PART ONE

The Shaping of Israeli Democracy

ONE

Democracy in Israel

Can a state be both Jewish and democratic? Over a century since the Zionist idea began to gather momentum, argument continues over what it means for a state to be Jewish. To those hostile to the very concept, it is clear that Jewishness is antithetical to democracy: "To the extent that Israel is a Jewish state, it cannot be a democratic state."[1]

Such a view essentially equates "Jewish" with race or religion. A state employing racial criteria would clearly be exclusivist (racist), while a state based on religious principles would by definition be theocratic. Some unsympathetic critics attach both definitions to Israel; they bracket Jews with Christians and Muslims (all living under "religious authority and religious law" in Israel), while arguing at the same time that a "sovereign state of the Jewish people" is the same as a "sovereign state of the White people" or of the Anglo-Saxon people.[2] Most Jews, however, reject the simple equation of Jewishness with race or religion. Jews in Israel and elsewhere clearly comprise a mixed racial group; furthermore, one can either cease to be a Jew or decide to become a Jew by personal choice, without regard to genetics. And while there is a Jewish religion, nonobservant Jews are still considered Jews. Israel demonstrates that a "Jewish" state can operate largely by secular rather than religious law—precisely the major criticism of Israel made by religious Jews.

What, then, is the commonly accepted meaning of "Jewishness"? For most Jews, or for that matter for most outside observers, it is a common national or ethnic identity as a historically developed community of people with distinctive cultural, linguistic, and other attributes. This includes a distinctive Judaic religion, which makes Jews unusual, though not unique, among ethnic groups. Jews are a people, a nation (in the original sense of the word), an *ethnos*. While the sense of peoplehood has been diluted in modern liberal

assimilationist societies such as that of the United States, or even reduced in some cases to religious expressions alone or to nothing at all, this characterization of Jews in history is still valid. It has been true for most Jews, in most places, at most times.

Consequently, a Jewish state, as simply a state with a largely Jewish population and a dominantly Jewish culture, is not necessarily any more undemocratic than any state structured around a dominant ethnic group or groups (in other words, than several dozen states in the world today). The question is, first, whether the dominant group or groups practice democracy among themselves, and second, whether they extend it to citizens from other ethnic groups. This is a question to be answered by observation, not by plays on words or a priori assumptions. Finland is not undemocratic simply because it contains a significant Swedish minority while at the same time maintaining its Finnish character. One must examine the actual functioning of Finnish politics. Likewise, a Jewish state is not by definition undemocratic or democratic. We have to observe the Israeli political system as it operates in order to pass judgment. That is what this book attempts to do.

But isn't ethnicity much more important in Israel than in progressive, social-democratic, postnationalistic Finland? To be sure, the importance of ethnicity does vary. On one end of the spectrum is the perfectly liberal modern secular state, ethnically neutral in laws and political behavior, and committed to universalistic norms that transcend the narrow confines of race, creed, or national origin (whether such a state actually exists is another question). At the other end is the state that clings to its ethnic identity explicitly, adopting a particularistic orientation rooted not in general principles but in its own traditions and values. This tension between the pull of universalism and the demands of particularism is familiar to anyone who knows Zionist history, because it has always been a basic point of contention. Was the Jewish state to be "a state like other states," by which advocates usually meant something on the progressive European model? Or was it to be something uniquely Jewish, an expression of the Jewish people's own history, traditions, and way of life? Or some synthesis of the two? Though Jewish history seems to have been intensely particularistic, universalist ideas were well represented in Zionism. The debate accompanied the movement from its very first days.[3]

The argument has implications for how one judges the Israeli political system. Those impressed by the particularism or uniqueness of the Jewish people sometimes use this as a basis for judging Israel by a different set of standards. This group includes both critics and sympathizers. Many outside observers, including professed friends, would hold Israel to a higher standard than other states, on grounds of the unique historical experience of Jews or the unique moral importance of Israel as a haven from anti-

semitism. Some Israelis and Israel supporters, on the other hand, argue that the same history of persecution makes it understandable, and excusable, for Israel to be judged more leniently (Jews having, so often, been the victims of widespread violation of international norms by others).

