

# **Israel's Democracy**

## **To What Extent Can Israel Be Fully Democratic If Its Citizenship Is Based On Ethnicity?**

Global Politics  
Group 3

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## **Table of Contents-**

Introduction.....	2-5
Body.....	6-16
Fair and Free elections.....	6-7
Structural violence.....	8-11
Social inequality.....	8
Political inequality.....	10
Cultural violence.....	12-13
Ethnic inequality.....	12
National Laws.....	14-16
Laws and Democracy.....	14
Law of return.....	14
Conclusion.....	17
Bibliography.....	18-22

## Introduction-

For my extended I chose to focus on the extent in which Israel is a fully democratic country. The main reason that I chose this topic, is that one of my favorite units in my Global Politics class was democracy and legitimacy.

The word democracy comes from the Greek language, demos means the people and Kratia means power <sup>1</sup>. Therefore, democracy is a regime where citizens have a supreme power to elect their government <sup>2</sup>. The idea of democracy allows the existence of a framework that recognizes the individual autonomy of the people and their fundamental rights. In this form of government, rules, different methods of management, principles and values are expressed. Democracy has different definitions; democracy as a value, and democracy as a form of government <sup>3</sup>. This essay will show on both.

As a value, democracy is a worldwide perspective and a way of life, expressing commitments to humanistic values. These values are based on placing the people in the center, allowing them to be free and provide them with basic rights given by birth<sup>4</sup>. On the other hand, as a form of government, democracy operates only in the administrative sense. By using different procedures it implements the following democratic principles; the rule of the people, legislation, and majority based decisions <sup>5</sup>.

In a democratic state, there are free and fair elections, as well as the absence of social, political and ethnic inequalities among the people who live within the country <sup>6</sup>.

As an Israeli student who lives in the United States, I thought that focusing on Israel as a country where there are many globally debatable situations in the matter of democracy, would be an interesting topic for my extended essay.

<sup>1</sup> "מהי דמוקרטיה?" ["What Is Democracy?"]. *CET*, citizenship.cet.ac.il/ShowItem.aspx?ItemID=0e59cd90-8bca-4ebe-9855-fa09b768dcfa&lang=HEB.

<sup>2</sup> "Democracy." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, www.britannica.com/topic/democracy.

<sup>3</sup> "מהי דמוקרטיה?" ["What Is Democracy?"]. *CET*, citizenship.cet.ac.il/ShowItem.aspx?ItemID=0e59cd90-8bca-4ebe-9855-fa09b768dcfa&lang=HEB.

<sup>4</sup> "The Value Of Democracy." *Britannica*, www.britannica.com/topic/democracy/The-value-of-democracy.

<sup>5</sup> "מהי דמוקרטיה?" ["What Is Democracy?"]. *CET*, citizenship.cet.ac.il/ShowItem.aspx?ItemID=0e59cd90-8bca-4ebe-9855-fa09b768dcfa&lang=HEB.

<sup>6</sup> "What is Democracy?" *Stanford University*, web.stanford.edu/~ldiamond/iraq/WhaIsDemocracy012004.htm.

Israel was declared independent on May 1948 by the United Nations<sup>7</sup>. Israel's population consists of 8,299,706 people. Among these, 74.8% of the population is Jewish, 17.6% are Muslim, 2% are Christian, and 1.6% are Druze<sup>8</sup>. Additionally, it is located between Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Egypt and the Mediterranean sea, in an area that comes to about 8,357 square miles<sup>9</sup>.

So I chose to focus on the question to what extent can Israel be fully democratic if its citizenship is based on ethnicity. In order to analyse this question, I used two methodological approaches; a case study and analyses of discourse. The case study I chose is Israel, and the discourse I chose is Israel's democracy. Furthermore, the techniques I used in order to conduct a research which will help me answer this question, are literature and media reviews, and quantitative data analysis. The literature and media reviews I used includes journals, reports, books, and researches published by both NGO's such as B'tselem and experts such as Johan Galtung, which showed different perspectives on Israel's democracy. Additionally, I also analysed quantitative data such as the Global democracy ranking to evaluate and receive a better understanding of those perspectives.

