuccessfully sought a meeting with Mussolini and proposed “the establishment of a military school for Beitar in Italy, which, he claimed, would be the most appropriate location for such a school.”<sup>207</sup> The shared inspiration that each movement drew from Italian Fascism reflects in the emphasis on strict discipline and military-style recruitment and training employed by both the RSS and Betar, and exemplifies how the politics of national renewal articulated by both movements comports closely with fascist views of nationhood and racial regeneration.

Similarly, the politics of national renewal remain an important part of the contemporary politics of the nationalist right in both India and Israel, albeit in different ways. In India, this manifests primarily in the outsize influence that the RSS continues to exert over Indian politics, as well as in the rhetoric and themes echoed by Modi and the BJP during electoral campaigns—particularly the “New

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<sup>204</sup> Casolari, “Hindutva’s Foreign Tie-Up,” 219.

<sup>205</sup> Casolari, “Hindutva’s Foreign Tie-Up,” 219-220.

<sup>206</sup> Kaplan, *The Jewish Radical Right*, 152.

<sup>207</sup> Kaplan, *The Jewish Radical Right*, 155.

India” messaging adopted by the BJP ahead of the 2019 Lok Sabha elections. In Israel, on the other hand, this manifests primarily in Netanyahu’s rhetorical obsession with national strength and his repeated portrayal of the modern State of Israel as a symbol of Jewish national revitalization whose founding transformed the Jewish people into “an independent and sovereign people in our ancestral homeland,” in contrast to the “powerlessness” of the Jewish Diaspora before 1948. Despite these differences, however, the use of national renewal as a rhetorical strategy by the contemporary nationalist right in both countries closely mirrors the approaches taken by their respective ideological founders, and reflects the enduring influence of both Hindutva and Revisionist Zionist ideologies.

Moreover, in both cases the politics of national renewal plays a similarly important role in enabling and justifying an ethnic-democratic regime by appealing to the majority’s “sense of threat” that is needed to sustain ethnic democracy. In India, the nationalist right reflects this politics through their rhetoric and messaging by presenting their political vision as the only one capable of enabling India (defined coterminously with the Hindu majority) to reclaim its past glory in the face of growing threats, at the same time as the RSS extends its political influence and continues its project of developing a fortified, militaristic Hindu identity that can defend the majority against the ‘Muslim threat’. In Israel, the politics of national renewal is utilized to demonstrate the Zionist project’s supposed success in endowing the Jewish nation with the strength and fortitude it needs to stave off threats to its security, thus providing justification for further repression in the name of national security (which is similarly seen as coterminous with the security of the Jewish nation). In both cases, such a politics is thus crucial in providing continual justification for the perpetuation of ethnic democracy.

## The articulation of maximalist territorial claims

### *In Hindutva ideology*

In addition to calling for the establishment of a ‘Hindu Rashtra’ in the ancestral and spiritual homeland of the Hindus, both Savarkar and Golwalkar described at length what they saw as the ‘true’ boundaries of the national territory, revealing an irredentist vision of a united Hindu homeland that extended far beyond the borders of present-day India. In *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?*, Savarkar examined the etymology of the term ‘Sindhu’, the original Sanskrit spelling of ‘Hindu’. While the term is most commonly used in reference to the Indus River (hence the name Hindu being used to describe the people who lived beyond the Indus), Savarkar noted that “Sindhu in Sanskrit does not only mean the Indus but also the Sea—which girdles the southern peninsula—so that this one word Sindhu points out almost all frontiers of the land at a single stroke,” and from this etymological analysis concluded that “the epithet Sindhusthan [or ‘Hindustan’] calls up the image of our whole Motherland: the land that lies between Sindhu and Sindhu—from the Indus to the Seas.”<sup>208</sup> While his description in *We* goes into less detail than Savarkar’s, Golwalkar also shared this maximalist vision, following his call for a renewal of national consciousness in the text’s final pages with an exhortation to “fill the heavens with the clarion call of the Vedic seers ‘from sea to sea over all the land—One Nation,’ one glorious, splendid Hindu nation.”<sup>209</sup>

In Hindutva ideology, this irredentist view of the Hindu nation’s rightful territory has a name—‘Akhand Bharat’ (Undivided India) or ‘Akhand Hindustan’ (Undivided Hindustan), both

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<sup>208</sup> Savarkar, *Hindutva*, 32.

<sup>209</sup> Golwalkar, *We*, 67.

terms which “[encompass] regions that are culturally linked or influenced by a Sanskritic culture that forms the Indian subcontinent and extends to Southeast Asia and Central Asia,”<sup>210</sup> beyond the borders of present-day India. Savarkar in particular was a strong proponent of ‘Akhand Bharat’ in his capacity as president of the Hindu Mahasabha, alluding to this concept in a 1937 address to the organization’s 19th session in Karnavati (Ahmedabad) in which he proclaimed that the “Hindusthan of tomorrow must be one and indivisible not only a united but a unitarian nation, from Kashmir to Rameshwar, from Sindh [in modern-day Pakistan] to Assam.”<sup>211</sup> Again in 1944, he called on the organization to “observe the first week in August, 1944 as an ‘AKHAND- HINDUSTHAN AND ANTI-PAKISTAN WEEK’” in order to “oppose...the vivisection of our Motherland and defend the national integrity and units of Hindusthan from the Indus to the Seas”—a reference to the proposed partition of India and formation of Pakistan, to which he was vehemently opposed.<sup>212</sup> This principle of ‘Akhand Bharat’ has remained an integral part of the RSS and the broader Hindu right’s political philosophy since its inception, and it represents an maximalist conception of national territory that is central to Hindutva ideology’s vision of the ‘Hindu Rashtra’.

