

Israel's Election Aftermath

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Dr Claire Spencer

Thank you very much, Sami. Also, I think reminding us that these things are not sustainable over a period that you mentioned might drag on into the next generation, but I think we've been seeing under the surface the tensions rising, and I would ask us really if we're – since the focus here is essentially on Israel – what first and foremost, what those tensions are likely to be? We've touched on the rising poverty.

I don't think much coverage of this issue really does hone in on the 25 per cent who are living on or below the poverty line in Israel, but I do know, and I'm quite fond of quoting, the former Central Bank director, Stanley Fischer, who mentions four problems that Israel itself, regardless of Palestinians, although this feeds into it, it's facing, is the large number of Haredim, as Sara has mentioned, who are not only not serving in the army but are not working. I think he mentioned 45 per cent don't actually engage in economic activities.

The rising Arab population within Israel, we haven't really touched on, except in relation with their role in the elections, many of whom are not able to work or where women are not working or contributing. The next one, the third one is an education system in Israel, which surprisingly, given the extraordinary success – and they are indeed extraordinary – at the world level, of the high tech sector, if you just think of technical in the [indiscernible] and all the associated clustering and businesses, how the education system, which was... Yossi was talking about a state, a country, a society based on social justice, education was a core factor, it seems to me, in the growth of Israel... how that has slipped.

We've talked about housing and other issues. But it's also the fact that the economy is not very competitive. I believe he mentioned there are about 10 holding companies that dominate the Israeli economy, and maybe Naftali Bennett's group is one of them.

I think these are key issues for Israel and Israelis to think about internally, if the narrative remains one of a holding pattern, that the status quo is tenable or even expansion into the West Bank is a solution to this, regardless of the old narratives of peace process actually no longer being viable. Anyway, that's my take on this.

Those who would like to intervene, you're invited to introduce yourselves at the beginning. Keep it brief. I believe we have... Do we have roving microphones for everybody? I'll start at the front. We'll take or three.

Question 1

Roland Tynan. Thank you very much for fascinating presentations, but just one thing that really troubled me, I have to ask you, because the phrase I think was used at the beginning – Israel is the only democracy in the Middle East. I mean, can Israel really be described as democracy with four million people under an occupation that de facto has all the characteristics of an apartheid style occupation? So some citizens don't enjoy the same rights as Israelis.

You've got the administrative tension, we used to call that in Northern Ireland 'internment', which is a prison without trial and so forth. So this kind of relentless oppression on a daily basis, and the occupation under international law would be defined as occupation, when you hold a community under siege, with this being the eighth year of siege.

Now this is my question – Gideon Levy sitting in the very same position you are, I think, Madame Chairperson. He made the point that Israel needed a shock. Its citizens needed a wake-up call, something dramatic to make them confront the reality of them sliding into this kind of apartheid hell which is going to lead ultimately to serious problems. I put it to the panel, I mean I know politically it doesn't sound as if it's very realistic, but certainly the momentum is growing for some kind of serious sanctions which did help bring down apartheid.

I have to raise this question again: isn't it really, at the end of the day, the only way Israel will get that kind of wake-up call that may hopefully see the citizens of Israel confront the reality of what they're now facing? Thank you.

Question 2

In your assessments of the Israeli elections, you focused largely on the right of centre bloc, and how the apportionment of votes differed at this election compared to the previous one. I was wondering what your assessment is going forward, of whether left of centre bloc, the centre and left bloc, how that bloc has emerged from these elections? And whether you see a potential viable alternative candidate for prime minister, perhaps in the next elections.

Question 3

Thank you very much. I am the press attaché at the Sudanese Embassy in London. My question is to Mr Abdel-Shafi. Thank you very much for a very fair presentation, and open-minded, you still have hope. The point you raised about containment, in view of the argument in the present Israeli government, majority in the present Israeli government, that God gave us this land, and we have the right to take all of it, not only to contain those who are living in it, but to kick them out completely. What do you say to that? Thank you very much.

Question 4

What I want to know is, what do you think the impact of the increased number in the Arab party will be?

Dr Claire Spencer

Impact on what?

Question 4

Generally.

Question 5

My question is, with the seeming convergence of interests between the Gulf countries and Israel, with respect to Iran, I've heard it suggested that the Arab peace initiative could be back on the table. How does that sort of translate down into the party politics in Israel? How receptive would they all be to that?

