

Israeli Transnational Rights

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This research project analyzes the attitudes and policies of Israeli state actors toward Israeli emigrants and their descendants from the late 1970s to the 2020s. It seeks to explain how and why these perspectives have evolved over time.

During Israel's first decades, Israeli politicians and public figures viewed and discussed emigration in very negative terms, describing Israeli citizens who left the country as "deserters," "traitors," and "sinners." Israeli antagonism toward emigration reached an apex when, in 1976, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin famously defined emigrants as "fallen among the weaklings." Over subsequent decades, however, many Israelis gradually changed their opinions on emigration, viewing it as a natural phenomenon in an age of cross-border mobility and globalization. Accordingly, more and more Israeli officials started to view Jewish Israeli citizens living abroad not as liabilities but as valuable assets who could help the Jewish state in various ways. They are now seen not only as potential returnees but also, increasingly, as an "Israeli diaspora" that can make contributions even while remaining abroad.

The project focuses on a significant aspect of the ongoing discourse in Israel regarding emigrants: the question of what rights and services the State of Israel should offer to those who choose to return, as well as to those who choose to stay abroad. By analyzing these debates, I will identify and understand the reasoning behind the positions of key Israeli actors regarding granting rights and benefits to emigrants. The study also aims to add to the broader field of literature on state-diaspora relations, specifically the enfranchisement of citizens abroad.

Empirically, the project makes use of a wide array of sources. The main source for my discourse analysis is the minutes of parliamentary debates in the Israeli *Knesset*. In particular, I analyze meetings of the Committee for Immigration, Absorption, and Diaspora Affairs, which has been the main forum since 1977 for parliamentary discussions of emigration and emigrants.

Additional sources include diplomatic documents from the Israeli State Archives, reports and official publications of state and quasi-state agencies (such as Israeli government ministries and the Jewish Agency), and white papers disseminated by specialized institutions and think tanks, many of which were commissioned by the Israeli government to study various dimensions of Israel's relations with its citizens abroad.