Therefore, in order to evaluate the democracy of Israel, I decided to address the terms mentioned above through the lenses of structural and cultural violence. Structural violence includes both social and political inequalities. It happens when some groups, classes, nationalities and genders have more access to resources and opportunities than others. On the other hand, cultural violence incorporates the idea of ethnic inequality, and refers to any type of idea in the culture that justifies violence against

<sup>7</sup> "Israel." *History*, [www.history.com/topics/history-of-israel](http://www.history.com/topics/history-of-israel).

<sup>8</sup> "The Middle East: Israel." *The World Factbook*, [www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/is.html](http://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/is.html).

<sup>9</sup> "Israel." *Britannica*, [www.britannica.com/place/Israel](http://www.britannica.com/place/Israel).

another group of people <sup>10</sup>. Moreover, in order for a state to be fully democratic it has to enact laws which equally apply to all citizens <sup>11</sup>.

As I was reading different articles about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the Israeli government, I noticed that democracy in Israel is one of the most undetermined issues these days. What attracted my attention even more was the definition of Israel as both Jewish and democratic. For decades, Israel has been presented by many, as 'the only democracy in the Middle East', as Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said, "...the one true democracy in the Middle East.." <sup>12</sup>, and it defines itself as a Jewish and democratic state <sup>13</sup>. But I was wondering if a state can be both Jewish and democratic, and if these contradict each other. Eventually, rather than the contradiction between Jewish and democratic state, I decided to focus on a more specific matter; Israel's democracy in relation to its ethnic based citizenship.

Israeli citizenship can be received in several ways, in which the vast majority requires the individual to be Jewish or to become Jewish. People who were born in Israel, born to a parent who has is an Israeli citizen, are also considered Israeli citizens <sup>14</sup>. Moreover, permanent residents are allowed to be recognized as Israeli citizens under specific conditions, such as swearing allegiance to Israel as a state, demonstrating that they only reside in Israel, and present some knowledge of Hebrew <sup>15</sup>. Therefore, people who have been living in Israel for a long time like the Palestinians and the Arabs who don't meet these criteria do not get to be recognized as Israeli citizens.

<sup>10</sup> Galtung, Johan. "Cultural Violence." *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 27, no. 3, 1990, pp. 291–305. *JSTOR*, JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/423472](http://www.jstor.org/stable/423472).

<sup>11</sup> "What is Democracy?" *Stanford University*, [web.stanford.edu/~ldiamond/iraq/WhatsDemocracy012004.htm](http://web.stanford.edu/~ldiamond/iraq/WhatsDemocracy012004.htm).

<sup>12</sup> "Full Text of Prime Minister Netanyahu's UN Speech." *The Jerusalem Post*, [www.jpost.com/Arab-Israeli-Conflict/Full-text-of-Prime-Minister-Netanyahus-UN-speech-376626](http://www.jpost.com/Arab-Israeli-Conflict/Full-text-of-Prime-Minister-Netanyahus-UN-speech-376626).

<sup>13</sup> *Palestinians In Israel: Segregation, Discrimination and Democracy*. Pluto Press, 2012.

<sup>14</sup> "Acquisition of Israeli Nationality." *Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, [www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/aboutisrael/state/pages/acquisition%20of%20israeli%20nationality.aspx](http://www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/aboutisrael/state/pages/acquisition%20of%20israeli%20nationality.aspx).

<sup>15</sup> "Legal Status of East Jerusalem and its Residents." *B'tselem*, [www.btselem.org/jerusalem/legal\\_status](http://www.btselem.org/jerusalem/legal_status).

In this essay, I will look at the question of whether Israel is a democracy, by exploring several perspectives. Additionally, through the lens of Galtung's triangle of violence I will present those perspectives in different forms of violence. Using Galtung's triangle of violence helped me to refer to the ideas behind democratic states, to wider political terms and address it to one specific country. I will then conclude that Israel is not fully democratic.



## **Free and Fair elections-**

As mentioned before, free and fair elections are an essential aspect of a democratic state. Free elections mean that all individuals who are authorized to vote, have a free choice. Additionally, free elections allow each person to choose whether or not to vote and who to vote for confidentially, without being judged. Fair elections mean that every political party has an equal chance to convince the public why they should be elected, via campaigns, and assemblies. As well as, elections where all individuals who are entitled to vote, have an equal opportunity to do so. All votes should be addressed and therefore, the final result should indicate the final count <sup>16</sup>.