Both of these arguments are rejected here. Even if we decide that Israeli political traditions and institutions are quite different, bearing little in common with the histories of other peoples, this does not justify invoking different standards. The circumstances under which nations function should be taken into account (for example, the seriousness of threats to security). But to cite the uniqueness of a people's character or past as cause for either unique condemnation or unique approbation is to enter the treacherous terrain of the double standard. Therefore, wherever Israel falls on the particularist-universalist spectrum, the working assumption here is that Israeli democracy must be judged by the same standards applied elsewhere—no more and no less.

But where does Israel fall on this spectrum? Is it true that Jewish history and traditions are biased toward particularism? Actually the apostles of pure universalism should find much to like in Theodor Herzl's original vision of the Jewish state. The title of Herzl's 1896 manifesto that galvanized the emergence of the Zionist movement, *Der Judenstaat,* usually translated as *The Jewish State,* is more accurately rendered as *The Jews' State.* There was little that was "Jewish" either in the arguments for the state—basically as a response to antisemitism—or in the nature of the state itself. As later depicted in his utopian novel *Altneuland* (or *Old-New Land*), Herzl's "Jews' state" was basically an empty framework into which he poured various progressive ideas then current in Europe and in which Jews, Muslims, and even Christian Europeans could feel equally comfortable.[4] Needless to say, many Zionist thinkers (especially Ahad Ha'am, the proponent of "spiritual" Zionism) condemned the near-total absence of Jewish content in Herzl's background, thinking, and program. But for Herzl, who dominated the movement in its early years, the aim was indeed "a state like other states" (though perhaps even more progressive).

Nor was Herzl alone in failing to find inspiration in purely Jewish themes; in a sense, Zionism itself was a reaction to the particularism of Jewish life. Though nationalist in content, the movement for a Jewish state was very much part of the currents then sweeping Europe. As Shlomo Avineri observes, "in all these founders of modern Zionism there appears again and again the same phenomenon: they did not come from the traditional, religious background. They were all products of European education, imbued with the current ideas of the European intelligentsia."[5] In copying the nationalism of other peoples, proponents of a Jewish state were revolting against the powerlessness, passivity, and pious quietism they associated with

the ghettoized Jewish life of recent centuries: "Jewish nationalism was then one specific aspect of the impact of the ideas and social structures unleashed by the French Revolution, modernism, and secularism. . . . For the Zionism Revolution is very basically a permanent revolution against those powerful forces in Jewish history, existing at least partially within the Jewish people, which have turned the Jews from a self-reliant people into a community living at the margin of and sometimes living off alien communities."[6]

Zionism was thus not merely an act of assertion against external threats, but also a revolution against age-old patterns of Jewish existence and an attempt to establish "normal" social, political, cultural, and occupational patterns that would make Jews more like other nations. Much of early Zionism—at least in its ideology—should therefore meet the approval of those whose ideal is Western secular liberal democracy, shorn of particularism. The "tragedy of Zionism," writes Bernard Avishai, is "that Labor Zionism is a good revolution that long ago ran its course, that it stopped short of its liberal-democratic goals, and that recent efforts to reinvigorate Zionism in Israel have only brought Israelis more misfortune."[7] In this view, shared by many veteran Israelis, positive aspects of early Zionism, such as the pioneering settlement ethic, have been appropriated in recent years by a narrower and more particularistic version of Zionism: "the question . . . is whether democratic tendencies—some of which, to be sure, were inherent in historic Labor Zionism—will prevail against the anachronistic institutions which Labor Zionists once made; prevail against the new Zionist ideology of a Greater Israel."[8] Democracy failed to take root in Israel because it was eventually overwhelmed by resurgent Jewish particularism: "Israeli schools have taught children much more about the tribes of Israel than about the Enlightenment. . . ."[9] This was even reflected in the Hebrew language itself, claims Avishai, since Hebrew has no word for democracy except the "borrowed" word *demokratia*, which, he feels, strikes the Israeli ear as "alien" or "affected."[10]

