

STRETCHING THE BOUNDARIES OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE: LESSONS FROM HUNGARY AND ISRAEL

Gadi Hitman

Ariel University, Israel

Abstract: Based on the case studies of Hungary and Israel, this article proposes an expansion of the term ‘political violence’ to encompass the phenomenon of using harsh language followed by punitive measures, which are not necessarily physical. It aims to gain additional power, intimidate opponents, and narrow the public and political abilities of social and political forces with a different ideology. One major consequence is a transition from a democratic regime to a non-democratic one. The paper concludes that political violence is currently mainly verbal in Israel, but in Hungary, it also has the practical dimension of hurting the government’s political opponents. This policy has a direct implication on the state national identity, which is in both cases a more national-religious one.

Keywords: political violence, democracy, Hungary, Israel

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1. Introduction

Political violence has different patterns and can be individual or collective (Gamson 1975: 82). The problem with the term ‘political violence’ is that it is too vague, leading, over the years, to too many theoretical definitions, explanations, and empirical types. However, this problematic situation is advantageous for scholars who observe political systems, trying to understand whether or not they can identify new patterns that can be classified under the umbrella of political violence.

Every socio-political study needs a theoretical framework or definition of the topic in question, and therefore the fundamental question for every researcher who

wishes to learn what political violence is encompasses the need to decide what violence is. Should we include only actions involving physical force (hand-to-hand fights, cold weapons, firearms, military coups, and so forth), or does it also include verbal violence, which can be considered incitement (as, for example, Israeli law determined in 1977) (Article 144, Israeli Criminal Code)? This challenge also stems from the term ‘political violence’ containing a wide variety of action patterns. There is a broad consensus that some case studies, such as terrorist acts, are intended to achieve political goals (Crenshaw 2000). However, when one includes other action patterns, such as a demonstration or a protest march, under the umbrella of political violence, the definition is loosened and not self-evident. For example, is attacking minorities, just because they are minorities, an event of violence or political violence? Is the closure of a TV channel by the regime political violence? Is allocating less screen time to the opposition than to the government an act of political power, suppressing the opposition and ensuring the regime dominates the media? What about the government stopping advertising in a free press that criticizes the regime? Are government sanctions considered acts of violence?

While scholars differ on the content of the definition, they agree that political violence is not only a product of secular ideologies, such as Nazism, Fascism, or Stalinism. In practice, all humanity has experienced political violence in various forms, such as terror, rebellion, confrontations between protesters and security forces, cold weapons, and roadblocks. It thus emerges that political violence has both an ideological basis and different meanings in different societies and regimes. What is considered political violence in a given place and time and under a certain type of regime is not necessarily defined as political violence elsewhere. Attempts to explain political violence have undergone a process of ‘conceptual stretching’ over the years since, through observations made by various researchers, more and more pertinent examples have been collected.

So, how should we define political violence? What are the basic components to be considered to understand that what we see is indeed political violence? Intimidation? Power? Coercion? Civilian arrests? Bodies on the streets? Military personnel in the head of state’s chambers?

One possible definition of political violence is “all the collective attacks within a political community against the regime” (Gurr 1970: 3-4). This classical definition by Gurr, first posited in 1970, is relevant but does not tell the whole story. The main lacuna here is the absence of any analysis of political violence by the regime. This in itself encompasses a conceptual bias because when the regime (in democracies, the elected political power) uses force, we tend to perceive it as legal.

Following Gurr, Della Porta suggested in 1995 that political violence “consists of those repertoires of collective action that involve great physical force and cause damage to an adversary in order to impose political aims” (Della Porta 1995: 2). This definition is also not free from criticism. For instance, ‘great physical force’ and ‘damage’ can be interpreted subjectively. Furthermore, the definition does not refer to events that do not necessarily involve the exercise of physical force but other

force arising from status or authority that has the purpose of intimidating political opponents.

