

Understanding Israel through the Lens of Local Media

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Introduction:

The Middle East Region in general and Israel in particular are often portrayed on international media platforms through the lens of conflict – in the case of Israel through the lens of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict - and a few other rather narrow viewpoints that are almost solely related to political and military relations and policy.

In reality, Israel has one of the most diverse populations in the region with a huge variety of ethnic and religious communities. This diversity exists within Israel's 80% Jewish majority as well as its 20% non-Jewish minority. Many of these people are first, second or third generation immigrants who are still in many ways newcomers to the country and struggle to integrate. In addition, within Israel's Palestinian Arab population (not to be confused with the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza), many people are uprooted from their family's historic place of residence and they too struggle to integrate into their current place of residence and into the Jewish state at large. What stems from this reality is a robust and multi-dimensional cultural, social and political scene that is rarely addressed in the media outside the boundaries of the country. Along with the incredible challenges so many of Israel's citizens and residents face daily, there is also tremendous creative development within all realms of private and public life and efforts to adapt and create a stronger society as a whole.

As someone who works for an organization that invites non-Israelis to engage with Israel's most diverse areas and most pressing social issues through service on the ground, I hope to provide some insight into these other aspects of Israel and its population for the sake of those who are unable to visit Israel and experience its reality firsthand.

Israeli English Language Media Platforms:

Israel has quite a few media platforms in the English language that publish news and opinions on multiple issues ranging from politics, arts and culture, social issues, international issues, media and more. The various media platforms range in terms of their political views and their target audience. Ample information about the background, history and political leaning of each platform is available both on the websites themselves as well as on Wikipedia and other online sources.

Below is a list of media platforms in the English language that can be used as a resource in the classroom to learn about Israel through a more nuanced lens and particular fields of interests. I have also included a few suggested questions and exercises that can be used to help students

approach these resources. I recommend choosing one particular issue of interest and searching various media outlets across the political spectrum, to get a sense of the range of perspectives on the issue. Reading blogposts and op-eds as opposed to more traditional news items could be particularly insightful. I find that it is often easier for students to do this sort of exercise about a foreign country and foreign issues – where there is less at stake for them personally. The conversation in class will hopefully lead later on to similar observations regarding issues and news coverage in their own country.

List of Israeli Media Platforms in the English Language:

1. **The Jerusalem Post** jpost.com
2. **Arutz Sheva** israelnationalnews.com
3. **The Times of Israel** timesofisrael.com
4. **I24 News** i24news.tv
5. **YNet News** ynetnews.com
6. **Haaretz** haaretz.com
7. **+972 Magazine** 972mag.com
8. **Israel Social TV** tv.social.org.il
9. **Intractable** – a podcast on the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict intractablepodcast.com

* I hoped to include a media platform established and lead by members of the Palestinian Arab minority in Israel who make up close to twenty percent of Israel's population. Such platforms exist in Arabic but I haven't been able to find any that publish or broadcast in English or have English translations. There are contributors from various minority groups within Israel – including the Palestinian minority - represented in some of the platforms listed above, although to the best of my knowledge the owners/founders and chief editors are all members of Israel's Jewish majority (with the exception of Intractable which is founded and hosted by a non-Jewish American who is not an Israeli citizen). If anyone reading this can recommend an English language media platform run by a member of Israel's Palestinian minority – please let me know!

Exercises and Questions for Students:

1. Begin with educating yourself about the various publications and the people behind them. Choose 3 different media platforms to explore. Follow the following guidelines for each platform:
 - a. When was the publication established? What are you able to learn about the purpose/background for its establishment, the audience it is aiming to reach and its general political and social orientation?
 - b. Use google, Wikipedia or other sources to learn about the personal and professional background of the owner/founder, chief editor and one other major contributor.*

2. Choose a topic or issue that you are particularly interested in or that seems to be of particular interest in Israeli current events. Most of the media platforms listed have blog pages or op-eds that represent the views of independent contributors and readers. Extra points if you choose an issue that seems controversial 😊.
 - a. Compare the way the issue is covered across a few different media platforms. Pay special attention to facts that are presented, terminology that is used, assumptions that are made and opinions that are expressed explicitly or implicitly.
 - b. What sort of differences are you able to glean?
 - c. What are you able to learn from these differences and from the coverage in general about Israel and its people? In what ways has it broadened your perspective on this country?

3. *Additional Exercise: Zoom further in to the identity of the people leading English language media platforms in Israel:
 - a. Now that you know the identity of the owner/founder, chief editor and additional contributor for each of the platforms you've chosen to focus on - What do you know about their country of origin – are they, their parents or grandparents immigrants to Israel or has their family been in the country for many generations?
 - b. If they or their parents/grandparents are immigrants – what country did they emigrate from?
 - c. Use this information as an opportunity to learn more about Israel's immigration policy since its establishment in 1948 and the tremendous diversity of the population that has immigrated to the county in the following years (ample information is available online)
 - d. How is this diversity apparent (if at all) in the news coverage you explored earlier? And how do you think it might impact the ways in which news is delivered and consumed?
 - e. Is this something you are familiar with in your own country? If so, how?

I hope this has provided some ideas for further exploration. I would love to hear any thoughts, questions or ideas for improvement – both from teachers and students. Please feel free to reach out to me at: tamaragottlieb@gmail.com