Professor Yossi Mekelberg

The only democracy in the Middle East. I would say it's a struggling democracy and it's always been a struggling democracy between its security paradigm, the need for absolute security, and everything as Sami said earlier comes at the expense. So Israel's security requires, according to its leader, this or that, and it comes at the expense of other people's political rights, human rights. So be it.

So that's where this democracy is struggling actually from day 1, because there was a military regime within Israel even before 1967, let alone post 1967 but the balance between the Supreme Court, high court of justice, the legislature, the Knesset and the government has always been there. The longer the occupation goes on, the more the democracy is going to struggle. When someone like the defence minister talks about separate bases for Palestinians and Israelis, Israel could expect the word apartheid. I'm not in favour of using this, but that's the impression it leaves.

When you have separate roads of Palestinians and for settlers in the West Bank, this will invoke this idea of apartheid. There is discrimination of Arabs within Israel as citizens, and again it comes back to the language. Israel [indiscernible], if it wants to benefit from being the only democracy in the Middle East. If you are a member of an exclusive club, being a democracy is an exclusive club, you behave like you come to an exclusive club. If you don't behave accordingly, then eventually there is a price there. I think this is a debate in the discourse that should enter into the Israeli society and have a proper debate about it – what it does to Israel, this constant erosion, when you occupy nearly four million people, and even minorities within Israel don't enjoy or entertain the same right.

What's left of the left? That's a question that we ask ourselves for a long time. I think the left is not only enough, not brave enough. They try to be everything for everyone. Look at the last election, even the election before. If they are not ready to talk about social justice, if they are not ready to represent, if a Labor party is not ready to represent those who are more vulnerable in Israeli society, why do we need them?

With all due respect to [indiscernible], he belongs to the elite in no different way than Netanyahu. The same goes for Tzipi Livni. There are very few there that actually represent... I don't know if working class is relevant in 2015, but the less privileged in the society, those who would like to see, the underprivileged and to see mobility within the Israeli society. There are very few in the Labor party that can say... And the same goes for Meretz. It's a very Tel Avivian, north Tel Aviv, I would say, party that represents the elite.

One of the... I don't know, tragedies is a strong word, of the left in Israel, that people in developing towns don't vote for them. Those are actually those that live under the poverty line, support a very Thatcherite Netanyahu. How [indiscernible]? I don't know, but they

need to go there and make sure that they appeal to these people and they don't do it, let alone on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Yes, two state solution, no two state solution, maybe, we don't deal with it, it's too sensitive. So what do they suggest, that parties don't deal with sensitive issues? Because it's too contentious.

That's what elections are all about, to deal with the contentious issues, and to present a proper alternative. I don't think the Labor party... They even go to this ridiculous name, the Zionist Camp. This is protesting too much. Don't think that we are not Zionist as the right. Anyone questioning your Zionism or your devotion to the country, why do you need to come with this name? They put themselves in this position, and as a result, they don't have the appeal that Netanyahu unfortunately does.

Just one... The Iran issue, which is interesting. The enemy of the enemy of my friend, the relation Shia-Sunni in Israel, for many, many years, Israel put as the main strategic threat, not the Palestinians, not Gaza, not rockets coming from Gaza, not Hezbollah, but Iran and the nuclear. This was the security establishment [indiscernible] for probably 15 years now and probably still is.

See what happens on the 30th of June, I probably should refer you to Sara, she knows more than me about the Gulf and Iran. But reality, there is commonality of interest between the Saudis, the Gulf States, Israel. I think Israel feels very comfortable with that, knowing that the Gulf States support it on the issue of Iran nuclear and at the minute, there is agreement, because Israel, whatever the agreement is going to say, 'This is not good enough. We can't verify it. We don't trust the Iranians. We don't trust the regime,' and then probably this kind of unofficial alliance would be very useful, especially if they could pressure in Washington for Congress to do what they expect Congress to do.

Dr Claire Spencer

Sara, I wonder if you could pick up also on the question of the Arab parties, because relating it back to what Yossi said, it seemed to me they did run a very grassroots, representative and constructive campaign. I mean, the very thought that very disparate Arab parties would actually form an electoral coalition as it were going into the campaign and actually succeed to some degree, where they have before, was actually seen as very constructive.