Subsequently, Sprinzak proposed the following definition: “Political violence is violence used in a political context, that is, for the purpose of overcoming the government, influencing the government, protesting against the government, defending the government, or fighting against another group that has socio-political power and is perceived as dangerous by the perpetrators of violence.” He perceived political violence as a general term that includes a wide range of phenomena and sub-concepts: “[Political violence] touches on a very wide range of phenomena, and it seems that the most useful way to understand it is as a type of political behavior, ranging from verbal violence to terrorist action. Found between the two are unauthorized demonstrations and protests, physical confrontations with security forces, damage to property, beatings, bodily harm, serious injuries, killings, and political murder” (Sprinzak 1995: 6-8).

While scholars have tried to understand political protest or violence outside of the official establishment, many have ignored the political violence of the formal ruling regimes. For instance, if an army of a non-democratic regime attacked civilians, should we not define it as political violence? When Donald Trump encouraged his supporters in January 2021 to storm the Capitol in an attempt to prevent a change of government after losing the presidential election, was this not collective political violence by the masses? Collective political violence is a longstanding historical phenomenon, and various models of violence in a group framework have developed over time, arising out of circumstances of religious, ethnic, national, and political struggle ultimately aimed at gaining control over resources and values.

The argument here is simple: if a government uses the means at its disposal to intimidate, narrow the scope of activity, and impose its opinion on political opponents and the public at large, this is political violence. It does not have to involve physical harm, but its very existence marks new boundaries for political and public discourse. The result is that freedom of action and expression is reduced due to the fear of contravening the framework of new regulations or laws. Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez is a well-known case study, though far from the only one. Shortly after he won the 1999 elections, he began a campaign of political intimidation: changing people in the judicial system, declaring a state of emergency, making fundamental changes to political institutions, approving a new constitution with ambiguous wording to allow him a free hand, and changing the criminal code to limit the freedom of the press and freedom of expression. Fleischmann concluded that “this new code aimed at maintaining the supremacy of the state-controlled media over competing voices” (Fleischman 2013: 34).

This opening part serves as a preface to a comparative analysis of official political violence in Hungary and Israel. These two case studies exemplify new patterns of political violence that do not necessarily have to include physical force. While the process has lasted over a decade and has been implemented in Hungary, at the time of writing (late 2023), it is at a preliminary stage in Israel it is mainly declarative.

2. The Hungarian case study

The first democratic elections in Hungary took place in 1990. The transition from a communist regime was smooth, but during the 1990s, the Hungarian people were not happy, mainly because of their precarious economic situation, a result of high rates of unemployment and inflation. From 1990 to 2010, center-right and center-left coalitions ruled in Budapest alternately, and all of them maintained democratic values. One of the benefits for Hungary was that the country has been an EU member since 2004 (Ayalon 2020).

However, in 2010, Viktor Orbán became Prime Minister (he also served as Prime Minister between 1998 and 2002). The results of the 2010 general election gave Orbán unlimited power (his party Fidesz won 263 out of 386 parliamentary seats) (*Hungary: Országgyűlés* 2023). Four years later, in a famous speech, he declared that Hungary was an 'illiberal state' (Randeira 2017). Between 2010 and 2013, his government enacted some 700 laws, many of which reversed unpopular economic policies: property rights were selectively whittled away, foreign-controlled private pension funds were renationalized, high taxes were levied on the foreign investment-heavy banking and energy sectors, and vast tracts of EU-subsidized agricultural land were redistributed to party functionaries (Randeira 2017). These new policies, which initiated a massive recentralization of economic and political power, were legitimate since the elected government had a public (and perhaps even ethical and moral) mandate to change the previous policies. The opposition, the private sector, and the public could accept or oppose them, but ultimately, these were legitimate steps.

