

ISRAEL: INTERRUPTED DEMOCRATIC DEVELOPMENT?

Since the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, Israeli democracy has followed a unique trajectory. Despite its strengths – regular and fair elections, an independent judiciary, a pluralistic party system etc. – the author argues that democratic development is in fact “interrupted.” The author identifies four main areas: the continuous occupation since 1967, the status of the Arab citizens within Israel, the growing socio-economic gaps, and the relationship between the state and religion. In order to mitigate the threats to Israeli democracy, the author espouses going back to fundamental democratic values – above all, democratic education in schools to build an enduring trust in democracy among young people.

Itzhak Galnoor*



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* Prof. Itzhak Galnoor is a senior research fellow at The Van Leer Jerusalem Institute and Professor of Political Science (emeritus) at Hebrew University of Jerusalem. This article is based on a lecture given by the author in a joint seminar organized by The Van Leer Institute and the Friedrich Ebert Foundation entitled: “Themes of Conflict in Middle Eastern Democracies: A Comparative Perspective from Turkey and Israel,” which took place at Kadir Has University on 6 November 2014.

The purpose of this article is to present a brief, critical overview of democracy in Israel – taking stock after 67 years. On 17 March 2015 Israeli voters elected a new Knesset (Parliament). No less than 25 party lists competed for citizens’ support and initially it was not clear which party would win and who would be the next prime minister. After a fierce election campaign, 10 parties passed the threshold of 3.25 percent of total votes and were elected to the Knesset’s 120 seats. 72 percent of voters participated in the elections, about five percent more than last time, mainly because of increased participation among the Arab citizens in Israel. Generally, the elections proceeded without violence or interruption and the voters’ free choice was safeguarded. Based on this recent democratic event, I could start by saying that Israel’s democracy is functioning well and there is no justification for the title of this article, which alludes to an “interruption” in Israel’s democratic development. I could also start by pointing out that a former prime minister was sentenced to six years in prison (a sentence still under appeal), and deduce from this event that Israel has a viable democratic regime that functions very well, because the courts are independent and do not hesitate to bring heads of state to justice. I could go on and list more unique and even odd features, but the purpose of my article is to ask a different question, based on our recent book, *The Israeli Political System*:¹

Why is it that while the institutional framework (which has remained almost the same since the early days of the state) functions relatively well, and the rules of the game have been generally observed, the values underlying them – including equality, freedom, and minority rights – have not become axiomatic? Why are symptoms of anti-democracy spreading?

Stated differently, all democracies face problems regarding some aspects of their collective goals or well-being (representation, immigration, alienation, quality of state services). Many face economic and social crises, and growing gaps between various parts of the population. However, there is a distinction between asking questions about the *outcomes* of the democratic process and questioning the *value* of democracy itself. In Israel, both types of questions are present, and the latter seems to be growing in importance; that is, individuals, parties, and groups are promoting non-democratic values to replace democracy. Most democracies have problems *within* themselves. Israel has problems with the *value of democracy* itself. The four main areas in which Israel’s democratic development has been interrupted, focusing on internal development only, are:

¹ Itzhak Galnoor and Dana Blander, *The Israeli Political System* (Am Oved and The Israel Democracy Institute: 2013); to be published in English by Cambridge University Press (CUP), New York.

- The impact of the continuous occupation and the imperative of security considerations
- The status of Arab citizens within Israel
- The growing socio-economic gaps
- The unresolved issue of state and religion

How Long Does it Take to be Democratically Confident?

There are many ways to analyze and compare democracies: by types of regimes, electoral systems, human and minority rights, freedom of speech, etc. My focus here on democratic development entails a specific approach to this issue. In analyzing the state of a particular democracy, I regard political culture as an independent variable. Political culture, simply stated, refers to the reciprocal relations between a society and its political system. Fisher Ames, a late 18th-century US congressman and philosopher presented it more vividly thus: “Monarchy is like a splendid ship, with all sails set it moves majestically on, then it hits a rock and sinks forever. Democracy is like a raft. It moves slowly, sensitive to the waves and the passengers’ movements, it does not sink easily, but damn it, your feet are always wet.”