In Israel, citizens vote for the people who will seat in the legislative body called the Knesset, which is made up of 120 members. All members are chosen by a national vote <sup>17</sup>. The elections in Israel happen every four years (with several exceptions under certain circumstances) <sup>18</sup>. In the last elections, which took place in 2015, there were 15 political parties running for the 20th Knesset <sup>19</sup>. Each political party forms a list of candidates, which will later on affect on who will be elected; the person who is on the top of the list, has the greatest chance to have a seat in the Knesset. Based on the number of votes each party gained, the number of seats is being divided. For instance, if a party received 10% of the votes, this party will have 7% of all 120 in the Knesset. Next, there is the coalition formation where the positions in the government are being distributed. However, the party who won most of the votes, obtains the opportunity to form this coalition. The prime minister, for example, is chosen by the other elected members. "The person with the most recommendations- or the best odds of gaining a majority in the Knesset- is given a mandate by the president to negotiate with the different parties to form a coalition." A coalition can be formed only when there is a

<sup>16</sup> "What are Free and Fair Elections?" *Civic Academy*, [www.civicsacademy.co.za/video/free-and-fair-elections/](http://www.civicsacademy.co.za/video/free-and-fair-elections/).

<sup>17</sup> "A Beginners Guide to Israels Elections." *Ynet*, [www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4623499,00.html](http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4623499,00.html).

<sup>18</sup> "The Electoral System in Israel." *The Knesset*, [www.knesset.gov.il/description/eng/eng\\_mimshal\\_beh.htm](http://www.knesset.gov.il/description/eng/eng_mimshal_beh.htm)

<sup>19</sup> "Israel's Political Parties." *Israeli Elections 2015*, [www.israelelection2015.org/parties/](http://www.israelelection2015.org/parties/).

majority of at least 61 people among all parties. The person who managed to do so, is the new Prime Minister <sup>20</sup>.

Based on article 4 of the Basic Law, in the Israeli electoral system, the Knesset is elected by general, confidential, direct, equal and national elections. General elections guarantee the right of all Israeli citizens (including Israeli Arabs) who are 18 or over to vote, and every Israeli citizen who is 21 or older to be elected. Confidential elections ensure that the votes are unprejudiced, to also make sure, that voters are not pressured to elect someone they do not wish to. Therefore, voters elect their party in a secret ballot <sup>21</sup>. By elections being direct, voters directly choose the Knesset members. Equal elections ensure that all voters have the same opportunity to vote and that no vote is more powerful than others, every voice counts. And lastly, national elections refer to the fact that Israel functions as one electoral district <sup>22</sup>. Moreover, in order to assure that all individuals who have the right to vote, participate in the elections, the day of elections is a holiday. This allows each person who wants to express his or her opinions about the next ruling government, to go to a ballot box and send a vote. There are also special voting stations for soldiers on duty, prisoners and people who are hospitalized. Lastly, around eight days after the election day, the results are being published in the official newspaper. About two weeks later, the new Knesset starts its term <sup>23</sup>.

Therefore, the fact that Israel holds free and fair elections where voters have a free choice which can be made confidentially, and all political parties have an equal chance of getting the public's support, shows that Israel is a democracy.

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<sup>20</sup> "A Beginners Guide to Israels Elections." *Ynet*, [www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4623499,00.html](http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4623499,00.html).

<sup>21</sup> "Israel Elections: Overview & Explanation." *Jewish Virtual Library*, [www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/overview-and-explanation-of-israeli-elections](http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/overview-and-explanation-of-israeli-elections).

<sup>22</sup> "The Electoral System in Israel." *The Knesset*, [www.knesset.gov.il/description/eng/eng\\_mimshal\\_beh.htm](http://www.knesset.gov.il/description/eng/eng_mimshal_beh.htm)

<sup>23</sup> "Israel Elections: Overview & Explanation." *Jewish Virtual Library*, [www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/overview-and-explanation-of-israeli-elections](http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/overview-and-explanation-of-israeli-elections).