Orbán mapped four pillars of the establishment in Hungary that needed to be weakened to make the country illiberal: the court, the media, civil society, and Parliament. In late 2011, Orbán began promoting anti-liberal legislation. He passed a bill according to which Fidesz could hold two-thirds of the seats in Parliament, even if it won only 25% of the vote, to allow his party to pass legislation freely without the approval of others (Scheppele 2022). The move was a precautionary measure after the mid-term polls did not predict the results that Orbán hoped for. While the automatic tendency is to define this bill as non-democratic, it is suggested here that it be seen as established political violence: it not only guarantees Fidesz endless dominance in Parliament but also creates an impassable (legislative) barrier for anyone who wants to run for a parliamentary seat. This obstacle is an attack on the right to choose and to be elected and on democracy. Therefore, it is political violence.

After taking over Parliament, Orbán utilized the House of Representatives to pass a series of laws against various targets that he saw as a threat to his ideology and rule. The examples presented below against those targets show the use of excessive political power and should be seen as actual violence despite the absence of physical force.

2.1. Civil society

In 2011, he passed the law on religion, the main purpose of which was to cancel the recognition of most religious groups in Hungary (Schlager 2019). The law stated

that only 14 of the 358 existing religious groups would be ‘registered’ and receive full religious status. It removed budgets and support for those groups, and in order to regain their religious status, the groups were required to go through a long process that included seven criteria and receive the support of two-thirds of Parliament. They were also asked to obtain 1,000 signatures from citizens who supported the move and to prove their presence in the country for 20 years or more. Whether the promise to promote such a law was given on the eve of the elections or not, the promotion of such a law and its approval in Parliament was not only a move aimed at reducing public expenditure on minorities but also the exercise of unrestrained power against a public whose religion is different from Orbán’s.

One of the most prominent case studies of the delegitimization of civil society concerns George Soros. The liberal Jewish Hungarian was marked as a target because of his ideology. Soros has been operating non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that promote liberal ideas since 1991 and even founded a university in Budapest in 2017. Orbán tried to pass bills to close the university and limit his NGOs’ activities in the country. The attempt was met with opposition and counterdemonstrations by citizens and also provoked a furor outside Hungary. Fidesz claimed that the demonstration against the university’s closure was just another attempt by Soros and his people to pressure the government into changing its immigration policy. Ultimately, Orbán’s government did not approve an agreement regarding the continuation of the university’s activities in the country, and it was forced to relocate to Vienna. Soros’ delegitimization also had a personal twist: pictures of him were plastered on subway station platforms in Budapest so that people could step on his face and blacken his image (Than 2017).

2.2. The media

Orbán made his first public appearance on Hungarian radio on June 21, 2011. His appearance surprised the editors of that morning’s newscast, and from that day on, his public appearances became a regular slot on the broadcasts. Why? Because he decided to – and because he has political power (Dunai 2014). In addition, Orbán’s Fidesz party has extended its influence across the state-financed media, and Orbán’s press chief determines what issues will be raised in interviews with the prime minister. The journalists say executives have created a culture that discourages tough questioning, and employees who dissent are moved aside.

Moreover, the new media laws state that all broadcasting channels must provide ‘balanced news coverage’ and register with the Media Authority, which operates under the government’s funding and control. It was also determined that heavy fines would be imposed on any broadcasting network, newspapers, or website that improved the government’s vague definition of ‘balanced coverage’. Many media outlets were transferred to the hands of those close to the Prime Minister, and restrictions were placed on the media coverage of bodies not identified with the right in the country.

Over the years, Orbán’s government systematically dried up non-aligned media outlets by withholding advertising revenue and pressured private media owners to censor publications or sell their companies. This move was highly successful: as of

2019, more than 500 Hungarian media outlets had taken a pro-government position compared to 31 in 2015. In 2016, the government scored a major victory when *Nepszabadsag*, the largest newspaper identified with the opposition, was shut down, and the media group that owned it passed into the hands of government supporters (*Hungary's largest paper Nepszabadsag shuts* 2016).