The fact that many early Zionists sought to divorce themselves from Jewish history does not, of course, mean that they always succeeded in disentangling themselves from its grip. Discussion of this point is central to much of what follows. But it should be noted at the outset that even had Zionists, against all odds, started with an entirely clean slate and had simply copied wholesale the European models they admired, this would still not necessarily have secured democracy. Of course liberal universalism seems much more hospitable to democracy than nationalistic doctrines, especially with regard to treatment of minorities. This was certainly something that Jews were especially well situated to appreciate, since the increasingly tenuous position of minorities in the new nations of Europe was one of the primary motivations for Zionism itself. But this is no simple one-to-one re-

lationship; just as national self-expression can conceivably be achieved democratically, so also universalistic norms are no absolute guarantee of democratic practice.

In the first place, no state can claim to have achieved a true universalism in its politics; the idea of true neutrality toward all citizens, with blindness toward all ethnic, religious, cultural, linguistic, and other attributes, is a chimera. No state exists in a demographic or cultural vacuum; all reflect the human reality from which they are constructed. The prevailing values of a society, the distinctive history through which its people have passed, the very language or languages in which its public affairs are conducted—all these are particulars that give each state its own character. And all states, even the most liberal and progressive, consider the preservation of this national character to be a legitimate and even obligatory function of government. All contemporary states, for example, carefully and selectively limit immigration in order to ensure, among other things, against massive demographic change.[11]

In the second place, not all universalist ideas are necessarily democratic in content. It should be sufficient to recall socialist internationalism, which does indeed purport to transcend ethnicity and religion but which has laid the groundwork for totalitarian rule based theoretically on dictatorship of one class over others. Traditional nondemocratic regimes never achieved the penetration and control of society achieved by Marxism-Leninism in the name of universal laws of history.

Particular traditions and practices can of course be either democratic or nondemocratic; by definition, particularism offers no single pattern in this regard or others. While we suspect that an inward-looking state might be less likely to respect internal differences, there is no a priori reason to assume this. Some peoples claim to have deeply grounded democratic traditions of their own, that may in the end be a firmer foundation for tolerance than alien doctrines from outside. Typically, a people's history includes precedents for both popular rule and authoritarianism. Certainly Jewish history includes both democratic and oligarchic tendencies.

In other words, both the "Jewishness" of Israel and the outside influences (ideologies and models) that have operated upon it have an ambivalent relationship to democracy. Both include strands that could lead in either direction. As Benyamin Neuberger has put it: "Israel's political tradition is a mix of democratic and nondemocratic traditions because its major components such as the Jewish religion and the Judaic historical traditions, but also the modern ideologies of socialism and nationalism, contain both liberal-democratic and authoritarian elements."[12]

That the "Jewish" dimension of Israel should contain both democratic and nondemocratic elements should come as no surprise, since the same

could probably be said of most traditions. The real surprise comes when one puts the oligarchic strands of traditions and ideologies together with the objective conditions hostile to democracy that impinged on the Zionist movement and on Israel. Considering the highly unfavorable circumstances attending its emergence, how did Israel achieve any democracy?

OBSTACLES TO DEMOCRACY

The central puzzle of Israeli politics is, in fact, how the state has managed to maintain a stable democratic system. The obstacles to such an achievement were enormous. Consider the following ten influences on the development of the State of Israel:

Relatively few of the Jewish immigrants to Palestine or to Israel over the last century came from countries with a viable democratic tradition. A quick survey of official statistics shows that only about 10 percent of those who entered Palestine or Israel from 1919 to 1987 came from countries with democratic governments at the time (and the pre-1919 figure would be even lower).[13] Not only were the countries of origin undemocratic but typically the Jewish communities there lived in a state of hostility toward official authority; Jews did not look to governments for protection but regarded them in "us–them"terms, with fear and antagonism.

