

## **Israeli Settlers' Population is going for a million: Indicators from the 2015 Knesset Elections Results**

The actual number of Israeli settlers in the illegal Israeli settlements in the West Bank remains one of the secrets camouflaged by the Israeli Civil Administration. The Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics (ICBS) only reports the population of communities with 5,000 residents or more. Also, ICBS counts the settlers of East Jerusalem as local residents of “unified Jerusalem” and reports them as such but not as settlers. Thus, the population figures from ICBS mask the extent of Israeli colonization and “Judaization” of the West Bank and Jerusalem, and challenge responsible statistics gathering cognizant of the demographic distinctions useful in negotiations and policy. Given its importance and policy implications, the settler population remains one of the most controversial issues between Israelis and Palestinians. On May 16, 2014 Israel’s Construction and Housing Minister – Uri Ariel – predicted that settler population would enlarge dramatically: “I think that in five years there will be 550,000 or 600,000 Jews in Judea and Samaria, rather than 400,000 (now).”<sup>1</sup> Indeed, current discourse on Israeli settlements usually cites populations around 400,000 in the West Bank in addition to 265,000 in East Jerusalem according to the Applied Research Institute-Jerusalem (ARIJ) or 300,000 to 350,000 according to Uri Ariel.

According to the database of the Applied Research Institute – Jerusalem (ARIJ), more than 716,000 Israeli settlers currently live in 196<sup>2</sup> settlements in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. In order to verify its estimations, ARIJ has utilized data published by the Central Election Committee on the 20<sup>th</sup> Knesset elections held in March 2015<sup>3</sup>. Data reported included all polling stations (including those based in settlements), the number of Israeli citizens over 18 years of old who are entitled to vote, voter turnout, and voting results. It was found that 118 out of 178 settlements in the West Bank had polling stations. Polling stations located in the 18 East Jerusalem settlements have not been verified, since they were

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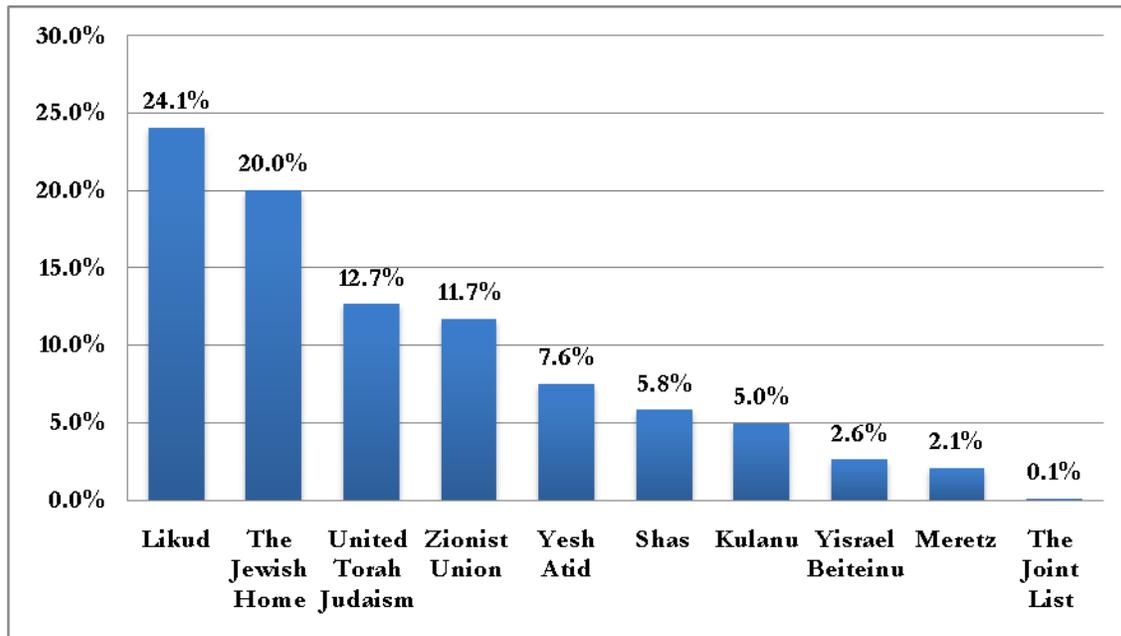
<sup>1</sup> The Jerusalem Post. <http://www.jpost.com/National-News/Housing-minister-sees-50-percent-more-settlers-in-West-Bank-by-2019-352501> (accessed June 20, 2015)

<sup>2</sup> ARIJ Database (2015)

<sup>3</sup> The Central Election Committee on the 20<sup>th</sup> Knesset, <http://www.votes20.gov.il/ballotresults>

reported under “Jerusalem” with no specifications on their exact location, and have therefore been excluded from the analysis.<sup>4</sup>

The analysis shows that 274,476<sup>5</sup> settlers were eligible to vote in the 118 settlement-based polling stations. 219,342 votes were cast, an 80% voter turnout.



