



Policy Regarding Migrant Workers in Israel: Solutions Based on Balancing Competing Collective Action Frames

Amelia Collins, Honors Student
MidAmerica Nazarene University, Olathe KS



“The State of Israel is the only Western Democratic State that has no immigration policy ...”

-Dr. Nathan Gilad¹

ABSTRACT

Within Israel, a large number of migrant workers lack valid permits. The popular debate over Israel’s immigration policy is divided on the issue of migrant workers. Some want Israel’s immigration policy to favor its national mission and security. Others want Israel’s immigration policy to favor the human rights of the migrant workers. A more inclusive debate would call for mutual consideration of both concerns.

RESEARCH CONCERN

Migrant workers have had a major presence in the state of Israel for decades. Many have married and had families, with children raised in Israeli society and identifying as Israelis. Conversely, Israel is concerned with the Jewish identity of the country and non-Jewish foreign migrants threaten this demographic balance. This dilemma prompted me to investigate if popular discussion on the issue is too polarizing and inhibits the formulation of an acceptable compromise.

RESEARCH METHOD

Literature review:

- o Sociological concept of “collective action framing”
- o Political documents on migrant worker policy and demographics
- o Current statements from stakeholders in the debate

Participant-observation:

- o A semester of immersion in Israel (January - April 2014)
- o Various discussions with Israelis, organizations advocating for migrant workers

Photos: <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/09/israel-democracy-migrants-rights-law.html>
<http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/un-report-slams-israel-s-treatment-of-pregnant-migrant-workers-1.343023>

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What is the current status of migrant worker policy in Israel?
- What policy changes are social actors advocating? How do they justify these changes?
- Are differences in justifications impeding adoption of policy?
- Can an understanding of these justifications inform conciliatory policy?

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Migrant Worker:

- o Entered Israel through quota system or agreement between Israel and sending country
- o Most work in construction, agriculture and care-giving²
- o October 2013 = 69,449 legal foreign workers in Israel³

Illegal Worker:

- o Entered Israel on tourist or work visa, overstayed visa; many from Africa and are claiming asylum
- o Most work in low-paying service sector²
- o October 2013 =14,847 illegal foreign workers, 93,000 tourists on overstayed visas³, 50,000 asylum-seekers

Collective Action Frame⁴: The summation of the below criteria formulated by a group seeking social change

- o Diagnostic framing = identify the problem and place blame on a group or individual
- o Prognostic framing = solution to the problem and a plan to resolve the issue
- o Motivational framing = rationale for collective action and outlines the vocabularies of the movement

RESULTS

Collective Action Frame	Diagnostic Frame	Prognostic Frame	Motivational Frame	Adherents
National Mission	-Migrants threaten Jewish identity of State -Obligation to employ Israelis first -Illegal migrants must leave	Priorities: -Detainment of migrants -Repatriate migrants -Enforce penalties against employers	Vocabulary: -“mission,” “threat,” “infiltrators” -Israel as protector of Jewish identity, migrants insurgents	-Israeli PM Netanyahu -Members of the Knesset -Majority of Israelis
Migrant Worker Rights	-Israel desires cheap labor, unwilling to grant basic rights -Current policy dehumanizes, disenfranchises	Priorities: 1. Worker protections 2. Family preservation 3. Unjustified detention/deportation 4. Residency/citizenship	Vocabulary: -remind Jewish people of history of oppression -“universal human rights”	-Hotline for Refugees and Migrants -Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI) -other NGOs -Migrant workers

The table above outlines my analysis of the dominant frames found and how they were articulated in the public discourse in Israel. The themes were extracted from statements made by leaders and activists, in addition to the analysis of the policies promoted by each group. Below are some sample quotes from each frame.

National Mission Frame: “The Sudanese are like a cancer in society.” -Miri Regev, Member of the Knesset
“The problem that currently stands at 60,000 could grow to 600,000, and that threatens our existence as a Jewish and democratic state.” -Benjamin Netanyahu, Israeli Prime Minister, referencing migrants from Africa

Migrant Worker Rights: “Migrant workers represent an extremely vulnerable population group...one whose rights are constantly trampled upon by both their employers and the state authorities.” -ACRI

“Migrants are one of the weakest groups in Israel; as non-citizens, non-Hebrew speakers, and non-Jews, they are an invisible ‘other.’” - Hotline for Refugees and Migrants

CONCLUSIONS AND LIMITATIONS

These two competing collective actions frames must be reconciled before a compromise can be enacted. It remains to be seen if the migrant worker frame has enough political and social weight to influence government policy, as the majority of adherents are extragovernmental actors without avenues to influence decisions. If the State of Israel seeks to be true to its democratic name and attempt to incorporate the interests of all parties, a mitigating policy might be enacted.

This policy should include⁵:

- o Complete a total assessment of the Israeli economy to evaluate migrant worker quotas
- o Process migrant worker applications at Israeli representation of sending country
- o Regulate status of necessary, illegal migrant workers; repatriate unnecessary workers in a safe and humane manner
- o Ensure rights afforded native Israeli workers are extended to migrant workers
- o Establish path to permanent residency for migrant workers in Israel for at least 10 years
- o Enforce policy penalizing those employing illegal migrant workers
- o Channel asylum-seekers to sectors currently employing migrant workers

Limitations:

- o Inadequate insight into foundation of a novel, effective collective action frame

Further research questions:

- o What motivational frame would resonate with both parties?
- o Would cross-party dialogue have an impact on the acceptance of a compromising narrative?

REFERENCES

- ¹Nathan, G. (2012, November). The OECD expert group on migration (sopemi) report, immigration in Israel 2011-2012. *The Knesset, Research and Information Center*, 9. Retrieved from <http://www.knesset.gov.il/mmm/data/pdf/me03131.pdf>
- ²Bartram, D. (1998). Foreign workers in Israel: History and theory. *International Migration Review* 32(2), 304. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2547185>.
- ³Schwartz, S. (2013, November 11). Does a border fence work? Check out the dramatic change after Israel put one up. *The Blaze*. Retrieved from <http://www.theblaze.com/stories/2013/11/11/does-a-border-fence-work-check-out-the-dramatic-change-after-israel-put-one-up/>
- ⁴Benford, R. & Snow, D. (2000). Framing processes and social movements: An overview and assessment. *Annual Review Sociology* 26, 614. Retrieved from www.annualreviews.org
- ⁵Avineri, S., Orgad, L. & Rubinstein, A. (2010). Managing global migration: A strategy for immigration policy in Israel. *The Metzliah Center*. Retrieved from http://www.metzliah.org.il/webfiles/fck/file/Immi_Book%20final.pdf