What is the sequence of the development of a democracy? One would assume that initially a society develops a strong collective belief in democratic values, such as freedom and equality, and then gradually moves on to establish democratic mechanisms to attain these values. These so-called “rules of the game” include free elections, a multi-party system, majoritarian principles, and the protection of minority rights. Research on democracy does not provide clear answers as to what the sequence has actually been. Historically, we find mixed paths: gradual development in countries such as England, Sweden, and the United States, as opposed to abrupt, external imposition in countries such as Japan and Germany after World War II. Either way, the real development of a robust democracy – gradual or abrupt, internal or external – is a dual process that lasts a long time and is based on the mutual nurturing of values and rules of the game.

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“*Vagueness surrounding the ‘decision not to decide’ about the future of the occupied territories undermines trust in the efficacy of democracy.*”

after plus/minus 100 years of continuous democracy a country will remain democratic. Most states have constitutions, but few have stable constitutions that have lasted for a century or more, and all those states are democracies. Heading the list are Britain (an unwritten constitution), the United States (a constitution since 1787), Sweden (1807–1809), Holland and Norway (1814), Belgium (1831), New Zealand (1840, a Basic Law), Denmark (1849), Canada (1867, an unwritten constitution), Luxembourg (1868), Switzerland (1875), Australia (1900), and Finland (1919).² Yet, again, the order of events – what leads to democratic and constitutional stability – is not clear: perhaps a stable regime and well-established relations between state and society are what make a constitution stable, and not vice versa.³

Israel: Relevant Background

Compared to new democracies, Israel is not an infant democracy. Democratic institutions existed in the Jewish community in Palestine in the pre-state period. The first Assembly of Representatives was elected in 1920. Since 1948, when the State of Israel was established, Israel has experienced a continuous democratic regime for 67 years, and if we count the pre-state era, for almost 100 years. Thus, one can say that in 1948 democracy in Israel had a promising beginning, certainly as compared with other democracies at that stage of development. When the state was established democracy was taken for granted, and the Declaration of Independence is clearly a democratic text even though the word “democracy” is not mentioned. Moreover, Israeli democracy managed to cope with major challenges. For instance, the pre-state rivalries did not threaten the regime and were channeled to the Knesset, thus establishing the legitimacy of the political system; free elections were held; and in 1977, Workers’ Party of the Land of Israel (Mapai), the dominant party for many decades, was ousted from power (the so-called “upheaval”) and the transition of power was carried out smoothly.

² These dates only mark milestones because constitutions by nature evolve and change. See: Vernon Bogdanor (ed.), *Constitutions in Democratic Politics* (1988); and the website of International Constitutional Law <http://www.servat.unibe.ch/icl/>

³ The relatively stable constitutions of Germany and Japan after 1945 also demonstrate the importance of a constitution in a particular historical context.

I am not trying to idealize democracy in the first decades of the State of Israel. The first Prime Minister, David Ben-Gurion, was centralistic and powerful and remained in power off and on until 1963. However, government at that time was not a dictatorship and certainly not a military regime, because civilian rule over the military was firmly established. Mapai dominated politics, society, and the economy. It could be blamed for curtailing participatory democracy, but it never attained a majority in the Knesset and was always forced to form coalitions in order to govern. In retrospect, Mapai was less powerful than dominant parties in India, Japan, and South Africa. Moreover, in the early 1960s there were already indications of an evolution toward a less-dominant, less-organized democracy.

Levi Eshkol, who became prime minister in 1963, was much more of a civilian democratic leader. He ended military rule over the Arab citizens of Israel, formed new alliances before the 1965 elections and was conciliatory toward his political rivals. Accordingly, Israel was entering a new phase of developing a more balanced democracy. One might have expected the path to be marked by a progression from just observing the rules of the game to a stronger belief in democracy and its basic values. But this did not occur. The development of democracy in Israel was interrupted, and today this interruption is endangering the rules of the game, even the rule of law.