Most immigrants came as refugees, with a life experience molded by disaster and political perceptions dominated by a sense of insecurity and vulnerability. Another rough survey of official figures shows that about three-quarters of those who arrived over the years would probably meet the standard definition of refugee: those fleeing because of "a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion."[14]

Those who came were plunged into a situation of permanent war, requiring full mobilization of manpower and resources, overwhelming dependence on the military, and a constant state of high readiness for emergency. All able-bodied males between the ages of eighteen and fifty-one are subject to military service, and most women are also drafted for two years. Contiguous Arab states have a combined advantage over Israel of 18 to 1 in population and 12 to 1 in size of armed forces.

The country is plagued by serious threats to internal cohesion, not only from a significant minority identified ethnically with the enemy but also by deep communal, religious, ideological, and political cleavages within the Jewish community itself. It has become a commonplace, if

untested, observation that, without the unity enforced by the Arab-Israeli conflict, Israel would tear itself apart in internal squabbles.

The economic pressures created by security needs, by the rapid absorption of large numbers of immigrants, and by conflicting development demands often seem beyond the capacity of the political system. The Israeli system is in a permanent state of overload. "The simultaneous striving for several major objectives . . . is a principal source of difficulty. . . . Political and social goals have continually demanded resources far greater than those which were in prospect."[15] Israel has frequently been ranked first in the world in government spending as a percentage of the gross national product.

The defense burden during much of Israel's history consumed a crushing 20 to 30 percent of the gross national product, an outlay unmatched by any contemporary state not engaged in full-scale war and several times the level of defense spending in any other democratic state. This heavy weight on the economy increased over time, growing from less than 10 percent of GDP before 1967 to a high of near 30 percent in the late 1970s, declining only in the 1980s after peace with Egypt.[16]

Because of small size, historical legacy, and a state of emergency, the Israel government formally has a very centralized structure, with authority concentrated on the national level and few institutional constraints on executive power (so long as supported by a majority in the Knesset).

As already indicated, the ideologies imported by early settlers were not unambiguously aligned with Western-style liberal democracy. Labor Zionism, especially among more leftist factions, flirted very seriously with democratic centralism and other doctrines of elite control then current in Eastern European revolutionary circles. Later the nationalistic right—Revisionist Zionists in particular—stressed the values of unity, military strength, and strong leadership, again reflecting the influence of contemporary antidemocratic ideas elsewhere. Furthermore, Israeli society has faced the challenge of all postrevolutionary societies: the challenge, in Shmuel Eisenstadt's words, of "the transformation of revolutionary groups from socio-political movements into rulers of states"—a process often attended by the collapse of democracy as ideals meet the pressures of reality.[17] One consequence of the influence of Eastern European revolutionary or postrevolutionary models of democracy has been, in the eyes of many close observers, that the emphasis in Israel has been on the formal and procedural aspects of democracy rather than on its content, especially in such areas as individual and minority rights.[18]

There are also elements in Jewish religion, as in any religion, that at the least create some tension with the demands of democracy. From the

religious perspective, the dictates of God-given law must always take precedence over man-made rules and institutions. The biblical injunction that "thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil" (Exodus 23:2) is often cited as an argument against majority rule. In any event, many in the religious (Orthodox) community refuse to recognize the legitimacy of democratically derived laws that they feel to be in conflict with the "higher law" as developed over the centuries by rabbinic Judaism.

Finally, after the 1967 war many Israelis asked how long democratic institutions could be maintained within Israel itself while the military administration of territories occupied in the war continued. These territories (except for East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights) were not made juridically a part of Israel but fell under the international law of belligerent occupation. This law was never designed for such a protracted period of control, and many feared that the reality of creeping de facto integration would erode democracy not only in the occupied territories but also in Israel itself. This issue will be the specific focus of chapter 10.

Concern over the strength of Israeli democracy increased considerably after the electoral upheaval of 1977, following which Menachem Begin's Likud bloc formed the first government not led by Labor in Israel's history (or in a sense, since the 1920s). Were Begin and his revisionist comrades, who had flirted with doctrines of the far right during the 1930s, truly dedicated to the democratic process? The increased visibility and political power of voters of African and Asian background and of religious nationalists—groups without strong ties to Western liberal values—added to the sense, among secular Westernized Israelis, of a rising tide of Jewish parochialism and religious obscurantism. The rise of the explicitly antidemocratic Meir Kahane, who won a Knesset seat in 1984 on a protofascist program calling for the expulsion of Arabs from Israel as well as the occupied territories and who according to polls would win several seats in 1988, brought these concerns to a head.