Dr Sara Hirschhorn

I think I'll take this broadly and I will get to that point in a moment. I think you mentioned the only democracy in the Middle East. It's still the only democracy in the Middle East. The question is, is it going to remain the only liberal democracy in the Middle East? This is what's under siege. It's not the democratic values, but the liberal values of the state.

I think I disagree with you, though, in the sense that the only thing that will save Israel's liberal democracy from itself is exogenous shock. I think that the most effective means of achieving this unfortunately is an endogenous shock, and Israel began to get that in the fall with the apparition of a third intifada, this so-called Jerusalem based intifada, which I think really galvanized the Israeli public into realizing some of the dangers that

surrounded them. That may not have translated into the electoral outcomes that those of us sitting in this room probably had hoped to see, but I think this is far more going to be events that take place on the ground amongst those who are parties to the conflict, are going to be far more effective and mobilizing than those that come from abroad and perhaps are perceived as coming from certain sectors from abroad.

For example, the BDS movement, the boycott, sanctions and divestment movement, I think we've seen has led only to a siege mentality in Israel, with those billionaires like Sheldon Adelson holding secret meetings for a group of the Jewish ultra rich to combat this phenomenon.

Unfortunately also, because the BDS movement has promoted itself as a kind of big tent or open tent phenomenon if you will, it has harboured various different elements that stand often in opposition to itself. Certainly many stand in opposition to Israel. There are those who'd like to use BDS to advance the cause of a two state solution or some kind of peaceful solution the Arab-Israeli conflict. And there are those others, I think, we can all admit, maybe a fringe within this camp, who would like to use this movement to delegitimize and perhaps openly even dismantle the state of Israel as it is. Some of them in fact are quite anti-Semitic.

I think that we have a very broad movement and as long as all these elements, those who are seeking a just and peaceful solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and those who are looking for something quite different, all exist within this one movement and are perceived as such, I don't think that the BDS movement in itself will cause Israel to change its position and to loosen its grasp on the occupation or any one of the other myriad of problems in the Arab-Israeli conflict.

So that brings us also to the questions of liberal democracy internally, and what, as you had mentioned, the ongoing of the left-wing bloc and the future of the left wing. I think the big shame of this election more than anything else was not that the Arab parties did so badly, but to see Arab citizens of Israel, Palestinian citizens of Israel who very courageously came out to vote for a state that does represent them and often one that they don't even necessarily want to historically recognize for a variety of reasons, and then see the great betrayal. In the midst of the elections, that the person who will become their prime minister is posting on Facebook, 'Look at the Arab doves coming out to vote.'

I mean, this was really the shame, the great disappointment of this election. Ayman Odeh, who's the head of the Arab List, had said that he would not sit in the government if the Zionist Camp had been chosen to lead the coalition. We never had a chance to see whether he would have changed his position, had this coalition been formed.

But I think that there is cause for optimism here. I think we do see that although it is very unlikely that the Israeli government will confront any of the difficult and often painful historical questions head on, I think that these are rising to the surface within the polity. As you see Ayman Odeh speaking very eloquently every day in the newspaper and the photos of him and his wife and children going out to vote, I think has penetrated the Israeli public. This perhaps will bring some change in the future of this coalition itself. It's far too unstable to begin to reckon with any of these important questions.

Certainly the one unfortunate thing is I also have a bit of a conspiracy theory, which is although there is great tension between Avigdor Lieberman and Benjamin Netanyahu, they don't like each other for a variety of reasons, their political marriage of convenience has ended in a very bitter divorce, I also have a theory which is probably completely unfounded that Avigdor Lieberman is also the Trojan horse in the opposition. He has inserted himself in there to prevent the opposition from rallying around any one issue, because he and his party, Yisrael Beiteinu, will prevent any of these different factions who have a variety of things that they may actually have some broad and non specific agreement on from uniting together.

Interestingly enough, Lieberman himself is a representative of one of those individuals that would look for a regional solution to the conflict, I think coming from over here, that question about the Arab peace initiative. I think there are both those on the left and the right who do not want to see this restricted to just a bilateral agreement between Israelis and Palestinians and that they want a package deal. That, I think, is growing in ascendance, especially given the US-Iran negotiations, that this is something that I think actually could hold traction for both the left and the right in Israel, although coming at it from very different perspectives.