Mitigating Factors

In Israel, as in other new states, the challenges of nation-building hinder steady development and tip the balance of priorities from ensuring representation to strengthening governability. Furthermore, the long shadow of the Holocaust has been a powerful factor in making security considerations the top priority. Other factors have been mass immigration, the challenge of creating a new nation, and the presence of a non-democratic, Orthodox version of Judaism. Thus, despite the efforts in 1948 and after, Israel does not have a written constitution to this day. However, perhaps the strongest obstacle to a more normal development path has been the security imperative, because of the recurring wars and continuous fight against terror.

Further, since the 1980s Israel has had frequent political turnovers in government, and in 1996 Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin was murdered. Israel's uneven path in democratic development could be presented as follows: whereas the rules of the game have been generally observed, the values underlying those rules (including equality, freedom and minority rights) have not become self-evident. Far from it.

Tacking Stock: Strengths

In general, basic and important democratic practices have been continuously observed: the existence of democratic institutions; regular and fair elections (20 in 67 years, an average of an election every 3.5 years); a real choice between many parties (an average of 12 in the Knesset); and the principle of majority rule and coalition governments that have functioned quite well over the years (though less so lately) as an effective mechanism.

“One of the major strengths of Israeli democracy has been the existence of an independent judicial system.”

One of the major strengths of Israeli democracy has been the existence of an independent judicial system. Judges in Israel are not corrupt, and the Supreme Court has a right to oversee both Knesset legislation and the decisions of the executive branch. Official commissions of inquiry have repeatedly investigated the conduct of top decision-makers during

wars and other events, and many senior office-holders have been fired as a consequence of the commissions' recommendations. In addition, citizens' rights are generally observed, freedom of speech and expression are maintained, and the media are free. The strength and importance of civil-society and independent nonprofit organizations have been steadily growing. Despite the security burden and the influence of the military, Israel has never experienced a military regime (in the state proper, as distinct from the occupied territories).

By conventional standards, Israel has been a continuous democracy and certainly a stable one among the democracies established since 1945.

Taking Stock: Weaknesses

Democratic procedures are not enough. In order for a democracy to be stable and to flourish, the citizens must trust it and believe that it is both valuable and effective. I use the term “effective” deliberately, because in the 20th century we learned that democracies won the war against nondemocratic regimes and outlasted almost all of them. In Israel, however, opinion surveys indicate a weakened democracy. According to surveys of the Israel Democracy Institute, the aggregate average figures for the years 2009-12 are as follows:⁴

⁴ “The Israeli Democracy Index,” *The Israel Democracy Institute (IDI)*, 2013, p.103.

For the following statements, there is a democratic (gradually decreasing) majority:

- Support democracy in general: 85 %
- Support freedom of expression: 75 %
- Support the right of all citizens to vote: 70 %
- Support equal rights for Arab citizens: 60 %

For the following statements there is a small, or no democratic majority:

- Limit certain rights of Orthodox Jews, or Arab citizens in Israel: 55 %
- Avoid criticizing the state publicly: 52 %
- Maintain the freedom of the press: 50 %
- Keep Arab citizens from participating in critical decisions regarding the future of the state: 86 %.

The picture regarding minority rights is even gloomier among young people, either because they are more truthful and less “politically correct” in their replies than their elders, or because they are less democratic.

Another aspect of the dwindling trust of Israel’s citizens in democratic instruments is the decline in voter turnout in Knesset elections. The average turnout up to the elections in 1999 was about 82 percent. In 2001-2012 it went down to 65 percent (in 2013 it rose to 68 percent and in 2015 to 72 percent). The turnout among younger voters was below the average.

Political life in Israel has always been turbulent and highly partisan. In Israel’s multiparty system the average number of parties in the Knesset through 2015 has been 12. But the new phenomenon is fragmentation. In the past, the biggest party (either Labor or Likud) had about 40 seats in the Knesset and could form a relatively stable coalition. After the 2013 election Likud was the biggest party but had only 20 seats, and the unstable coalition headed by Benjamin Netanyahu lasted only two years. After the 2015 elections, Likud (again the biggest party) has 30 seats (25 percent) in the Knesset and the coalition formed after the election includes a rather small majority of 61 seats.