## Structural violence-

As previously mentioned, in a democratic state there is absence of structural violence. Structural violence creates an unequal advantage which is built into the social, political and economic system that governs societies, states and the world. According to Johan Galtung, structural violence is less obvious and usually invisible, since the cause behind it is often uncertain along with the fact that it is common in a way that does not attract attention<sup>24</sup>. "Such violence fails to catch our attention to the extent that we accept its presence as a "normal" and even "natural" part of how we see the world"<sup>25</sup>. For example, when one child in New York City goes to sleep without eating anything all day there is an individual case of violence, however, when there are around 49 million people in America who suffer from hunger<sup>26</sup>, there is structural violence.

To identify structural violence, it is essential to focus on social and political inequality.

### Social Inequality:

Social inequality refers to a country where all the people who live within its borders do not have equal access to services and do not receive the same opportunities for wealth, education, and health care while also not having the same status in terms of civil rights, freedom of speech and shared resources<sup>27</sup>.

In Israel, there is a gap between Jewish and Arab citizens in terms of housing, education, jobs, and social services<sup>28</sup>. According to the Jewish Virtual Library, as of 2017, Israel's population stands at 8,680,000 people where 74.7% are Jewish, 20.8%

<sup>24</sup> Galtung, Johan. "Violence, Peace, and Peace Research." *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 6, no. 3, 1969, pp. 167–191. *JSTOR*, JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/422690](http://www.jstor.org/stable/422690).

<sup>25</sup> "The Violence Triangle." *Ahmed Afzaal*, [ahmedafzaal.com/2012/02/20/the-violence-triangle/](http://ahmedafzaal.com/2012/02/20/the-violence-triangle/).

<sup>26</sup> "Where Does Hunger Exist?" *Bread For The World*, [www.bread.org/where-does-hunger-exist](http://www.bread.org/where-does-hunger-exist).

<sup>27</sup> "Social Equality." *Journal of Socialomics*, [www.omicsonline.org/scholarly/social-equality-journals-articles-ppts-list.php](http://www.omicsonline.org/scholarly/social-equality-journals-articles-ppts-list.php).

<sup>28</sup> "Not All Israeli Citizens Are Equal." *The New York Times*, [www.nytimes.com/2012/05/24/opinion/not-all-israeli-citizens-are-equal.html?mcubz=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/24/opinion/not-all-israeli-citizens-are-equal.html?mcubz=0).

and are Arabs<sup>29</sup>. In terms of housing, the Israeli government has denied 22,000 building permits for the Israeli Arab who have not built a single structure since 1948<sup>30</sup>. When it comes to education, there are two education systems; one for the Jewish people and one for the Palestinians<sup>31</sup>. As of 2015, 73.4% of Jewish students goes to lower school where only 26.6% of Arabs, as well as 73.2% of Jewish students goes to middle school and only 26.8% of Arabs<sup>32</sup>. A study conducted by the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics, showed that for each Jewish student, schools receive a budget of around \$1,100 a year, as opposed to \$191 a year received by schools for each Palestinian student. The two parallel systems are divided through discriminatory budget, which makes Israel a big contributor to these inequalities which later on result in teaching quality, class size, job prospects and economic health which have an impact on the whole community<sup>33</sup>. In terms of employment, for 16 or more years of schooling, Jewish employees receive a monthly payment of 14,822 shekels while Arab employees receive only 8,367 shekels. Moreover, there is also the presence of gender inequality when it comes to employment. For 16 or more years of schooling, Men receive a monthly payment of 18,065 shekels while Women receive only 11,642 shekels<sup>34</sup>. Additionally, 14% of Arabs are unemployment as opposed to 9.5% of Jews<sup>35</sup>. In 2003, a new law which bans the entry of Palestinians from the occupied territories was passed. This law also denies any form of citizenship or residency to Palestinians who are married to Israeli citizens<sup>36</sup>. Adalah, the legal center for Arab minority rights in Israel in response; "It should be emphasized that no other state in the world denies the right to conduct a

<sup>29</sup> "Vital Statistics: Latest Population Statistics for Israel." *Jewish Virtual Library*, [www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/latest-population-statistics-for-israel](http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/latest-population-statistics-for-israel).

<sup>30</sup> "Israeli Arabs Enraged by Underclass Life." *The Guardian*, [www.theguardian.com/world/2000/oct/06/israel](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2000/oct/06/israel).

<sup>31</sup> *Palestinians In Israel: Segregation, Discrimination and Democracy*. Pluto Press, 2012.