Sami Abdel-Shafi

I realize that we have three minutes left. I'll quickly comment on the question of the dynamic between Israel and the Arab states in the context of Iran. I have a true suspicion that the government of Israel is going to seek to normalize relations with the Arab states, invoking the peace initiative with the Arab states at times of convenience and advantage to Israel.

For all I know, they may be eyeing an eventuality where they normalize relations with all Arab states except to make peace with the Palestinians. So they will get the benefit of all of the openness and normalization, without paying the fair dues towards a two state solution.

Speaking of sensitivities, to the question from the gentleman from the Sudanese Embassy, it's never a good idea as has been proven in late history under recent history to involve religion and politics, I think. But to directly answer your question, it is the belief of the Jewish people that if Palestine is their promised land, no problem. I would say to that, it is also a very strong belief to Muslims and Christians that that land is dearly sacred to them.

I highly doubt that when God gave those things to those people from the three religions, that he also gave them a mandate to kill each other in order to be loyal to God's word. This is my true conviction, after having studied Islam, Christianity and Judaism. So invoking this as a promised land issue as far as I am concerned, is a very flawed argument, with all due respect to the religious aspect of it. I thank you for the question.

Dr Claire Spencer

Thank you to everybody. I was hoping we might fit in one or two other questions, but I think this is... Well, has anyone got a burning question? I know we started two minutes late. I don't think we can take all the questions.

Question 6

There was the larger question in this election and its implications for countries outside, namely the EU and the United States, that was raised. He asked for a question, in the United States, and I think I can see from Europe... Sorry, this is Harry Blaney from the Center for International Policy in the US. It seems to me that the bait is moving now [indiscernible] if there isn't going to be a peace agreement, to other options, in effect a force majeure, if you would, to move this peace negotiation from external elements, the UN, the US changing its view on how and why to get to a new peace agreement that may not include – let's put it this way – simply the negotiation between Israel and the Palestinians.

Within my view, there's more and more consensus looking at this than we have seen before, because of extremism and particularly the extension of the settlements. So the question I'm asking is simply, how would you think either the Palestinians or the Israelis would react to that? Would they be able to maybe come together and decide that maybe it's better for making a deal directly? Thank you.

Question 7

Quick question. Andrew Horney, member of Chatham House. Discussion this morning, conversation is much continuum of the discussions that have gone on for years. All the issues are the same. The one issue that seems to me in that continuum that didn't get enough air time is the threat to Israel, the threat to Israel that comes from everything that's going on around Israel. Netanyahu made something of this in his election promises. I wonder if any of the speakers have any sympathy with that, that the threat to Israel from what's going on around merits Israel taking an even more defensive, or if you might like to call it aggressive view, to what goes on in the lands around it.

Question 8

My name is Leo [indiscernible]. We heard exogenous, endogenous factors passed onto us. In a sense, it's related to the previous question. It strikes me that security, Netanyahu needs Khaled Mashal, and Khaled Mashal needs Netanyahu. Is it not possible for Khaled Mashal perhaps, sincerely or not, whether he believes it, just to offer something which would separate the two and put one or other of them on their own?

Question 9

Hello, I'm [indiscernible], a member of the House. Just a quick reflection from yourself, all of you, I think please, on the issue of a one state solution. Is there any appetite to it? You know, one state from the river to the sea, having all the Palestinians and Israelis living together in harmony and democracy, true democracy this time around, which was

one of the brilliant ideas of the late Muammar Gaddafi, basically. Is there any appetite for this at all in Palestine or Israel?

Question 10

Alan Craig, University of Leeds. The suggestion that Netanyahu's outrageous statements at the end of his campaigning may have influenced a last minute vote I think obscures the fact that the Israeli vote has rejected the outliers on the right and hasn't supported the left. The Israeli vote has come out genuinely for a Netanyahu platform, and the Netanyahu platform is status quo.

The Israeli population looks at a mixed discourse coming from the left and finds it unsettling. It looks at a discourse from the right and finds it frightening. So continuing more of the same is very much the outcome of this election. Netanyahu is not an adventurous politician. He's a status quo politician. So the question really is, how long is this status quo maintainable?