The Hungarian government currently oversees state-owned media. Orbán's people control most private sources of information, highlighting his right-wing nationalist views and his attacks on immigrants. Additionally, the Hungarian Parliament enacted two laws to persecute journalists who published investigations that were not to Orbán's liking. A case in point concerns the popular news website Origo. In 2014, it was written on the website that one of Orbán's senior aides used state funds to pay sizeable expenses during secret foreign trips – a publication that embarrassed Orbán and his government. Today, however, Origo is among Orbán's most loyal supporters. How did this happen? The German telecommunications company that controlled Origo was weakened by burdensome regulations applied to independent media outlets that often published content opposing the government, and in 2015, it sold the site to New Wave Media, a company owned by relatives of former ministers in the Orbán government. It was bought with government money through tenders only opened to media corporations aligned with government policy. These moves, like others, are examples of soft political violence. The official explanation was that it was a rational economic decision, but this is no more than a poor attempt to hide the pressure exerted by the government on the media, which is ultimately a violent act. According to a BBC report, many Hungarians concluded that this constituted a serious attack on press freedom and democracy.

2.3. *Changing the court system*

In December 2018, the Hungarian Parliament approved the creation of a parallel court system that cemented the executive's control over the judiciary. This new law gave the minister of justice absolute control over hiring, firing, and promoting judges. New judges have the authority to discuss issues of public administration, such as electoral law, corruption, and the right to protest. Orbán took this move at a time when Hungary's existing judiciary already faced significant governmental interference (Novak and Kingsley 2018).

Orbán has been leading changes to the Hungarian constitution since 2010. By 2012, Orbán's government had very few checks on its power, and the new constitutional order permitted the governing party to appoint its loyalists to crucial long-term positions with veto power over what future governments might do. This undermines the independence of various political institutions and guarantees virtually unlimited powers for the ruling party (Jenne and Mudde 2012).

2.4. *Summary*

Even if Orbán's focus was on four pillars of Hungary's democratic society, these were not the only targets he worked to weaken. An analysis of the government's activities since 2010 reveals real damage to the Hungarian economy and the status

of women. For example, in 2015, when Orbán was asked why there were no women in his government, he replied that women cannot withstand the pressure that comes with participating in Hungarian politics. In practice, the Hungarian Parliament is one of the EU's worst in terms of gender balance: women occupy only one position in Orbán's 14-person cabinet and 13% of all parliamentary seats. In 2017, Orbán made his position clear: "We don't deal with female issues [...]. There are a few talented women, who could maybe work out, but I'm not surprised they didn't apply for the role" (Rutai 2023).

Orbán's position on women not only reflects chauvinism but also corresponds with the Slave Law, which allows employers to force workers to work up to 400 extra hours a year and delay paying them for three years (*Hungary president signs controversial 'slave law'* 2018). This can be seen as a violation of workers' rights, but it is also the use of excessive force (derived from one-party rule) against a public that cannot turn to legal support because all three authorities (executive, judiciary, and legislature) blindly obey the political leadership. This is institutional political violence in both a dictatorship and, in Orbán's terms for his country, an 'illiberal democracy'.

Considering the processes, Hungary is a democracy: there are parliamentary elections, and the citizens have the right to vote. But focusing more closely on the processes' content and essence, Hungary is not a democracy because the ruling party has an absolute majority in Parliament by law, so the elections have no value. Moreover, the Hungarian government uses violence – usually soft – against its opponents and does not hesitate to intimidate them and impose personal and group sanctions to mark clear boundaries between what is allowed and what is forbidden. From any angle, this is political violence.

3. The Israeli case study

Unlike Hungary, Israel does not have a constitution. In 1950, the first Knesset (Israeli Parliament) decided not to enact a constitution. Instead, it adopted the Harari Resolution, whereby a constitution will be written in chapters called 'fundamental laws' that will eventually be incorporated into the state constitution. As a result, many important areas of Israeli society are not regulated by law (Appendix H to the Minutes of Session No. 150–152 of the First Israeli Knesset).