<sup>32</sup> *Education*. Central Bureau of Statistics, [www.cbs.gov.il/shnaton67/np4.pdf](http://www.cbs.gov.il/shnaton67/np4.pdf).

<sup>33</sup> *Palestinians In Israel: Segregation, Discrimination and Democracy*. Pluto Press, 2012.

<sup>34</sup> *Employees Aged 15 And Over, By Gross Money Income From Wages And Employee Salaries And By Population Group, Sex, Age And Years Of Schooling*. Central Bureau Of Statistics, [www.cbs.gov.il/reader/shnaton/templ\\_shnaton.html?num\\_tab=st08\\_73&CYear=2017](http://www.cbs.gov.il/reader/shnaton/templ_shnaton.html?num_tab=st08_73&CYear=2017).

<sup>35</sup> "Israeli Arabs Enraged by Underclass Life." *The Guardian*, [www.theguardian.com/world/2000/oct/06/israel](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2000/oct/06/israel).

<sup>36</sup> *Palestinians In Israel: Segregation, Discrimination and Democracy*. Pluto Press, 2012.

family life on the basis of national or ethnic belonging”<sup>37</sup>. The purpose of enacting this law was to ensure the Jewish majority in the country by making it more difficult for non-Jews and particularly Israeli Arabs to gain citizenship<sup>38</sup>.

#### Political Inequality:

Political equality means that all citizens can advocate for their opinions over national decisions, as well as that no opinion matters more than the other. Moreover, political equality as a part of the criteria for a democratic state, contains the equal attention of all its citizens' concerns<sup>39</sup>.

As to 2017, in the legislative body in Israel called the Knesset, there are 9 Jewish led political parties; 5 are right wing parties, and 4 are centered or left wing parties and only one of 10 political parties in the Knesset is led by an Israeli Arab led<sup>40</sup>. Moreover, only one of 23 government ministers, is non- Jewish<sup>41</sup>. Additionally, in the 20th Knesset, 16 out of 120 members of the Knesset are Arabs. This may be the highest number of Arab representatives ever in the Knesset, but it is still less than 15% of all members<sup>42</sup>. As a part of the political inequality in Israel, in 2016 three members of the Knesset were banned because they went to comfort several Palestinian families who lost their loved ones by the Israeli forces. Jamal Zahalka, Basel Ghattas and Hanin Zoabi, all members of Balad, which is a part of the Joint List political party, attended this gathering to support the families asking the Israeli government to return the bodies of their relatives held by the Israeli forces. However, this action seemed very odd to the other Knesset members as well as Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who banned these members for 2-4 months. Moreover, in 2015, only 5.3 million people out of 8.38 million people living in Israel had the right to vote. 80% of voters are Jewish, 15% are

<sup>37</sup> "Adalah: Extension to Citizenship Laws Validity is Latest In a Series Of Israeli Policies Of Racial Separation Based On National Belonging." *Adalah*, [www.adalah.org/en/content/view/7367](http://www.adalah.org/en/content/view/7367).

<sup>38</sup> *Palestinians In Israel: Segregation, Discrimination and Democracy*. Pluto Press, 2012.

<sup>39</sup> "Political Equality What Is It? Why Do We Want It?" *Russell Sage Foundation*, [www.russellsage.org/sites/all/files/u4/Verba.pdf](http://www.russellsage.org/sites/all/files/u4/Verba.pdf).

<sup>40</sup> "Parties in Current Government." *Jewish Virtual Library*, [www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/israeli-political-parties](http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/israeli-political-parties).

<sup>41</sup> "Current Government." *The Knesset*, [www.knesset.gov.il/mk/eng/mkindex\\_current\\_eng.asp?view=4](http://www.knesset.gov.il/mk/eng/mkindex_current_eng.asp?view=4).

<sup>42</sup> "The Social Composition of the 20th Knesset." *The Israel Democracy Institute*, [en.idi.org.il/articles/5199](http://en.idi.org.il/articles/5199).

Arabs (includes Muslims, Christians, Arabs and Druze) and 5% are other minority groups <sup>43</sup>.

Due to the facts listed above, which show that there is the presence of both social and political inequalities in Israel, Israel cannot be recognized as a democracy.

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<sup>43</sup> "Press Release" *Central Bureau of Statistics*,  
[www.cbs.gov.il/reader/newhodaot/hodaa\\_template.html?hodaa=201524029](http://www.cbs.gov.il/reader/newhodaot/hodaa_template.html?hodaa=201524029).