Do Israelis trust their institutions? The surveys in the 2000s indicate declining confidence that the democratic institutions are functioning well, especially the Knesset, ministries, political parties, and the media. Membership in parties used to be very high but declined to an average of only four percent before the 2013 and the 2015 elections. The flip side of the aversive sentiments toward politics and politicians is the growing support for authoritarian mechanisms and “strong” leaders. Some of the legislators, too, exacerbate this situation by promoting nondemocratic legislation and proposals in the Knesset, such as bills violating the principle of equality,

demanding loyalty oaths from citizens, discriminating against Arab citizens, limiting freedom of speech and opinion, restricting human rights organizations, and attempting to reduce the independence of the Supreme Court.⁵

In an attempt to overcome some of the weakness listed above, a new system of electing the prime minister was introduced in the late 1990s.

An Attempt to Strengthen the Executive Branch: Direct Election of the Prime Minister (1996-2003)

In Israel's parliamentary system, as in Britain, the prime minister and his government require a vote of confidence in the Knesset. Given the need for coalitions, the government is dependent on the support of the parties in the Knesset. Direct election of the prime minister was first implemented in the 1996 election. The experiment failed – the law was changed in 2001, and since 2003 elections are conducted according to the previous system. The effects of this change can still be felt in both Israeli democracy and the political system as a whole. Direct election provides an opportunity to examine an attempt to strengthen the executive branch by changing the support base of the prime minister, i.e., by giving him a personal mandate directly from the public, similar to that of presidential systems.

“The electoral system adopted [in 1992] was unique, as it combined some of the shortcomings of a parliamentary system with the shortcomings of a presidential system – a ‘presidential parliamentarism.’”

In the spring of 1990 the second national unity government fell, after spending two years in political gridlock. Three months of political crisis were accompanied by widespread public protest: the public had lost its trust in the political leaders and demonstrations were held expressing revulsion at the corruption and a deep desire for change in the political system. Thus, despite strong opposition from most Israeli political scientists,⁶ the law had public support and passed the Knesset in March 1992.⁷ The system of direct election of the

5 Examples: (1) The law passed in March 2014 raising the election threshold for parties to 3.75 %. (2) Legislative initiatives that violate the basic principle of equality by discriminating against and excluding Israeli Arabs (loyalty oath, admission committee law, the Nakbah law [passed], Basic Law: the Jewish nation-state). (3) Initiatives that attack freedom of speech and opinion (restrictions on the funding and activity of human rights organizations, amendment to the defamation law, the antiboycott law). (4) Legislative initiatives that seek to reduce the independence of the Supreme Court (the override mechanism).

6 See, for example: Itzhak Galnoor, “A Rollercoaster,” *Ha'aretz*, 1 January 1992.

7 For a review of the legislative path of this law, see: Gideon Alon, *Direct Election* (Tel-Aviv: Bitan, 1995).

prime minister removed Israel from the family of parliamentary democracies, but did not move it into the family of presidential democracies. The electoral system adopted was unique, as it combined some of the shortcomings of a parliamentary system with the shortcomings of a presidential system – a “presidential parliamentarism.”⁸ It was not a pure presidential system, because although the head of the executive branch was directly elected by the public, mutual dependence with the Knesset persisted. The Knesset could dismiss the prime minister or vote no-confidence in the government, while the prime minister had the power to dissolve the Knesset.

What Happened

The objectives of the new law was to strengthen the power of the prime minister and the executive branch, weaken the bargaining power of the small parties, improve the quality of the political leadership, and increase stability while enhancing governability.