Over the years, the Knesset has enacted 14 Basic Laws, such as The Knesset, The Government, The State Economy, The President, Israel Lands, The Military, The Judiciary, Freedom of Occupation, and Human Dignity and Liberty. One of the Basic Laws that has not yet been enacted in Israel relates to legislation. Israel is thus a country without a constitution where the balance between the legislative, executive, and judiciary is not explicitly defined, creating many contrasting spaces of interpretation.

In January 2023, a newly elected government was sworn in. It is a coalition of right-wing parties featuring both secular and religious and liberal and conservative people. As in Hungary, this right-wing ruling coalition launched a judicial reform

on January 5, 2023. Yariv Levin, the Minister of Justice, backed by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, explained that it is necessary to curb the power of the judiciary as it interferes with the sovereign (the government's) decisions (*Justice Minister Yariv Levin's legal reform 2023*). In practice, since January 2023, the government has been trying to take over the judicial system and reduce the power of the judiciary in the following areas:

- A) Reducing the 'reason for reasonableness', the mechanism by which a court decides that a government or administrative decision is extremely unreasonable, intervening in decisions made by elected officials without a legal basis. Supporters of the reform argued that the judicial system makes excessive use of this pretext, which therefore should be scaled back. On July 23, 2023, the Knesset approved the reduction of the reason for reasonableness by a majority of 64 to 0 (Basic Law: The Judiciary).
- B) Changing the method of appointments to the Judicial Selection Committee, which selects the judges in the Israeli courts, who, after their selection, are appointed to office by the President. The committee was established in 1953 following the enactment of the Judges Bill. The rules for the composition of the committee are designed to reduce the influence of political pressures on the selection of judges. The committee is made up of nine members: two ministers (the Minister of Justice is the chairman), two Members of the Knesset (one from the coalition and one from the opposition), three judges from the Supreme Court, and two representatives from the Israel Bar Association. Since a committee determined the selection method, more than 60 bills have been put forward to change the method of selecting judges (Cohen et al. 2020). Critics of the system claim that the selection method does not properly represent the public and that since the Supreme Court discusses issues subject to political controversy, the selection method in which public representatives are a minority of the committee members undermines the principles of democracy. In contrast, supporters claim that the proposals for change will politicize the committee, which will select judges based on their political views instead of their professional skills. In order for the judges serving in the Supreme Court not to have a veto in the Judicial Selection Committee, Levin proposed a change whereby the coalition would have a majority in the committee.
- C) The superseding clause, proposed as part of the legal reform, will allow the Knesset to re-enact a law invalidated by the High Court (that is, it has been agreed that the law is unconstitutional), provided that there is a majority of at least 61 MKs (privileged majority), which is actually the minimal majority of the coalition. In this way, the Knesset (legislative authority) can prevail over Supreme Court decisions. In doing so, the Knesset wishes to secure unlimited power in determining the laws of the state (*The superseding clause 2023*).

These three topics were at the core of the proposed judicial reforms. Although there are additional issues, these were enough for many Israelis to initiate protests, which have been ongoing since January 2023. In early September 2023, the Inspector

General of the Israel Police said that the cumulative number of people who had participated in the protests was 7 million (Morag 2023). These continuous protests did not just stay on the streets, however: the high-tech sector joined the protests, some people announced they would stop volunteering for reserve service, and doctors announced that they intended to emigrate if the reform is passed.

This socio-legal-political development quickly led to a rift in Israeli society, which also has characteristics of political violence in several ways: demonstrators being repressed and attacked with cold weapons, threats being made to the Supreme Court not to interfere in legislation, threats being made to establish an alternative court, police officers committing acts of violence against demonstrators (beating, throwing grenades, using excessive force with horses), and state institutions (including security and military bodies) being delegitimized. This is considered political violence here because, in all cases, the ruling coalition was pursuing unlimited power and calling for people to intimidate the coalition's opponents – the formal opposition, the security establishment (army, the internal security agency), the hi-tech sector, and part of the health system. All of them are labeled 'the left' without any clear definition of what the term 'left' means and despite the fact that many of these opponents identify themselves as belonging to the 'right'.