### *In contemporary Indian politics*

This principle of territorial maximalism can be most clearly observed in the politics of the contemporary Hindu right through its emphasis on securing Indian control of Kashmir, the disputed

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<sup>210</sup> Arkotong Longkumer, “Playing the Waiting Game: The BJP, Hindutva, and the Northeast,” in *Majoritarian State*, 284.

<sup>211</sup> V.D. Savarkar, “Presidential Address at the 19th Session of the Hindu Mahasabha” (1937), in *Hindu Rashtra Darshan*, 4.

<sup>212</sup> V.D. Savarkar, “Observe the First Week in August 1944 as an ‘Akhand-Hindusthan and Anti-Pakistan Week’,” in *Historic Statements* (Bombay: G.P. Parchure, 1967), 79,

[https://savarkar.org/en/encyc/2017/5/23/2\\_12\\_15\\_55\\_historic\\_statements\\_by\\_savarkar.v001.pdf\\_1.pdf](https://savarkar.org/en/encyc/2017/5/23/2_12_15_55_historic_statements_by_savarkar.v001.pdf_1.pdf).

geographical region in the northern part of the subcontinent which was divided during Partition between Pakistan and India. The Indian-controlled territory was organized into the state of Jammu and Kashmir—the only Muslim-majority region in the country—which was granted special political status and a degree of autonomy under Article 370 of the Indian Constitution pending a plebiscite on the territory’s future that ultimately never took place. Both the BJP and its predecessor party, the Jana Sangh, have long sought the repeal of Article 370—as far back as 1951, the Jana Sangh called to “end the state of uncertainty about Kashmir’s future” and “integrate it with Bharat like other acceding states” by abrogating Article 370,<sup>213</sup> and the repeal of the constitutional provision has appeared in every BJP campaign manifesto and vision document since the party’s first contested national election in 1984.

In August 2019, Modi made this longstanding dream of the Hindu right a reality when he officially moved to revoke Article 370, eliminating Jammu and Kashmir’s special status and restructuring the region into two Union Territories—Jammu and Kashmir in the west, and Ladakh in the east—that are centrally administered by the Indian government. In the two years since the abrogation of Article 370, the BJP government has “dismantled structures of self-government in Kashmir with remarkable speed,” including by “[opening] ownership of land in Indian-administered Kashmir to outsiders, [making] it easy to acquire domicile rights, and [overturning] historic land reforms,” as well as “[reducing] the share of Kashmiri candidates entering the Indian civil service from

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<sup>213</sup> Anand Mishra, “BJP traces its 70-year-old commitment to abrogate Article 370,” *The Deccan Herald*, August 7, 2020, <https://www.deccanherald.com/national/national-politics/bjp-traces-its-70-year-old-commitment-to-abrogate-article-370-870450.html>.

50 percent to 33 percent, which in the future will increase the number of nonlocal officers in Kashmir’s administration”—all moves that bring the BJP “closer to achieving its civilizational project of changing the Muslim-majority region into one with a Hindu majority.”<sup>214</sup>

Senior BJP leaders have made no secret of the fact that they see this move as the first step in fulfilling Hindutva’s vision of ‘Akhand Bharat’. In February 2020, then-BJP General Secretary Ram Madhav (who now serves on the national executive body of the RSS) told youth leaders that the realization of ‘Akhand Bharat’ “will happen in phases,” the first of which was the integration of Jammu and Kashmir into India, and asserted that “[o]ur next objective is to take back the Indian land which is under illegal occupation of Pakistan”—a reference to Pakistani-occupied Kashmir, which the Indian government has viewed since 1994 as being illegally occupied.<sup>215</sup> This is not the first time that Madhav and his counterparts in the BJP have alluded to the ‘Akhand Bharat’ concept—in 2015, Madhav told India Today TV that “one day these parts (India, Pakistan and Bangladesh), which have for historical reasons separated only 60 years ago, will again, through popular goodwill, come together and Akhand Bharat will be created,” later backtracking on his comments by characterizing them as being about “a cultural union in South Asia” rather than “physically redrawing boundaries.”<sup>216</sup> Similarly, in 2021,

Tourism Minister Prahlad Patel said in an interview that “all of us would like to see that fortunate day”

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<sup>214</sup> Kaisar Andrabi and Zubair Amin, “Modi Is Trying to Engineer a Hindu Majority in Kashmir,” *Foreign Policy*, August 11, 2021, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/08/11/modi-is-trying-to-engineer-a-hindu-majority-in-kashmir/>.

<sup>215</sup> Press Trust of India, “Taking back PoK is next step towards achieving Akhand Bharat: Ram Madhav,” *The Times of India*, February 22, 2020, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/taking-back-pok-is-next-step-towards-achieving-akhand-bharat-objective-ram-madhav/articleshow/74258970.cms>.