- In practice, however, the executive branch was weakened. The power bestowed upon the prime minister by direct election was only an illusion: the coalitions formed were fragile, and the governments became a revolving door for parties to enter, exit, and return again.
- The direct election did not free the prime minister from the pitfalls of a coalition, especially those dug by small parties. In practice, the social structure in Israel continued to dictate the need for a coalition, and being elected prime minister was not enough to sweep the winner’s party into a majority of Knesset seats. In fact, the voters “punished” the parties of the prime minister and diminished their power.
- The tacit hope was that the person chosen for prime minister would not be a party functionary or politician, but a leader, a statesperson. And indeed the first two prime ministers who won office via direct election (Benjamin Netanyahu and Ehud Barak) were relatively new faces and lacking in political experience. However, their terms were short, and they both were not reelected. Ariel Sharon, who subsequently won direct election as prime minister, was a seasoned political veteran of the old school, and although he was not young, new, or a media celebrity, he remained in power for five years until a stroke incapacitated him.
- Direct elections did not enhance governability and increased stability because it disconnected the prime minister from the real political arena,

⁸ Reuven Hazan, “Presidential parliamentarism: Direct popular election of the prime minister, Israel’s new electoral and political system,” *Electoral Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (February 1996), pp. 21-37.

which continued to be the parliament, dominated by parties. However, it further reinforced the populist dimension of this complex position.

- Undermining the collective responsibility of the government became an obstacle to governability. The governments were unstable, coalition membership frequently changed, and the prime minister repeatedly came up against resistance – in the Knesset, the coalition, the government, and ultimately the public.
- Direct election changed the party system. At the time it was instituted in 1996 two relatively large parties held sway: the Likud and Labor together controlled some 65 percent of the Knesset seats in 1988 and 1992. Voting with two ballots – one for the prime minister and the other for the Knesset – inflated the mid-size and small narrow-interest parties and deflated the large parties. After two direct elections (1996 and 1999), the power of the two big parties had diminished to a mere 45 seats.⁹ Voting for a candidate for prime minister did not encourage voting for his party. Even later, the party system remained weak. In the 2015 elections the two major parties controlled together only 42 percent of the vote, 54 seats in the Knesset.

The experiment has had an impact on Israeli democracy because it is a mechanism of direct democracy that aims to stimulate public participation. The assumption was that giving voters the opportunity to directly choose their prime minister, without the mediation of parties, would increase political participation. Namely, when citizens feel they have direct influence, they will want to exercise their democratic right to vote. Unlike the party list system, in which a prime minister is determined only after coalition negotiations, in direct election the citizens decide who will be their prime minister. This assumption was proven wrong, too, as the system did not increase voter turnout in Israel. The special election for prime minister in 2001, had the lowest turnout (62 percent). Moreover, Arab citizens largely boycotted these special elections because they felt they had no suitable candidate, and could not express their preference for a party.

Lessons from the Failure of Direct Elections in Israel

The failure of direct elections revealed the complex web of relations between the democratic system and society in Israel. It changed the system of governance in a way that was incompatible with Israel's social structure and political tradition. The main lesson

9 Ofer Kenig, Gideon Rahat, and Reuven Hazan, "The Political Consequences of the Introduction and Repeal of the Direct Elections for the Prime Minister," in Asher Arian and Michal Shamir (eds.), *The Elections in Israel 2003* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction), pp. 33-61.

learned was the need to be cautious of artificial transplants, because elements that work well elsewhere are not necessarily suitable for governance in other countries.

When the head of the executive branch is elected by a majoritarian system, the winner takes all, even if the victory was by a slim margin. This is incompatible with Israeli political culture, which has been based on seeking consensus, inclusiveness, and a coalition government. Introducing a majoritarian component into the Israeli system could be problematic precisely because it gives a decisive victory to one side, creating absolute winners and losers. Direct elections in Israel, rather than fostering centrist politics, deepened the social rifts, as reflected in the split ballot. There is nothing wrong with adopting elements of direct democracy (such as holding referendums), as long as these are adapted to the political culture and add a channel for airing public preferences. Otherwise, “direct” democracy could give impetus to the trends in Israel, as in other countries, of populism and personalizing politics.

