

Israel's Dual Identity: A Comparative Analysis of Ethnic Democracy and Egalitarian Pluralism



Yaron Katz

Holon Institute of Technology, Israel

ABSTRACT: This research examines the tension of Israel's dual identity as a Jewish and democratic state through the frameworks of ethnic democracy articulated by Sammy Smootha and egalitarian pluralism proposed by Gila Stopler. Ethnic democracy prioritizes the preservation of Jewish identity, allowing the Jewish majority to dominate political, economic, and cultural life while providing limited rights to minority groups. In contrast, egalitarian pluralism advocates for structural reforms to promote equality, enhance minority rights, and reduce the influence of religious authority, seeking to reconcile Israel's Jewish character with universal democratic principles. The study employs a comparative analysis of these models, incorporating thematic exploration, case studies, and interpretive inquiry to assess their theoretical foundations, practical applications, and societal implications. Findings reveal that ethnic democracy emphasizes stability and national cohesion at the expense of total inclusivity. At the same time, egalitarian pluralism offers a transformative vision that prioritizes justice and equality but challenges traditional notions of Jewish statehood. The research concludes that the future of Israeli society depends on navigating the inherent tensions between identity and democracy. Ethnic democracy reflects the status quo, while egalitarian pluralism promotes greater inclusivity. These frameworks illuminate broader governance, diversity, and justice debates in ethnically divided societies.

INTRODUCTION

Israel's dual identity as both a Jewish state and a democracy has been a source of ongoing tension and debate. This tension stems from the challenge of reconciling the country's commitment to its Jewish character with its democratic ideals, which include principles of equality, civil rights, and minority protections. Scholars and policymakers have proposed various frameworks to navigate these complexities, each offering distinct approaches to addressing the inherent contradictions in Israel's identity. Among the most prominent perspectives are Sammy Smootha's concept of ethnic democracy and Gila Stopler's model of egalitarian pluralism.

Smootha's ethnic democracy characterizes Israel as a system where democratic institutions coexist with an ethnic framework that privileges Jewish citizens. This model legitimizes Jewish dominance in governance, national identity, and resource distribution while granting non-Jewish minorities limited political rights and protections. According to its proponents, ethnic democracy is a pragmatic compromise allowing Israel to maintain its Jewish identity without abandoning democratic principles. However, critics argue that this framework entrenches systemic inequality, alienates minorities, and undermines Israel's democratic legitimacy.

In contrast, Stopler advocates egalitarian pluralism, a vision that balances Israel's Jewish identity with a more substantial commitment to democratic equality. This approach emphasizes the need for structural reforms to enhance minority rights, reduce religious influence in public policy, and promote inclusivity. Egalitarian pluralism envisions a more equitable society where all citizens, regardless of ethnicity or religion, can participate fully and equally. While this model aligns more closely with liberal democratic ideals, it faces significant resistance from nationalist and religious groups that view it as a threat to Israel's Jewish character.

This essay explores the commonalities and differences between ethnic democracy and egalitarian pluralism, focusing on their influence on Israeli society and politics. It argues that while ethnic democracy reinforces existing power structures and preserves the status quo, egalitarian pluralism offers a transformative vision to foster greater social cohesion and international legitimacy. By examining these contrasting frameworks, the essay sheds light on the critical choices facing Israeli society as it navigates the challenges of identity, governance, and equality in a deeply divided context.

THEORETICAL APPROACH

The theoretical exploration of Israel's identity as a Jewish state and a democracy requires engaging with concepts drawn from political science, sociology, and law. Two distinct frameworks - Sammy Smootha's ethnic democracy and Gila Stopler's egalitarian

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pluralism - provide contrasting theoretical lenses to analyze and evaluate the complex interplay between ethnicity, democracy, and governance in Israel.

Smooha (2002) constructs the concept of ethnic democracy by integrating elements of ethnonationalism with democratic governance. Ethnic democracy operates on the principle that a dominant ethnic group of Jewish citizens can maintain privileged access to political, economic, and cultural resources while permitting minority groups limited participation in democratic institutions.