Sami Abdel-Shafi

Thanks to all the questions. To the question about Netanyahu and Mashal, if I understood it correctly, I think Netanyahu and Mashal should be talking. There have been incidents when people in the leadership of Hamas made serious gestures accepting a two state solution, but they were snubbed by the international community. I was personally witness to two such negotiations. But they were completely snubbed and boycotted.

I don't want to assess blame more than is reasonable on either party, but no solution will come about for as long as the policy of boycotting and sanctions continues. It has never worked. For God's sake, the US is talking to the Iranians. Who would have ever thought that would be possible five or six years ago?

On the threat to Israel, I don't deny that there must be a feeling of a threat of some sort to the state of Israel, but what Israel is doing to the Palestinians on the other side cannot be justified by such a feeling. There is a massive disproportionality and all of the stuff that everybody knows.

What I think, a way to positively go forward is to not alienate and separate both Palestinians and Israelis. Today, if I want to go to Israel to talk to the Israelis, if I want to go talk to Lieberman in an attempt to convince him that what he says offends me, I cannot. But I would love to talk to a Lieberman, but you are segregating people, you are alienating them.

At the same time, you have got leaders who are making those big statements just to basically appease public policy. I think there is a limit to defence. There's a limit for fear, for want to be fearful and to drive someone else's life into absolute hell, that goes off balance. But it's definitely something that needs to be seriously contemplated.

There was a third question, something related to... I'm sorry. Oh, the one state solution. I think that's the idea. If you ask all the generations in Palestine, what do they think of that? They would tell you it is ideal because those Palestinians grew up with Jewish

people in historic Palestine. I think this would be the ideal case. Unfortunately, according to what we are hearing and seeing, it's absolutely rejected by almost all Israelis because of the demographic issue and so on and so forth.

Dr Sara Hirschhorn

I'll try and tie together a few of the questions. As to the issue of Netanyahu's apparent status quo 'do nothing' approach, the problem with his logic is he thinks that this somehow neutralizes the dangers and threats to Israel, when in fact this increases the dangers and threats to Israel, without any recourse to political process. All it's going to do is encourage violence. What did Martin Luther King say? Those who deny non-violent resistance will inevitably lead to violent resistance. I think that this is exactly the situation in which Israel and Palestinians find themselves in.

This sense of danger and threat on both sides obviously threatens the viability of the two state solution. Every month, the Tami Steinmetz Center for Peace at Tel Aviv University asks Israelis and Palestinians, 'Do you still want a two state solution?' Today, this hovers somewhere in between 50 and 60 per cent of both sides of the population saying this is what they still want despite all the history that has gone wrong.

What happens on the day where only 49 per cent of both populations say this? This is the end of the two state solution and this window is closing every single month that we see this polling data, and the 'status quo do nothing' approach of the Israeli government, and the challenges notwithstanding on the Palestinian side in regards to Palestinian unity and their ability to also project power are obviously decreasing the opportunities of having a viable two state solution.

I'm not sure that we really are there anymore. We had a very small window in the 1990s where that was even an acceptable solution to both sides, both sides who have historically rejected partition of the land and this is increasingly becoming entrenched within the religious ideology and also the secular views of both populations.

I don't think that we're going to be able to... I don't know if we'll be able to get to a point where the two state solution is still something that really can reasonably be negotiated.

The problem is that if we're going to talk about a one state solution, this climate of threat and danger and perceived existential crisis leads only to the one state solution where it's X pushes Y into the sea, or Y pushes X into the sea. This is not the one state solution that either side should aspire to.

If we're going to have a one state solution, which is something that would not be my preferred solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, I think the two state solution is really the best solution, because these are two populations that cannot and should not be living together at least for the next two or three generations, but I think that smart people including those of us sitting in this room really need to think about what a viable one state solution looks like that honours both Zionist and Palestinian national aspirations.

It is not that someone pushes the other into the sea. It is not that you get three votes on some kind of municipal garbage pickup council that's supposed to give you a feeling of

emotional satisfaction in your national aspirations. I think this is a topic that needs to be explored further by intelligent people.

Dr Claire Spencer

I do believe we'll be trying to do that here, with the good help of yourselves. Yossi, what's your take on this?