With all these influences to overcome, how does public support of democracy in Israel measure up? The bottom line is that there is strong support for democratic values generally among the Israeli public, but this support has some clearly identifiable soft spots.

Beginning in 1987, a systematic series of surveys was carried out by the Israel Democracy Institute (IDI; formerly the Israel Diaspora Institute) on similar issues. These surveys confirmed the Israeli public's low level of trust in political institutions, with the government, Knesset, and parties consistently falling much lower in prestige than the army, courts, and universities. Furthermore, over one-third of the respondents, time after time, stated that

Israel was "too democratic" or "far too democratic." Application of various demographic criteria showed that these opinions were not just conflict-related but also were a function of more traditional ways of life: those of African or Asian background, those professing a higher degree of religious observance, and those with lower levels of educational achievement were all more likely to express attitudes hostile to democracy.[19]

These surveys also demonstrated three particularly weak areas in public support of democracy—weaknesses that make some sense in light of the peculiarities of Jewish history and Israeli circumstances.

First, the Israeli public demonstrated a marked deference to authority on matters directly linked to security. As Yochanan Peres concludes, "a significant minority is prepared to curtail democracy when faced with the slightest threat to national security."[20] One aspect of this tendency was the marked support for strong leadership, even at the expense of democratic norms.

Second, there was a marked willingness to curb the media whenever the state's image or interests were threatened. This aversion to unfavorable publicity may reflect the traditional closure of the Jewish community and its obsession with the image projected to the outside world (what the goyim, or non-Jews, think), as well as security concerns related to the revealing of sensitive information.

Third, and most marked, there was a special weakness with regard to minority rights—that is, with regard to the non-Jewish minority in Israel. IDI studies and other surveys showed greater intolerance in Israel toward target groups on the left than toward those on the right end of the spectrum. The explanation, fairly clearly, is that the disliked groups on the left are either Arab groups or are perceived as pro-Arab.[21] Thus, while majorities of around 80 percent support democracy generally, only half of the population opposes discrimination between Jews who harm Arabs and Arabs who harm Jews. The ideal of equality before the law runs into considerable resistance when applied to Arabs; it is the "Achilles heel" of Israeli democracy.[22]

Survey results give us an important part of the picture regarding the overall strength of Israeli democracy and the threats it faces. Another important piece of the puzzle is the intense public discussion, within Israel, over these same issues. From its very inception, Israeli democracy has been barraged by complaints regarding its flaws and by lamentations heralding its imminent collapse. The character of this critical debate has, of course, evolved over time as the system itself evolved. In the pre-1977 critiques, focus was on the general dominance of parties in public life, the lack of internal democracy within parties, the long-standing hegemony of one party within the government, and the role of nongovernmental institutions (such as the Labor Federation) in what would elsewhere be governmental affairs.

After 1977, with the loss of coherence associated with the long period of Labor hegemony, the discussion of democracy shifted to other targets.

Government seemed unable to cope with the increasingly complex problems it faced. The vociferous debate over the future of the occupied territories seemed to threaten the very fabric of the system. The state of the economy reached crisis proportions. Scandals in public life multiplied, and faith in public institutions plummeted. Extremism seemed to flourish; extra-parliamentary groups such as Gush Emunim (Bloc of the Faithful, a group promoting Jewish settlement in the occupied territories) adopted postures that questioned parliamentary rule, if not democracy itself. Religious symbolism and pressures became more visible in public life, injecting new sources of tension and conflict. Elections became rowdier, and there appeared to be much more violence in public life. Many on the left feared what they saw as the demagoguery of the nationalistic right, which controlled the government and maintained close ties to more extreme groups that seemed to threaten the very basis of democratic rule.