Graph (1): Distribution of settler votes in the 20<sup>th</sup> Knesset Elections (2015)<sup>6</sup>

In order to calculate the number of settlers by utilizing the election results, a percentage of Israelis under the 18-year voting age needs to be assumed. Accordingly, two scenarios are projected:

<sup>4</sup> No data was found on polling stations in the following settlements: Har Alei Zahav, Barqan Industrial Zone, Rechelim, Ginnot Shomeron, Mazor Atiqa, Hadar Betar, El David (Kfar Eldad), Geva'ot, Mizpe Shalem, Gilo, Giva't Ha-Matos, Har Homa, Bat Ayin (Tzurif), Avenat, Ibei Nahal, Ayn Fashkhah, Mshoki Dargot, Karmel, Mitzad Shimon, Beit Hadasa (Ad daboya), Abraham Afeno, Ramat Mamre (Kharsine), Sinsaneh, Kaddim, Tal Menashe, Sa Nur, Ya'arit, Peza'el, North Dead Sea (Solar Pond), Atrazqia, Mizpe Yeriho, Lido Yehuda, Neve Oramin, Giv'at HaMerkaziz, Kedumim Zefon, Jit (Mitzpe Yishai), Hemdat, Rotem (Nahal), Bitronot (Shila), Maskiyot, Bracha, Mekhora, Homesh, Mizpe Rahel (Shvut Rahel), East Talpiot, Allon, Giva't Shappira, Hebrew University (Har HaTzofim), Mishr Adummim, Neve Brat (Nofei Prat), Ramat Eshkol, Ramot, Rekhesh Shufat (Ramat Shlomo), Givon, Har Shamual, Neve Shamual, Mamilla, Mizpe Yedude (New Kedar), Atarot Neve Ya'akov, Pisgat Amir, Pisgat Ze'ev, Sha'ar Benyamin, Nof Zion, Jewish Quarter, Ras al A'mud (Ma'ale Ha zeitim), Roman Bathing House, Ofarim, Hallamish (Neve Tzuf), Kokhav HaShahar, Hashmona'im, Menora, Na'aleh, Canada Park.

<sup>5</sup> Author's calculations based on data from Central Election Committee of the 20<sup>th</sup> Knesset (2015)

<sup>6</sup> Author's analysis based on data from Central Election Committee of the 20<sup>th</sup> Knesset (2015)

**Scenario I:** Assuming that settlers' age spread corresponds to the demographic of the rest of the population, the percentage of Israelis less than 18 years old is 32.26%. This percentage is calculated by taking the weighted average of the percentage of Israelis under 18 year olds residing in 201 localities as reported by the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics for the year 2012. As Israeli registered voters constitute the number of people above the age of 18, the equation is thus expressed as follows:

$$274,476 = \text{total settler population} * (1.000 - .3226)$$

Total settler population (excluding Jerusalem) is then around **405,190** people.

**Scenario II:** The previous scenario assumes a 32.26% under 18 year old; however this percentage is not likely representative of settlers, due to their higher birth rates. According to reports, "the growth of the Jewish population in the settlements is organic and due to high birth rate rather than to arrival from pre-1967 Israel."<sup>7</sup> Taking data from the ICBS (2012), the percentage of Israelis under 18 in reported settlements is closer to 44.55%, calculated by taking the weighted average of percentages in the following West Bank settlements: Ari'el, Betar Illit, Modi'in Illit, Modi'in-Maccabim-Re'ut, Ma'ale Adumim, Oranit, Alfei Menashe, Elkana, Efrat, Beit El, Giv'at Ze'ev, Beit Arye, Har Adar, Mevaseret Zion, Ma'ale Efraim, Imanu'el, Kdumim, and Kiryat Arba. In this calculation:

$$274,476 = \text{total settler population} * (1.000 - .4555)$$

The total settler population (excluding Jerusalem) is then around **494,997** people.