<sup>216</sup> “Comments on Akhand Bharat were in the context of a cultural union in South Asia: Ram Madhav,” *India Today*, December 29, 2015, <https://www.indiatoday.in/mail-today/story/my-comments-on-akhand-bharat-were-in-the-context-of-a-cultural-union-in-south-asia-279343-2015-12-29>.



when Pakistani-occupied Kashmir is merged with India, and that “the way things are moving, it is my firm belief...that the Akhand Bharat concept would materialize under [Modi’s] leadership.”<sup>217</sup> While Modi himself has stayed away from direct allusions to the ‘Akhand Bharat’ concept in his rhetoric, statements such as these from top BJP leaders, coupled with the Modi government’s *de facto* annexation of Kashmir through the abrogation of Article 370, reflect the extent to which the territorial maximalism inherent in the ‘Akhand Bharat’ principle remains an integral part of contemporary right-wing politics in India.

### *In Revisionist Zionist ideology*

As with Hindutva, a maximalist territorial claim forms an integral part of Revisionist Zionism’s ideological backbone, and can be clearly observed throughout Jabotinsky’s body of writing. Throughout his lifetime, Jabotinsky professed a commitment to ‘Eretz Yisrael Hashlema’, or ‘The Whole Land of Israel’ (otherwise known as ‘Greater Israel’)—a territory whose borders have been defined differently over time, but which Jabotinsky and the Revisionists saw as encompassing at the very least the entirety of Mandatory Palestine, including the territory of Transjordan. Jabotinsky declared at the founding congress of the New Zionist Organization “that the purpose of the NZO was ‘the realization of a state with a Jewish majority on both sides of the Jordan River,’” and this goal was frequently repeated by other arms of the Revisionist movement as well—“Transjordan remained a central and frequently discussed component of the area Betar considered appropriately part of the

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<sup>217</sup> Kumar Shakti Shekhar, “PoK will merge with India under PM Narendra Modi’s leadership: Prahlad Patel,” *The Times of India*, June 22, 2021, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/pok-will-merge-with-india-under-pm-narendra-modis-leadership-tourism-minister-prahlad-patel/articleshow/83746250.cms>.

Jewish state throughout the 1940s,” and “[t]he Irgun Zvai Leumi (the military arm of the Revisionist movement) repeatedly declared that they would continue to fight for the ‘liberation of the whole of Palestine on both sides of the Jordan’ even after the state is established.”<sup>218</sup>

In keeping with this maximalist territorial vision, Jabotinsky was strongly opposed to the British Peel Commission’s proposed Partition Plan for Mandatory Palestine, which he worried would give the Jewish state such a small territory as to render impossible his desired levels of Jewish immigration from Europe—a goal to which he “accorded prime importance” from 1935 onwards—and the broader Revisionist movement “decried the Partition Plan as a monstrous decree: ‘Cursed be he who pronounces the word,’ was the Revisionist slogan.”<sup>219</sup> A decade later, the next generation of Revisionists would continue to express this same irredentist vision—in 1948, shortly after the establishment of the State of Israel, Menachem Begin declared that “[o]ur Homeland is the whole of Eretz Israel, yes on both banks of the Jordan,” and he “consistently included areas of the East Bank among the parts of the Land of Israel that ‘have not yet been liberated,’ listing them as part of the territory still occupied by the British.”<sup>220</sup> As with the principle of ‘Akhand Bharat’ in Hindutva ideology, this maximalist territorial vision of a ‘Greater Israel’ encompassing an area extending beyond the borders of the present-day State of Israel has thus remained an integral element of Revisionist Zionism since the movement’s earliest days, and its influence on the politics of the Israeli right can be observed to this day.

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<sup>218</sup> Nadav G. Shelef, “From ‘Both Banks of the Jordan’ to the ‘Whole Land of Israel:’ Ideological Change in Revisionist Zionism,” *Israel Studies* 9, no. 1 (Spring 2004): 127-128.

<sup>219</sup> Shavit, *Jabotinsky and the Revisionist Movement*, 216-217.

<sup>220</sup> Shelef, “From ‘Both Banks of the Jordan,’” 129.

*In contemporary Israeli politics*

The irredentist vision of Israel extending its territorial sovereignty beyond the state's current borders remains a major theme of contemporary right-wing politics in Israel. For example, the Knesset Land of Israel Caucus, which includes 43 of the body's 120 members (making it the largest lobby group in the Knesset),<sup>221</sup> has a declared goal of "strengthening the state of Israel's hold over all parts of Eretz Israel, especially Judea and Samaria [the Biblical name for the West Bank] and the Jordan Valley."<sup>222</sup> In July 2020, the caucus presented a bill "to apply sovereignty to all Jewish communities in Judea and Samaria," with caucus chairman Haim Katz (himself a Likud member) warning that "[t]he more we procrastinate...the national mission to exercise our historic right in the land of our ancestors may be in jeopardy" and arguing that the bill represented "the continued fulfillment of the Zionist vision."<sup>223</sup> This reflects the official position taken by the Likud itself—in 2017, the party's Central Committee unanimously adopted a nonbinding resolution calling on elected officials to "work to allow unhindered construction and to extend Israeli law and sovereignty in all the areas of liberated settlement in Judea and Samaria."<sup>224</sup>

Netanyahu himself has endorsed these territorial ambitions, albeit in varying forms, particularly in the last two years of his tenure as prime minister. In a speech ahead of the September

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<sup>221</sup> Gil Hoffman and Tovah Lazaroff, "Knesset speaker: Rifts in Right helped foil annexation," *The Jerusalem Post*, August 17, 2020, <https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/knesset-speaker-no-sovereignty-due-to-rifts-on-right-638944>.