Ethnonationalism emphasizes the centrality of shared ethnicity, culture, and history in nation-building. In Israel, this is manifested in policies that prioritize Jewish identity, such as the Law of Return and the Nation-State Law. Ethnic democracy theorizes that majority dominance is compatible with basic democratic structures as long as minority rights are recognized to some extent. However, the extent of these rights is inherently subordinate to the dominant group's interests. Smooha suggests that ethnic democracy manages intergroup tensions through control mechanisms rather than full integration or equality. He frames ethnic democracy as a pragmatic response to the existential challenges of maintaining Israel's Jewish character while accommodating its democratic commitments. This framework, however, operates with significant tensions between inclusivity and exclusion and between universal democratic principles and ethnocentric priorities.

Stopler (2013) offers an alternative framework through her theory of egalitarian pluralism, which is grounded in liberal democratic principles and multiculturalism theories. Egalitarian pluralism seeks to reconcile Jewish identity with democratic commitments by advocating for equality, minority protections, and secular governance. The model builds on liberal democracy, emphasizing equal rights and the protection of minorities as foundational to a just society. It challenges ethnonationalism by arguing that democratic legitimacy requires substantive equality for all citizens. This approach stresses the need for institutional arrangements that allow all groups to thrive without dominance or marginalization.

Egalitarian pluralism incorporates the principle of secular governance, as theorized by political thinkers such as John Locke and Alexis de Tocqueville. This entails limiting the role of religious authority in public policy to protect individual freedoms and minority rights. Stopler's model envisions a society that transcends ethnocentric governance, balancing the preservation of Israel's Jewish identity with a commitment to inclusive democratic principles.

Both frameworks address the challenges of ethnic diversity and democracy but differ in their prioritization of values. Ethnic democracy prioritizes the preservation of Jewish identity as central to the state's purpose, while egalitarian pluralism emphasizes equality and inclusivity, even if it means redefining the state's identity. Ethnic democracy relies on mechanisms of control to manage societal cleavages, while egalitarian pluralism aims for integration through institutional reforms that address structural inequalities. From a theoretical perspective, ethnic democracy and egalitarian pluralism offer distinct pathways with significant societal and political implications. Ethnic democracy is more aligned with realist approaches, prioritizing stability and majority interests in segmented societies. Egalitarian pluralism, by contrast, aligns with normative theories advocating for justice, fairness, and long-term cohesion through equal participation and shared identity.

By examining these theoretical foundations, this essay explores how these frameworks influence Israel's governance, intergroup relations, and democratic legitimacy, shedding light on the challenges and opportunities for navigating its unique identity as a Jewish and democratic state.

METHODOLOGY

This research employs a qualitative methodology to examine and compare the frameworks of ethnic democracy and egalitarian pluralism as they relate to Israel's dual identity as a Jewish and democratic state. The study focuses on the theoretical underpinnings, practical implications, and societal outcomes associated with each framework, utilizing a combination of comparative analysis, case studies, and interpretive inquiry. The research is designed as a comparative analysis, juxtaposing the two frameworks - Sammy Smooha's ethnic democracy and Gila Stopler's egalitarian pluralism - to identify their points of convergence, divergence, and influence on Israeli society and politics.

Data is drawn from various primary and secondary sources, including peer-reviewed articles, books, and essays by Sammy Smooha, Gila Stopler, and other scholars specializing in political science, sociology, and law. To frame the comparison, themes such as identity, equality, governance, minority rights, and societal cohesion are extracted from the literature. The two models are compared across critical dimensions, including their theoretical underpinnings, implications for democracy, and approaches to managing diversity and inclusion. Specific cases, such as the legal and political controversies surrounding the Nation-State Law or the role of religious authority in public policy, are analyzed to illustrate each framework's practical applications and limitations.

The study focuses on Israel as a case study to explore the broader theoretical debates about democracy, ethnicity, and governance in divided societies. While grounded in the Israeli context, the findings may offer insights applicable to other ethnically or religiously divided states. Nevertheless, the study is limited by the reliance on existing literature and secondary data, which may not fully capture recent or emerging trends in Israeli society. Furthermore, the complexity of Israeli politics and identity may result in varying interpretations of the frameworks. Given the sensitivity of the subject matter, the research avoids polemical or partisan arguments, aiming instead for a balanced and scholarly examination.