“The standard of living of Arabs in Israel has improved considerably over the years but in practice they are largely alienated citizens because the state grants obvious advantages to its Jewish citizens.”

The failure of direct elections was an important reminder of the limitations on using the law to engineer governance. The image sold to the public was that a “professional manager” (the prime minister) would head the state and organize the affairs of state efficiently and without corruption for the good of everyone. Ultimately politics won in Israel, and that is a good thing, because good politics is concerned with real needs. The Israeli political system reflects the complexity of society, and any attempt to “organize it” must be cautious and appropriate for the social fabric. The parties, social groups, and coalitions are not superfluous “noise” in the political system, but serve important functions of mediation and interest aggregation. The effort to eliminate the legitimate mediators is not just futile, but puts democracy at risk.

Threats to Israeli Democracy

Compared to the list of strengths presented above, some of the weaknesses clearly threaten the core values of Israeli democracy. Let me start with an example. In the previous Knesset, Prime Minister Netanyahu proposed and supported the legislation of a new Basic Law: Israel as the National Home of the Jewish People. The

bill gives priority to the Jewishness of the state and enables that to override clauses regarding democracy in Israel, which is granted only a forlorn place at the end: “The State of Israel has a democratic regime.” It is difficult to ascertain the advantages, if any, of such a formal legal declaration. The state has an official name – Israel; another Basic Law stipulates that the state is “Jewish and democratic.” Why add a caption – “a home for the Jewish people” – when in practice Israel is already, by most criteria, such a home? Why change the so-called “balance” between “a Jewish and democratic state?” How much lack of confidence is revealed in such a legislative attempt that ignores the negative implications for Israel’s democracy?

In my opinion, the main threats to Israeli democracy derive from the rather consistent inability to resolve four main challenges: the continuous occupation since 1967, the status of Arab citizens in Israel, the growing socio-economic gaps, and the unresolved issue of state and religion. Are these so-called “wicked problems” inherently difficult to define, deeply disputed, and perhaps impossible to resolve?¹⁰ They have eroded the unwritten pact between state and citizens that assumes that democratic leaders are elected to provide solutions, not just to contain or manage difficult problems. Leaving them as “open” issues tends to erode the moral infrastructure of democratic systems.

Occupation

In addition to the arguments about the impossibility of limiting democracy to one side of the Green Line, that is, within the State of Israel only and not in the occupied territories, I would like to add that a democracy that cannot solve the most important problem facing a society, one way or another, loses trust.

There is of course also a moral issue: democracy requires popular belief in the justifiability of state actions. This is how democracies win wars. Since 1967, security in Israel has not improved, and all wars and military operations have been internally disputed. Even the excuse that “our rivals are not democratic” rings hollow. Moreover, vagueness surrounding the “decision not to decide” about the future of the occupied territories undermines trust in the efficacy of democracy.

Arab Citizens in Israel

Arabs comprise about 20 percent of the Israeli population and, formally, they are equal citizens whose rights are protected by law. The standard of living of Arabs in Israel has improved considerably over the years. In practice, however, they are

¹⁰ See: Horst W. J. Rittel and Melvin M. Webber, “Dilemmas in a General Theory of Planning,” *Policy Sciences*, Vol. 4 (1973), pp.155-169; N.C. Roberts, “Wicked Problems and Networks Approaches to Resolutions,” *The International Public Management Review*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (2000), pp. 38-57.

largely alienated citizens, because the state grants obvious advantages to its Jewish citizens. In many respects, Israel is an ethnic (Jewish) democracy in which one-fifth of the population keeps asking whether there is a place for non-Jews in the state. An alienated minority is a moral issue and a danger to the strength of democracy. In the 2015 election all Arab parties united into one “Joined List” with a new leader, voter participation increased significantly, and the party won close to 11 percent (13 seats) – making it the third largest in the Knesset. It remains to be seen what effect it will have on the situation of Arab citizens in Israel.