<sup>222</sup> Raphael Ahren, "Coalition chief heading caucus that seeks to retain entire West Bank," *The Times of Israel*, June 11, 2013, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/coalition-chief-heading-caucus-that-seeks-to-retain-entire-west-bank/>.

<sup>223</sup> Jewish News Syndicate, "Knesset lobby proposes bill to extend sovereignty to all of Judea and Samaria," *Jewish News Syndicate*, July 14, 2020, <https://www.jns.org/bill-to-extend-sovereignty-to-entire-judea-samaria-proposed-by-knesset-lobby/>.

<sup>224</sup> Jacob Magid, "Likud top body votes to urge annexing parts of the West Bank," *The Times of Israel*, December 31, 2017, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/likud-top-body-votes-to-annex-parts-of-the-west-bank/>.

2019 general election, he repeated a pledge made in April of that year to “annex all Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank,” telling an audience in the settlement of Elkana that “[w]ith God’s help we will extend Jewish sovereignty to all the settlements as part of the (biblical) land of Israel, as part of the state of Israel.”<sup>225</sup> Nine days later, he announced his intention, “after the establishment of a new government, to apply Israeli sovereignty to the Jordan Valley and the northern Dead Sea”—a territory making up nearly 30 percent of the West Bank, with a population of around 76,000—in a move that many commentators saw as “a bid to siphon support away from far-right rivals who have long advocated annexation of Jewish settlements in the West Bank.”<sup>226</sup> While these proposed annexation plans ultimately failed to materialize, the repeated assertion of maximalist territorial claims by Netanyahu and other right-wing politicians—claims which are frequently justified with allusions to the Biblical ‘Land of Israel’—closely mirrors the irredentist vision advanced by Jabotinsky and other early leaders of the Revisionist movement.

Despite the continued influence of these maximalist claims within Revisionist Zionism, however, it is important to highlight the significant shift in the territorial extent of these claims over time. Although Begin and his generation of post-independence Revisionist leaders shared Jabotinsky’s rhetorical commitment to a Jewish state on both sides of the Jordan, Nadav Shelef notes how by the

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<sup>225</sup> Jeffrey Heller, “Netanyahu repeats pledge to annex Israeli settlements in occupied West Bank,” *Reuters*, September 1, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-israel-palestinians-settlement/netanyahu-repeats-pledge-to-annex-israeli-settlements-in-occupied-west-bank-idUSKCN1VM10D>

<sup>226</sup> Jeffrey Heller, “Israel’s Netanyahu announces post-election plan to annex West Bank’s Jordan Valley,” *Reuters*, September 10, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-israel-netanyahu/israels-netanyahu-announces-post-election-plan-to-annex-west-banks-jordan-valley-idUSKCN1VV21L>.

mid-1950s, this vision “began to share space with an increasingly pervasive definition of the homeland that extended only to the area west of the Jordan.”<sup>227</sup> Particularly in the years surrounding the 1967 war, right-wing Zionists continued to advance a territorial claim extending beyond the state’s actual borders, but this claim generally stopped at the Jordan River, and by 1988, “the claim to the East Bank of the Jordan was all but gone from the Revisionist movement ‘even in the margins.’”<sup>228</sup>

This moderation of the maximalist claim, and concurrent shift in the Israeli right’s rhetoric and priorities, can similarly be observed in the massive controversy sparked by Netanyahu’s proposal to annex just 30 percent of the West Bank—a far cry from “both sides of the Jordan”. Shelef attributes this shift to “the unintended consequences of Revisionist response to their internalization of having lost a battle for hegemony”—in the face of declining support relative to center-left parties, Revisionist politicians in the decades following independence “faced a choice of fading into irrelevance or modifying their ideology in the hopes of eventually building a hegemonic alternative,” and in the interests of political pragmatism, they chose the latter.<sup>229</sup>

For his part, Netanyahu’s continuance of this moderated stance reflects his own pragmatic approach as a politician concerned more with political expediency than ideological purity—when necessary, he invoked an extreme (by the standards of mainstream Israeli politics) territorial position in order to win much-needed right-wing support during a difficult election, but nevertheless refrained from coming anywhere close to the hyper-maximalist position abandoned several decades ago by his

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<sup>227</sup> Shelef, “From ‘Both Banks of the Jordan’,” 130.

<sup>228</sup> Shelef, “From ‘Both Banks of the Jordan’,” 136.

<sup>229</sup> Shelef, “From ‘Both Banks of the Jordan’,” 137.

political and ideological predecessors. This reframing and repackaging of Revisionist goals to suit the political needs of the contemporary Israeli right can be observed in multiple aspects of Revisionist Zionism, and reflects a broader trend towards the strategic modernization of Revisionist ideology in order to ensure that it remains a viable political force in the perpetuation of Israel's ethnic democracy.