Notable examples of violent political discourse from members of the ruling coalition are provided below to demonstrate this diagnosis. However, it is important to remember that violent statements are also heard from opposition and protest elements, albeit to a lesser extent, but they are not part of the present discussion and deserve a separate study.

3.1. General accusations against the (amorphic) left

MK Tali Gottlieb (Likud party, right) declared that the left has betrayed the State of Israel and endangered the security of the state. She accused Ehud Barak (former prime minister of the Labor party, left) of sedition and said that he should be in prison (Ben-Tzur 2023). This was a direct continuation of the threat of MK Dudi Amsalem, a government minister since January 2023, who said in June 2022: "When we return to power, we will crush the bones of the left" (Bender 2022). Ayoub Kara, a Druze MK from Likud also joined these calls ahead of the general elections held in November 2022 and declared that "with the help of God, we will trample. We will trample, we will trample the left" (Hominer 2022). Since members of the coalition (whether ministers or MKs) do not point precisely to parties or personalities belonging to the left camp, the rule used in their attacks is simple: any person, idea, or move that does not correspond to their ideology is called – automatically and mechanically – leftist. In this way, the 'left' can also include institutional bodies (see below).

3.2. Attacking the security apparatuses

Shortly after the Minister of Justice launched the new reforms, a protest began among Israelis who volunteered for reserve service within the army. Various groups of volunteers from the Air Force and the intelligence and operations divisions

announced that they would stop volunteering if the reforms passed. In a short time, this phenomenon became known as ‘reluctance’. Netanyahu said that “there is no room for reluctance – because as soon as it is given legitimacy, the scourge will spread and become systemic. Anyone who does not see a democratic decision will judge himself. I am convinced we will overcome this reluctance, but its seeds can grow wild crops in future disputes” (Zerahia 2023). Netanyahu’s public statement gave the signal for an attack by the establishment against army volunteers:

1. MK Nissim Vatoori (Likud) confirmed that he said that the pilots (implying the volunteers) should be kicked out of the army (*It was in a private conversation* 2023).
2. In response to the warning of the head of the ISA that Jewish terrorism fuels Palestinian terrorism, Gottlieb stated that “the depth of the deep state has reached the head of the Shin Bet” (Kidon et al. 2023).
3. At the beginning of September 2023, MK Miri Regev stated that “the revolution is seeping into Shin Bet” (Zeitoun et al. 2023). This came after security guards detained the driver of her vehicle for an inspection. Gottlieb, again, joined in, accusing the ISA and the Israeli Army (IDF) of working with terrorists and not safeguarding the security of the state of Israel (Azoulay 2023).
4. MK Orit Struck attacked the heads of the police, the army, and Shin Bet after they defined nationalistic terrorism as attacks by Jews against Palestinians. She even compared them to the Wagner Group (a private military force that acted on behalf of Russian President Vladimir Putin in Ukraine in 2022–2023) and claimed that it is not their job to set norms and morals. Her aggressive message sought not only to criticize the work of the security establishment but also to make it stop investigating acts of terrorism against Jews (Golan 2023).
5. MK Amichai Eliyahu stated that senior officials in the security system are rebelling against the government, while MK Shlomo Karhi said to reserve service volunteers that “the people of Israel will manage without you, and you will go to hell” (Golan 2023).

3.3. *Attacking civil servants*

An accepted and routine custom in a democratic regime is the appointment of people close to the candidates who won the elections and formed a government to positions of trust. The change of government in Israel in January 2023, not unusually, included senior officials being moved to different positions (for example, CEO of a government ministry). However, this time, it was accompanied by violent verbal attacks against holders of public positions who are not part of the circle of trust. Several media outlets followed the (legitimate) phenomenon of new appointments and very quickly realized that anyone appointed during the previous government was marked as an enemy. The atmosphere in the Israeli civil service in 2023 is similar to that in Hungary in 2011 when Orbán began his party’s campaign to take over the establishment. One frightened public servant said, “the atmosphere is that they come

to power, and they came to run over where possible” (Amit and Reuveni 2023). In some cases, members of the government use verbal violence to express their aspirations, as in the case of the director of the Government Companies Authority. MK Dudi Amsalem stated that the director of this organization “isn’t a failure, she’s deeply rotten,” but while he is seeking to fire her, he is encountering legal difficulties (Khodorov 2023).

