

Israel faces a most dire threat, and there's only one solution

A drastic plan to confront Israel's profound economic and military crisis

[Dan Perry](#) December 9, 2025



Israeli mounted police disperse Haredi Jewish men during a protest against conscription into Israel's military in Jerusalem on Oct. 30. Photo by Fadel Senna/AFP/Getty Images

Most discussions about “saving” Israel revolve around geopolitics and security from the dangers posed by the rest of the Middle East. But the most vexing of the challenges facing the Jewish state is internal.

The burgeoning military and economic crisis surrounding Haredi communities risks destabilizing the entire state. What is needed is an organized effort, across all sectors of society, to incentivize hundreds of thousands of Haredi Jews to participate in Israel's shared life in ways that, while honoring their practice, will prevent the social and economic disintegration that looms if no drastic changes are made.

This effort should be organized through a new ministry, tasked with encouraging and assisting Haredim in pursuing a more modern education, employment, military service and active citizenship. Ideally, it would be an independent statutory body, shielded from daily politics.

An unavoidable demographic problem

The significantly higher-than-average Haredi birthrate means the Haredim are projected to make up a third of Israel's citizens by 2050, and a majority soon thereafter.

This creates a major economic problem. Right now, Haredi communities are broadly subsidized by the Israeli government: As one indicator, Haredi men have a participation level in the workforce of just around 50%. Many of those who do work do so in jobs in the religious establishment — as kashrut supervisors, mikvah workers, and so on.

That lack of economic productivity is made up for by governmental spending. For the 2023-2024 budget cycle, some reporting estimates that spending directly targeting Haredi communities — including through stipends for scholars and funding for yeshivas and religious institutions — was on the order of NIS 13.7 billion, about \$4 billion. But more spending on the community is not officially recorded — for example, that on the child subsidies, which overwhelmingly benefit the Haredim, whose birthrate is almost three times higher than that of other Israelis.

The Haredi leadership is entrenched in its refusal to change. They reject all calls to have yeshivas integrate a core curriculum that would enable the next generation to be employable in a modern economy, insist on Torah study as the main vocation for men well into adulthood, and have practically sanctified draft evasion.

The implications are existential. Already today, as the productive sector bears an ever-heavier burden, there is growing emigration among non-Haredim — engineers, doctors, and entrepreneurs, taking with them the talent and capital that drive Israel's economy. According to recent data, about 125,000 Israelis have left since 2022.

And as the Haredi share of the population rises, it is likely they will help secure the political right — for which they overwhelmingly vote, in large part because of support for a continuing Haredi draft exemption — as something like the permanent ruling bloc.

That outcome is all but sure to further accelerate emigration. The result will be deepening poverty, and further military insecurity, as less Orthodox portions of the population increasingly rebel against a system they see as unjustly demanding they put their lives on the line to protect the Haredim from the dangers of war.

At present, every incentive structure encourages the Haredim to persist in this madness. The Haredi community, to a large extent, ostracizes those who leave the flock — [estimated as between 5% and 15%](#) of the community — and in many cases even the tiny minority who merely enlist in the army.

A radical solution

With communal leadership so averse to change, what can the rest of Israel do? The incentive structure must be turned on its head, through a series of radical but necessary governmental moves.

- **Tie all school funding to compliance with a national core curriculum.** Haredi youth, particularly boys, currently experience little to no instruction in modern subjects. This cannot continue. It creates a crippled society that is beholden to the rabbis, and ensures the Haredi community cannot contribute meaningfully to Israel's economy, as new generations are not given the knowledge and skills to work. This lack puts an unbearable economic burden on the ever-shrinking rest of Israeli society.
- **Phase out study stipends** past university age. Some will object that this move will destroy the yeshiva lifestyle. But that lifestyle is a result of power politics, not tradition: In the West, many Haredim are working members of society and thrive as such.
- **Redesign child subsidies.** Haredim currently have an average of almost seven children per family, which is financially possible largely because of child subsidies issued by the state. To encourage workforce participation, this system must be adjusted, such that families cannot subsist primarily on these subsidies. If this trend continues, the state will buckle under the economic burden of supporting the rapidly expanding community. This must be done with great sensitivity, and apply only to future births.
- **And, critically, mandate full national or military service** for all citizens, with some tailored options for Haredi sensibilities.

The message would be that modern Israel will not continue to fund its own destruction. In charge of implementing it would be the new ministry. Its main areas of responsibility would include:

- **Public outreach and culture** — Enshrining the message that integration is not betrayal of faith, but rather an expansion of opportunity: Torah and modernity can coexist, and work, service and education are deeply Jewish values.
- **Military and national service** — In coordination with the IDF, establishing dedicated Haredi military tracks, alongside national service paths for some men and women who insist on that route. This would involve expanding existing routes, including the number of dedicated

Haredi units in the military, and providing housing and psychological support for recruits facing ostracism.

- **Adult education** — Establishing adult education institutions offering full core studies to Haredim who never learned math, English or science. State scholarships and stipends during the transition period would encourage participation.
- **Employment and entrepreneurship** — Creating partnerships with employers to fund professional training, apprenticeships, and personal mentorship, as well as tax incentives for companies hiring Haredim or ex-Haredim — especially in high-tech, health care and education, fields where Haredim have already made some inroads.
- **Social and family support** — Forming a national network of counselors, social workers and career coaches to accompany Haredim through their increasing integration into the modern world. Many Haredim will be deeply resistant to this change; establishing thoughtful routes to help them will be crucial to the initiative's success.

The necessity of adaptation

Integration does not mean the Haredi lifestyle must end — only that it must adapt, so that the society in which it exists can sustain into the future. The goal would be to make integration safe and feasible.

The scale of the initiative must match that of the threat. It will cost tens of billions of shekels — but the money must be found, just as it was found for the endless Gaza war, which, for all its importance, posed a lesser risk to Israel's continuance. Israel already spends vast sums each year subsidizing unemployment and ignorance in the Haredi sector. Redirecting some of these funds to integration will yield immense economic and social returns. I hope that many donors, secular and religious alike, will join the effort.

A great confrontation over such an ambitious effort would be unavoidable. Many Haredim, including their elected officials, will rage and accuse the government of waging war on Judaism. Protests, petitions to the Supreme Court, and even charges of antisemitism will follow. The Haredi leadership will claim the government seeks to “convert” them. But this fight must be fought at some point; the options are to fight it now, or to risk an even worse version of it in the future.

The irony is that the current situation is bad for the Haredim themselves. They are trapped in a system that denies them opportunities, and leads them instead to enforced poverty and dependence on rabbinic leadership. This leadership has built a structure of control that survives only by keeping its public helpless.

For too long, powerful parties, including the governing Likud, have kicked this issue down the road, sacrificing the nation's future for coalition stability. It is a moral and strategic disaster. Israel's place in the modern world hangs in the balance.

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