## Cultural Violence-

As mentioned before, in a democratic state there is the absence of cultural violence. Cultural violence refers to any type of idea of culture, such as flags, symbols, beliefs, religions and language that is used to justify violence against another group of people. "Cultural violence makes direct or structural violence, look, even feel, right- or at least not wrong". However, cultural aspects are not the main cause of violence since both structural and direct violence have an equal impact on violence in the society. But it is true that culture is a part on both structural and direct violence <sup>44</sup>. One example of cultural violence is the Holocaust. The Holocaust is considered to be a form of cultural violence, since the Nazis were targeting specific groups such as Jews and Gypsies and justified it by claiming these groups for the problems Germany faced at that time.

In order to analyse cultural violence, it is necessary to focus on ethnic inequalities.

### Ethnic inequality:

Ethnicity refers to a group of individuals who share the same origins and cultural traditions <sup>45</sup>. Therefore, ethnic inequality refers to any type of disadvantage; political, social or economic which discriminate a certain minority group <sup>46</sup>.

In Israel the source of justification is the definition of Israel as both Jewish and democratic state. "By definition, the state of Israel was founded as a Jewish state. The regime constituted in it is democratic in character, but its essence is Jewish. And if there is a contradiction between this essence and the character of the government, it is clear that the essence takes precedence" <sup>47</sup>.

<sup>44</sup> Galtung, Johan. "Cultural Violence." *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 27, no. 3, 1990, pp. 291–305. JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/423472](http://www.jstor.org/stable/423472).

<sup>45</sup> "Ethnicity." *Cambridge Dictionary*, [dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/ethnicity](http://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/ethnicity).

<sup>46</sup> "Ethnic Inequality is Widespread and a Drag on The Global Economy." *The Guardian*, [www.theguardian.com/public-leaders-network/2015/jan/20/ethnic-inequality-widespread-global-economy](http://www.theguardian.com/public-leaders-network/2015/jan/20/ethnic-inequality-widespread-global-economy).

<sup>47</sup> *Palestinians In Israel: Segregation, Discrimination and Democracy*. Pluto Press, 2012.



This idea of Israel as Jewish state affects all areas of inequalities since instead of relating to all citizens, it identifies with the primary national group.

Accordingly, this shows the presence of cultural violence since all the inequalities and discriminations against different minority groups (such as the Israeli Arabs), who do not get the same treatment as others, are justified by the fact that Israel is a Jewish country which has to primarily take care of its Jewish citizens. Therefore, Israel is not a democracy since it does not fulfill its duty to look upon all its citizens equally despite their ethnic differences.

## **National Laws-**

As previously mentioned, in order for a state to be called democratic, it has to have equal laws. Equal laws or in other words, the rule of law, refer to the standard that all individuals and establishments are responsible and liable to laws that are genuinely implemented <sup>48</sup>. As a system, democracy is made up from the rules. In democracy, the rule of law ensures the privileges of citizens, restricts the power of government, and possess order. Lastly, the laws are fairly and reliably enforced by courts that are free of alternate chapters of government <sup>49</sup>.

### Laws and Democracy:

In a democracy, there are laws which apply and protect all citizens equally. Under these laws, all citizens are equal despite their race, ethnicity, background, religion or gender. These laws ensure that no citizen is discriminated against or denied the rights he or she is entitled to. In fact, no one is exempted from these laws, no matter of social status or if an individual is a part of the government, these laws apply to all <sup>50</sup>.

### Law of Return:

In Israel, along with the social, political and ethnic inequalities there are also unequal laws; and specifically, the Law of Return. The Law of Return is a legislation, that was passed by the Knesset in 1950, giving all Jewish people the right to live in Israel as citizens <sup>51</sup>. According to the Jewish Agency, the Law of Return indicates the main purpose for the existence of the state of Israel; every Jew has the right to immigrate and live in Israel <sup>52</sup>.

In order to understand the reason in which the Law of Return is unequal, the distinction between nationality and citizenship has to be addressed. Unlike English

<sup>48</sup> "Rule of Law." *Dictionary.com*, [www.dictionary.com/browse/rule-of-law](http://www.dictionary.com/browse/rule-of-law).