3.4. Attorney General

According to Israeli law, the holder of the position of Attorney General is the interpreter of the law. Since January 2020, there has been a constant witch hunt against the Attorney General. There have also been attempts (including through the media) to threaten the current Attorney General, Gali Baharav Miara, so that she interprets the law according to the ideology of the elected government, not in an impartial manner. Members of the ruling coalition have attacked the Attorney General on various issues, such as the death penalty for terrorists, the ‘Fortification Law’ (in Israel, the issue is particularly sensitive because Netanyahu is facing a criminal trial), and her point of view on legislation on reducing the reason for reasonableness. In the latter regard, the Knesset speaker, Amir Ohana, threatened the judicial system that if the Supreme Court abolishes the law, the Knesset will establish a new constitutional court (Karni 2023). This is exactly what Orbán has done in Hungary.

4. Discussion

As of 2023, Hungary and Israel are ruled by conservative right-wing parties (in Hungary, by one party; in Israel, by a coalition). While Hungary has transitioned to an illiberal democracy, as Orbán defines it, Israel is only at the beginning of this process. In both cases, the targets are identical: after entering office, a legislative campaign begins with the aim of changing the characteristics of the state and society. This article proposed that several variables were used, some of which incorporate political violence, to execute the conservative reforms: weakening the justice system; attacking the ‘left’ without characterizing it other than the inclusion of liberal elements, including judges with liberal views; and delegitimizing anyone who opposes the positions of the ruling establishment, including civil and security establishment elements. To sum this point, turning the state into illiberal democracy is an established political violence, it aims to intimidate the political opponents and not just to narrow their abilities to act within the public sphere.

These moves in Hungary and Israel can also be cited as examples of established political violence for several reasons. First, they were done very quickly. Second, the scope of the reforms was vast and were intended to erase the existing laws and thus change the nature of the state and society. This in itself struck fear into the masses. Third, government representatives’ terminology is crude and includes the use of insults to delegitimize and threaten their political opponents, who are defined as ‘the enemy’.

5. Conclusions

Political violence has a wide variety of physical expressions. This historical and socio-political phenomenon has been thoroughly studied in recent decades, with a particular focus on definitions and theoretical explanations. However, the non-physical aspect is missing in the existing literature. Based on the case studies of Hungary and Israel, the paper offers the following insights and conclusions:

- A) As of January 2023, Orbán's regime in Hungary and Netanyahu's coalition in Israel use verbal political violence. It is political violence if only because it intimidates their socio-political opponents as well as civilians within the official establishment (Attorney General, high-ranking police officers, Supreme Court judges, and others).
- B) The establishment in Budapest and Jerusalem extends the use of political violence (especially verbal) against everything perceived as a threat to its rule and values. Such blatant lashing out at real or imagined opponents also affects law enforcement arms, who use physical violence during protests, which are a legitimate means of expression in a democratic regime.
- C) Hungary and Israel are marching on the path that goes from democracy to illiberal democracy, at the very least, by using violent methods to achieve political purposes and interests. In both countries, methods of violence were used to implement a robust agenda that would ensure their rule for a long time, if not permanently (Orbán passed a specific law to guarantee his party a parliamentary majority regardless of the election results, while the Israeli justice minister said that there is no place in his democracy for reform, implying that his vision is permanent control).
- D) Both countries have been required to recalculate not only the nature of the regime but also the limits of the institutional use of force to prevent taking on – voluntarily or involuntarily – the characteristics of a non-democratic regime, where political violence is measured differently from democracies.

Address:

Gadi Hitman

Ariel University

Ariel, 4070000

Israel

E-mail: gh791966@gmail.com

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