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Ethnic Democracy

Samocha's work, particularly in the context of nationalism, state-building, and ethnic identity, can provide a foundational theoretical and methodological framework for researching Israeli nationalism and its implications for democracy and politics. His perspectives revolve around the interaction between ethnic, cultural, and political dimensions in national identity formation. Drawing on his theories, this research incorporates additional layers of analysis regarding the dynamics of Israeli nationalism, its relationship with democratic values, and the complexities of minority rights within the Israeli state.

Samoocha (2004) discusses the concept of ethnic democracy and how it applies to Israel, focusing on the political system and how the state privileges the Jewish majority while maintaining a democratic structure that includes non-Jewish minorities. This concept relates to how democratic institutions are constructed in states with a dominant ethnic or national group. In this context, Israel can be seen as an example of an ethnic democracy, where the state is designed around the interests, identity, and priorities of Jewish citizens while maintaining specific democratic structures that theoretically apply to all citizens, including Israeli Arabs.

Drawing from Samocha's framework, the research explores how Israel functions as an ethnic democracy, where the majority (Jewish citizens) retains a dominant political, cultural, and social position while minority groups face systemic disadvantages. Samocha's work helps explain the tensions between Israel's commitment to democratic values and the privileging of Jewish identity, providing a lens to understand the conflicts between nationalism and minority rights within the Israeli state.

Samocha's (2015) analysis of the intersection between ethnicity and politics could be used to investigate how Israel's Jewish identity has influenced its policies toward Arab citizens and the broader Arab world. He examines how Israel's commitment to democracy and nationalism interact, particularly regarding the treatment of Arab citizens, providing insights into the wider debates on the relationship between national identity and democratic ideals in ethnically based states. For example, Samocha's emphasis on politicizing ethnic identity in nation-states can provide a valuable approach to examining Israeli national identity in public policy. This would include the legal, social, and economic privileges given to Jewish citizens, as well as the institutionalized forms of exclusion experienced by Palestinian citizens and the occupied Palestinian territories.

Samocha (2013) explores nationalism's theoretical framework and role in generating ethnic conflicts. He also critiques the traditional ways nationalism has been linked to statehood and proposes alternatives for understanding ethnic conflict, particularly within the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. His framework helps to understand the structures that maintain Jewish dominance in Israeli politics, including the Law of Return, Jewish settlement policies, and laws regarding the definition of Israel as a Jewish state. Samocha's theories provide a way to analyze the cultural and political mechanisms that uphold this ethnic hierarchy and its implications for Israeli democracy.

Samocha's (2002) approach to nation-building, especially in the context of states with ethnic majorities, highlights the role of institutions in consolidating national identity. For Israel, this perspective is beneficial when examining the role of institutions such as the military, education system, and legal framework in fostering and reinforcing Jewish national identity. Samocha's work can inform the research by providing a theoretical backdrop for understanding how Israeli nationalism is institutionalized and how these institutions reinforce or challenge the notions of democracy and minority rights within the state.

The Israeli Defense Force (IDF) is central to the national identity of many Israelis, and their role in defending Jewish identity, both within Israel and in the occupied territories, could be analyzed through Samocha's lens of how nation-states construct their identity. Additionally, the educational system in Israel plays a crucial role in instilling a Jewish national consciousness among young Israelis while also presenting narratives that exclude or marginalize Palestinian perspectives. This could be explored further by using Samocha's theories on the role of national education systems in maintaining ethnic-based national identities.

Samocha's work on the relationship between ethnic identity and democracy is particularly relevant to understanding the dynamics of ethnic conflict. He discusses the mechanisms maintaining Jewish dominance in the state, the legal frameworks prioritizing Jewish identity, and the political consequences for Arab citizens (Samoocha, 2017). Israel, as a state with a dominant Jewish identity, faces ongoing tensions between the majority and the Palestinian Arab minority within its borders, as well as with Palestinians in the occupied territories. Samocha's theories could offer insight into how the Israeli state balances its commitments to democracy with the protection of the Jewish identity, often to the detriment of Palestinian rights and sovereignty.

By applying Samocha's analysis, the research reflects the ongoing struggle to reconcile democratic principles with preserving the Jewish ethnic majority. This includes issues such as restrictions on land ownership, political representation, and the challenges to the recognition of Palestinian culture and identity within Israeli institutions. Samocha's work on ethnic conflict would help analyze how the state's ethnic foundations contribute to or exacerbate tensions between Israelis and Palestinians.