Growing Socio-economic Gaps

Is it possible to have a strong economy and a weak society? Theoretically, it is possible, and there are many democracies with deep socio-economic gaps. However, given the external threats, the secret of Israeli existence is solidarity, not security. For many years Israeli society enjoyed relative equality, but this has changed drastically in recent years. In the 2000s, Israel reached almost the top of most inequality indices of democratic countries. Again, such a gap erodes the unwritten pact between state and citizens. This growing gap has not been the result only of globalization, as many claim, but rather a direct outcome of government policies, for instance, lowering direct taxation and giving other forms of preference to high-income groups, or the continuous policy of privatization.¹¹ The 2011 social protest in Israel highlighted the existence of a link between the growing socio-economic gaps and the weakening of democracy. On the one hand, Israeli high-tech based economy is among the advanced in the world. On the other, the percentage of beneficiaries from economic growth has steadily decreased.

Religion and State

Since 1948, the State of Israel has been trying to preserve a delicate balance between the demands of the powerful religious groups and the way of life of the majority, which is either secular or “traditional” that is, not strictly religious. This balance has been largely eroded by religious groups (especially the settlers in the occupied territories) that consider their values to be “above” democracy. For instance, in a 2012 survey, a sample of the Jewish population was asked, “Which part of the definition ‘a Jewish and democratic state’ is more important for you?” The answers were: Jewish: 34 percent; democratic: 22 percent; both: 42 percent.¹²

The above question implies a false choice, because democracy as such does not contradict any religious belief – unless one regards religious authority as being above

11 See: Itzhak Galnoor, Amir Paz-Fuchs, and Naomi Zion, (eds.) “State Responsibility and the Boundaries of privatization,” *The Van Leer Institute*, 2015.

12 “Democracy Index 2012,” *Israel Democratic Institute (IDI)*.

the law of the state. The appearance of such a threat is another major obstacle to the development of Israel's democracy.

Conclusions

The combination of the four problems presented above has started to erode both the moral and practical bases of democracy in Israel. The fact that they have remained open issues for a very long time has contributed to democratic weakness and to citizens' lack of confidence in the advantages of democracy. This is one of the reasons for the attempt to "strengthen" the state by adding legal titles such as "Jewish democracy," "Zionist democracy," and most recently, "the national home of the Jewish people." Such additions usually *exclude* some groups, and democracy, on the contrary, is about *inclusion*.

Another futile attempt was the experiment with direct election of the prime minister. If the goal is to strengthen the executive branch and its head, other elements of a parliamentary system must also be strengthened – those that provide the basis for legitimacy and the stability needed for governability. Parliamentary systems function well even though ongoing adjustments are needed to help turn the gears of the legislative and executive branches, which partially interlock. Each branch has a purpose and a function of its own, and the tension between them gives the political system its dynamism and ability to be both representative and task oriented. To strengthen the executive branch, one must hearken back to the wisdom of the main principle of the parliamentary system: strengthen the parliament, which is the basis for the power of the executive branch, its extension.

This article is about the threats to democracy in Israel and not a prediction of its end.¹³ On the contrary, based on the strengths described above, my assumption is that it is possible, indeed urgent, to restart the interrupted development of democracy by going back to fundamental democratic values: "Human beings are born free and equal." Societies can escape dead ends, and Israeli society has proven in the past that it has this ability.

It will require going back to democratic education in schools to build an enduring trust in democracy among young people.¹⁴ The goal is to teach them that democracy does not contradict security, or religion – that it must safeguard minority rights, that it should strive to close social and economic gaps and invest in citizens' solidarity, and that it can coexist happily with all religious beliefs.

13 Israel also shares general democratic dilemmas with other countries: crises in the political elite, internal social divisions stretched too far, tension between governability and representativeness and erosion of public trust. See: L. Diamond, "Democracy as a Paradox", in E. Sprinzak and L. Diamond, (eds.), *Israeli Democracy under Stress* (Lynne Rienner Pub., 1993), pp. 21-43.

14 Investment in reshaping the democratic political culture in Israel is much more important in my opinion than other suggested measures, such as a written constitution, or "political engineering," such as changing again the electoral system or artificially further reducing the number of parties.