In short, the particularistic side of Jewish life was resurgent after a long period during which the presumed universalism of Labor Zionist ideology had had the upper hand (at least on the surface). There was a human reality that had been obscured by the success of Labor Zionism. Those who came to Palestine or Israel were largely refugees motivated not by socialist ideology or Western liberalism but by desperation; they were far more closely wedded to tradition than were their Zionist mentors. They were not in revolt against Jewishness, as were many Zionist ideologues, and as ideology faded it was perhaps inevitable that Jewishness would make a comeback (though, as we shall see, it was never really absent). Along with a renewed emphasis on Jewish values came, also perhaps inevitably, objections to the universalistic pretensions of Western liberalism—including attacks on the primacy of democracy. One began to see statements such as the following, taken at random from numerous examples: "The perpetuation of the Jewish character of Israel is paramount to and transcends all other considerations, including the ideal of democracy. . . . Teaching and indoctrinating the young as to democratic values in the abstract and out of Jewish context is fraught with danger. . . . Assimilation, like Nazism, is anathema to Jewish survival and no less odious."[23]

A sustained, reasoned, intellectual challenge to democratic ideals was mounted in some nationalistic and religious circles, such as the pages of the right-wing intellectual journal *Nativ*. Accepting the argument of a conflict between Jewishness and democracy in Israel, these critics drew exactly the opposite conclusion to that drawn by their liberal opponents: democracy would have to be compromised, as preserving the Jewish character of the state was the first priority. Behind this was the assumption that Arab hostility to Israel was a given, and that consequently self-preservation meant some curtailing of Arab rights. Under such conditions, Israel could not afford pluralism; equality could be extended only to those fully accepting

the state and their duties as citizens, and acts of hostility should be suppressed without apology. Any people, it was argued, has a distinct character that is inextricably linked to its statehood. The essence of nationhood was particularism, not a vague set of liberal principles that few states observed in practice anyway (especially when their survival was at stake).[24]

All of this adds up to a rather dismal view of Israeli democracy, or at least of trends that threaten to undermine it. But is the pessimism justified? Do the opinion surveys, the dire predictions, and the open attacks on democratic principles all reflect an actual decline in democratic practice, as the particularistic side of Jewish life reasserts itself? The answer is that the total picture is much more complex. To each claim or finding outlined above, there is generally an opposed counterclaim challenging the picture of erosion in democracy.

DEMOCRATIC REALITIES

What expectations do we bring to bear in evaluating democratic attitudes, in Israel or elsewhere? If political institutions are held in low repute everywhere, what is the significance of the Israeli data? Beginning with the assumption that Israel is to be judged as other countries are judged, the comparative perspective becomes necessary. Such problems as minority rights in a conflict situation, security pressures on civil liberties, the role of religion in politics, and overwhelming pressures on available resources can be fully evaluated only by comparing the Israeli case to others, similar and dissimilar.[25]

More fundamentally, one must begin with a recognition of the general tenuousness of democracy. Democracy is a relatively recent and still far-from-universal human achievement; if we posit universal suffrage, including women, as part of the minimal criteria, there were no democracies at all until the early twentieth century, and only twenty-three states have been continuously democratic since the immediate post-World War II period. All of these are relatively well-developed, prosperous nations; all but Israel, India, Costa Rica, and Japan are in Western Europe, North America, or the British Commonwealth.[26]

Looking at matters comparatively, it appears the Israeli public is not substantially more intolerant than the U.S. public, and that existing differences can be explained by differences in the nature and degree of threat to which the two societies are exposed. The major comparative study, published in 1983, concluded that "the two countries are quite similar, with Americans only slightly more tolerant." On the abstract level, there was no difference; for example, 85 percent of Americans and 83 percent of Israelis endorsed the principle of free speech.[27] Differences appeared when the principle was put in the context of the least-liked target group, with a result that support of free speech declined by 30 percent among Americans

and by 45 percent among Israelis. This is explained by the fact that there was less agreement among Americans on the identity of the target group—a situation of "pluralistic intolerance"—while in the Israeli setting of "focused intolerance" the Arab minority is more clearly identified and linked with an external threat.[28]