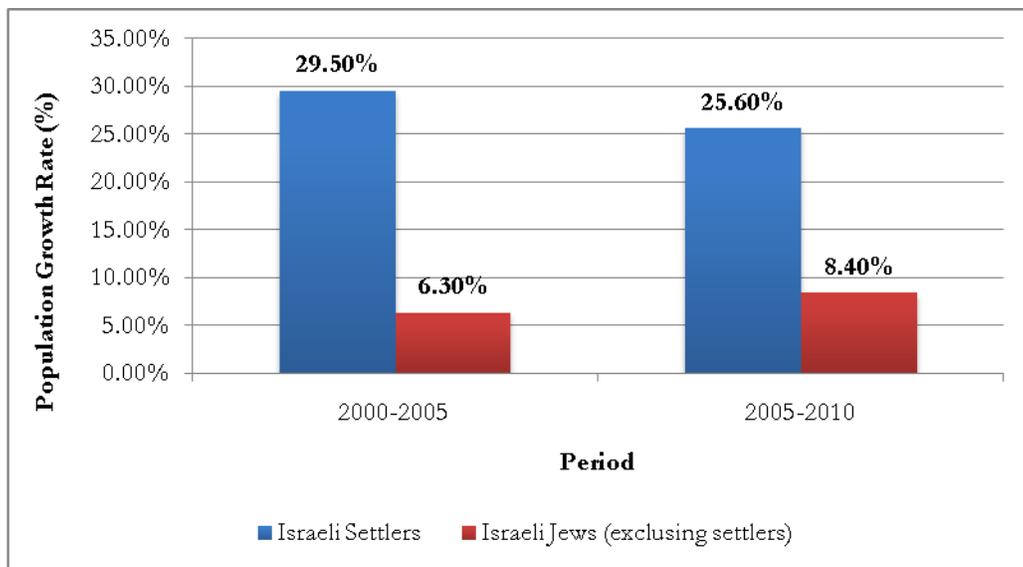
In following a principle of conservative estimation, a **third scenario** can be added, using the average of the two previous scenarios (32.26% and 45.55%) of 38.91%. This scenario reflects the midpoint of the projections of average Israeli age populations and the conservative Jews more characteristic of Israeli West Bank populations. Applied to the election data, the total settler population (excluding Jerusalem) is then around **449,298** people. Therefore, it can be estimated that the total number of Israeli settlers in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem range between 670,190 (**405,190+265,000**) and 759997 (**494,997+265,000**) and is was most probably close to 714,298 (**449,298+265,000**) in 2015.

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<sup>7</sup> The Jerusalem Post. <http://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Op-Ed-Contributors/Israels-fast-evolving-demography-320574> (Accessed June 20, 2015)

Between the reviewed scenarios, the third one is found to be consistent with the number of settlers reported by the Applied Research Institute-Jerusalem (ARIJ) for some time now. While the first two scenarios round the settlers' numbers to 670,000 and 760,000; respectively including East Jerusalem, the third one estimates the number to be 714,000. The issue of matter at this point and for the future is the anticipated population number of the Israeli settlers in the next 5 years; by the year 2020.

In the year 2000, the ICBS reported that the population of the Israeli settlers in the West Bank excluding occupied East Jerusalem stood at 192,976<sup>8</sup>. By 2005, the settler population increased to reach 249,901<sup>9</sup>; exhibiting 29.5% increase over 5 years. This population continued to grow at a rate of 25.6% over the following 5 years, reaching 313,928 by the year 2010. On the other hand, the Jewish population in Israel (excluding settlers) has been growing at a much slower rate during the same periods as seen in Graph (2). Given an Israeli settler population of 714,000 in 2015 and assuming future growth rate based on historic trends (2000-2010) of 5.5%, it is conceivable that the total number of settlers in the West bank and East Jerusalem would exceed 930,000 by 2020.



<sup>8</sup> Israel Central Bureau of Statistics (2001). List of Localities: Their Population and Codes, 31.12.2000.

<sup>9</sup> Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, Localities in Israel 2003-2008 (Hebrew)

Graph (2): Population growth of Israeli settlers and Israeli Jews<sup>10</sup>

Furthermore, it is no secret that the consecutive Israeli government relentlessly worked to undermine the two-state solution. Israel has made it clear on many occasions that it will not give up the so-called “unified” Jerusalem under any peace agreement, nor will it give up the major settlement blocs located in the West Bank and East Jerusalem which hold together more than 80% of the settler population. Data reflects that Israel schemed to increment the number of settlers in the West Bank to exceed one million as was ominously stated on different occasions and times by a number of Israeli officials: “*The number of Jewish settlers in the Israeli-occupied West Bank could grow by as much as 50 percent by 2019.*”<sup>11</sup> (Uri Ariel, Israeli Housing Minister). If Ariel’s assumption holds, the total population of Israeli settlers is expected to grow up to 1,071,000 by the year 2020.

Revealing the actual number of Israeli settlers in the West Bank using elections data confirms Israel’s continuous efforts to mask this number. Yet, accurate information on settlers’ population is increasingly important, given its political ramifications. The continuous growth of settler population can jeopardize any potential two-state solution between Palestinians and Israelis, and considerably affect its terms. This increasing number will be used by Israel as an excuse for maintaining control over large settlement blocs, and pushing for land swaps with Palestinians instead of dismantling large settlement blocs located in the West Bank.

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### Sources

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<sup>10</sup> Author’s analysis of data reported by ICBS (2012), and [jewishvirtuallibrary.org/](http://jewishvirtuallibrary.org/)

<sup>11</sup> Reuters (August 11, 2013)

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