### Comparative analysis

Within both Hindutva and Revisionist Zionist ideology, the various projects of identity construction and mobilization, deployment of historical narrative, and national renewal discussed throughout this paper all converge toward the same goal—establishing a state in the national homeland that adheres to each ideology's exclusionary principles. In the process of envisioning such a state, both ideologies advance a maximalist territorial claim that extends beyond the borders of present-day India and Israel, represented by the analogous concepts of 'Akhand Bharat' (Undivided India) and 'Eretz Yisrael Hashlema' (The Whole Land of Israel). Similarly, the ideological founders of both movements vehemently opposed plans to partition the respective territories, albeit for slightly varying reasons—whereas Savarkar decried the Partition of India as representing “the vivisection of our Motherland,” Jabotinsky's opposition to the Peel Commission's partition plan was rooted in more practical concerns about the feasibility of continued Jewish immigration to the reduced territory.

This divergent reasoning reflects a dichotomy that can be observed in several of the ideological themes discussed throughout his paper, most notably in the deployment of historical narrative—whereas the fathers of Hindutva tended to root their arguments in grand historical narratives and abstract, emotionally-charged displays of poignant nationalist sentiment, Jabotinsky's

Revisionism placed a much greater emphasis on the material realities of the here and now, and concerned itself primarily with the practical realization of the Revisionist dream rather than abstract notions.

Just as both ideologies advance a maximalist territorial claim, so too does the contemporary political right in both India and Israel. Through both rhetoric and policy, right-wing actors in both nations regularly emphasize the importance of territorial integrity and set their sights beyond the official borders of their respective countries by seeking to extend Indian and Israeli sovereignty over Kashmir and the West Bank, respectively. Nevertheless, these territorial ambitions—which are certainly maximalist by the standards of both countries’ contemporary political culture—are still significantly narrower in scope than the ideological visions of ‘Akhand Bharat’ and ‘Greater Israel’, both of which encompass territory that currently belongs to India and Israel’s neighbors.

In both India and Israel, the nationalist right has largely moved away (in all senses but rhetorical) from the full-scale territorial maximalism envisioned by the ideological fathers of Hindutva and Revisionist Zionism, and this vision been replaced in practice by a watered-down irredentism which, while still maximalist by contemporary standards, is better suited to the pragmatic considerations of modern political culture. In both cases, this moderated maximalism thus manifests not in attempts to seize external territory, but rather in attempts to cement the state’s sovereignty in disputed areas over which the state had previously established some tenuous degree of control—just as the parts of Kashmir affected by the abrogation of Article 370 technically fell within India’s post-Partition borders, albeit with a semi-autonomous special status, so too has the West Bank been

occupied by Israel since 1967, and Netanyahu's threatened annexation merely sought to extend full Israeli sovereignty over the territory.

Nevertheless, the application of even these moderated maximalist visions is highly relevant to the scope and nature of ethnic democracy in both countries, as both Kashmir and the Occupied Territories are primarily populated by groups that would form part of the national minority if fully annexed. Beyond increasing the proportion of citizens relegated to second-class status, the increase in the minority population that would be brought about by subsuming these territories would in all likelihood only heighten the majority's "sense of threat" about demographic shifts, thereby providing the state in both cases with renewed justification for the further repression and Othering of the minority population. Thus, the contemporary moderation of both movements' maximalist territorial ambitions should not be seen as an abandonment of the movement's basic principles, but rather must be read in light of the nationalist right's efforts to walk a narrow line between ethnic majoritarianism and the preservation of democratic values—a fragile balance which is characteristic of ethnic democracy in the 21st century.

### **The invocation and rehabilitation of past ideologues in contemporary political life**

#### **In India**

Beyond the continuing influence of Savarkar and Golwalkar's theories on the politics of the contemporary Indian right, as highlighted above, the two men themselves remain highly influential, and their names and legacies are frequently invoked by contemporary right-wing actors. In large part



due to his role in the early struggle for independence from the British, for which he was arrested and imprisoned in 1910, Savarkar has been mythologized as a revolutionary hero by his followers, who often refer to him with the honorific ‘Veer’, or ‘brave’.<sup>230</sup> In addition to L.K. Advani, Ram Madhav, and other senior BJP and RSS leaders, Modi himself has repeatedly invoked Savarkar’s legacy as a national hero—in May 2014, for example, he became the first prime minister since Vajpayee to pay tribute to Savarkar’s portrait in the Parliament building on the figure’s birth anniversary.<sup>231</sup> Modi’s invocations of Savarkar’s legacy, which have occurred on several occasions, are not limited to presenting him as a hero of the independence struggle—rather, they celebrate Savarkar’s nationalist politics as well. In October 2019, for example, Modi told the crowd at a campaign rally in Maharashtra that “[b]ecause of Savarkar’s values we put nationalism as a basis of nation-building,” and lamented that modern opposition parties (namely, the Congress Party) “abuse Savarkar” through their criticisms of his legacy and views.<sup>232</sup>

While he is not mythologized to the same extent as Savarkar—no doubt due largely to the fact that he kept a somewhat greater distance from the independence struggle, instead focusing on mobilizing Hindu national identity through the RSS—Golwalkar nevertheless remains highly influential for the contemporary Hindu right, who have on several occasions invoked his name and

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<sup>230</sup> Ajaz Ashraf, “History revisited: Was Veer Savarkar really all that brave?,” *Scroll.in*, May 27, 2016, <https://scroll.in/article/808709/the-hollow-myth-of-veer-savarkar>.