Outside observers, employing presumably objective criteria regarding freeness of elections, competitiveness, and individual rights, have always ranked Israel among the democratic polities. The annual Freedom House series ranks Israel among the "free" nations while also putting it on the second rung regarding political rights, as a nation with a functioning electoral system but "particular problems."[29] Israel made Dankwart Rustow's 1967 list of thirty-one democracies, Robert Dahl's 1971 roster of twenty-nine "polyarchies," and G. Bingham Powell's 1982 enumeration of twenty nations with continuous democratic regimes from 1958 to 1976 (as well as Arend Lijphart's similar list of twenty-one, mentioned earlier).[30] In short, those who approached the topic with empirical criteria, rather than semantic arguments, have had little difficulty recognizing the essentially democratic character of Israel's political system.

Israel also appears in general discussions as one of the major case studies of democracy in a deeply divided society. Ethnic and religious cleavages clearly make the achievement of democracy more difficult; analysts point to a strong correlation between homogeneity and political democracy.[31] Generally, only a handful of states with deep and numerically significant ethnic divisions have maintained stable democracies: Switzerland, Belgium, Canada, arguably India—and Israel. Thus it is not too surprising that one of the weaker aspects of Israeli democracy is minority rights, or that the style of democracy adopted by Israel is that considered by political scientists to be most suitable for deeply split societies.

WHAT KIND OF DEMOCRACY?

How has Israel preserved the essentially democratic character of its political institutions against such odds? In answering this question, it is important to understand just what kind of democracy Israel has managed to maintain and where the strength of its democratic habits lie. It is useful to begin with the distinction that Arend Lijphart makes between majoritarian democracy, on one hand, and consensus democracy or consociationalism on the other.

Majoritarian democracy—or the "Westminster model" in Lijphart's words—is based on the idea that majority rule is the essence of democracy and that this principle should not be diluted (by a minority veto, for example). The British style of parliamentarism, with bare-majority governments, fusion of executive and legislative power, and tendency to unicameralism,

is an expression of the majoritarian ideal. It also can be characterized by a unidimensional two-party system with one-party governments, by nonproportional electoral systems, by centralized as opposed to federalized government, and by unentrenched (or even unwritten) constitutions that can be altered by ordinary acts of parliament, since all of these arrangements help to guarantee that the untrammeled will of the majority will prevail.[32]

Consensus democracy and the related concept of consociationalism embody the idea that the exclusion of losing groups or minorities from all decision-making is, in some basic sense, undemocratic. This model regards the diffusion and sharing of power according to some principle of proportionality as the ideal to be pursued. Lijphart identifies the eight characteristics of consensus democracy that stand in contrast to the majoritarian model. The following five characteristics fall along what could be called an "executive-parties" dimension:

1. Executive power-sharing. There is a tendency to share executive powers beyond a bare majority, making otherwise powerless minorities a part of the system.
2. Executive–legislative balance. The executive and legislative branches, instead of being fused, serve as a check on each other.
3. Multiparty system. The presence of many parties makes it unlikely that any one party will gain a majority, necessitating coalitions among smaller parties in which the interests of each is safeguarded.
4. Multidimensional party system. The formation of parties along many lines of cleavage—such as socioeconomic, ethnic, or religious—also enforces the pluralism of the system and the need to build coalitions protecting the position of smaller groups.
5. Proportional representation. Apart from providing the underpinning for a multiparty system, proportional electoral systems are the classic method of guaranteeing a voice to minorities and smaller groups in society.

The other three characteristics of consensus democracy comprise a "federal-unitary" dimension:

6. Federalism and decentralization. Different levels of government serve as a check on each other, and the reservation of powers to local jurisdictions is a means of providing autonomy to distinct groups.
7. Strong bicameralism. The second chamber in a two-house system usually serves as a check, representing territorial divisions or minorities to be protected from the tyranny of the majority.
8. Written and rigid constitutions. The final guarantee for minorities is the entrenchment of provisions that cannot be changed by a simple