<sup>49</sup> "Democracy Education for IraqNine Brief Themes." *Stanford University*, [web.stanford.edu/~ldiamond/iraq/DemocracyEducation0204.htm](http://web.stanford.edu/~ldiamond/iraq/DemocracyEducation0204.htm).

<sup>50</sup> "Democracy Education for IraqNine Brief Themes." *Stanford University*, [web.stanford.edu/~ldiamond/iraq/DemocracyEducation0204.htm](http://web.stanford.edu/~ldiamond/iraq/DemocracyEducation0204.htm).

<sup>51</sup> *Palestinians In Israel: Segregation, Discrimination and Democracy*. Pluto Press,2012.

<sup>52</sup> "The Law of Return." *The Jewish Agency*, [www.jewishagency.org/first-steps/program/5131](http://www.jewishagency.org/first-steps/program/5131).

where the two are generally identical, in Hebrew nationality ('le'um') and citizenship ('ezrahut') are two separate terms<sup>53</sup>. 'Le'um' refers to a group defined by a social border. 'Ezrahut', on the other hand, refers to a group defined by the geographical border. 'Le'um' usually alludes to a collective with a unique identity, which usually includes language, tradition, and common cultural symbols. While 'Ezrahut', can be defined as participation or membership in a political community<sup>54</sup>. Each term entitles individuals to different rights. "...non- Jews, can be citizens, but never nationals, and thus denied 'rights and privileges' enjoyed by those 'who would qualify for Israeli citizenship under the 1950 Law of Return<sup>55</sup>". Additionally, these days, there are around 7 million Palestinian refugees worldwide. The privilege perceived by the UN resolution 194, allowing these Palestinians to return to their land is being denied by Israel. On the other hand, different organizations such as the Jewish Agency and synagogues encourage Jews around the world to migrate to Israel. In one of the actions in London, activists tried to convince the Jewish population to live in Israel, stating all the privileges given to them. "Make your dream come true with your own home or investment in Israel"<sup>56</sup>. Therefore, this law discriminates Palestinian and Arab individuals who have lived on the land of Israel for generations, even before it formed into an independent state.

Later on, the Law of Return was combined with the Citizenship Law, which gave citizenship status to Jews who 'went back' to Israel. The citizenship law, was additionally a legal foundation of Israel's ethnic cleansing of Palestine by, denationalizing a huge number of Palestinians. For instance, the Israeli government previously expelled about 700,000 Palestinians<sup>57</sup>. The main absurd is, that people who don't live within the country automatically receive the citizenship status, unlike people who do live in the country and fight for equal rights and privileges given to others only because of their ethnicity.

<sup>53</sup> *Palestinians In Israel: Segregation, Discrimination and Democracy*. Pluto Press,2012.

<sup>54</sup> "לאום ואזרחות" ["Nationality and Citizenship"]. *CET*, lib.cet.ac.il/ pages/item.asp?item=16473.

<sup>55</sup> *Palestinians In Israel: Segregation, Discrimination and Democracy*. Pluto Press,2012.

<sup>56</sup> "Israel's Unfair 'Law of Return.'" *The Guardian*,  
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<sup>57</sup> *Palestinians In Israel: Segregation, Discrimination and Democracy*. Pluto Press,2012.

The Law of return and the citizenship law are both unequal laws which do not apply and protect all citizens equally. These forbid non-Jewish Israelis from getting a citizenship status which results in a lack of opportunities and resources. This also shows that Israel is not a democracy.

## **Conclusion-**

Democracy is a worldwide system based on laws where the main actors are the people. In order for a state to be fully democratic it has to hold free and fair elections, have the absence of social, political and ethnic inequalities as a part of structural and cultural violence, and legislate laws which apply to all citizens equally. As a state, Israel's democracy was negotiable and not certain, but after writing this extended essay I came to the conclusion that Israel is not fully democratic. While it is true that there are free and fair election in Israel, there is also both structural and cultural violence which is expressed in the form of social, political and ethnic inequalities between the people living within its borders. Furthermore, the laws in Israel do not affect all citizens equally, and even give certain people an advantage over others. This is mainly shown through the Law of Return and the Citizenship law which both affect only the Jewish people.

Therefore, this essay concludes that Israel, a state where citizenship is based on ethnicity cannot be fully democratic.

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