<sup>231</sup> Radhika Ramaseshan, “After Atal, Modi first to salute Savarkar,” *The Telegraph*, May 29, 2014, <https://www.telegraphindia.com/india/after-atal-modi-first-to-salute-savarkar/cid/182581>.

<sup>232</sup> Shloak Prabhu, “PM Modi: Nationalism A Basis Of Nation-building Because Of Savarkar,” *Republic World*, October 16, 2019, <https://www.republicworld.com/india-news/elections/pm-modi-have-followed-savarkars-values-of-nationalism-in-governance.html>.

legacy in a favorable light. In February 2021, for example, the BJP government's Culture Ministry sparked controversy with a tweet on Golwalkar's birth anniversary which praised him as a "great thinker, scholar, and remarkable leader" whose "thoughts will remain a source of inspiration & continue to guide generations."<sup>233</sup> A few months earlier, the central government had sparked a similar outcry from the opposition when it proposed to rename the Rajiv Gandhi Centre for Biotechnology's second campus in Kerala after Golwalkar, who had been a zoologist by training.<sup>234</sup>

As with Savarkar, Modi himself has favorably invoked Golwalkar's legacy as well. In 2008, shortly after winning reelection as Chief Minister of Gujarat, Modi published a book entitled *Jyotipunj*, in which he wrote about the lives of 16 RSS members who he counted as inspirations and influences. One of the essays, titled "The Honourable Guruji", was dedicated to Golwalkar, who Modi described as a great but humble "pearl of [the] national rosary" who "lived among thousands of people and awakened in them social sense and nationalism"<sup>235</sup> while "investing every particle of body, every drop of his blood, every moment of his life, for the well-being of Motherland, for the glory of Mother India."<sup>236</sup>

For both figures, the invocation of their names and legacies by the contemporary right has notably been accompanied by a sanitization of their extremist political stances and activity. In Savarkar's case, this has manifested in the BJP's attempts to present him as a hero of national

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<sup>233</sup> "Culture Ministry Tweets Tribute to M.S. Golwalkar Who Glorified Hitler, Justified Caste," *The Wire*, February 19, 2021, <https://thewire.in/politics/culture-ministry-ms-golwalkar-hitler-caste-muslim-rss>.

<sup>234</sup> "Naming of Kerala institute after RSS leader Gowalkar kicks up a row," *The Hindu*, December 5, 2020, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/kerala/naming-of-rgcb-unit-after-gowalkar-kicks-up-a-row/article33258778.ece>

<sup>235</sup> Narendra Modi, "The Honourable Guruji Madhavrao Sadashivrao Golwalkar," in *Jyotipunj*, trans. A.K. Gandhi (New Delhi: Prabhat Prakashan, 2015), 46, <http://cdn.narendramodi.in/ebooks/JyotipunjEng.pdf>.

<sup>236</sup> Modi, "The Honorable Guruji," 52.

independence who bravely resisted the British, even going so far as to propose honoring him posthumously with the Bharat Ratna, India's highest civilian honor—a move which the Congress Party forcefully opposed, given Savarkar's alleged role as a co-conspirator in the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi.<sup>237</sup>

In Golwalkar's case, the Hindu right has sought to sanitize and rehabilitate his image by repackaging, and at times distancing themselves from, his nationalist views. In September 2018, for example, RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat told a conference that some of Golwalkar's views on Muslims and Christians were made in a particular context and thus no longer relevant, a statement which was coupled with the announcement that the RSS would be publishing a new edition of *Bunch of Thoughts*—a famous collection of Golwalkar's speeches—“in which we have removed all remarks that have a temporary context and retained those that will endure for ages.”<sup>238</sup> Similarly, a 2017 call for papers by the Indian Council of Philosophical Research—a government-backed body affiliated with the Ministry of Education—stressed a need to put Golwalkar's “enlightened nationalism” in “proper perspective,” as his views had been “misunderstood and maligned by his adversaries.”<sup>239</sup>

In both cases, however, these attempts by the contemporary right to rehabilitate the images and legacies of Hindutva's ideologues are belied by the clear influence of both Savarkar and Golwalkar's

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<sup>237</sup> “God save this country: Congress on BJP's demand of Bharat Ratna for Savarkar,” *The Economic Times*, October 15, 2019,

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/god-save-this-country-congress-on-bjps-demand-of-bharat-ratna-for-savarkar/articleshow/71599145.cms?from=mdr>.

<sup>238</sup> Ravish Tiwari, “Mohan Bhagwat's silence on Golwalkar telling: Edits anti-Muslim remark,” *The Indian Express*, September 20, 2018.

<https://indianexpress.com/article/india/mohan-bhagwats-silence-on-madhav-sadasiva-golwalkar-telling-edits-anti-muslim-remark-5365537/>.