Professor Yossi Mekelberg

Very, very telegraphic, because the issue of status quo, it's an illusion that actually Netanyahu sells the illusion of status quo, but it doesn't exist. You see it, now you don't. More people living in settlements, for instance, there is rising poverty in Gaza. They are more frustrated. All of this is not staying in the same place. It's getting even worse.

Even military capabilities, for instance, in Gaza or elsewhere is increasing. You have to deal with something different on the military front. But you're right, Netanyahu is very good in selling this illusion of status quo. 'I just provide you the kind of stability that you want. Don't trust these and don't trust them.' But reality, the situation is getting worse. With this comes the issue of one state solution.

It would have been wonderful to think that we cannot only... Why only with Israel and Palestinians? All of us, let's live in one state. We love each other. We all enjoy each other's company. Why do we need states at all? Reality, we live in nation-states based in an international system. How do you move from people that fight each other, not only for 67 years but probably more than 100 years, and the next day say, 'Why don't you just share the same parliament, the same ethos, the same values? And forget about killing each other for so long. You actually like each other and you're suitable for...'

Dr Claire Spencer

It did in Ireland.

Professor Yossi Mekelberg

Well, it doesn't work in Northern Ireland sometimes as well as people portray it as well. But it just doesn't work. I don't know one... We need to look at the modalities of it. I don't have one good example, Yugoslavia, Soviet Union, Cyprus and so on, where one state solution. So maybe it's time to think about some sort of confederation, federation. I share with you, Sara, the idea of two state solution is probably the way forward.

And maybe two, three, four generations from now, they see that it's so good living next to it and why spend money on two parliaments, two governments? Let's have just one and save money. Why not? I'm not against it, but I can't see how it happens without a two state solution first.

Let me just talk about security. It's a very limiting way to see security as only through the military prism. Only five military and of course Israel doesn't have nuclear capability, doesn't have all of these things, that we know. We are not allowed to talk about it. And

compared to all these rockets that are coming from Gaza, but if you look at security, only through a military prism, you always need to increase capability. This is a well-known security dilemma.

But what about reducing motivations to resist you on the other side by not occupying them, by not violating their rights? This is another way to look at security and both of them need to be balanced. I'm not suggesting that we go into some pacifism and forget about armies and forget about security, but balancing between reducing motivation, because we don't violate their rights, and keep some military option, probably will serve [indiscernible] about the United States.

Israel entering into actually the domestic politics in the United States, it's not just Israel in the United States, there is triangular between Congress, president, and the Israeli government, and in this triangle, Netanyahu actually plays very well. The divisions in Washington, in a way that is difficult for the presidency or the executive actually to practice what they should, and even the Supreme Court entered into this on the issue of Jerusalem, entered into this last week when it said, 'Actually Jerusalem is not part of Israel.'

So in the time left for Obama in power, this is very delicate, but I absolutely agree with you, I think the EU and President Obama are close as ever in the way they look at the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Dr Claire Spencer

Thank you very much, Yossi. And it's obvious, given the overrun, that all the best meetings overrun. But they often result in project ideas. I think it might be one in which we invite our panel and maybe a few others to actually devise what this one state, two state confederation might look like. Maybe you could base it on the United Kingdom, given our recent history.

Professor Yossi Mekelberg

Don't mention Scotland.

Dr Claire Spencer

Well, if it's a lifelong project, the alternative has been a lifelong career in lamenting the lack of progress and I think, Sami, you touched on this. Can we really – the serious point is – sit around with the amount of expertise there is on this area? Leave alone the maps and the plans and everything else, and just hand it all to the next generation. I think what we've heard, speaking seriously, is that there are many risks in doing that in that the patience of communities, particularly the Palestinians in Gaza, is running thin. And the status quo is not tenable. It's an illusion, frankly. Particularly on the Israeli side, but perhaps on all sides. Maybe in the outside world as well.

Anyway, I will close by going back, I was just thinking as Sami was saying that God didn't put us on the Earth, the three major religions, to kill each other over Jerusalem. Of course, the brother of the great wicked King John who's been feted today for actually

putting his signature on this Magna Carta, the wicked Richard Coeur de Lion did exactly that. That was his mission in life, was to go on the rampage around Jerusalem.

Dr Claire Spencer

Funny enough, he's not with us anymore and it's not one of the core tenants certainly of the Church of England, which is the religion of this state. But on that note, thank you very much and thank you, the audience, for being here.