<sup>239</sup> “Golwalkar's Hindu Rashtra is 'Enlightened Nationalism', Says Government-Backed Body,” *The Wire*, July 10, 2017, <https://thewire.in/communalism/golwalkar-hindu-rashtra-icpr>.

thought on the contemporary rhetoric and policy of the Hindu right in India today, which closely reflects the maximalist Hindu nationalism advanced by the two figures. Rather than signifying a genuine commitment to disavowing extremist principles, then, these attempts at rehabilitation should be understood for what they are—attempts to repackage Hindutva ideology and bring it closer in line with the 21st-century political norms and ostensibly democratic values that are necessary to sustain a viable ethnic democracy.

### **In Israel**

Beyond his ideological influence, the influence exerted by Jabotinsky as a historical figure on the contemporary Israeli nationalist right, represented by Netanyahu and the Likud, cannot be overstated. This influence runs deep—as mentioned before, the Likud is a direct descendant of the Herut party, which itself originated from the Irgun Zvai Leumi and absorbed the Hatzohar party, both of which were founded by Jabotinsky and his followers. Today, the Likud national headquarters are housed in the same building—Metzudat Ze'ev, also known as Beit Jabotinsky—as the Jabotinsky Institute and Jabotinsky Museum,<sup>240</sup> and Jabotinsky's grandson (also named Ze'ev) himself joined the Likud in November 2008.<sup>241</sup> Indeed, Jabotinsky's legacy remains so influential in contemporary Israeli political life that in March 2005, the Likud government under Ariel Sharon passed the Jabotinsky Law “to instill for generations the vision, legacy and work of Ze'ev Jabotinsky...and to shape the State of

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<sup>240</sup> Batsheva Pomerantz, “Aliya in the face of adversity,” *The Jerusalem Post*, January 10, 2007, <https://www.jpost.com/cafe-oleh/cafe-talk/aliya-in-the-face-of-adversity>.

<sup>241</sup> Gil Hoffman, “Ze'ev Jabotinsky's grandson joins Likud,” *The Jerusalem Post*, November 23, 2008, <https://www.jpost.com/israel/zeev-jabotinskys-grandson-joins-likud>.

Israel, its institutions, its objectives and its character in accordance with its Zionist vision.”<sup>242</sup> The law established Jabotinsky Day as a national holiday on the anniversary of Jabotinsky’s death, and a state memorial service is held at Jabotinsky’s tomb on Mount Herzl every year on this day.

It is in Netanyahu’s annual remarks commemorating Jabotinsky Day that the extent of Jabotinsky’s influence becomes most apparent through Netanyahu’s adulatory invocations of the Revisionist leader’s legacy. In his speech at the 2016 memorial service, for example, the prime minister described the “special connection” he felt with Jabotinsky due to the figure’s close relationship with his father Benzion, who served as Jabotinsky’s personal secretary and was a pallbearer at his funeral—“[My father] viewed Jabotinsky as his mentor,” he told the service, “and I – the student of the student of Jabotinsky – am proud to continue in his path.”<sup>243</sup> In his speech the following year, Netanyahu reiterated Jabotinsky’s personal influence and invoked Jabotinsky’s legacy as especially relevant in the modern era, asserting that “Jabotinsky’s stature has grown and developed over the years” as “his national theories soar to new heights and are becoming common knowledge.”<sup>244</sup> In his 2011 remarks, Netanyahu had characterized Jabotinsky as being fundamentally committed to liberal and democratic values, claiming that “Jabotinsky was a great believer in the most fundamental values of democracy: freedom, individual rights and genuine equal opportunities”—beliefs which were “incorporated in his aspiration to establish Israel as a free, prosperous and just society.”<sup>245</sup>

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<sup>242</sup> Alex Winston, “Who is Ze’ev Jabotinsky?,” *The Jerusalem Post*, August 2, 2019, <https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/who-is-zeev-jabotinsky-597238>.

<sup>243</sup> Netanyahu, “Remarks at the Official Memorial Service for Zeev Jabotinsky at Mount Herzl.”

<sup>244</sup> Benjamin Netanyahu, “Remarks at the Memorial Service for Ze’ev Jabotinsky” (speech, Jerusalem, July 23, 2017), Prime Minister’s Office, <https://www.gov.il/en/departments/news/speechjabo230717>.

<sup>245</sup> Benjamin Netanyahu, “Speech at the Special Knesset Session Commemorating the Late Ze’ev Jabotinsky” (speech, Jerusalem, January 8, 2011), Prime Minister’s Office, <https://www.gov.il/en/departments/news/speechjabo010811>.

However, these claims on Jabotinsky's supposedly liberal legacy are not just limited to the nationalist right—rather, especially in recent years, such claims have come from across the Israeli political spectrum, and are frequently accompanied by attempts to rehabilitate and sanitize his beliefs. In August 2016, for example, an editorial in *Ha'aretz*—a decidedly left-of-center mainstream newspaper—roundly criticized the Likud under Netanyahu for abandoning Jabotinsky's principles of “total equality for the country's citizens” and “total freedom of the press,” and asserted that “[p]oliticians who faithfully represent Jabotinsky in the Likud have become an extinct species.”<sup>246</sup> Just a few months earlier, at the Knesset Plenum's special meeting on Jabotinsky Day, then-opposition leader Isaac Herzog of the Labor Party noted the “irony” that his political camp “[has] more in common with Ze'ev Jabotinsky's democratic doctrine than the Likud party,” and that “we are the ones protecting his democratic legacy from those who claim and boast of being his successors — while they harm the values he believes in.”<sup>247</sup> The fact that Jabotinsky's legacy is invoked not only by right-wing leaders, but by left-leaning opposition figures as well, reflects the extremely influential role that his legacy plays in contemporary Israeli political life, as actors from across the political spectrum rehabilitate his nationalist politics and repackage them as conforming to liberal values, thus making them more suitable to sustaining a viable ethnic democracy.

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<sup>246</sup> “A Dark Shadow Has Been Cast Over the Likud and Jabotinsky's Legacy,” *Ha'aretz*, August 4, 2016, <https://www.haaretz.com/opinion/a-shadow-over-the-likud-1.5420603>.

<sup>247</sup> Raoul Wootliff, “Netanyahu shrugs off charges of ‘fascism’ as leftist rhetoric,” *The Times of Israel*, August 3, 2016, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/netanyahu-shrugs-off-charges-of-fascism-as-leftist-rhetoric/>.

## **Comparative analysis**

In both India and Israel, the individual legacies of nationalist ideologues remain highly influential to this day and are routinely invoked by contemporary politicians, particularly among the nationalist right. In both cases, these historical figures are rehabilitated and their legacies sanitized to suit the conditions of contemporary political culture, but the nature of this rehabilitation varies. In India, Savarkar's legacy is sanitized by emphasizing his mythologized status as a revolutionary hero of the independence struggle while generally downplaying his ideology, while Golwalkar's legacy is sanitized by contemporary figures who strategically distance themselves from those of his views that are less compatible with democratic values, thus obscuring the enduring influence of even his most extreme views on their own politics. In Israel, on the other hand, Jabotinsky's legacy is sanitized by repackaging his Revisionist philosophy and presenting it as fundamentally liberal and democratic in nature, rather than as the hardline nationalist ideology that it is. In both cases, however, these attempts at rehabilitation are belied by the clear influence of Hindutva and Revisionist Zionist ideology—including their most exclusionary and ethnonationalist principles—on the rhetoric and policy of the contemporary Indian and Israel right, regardless of the context in which the movements' founders themselves are invoked.

## **Concluding thoughts**

In both India and Israel, the first several decades of post-independence political life were respectively dominated by the center-left politics of the Indian National Congress and Israeli Labor

Party. Beginning in the late 20th century and into the 21st, however, this ‘soft’ nationalist consensus began to give way to a rising nationalist right in both countries that rejected, and continues to reject, the dominant models of Nehruvian secular socialism and Labor Zionism. Represented by the BJP in India and the Likud in Israel, with Benjamin Netanyahu and Narendra Modi at their helms, this new political force has pursued a much more aggressive politics of ethnic majoritarianism than has been seen before in the political mainstream of either country. Applying the analytical framework of ethnic democracy first proposed by Sammy Smooha in relation to Israel and extended to India by Christophe Jaffrelot and others, it becomes clear that these ethno-nationalist movements reflect a distinct ideological influence in their respective quests to entrench and perpetuate an ethnic-democratic model in which minorities are granted the official rights of democratic citizenship but are nevertheless treated as second-class citizens at both the *de jure* and *de facto* levels.

Both movements directly descend from and are heavily influenced by ethnonationalist ideologies of the past—Hindutva in the Indian case, and Revisionist Zionism in the Israeli case—and, importantly, both invoke and repackage the key tenets and principles of these ideologies to suit the needs of a 21st-century ethnic democracy. Drawing on the ideological legacy of V.D. Savarkar and M.S. Golwalkar in India and Vladimir Jabotinsky in Israel, these movements espouse a modern-day version of Hindutva and Revisionist Zionism that focuses on certain basic themes—the construction and mobilization of national identity, an exclusionary approach to national minorities, the deployment of a nationalist historical narrative, a strong emphasis on national renewal and regeneration, and an irredentist politics of territorial maximalism. Both at the ideological and contemporary levels, however,



the treatment of each of these themes and their manifestation in political life varies considerably between the two cases, reflecting key fundamental differences in the historical and political contexts of the two countries and movements. This study was intended to serve as a broad overview of the ideological themes that shape ethnic democracy in each context, and future comparative studies of these two ethnic-democratic frameworks should therefore delve deeper into the individual nuances and complexities of each of these themes.

The close political affinity between the Indian and Israeli governments and the nationalist political forces that have dominated them in recent decades is not limited to the contemporary era or the official relationship between the two countries. Rather, the roots of this affinity can be traced back over nearly a century to the ideological fathers of the Hindutva and Revisionist Zionist movements who, although they were located in different parts of the world and situated against radically different historical and political backdrops, emphasized many of these same themes and principles as they articulated the nationalist ideologies that still dominate right-wing politics in India and Israel to this day. By examining the historical roots and myriad complexities of this relationship, we can therefore gain a deeper understanding of the political nature, historical evolution, and potential future development of ethnic democracy in India and Israel.

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