Incorporating Samocha's theories into this research allows a deeper understanding of the intersection between Israeli nationalism and its democratic structures. By focusing on how ethnic identity shapes political institutions, policies, and minority rights, Samocha's framework helps elucidate the challenges faced by Israel in maintaining a balance between its Jewish character and democratic commitments. Through this approach, the research can offer a nuanced analysis of how nationalism in Israel influences domestic politics and the broader Israeli-Palestinian conflict, providing valuable insights into potential paths toward greater democracy and coexistence.

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Egalitarian Pluralism

Gila Stopler (2013) proposed an "egalitarian pluralism" approach to reconciling Israel's identity as a Jewish and democratic state. This model seeks to balance Israel's Jewish character with its democratic principles, ensuring complete and equal rights for all citizens, including minorities. Her argument is based on reconciling Jewish identity and democracy. Stopler acknowledges the challenges of the Jewish state's dual identity, including its self-definition and democratic commitments. She argues that these identities need not be inherently contradictory if reforms ensure that the state equally respects and accommodates diverse identities while maintaining its Jewish cultural heritage.

Egalitarian pluralism is based on equality for all citizens. It emphasizes equal civil, political, and social rights for all Israeli citizens, including Arab minorities. While affirming Israel's Jewish identity, the approach advocates for greater recognition of non-Jewish citizens' cultural and national identities, predominantly the Arab minority. The balance between majority and minority rights calls for safeguarding the rights of minorities without undermining the collective identity of the Jewish majority.

Stopler argues that legal protections should strengthen minority rights, including enhancing anti-discrimination laws and ensuring minority groups have equal access to state resources and opportunities. This should also promote more significant political and social inclusion for Arab citizens and minorities in government and public institutions.

She stresses the importance of educational and cultural autonomy and supports initiatives that preserve and celebrate minority traditions, languages, and histories. This includes strengthening individual freedoms and civil liberties, such as freedom of expression, religion, and association, and ensuring that the fundamental rights of minorities are protected, even when their views or practices differ from those of the Jewish majority.

A significant aspect of Stopler's agenda is reducing the dominance of religious authority, especially ultra-Orthodox Jewish influence, in shaping public policy. She argues for reforms in secularizing family law and allowing citizens civil marriage and divorce options, reducing the control of religious institutions over public services like education, kosher certification, and Sabbath observance, and protecting individual freedoms to ensure that religious norms do not infringe upon the rights of secular or non-Jewish citizens.

However, implementing this agenda would be challenging since egalitarian pluralism would face challenges from groups that see any reduction in Jewish privilege or religious authority as a threat to Israel's Jewish identity. Stopler emphasizes fostering a societal culture of pluralism and mutual respect to support these reforms and acknowledges that these reforms would require gradual implementation to avoid backlash and to build consensus.

Stopler's egalitarian pluralism offers a vision for Israel where Jewish identity and democratic values coexist harmoniously. By enhancing minority rights, promoting inclusivity, and curbing the influence of religious authority in public life, this approach seeks to create a more equitable society. It provides a path for addressing the tensions in Israel's dual identity while upholding its commitment to democracy and human rights.

Stopler's egalitarian pluralism offers a countermodel that seeks to reconcile Israel's Jewish identity with its democratic commitments by emphasizing equality and minority rights. This perspective advocates for reforms to ensure that all citizens, regardless of ethnicity or religion, enjoy equal rights and opportunities.

Egalitarian pluralism calls for institutional changes to reduce systemic discrimination. These include enacting stronger anti-discrimination laws, ensuring equal funding for Arab-majority areas, and promoting representation for minorities in public institutions. Such reforms would enhance minority participation in governance, fostering a sense of inclusion and shared responsibility for the state's future.

Stopler's model envisions a political system where Arab parties and leaders can influence national policy on an equal footing with their Jewish counterparts. This would require dismantling structural barriers and encouraging cross-community coalitions. More excellent representation could lead to policies that more effectively address the needs of Arab citizens, reducing intergroup tensions and promoting national cohesion.

A key component of egalitarian pluralism is reducing the dominance of religious authority in public policy. This includes reforms such as allowing civil marriage and divorce, regulating religious monopolies, and protecting individual freedoms from religious coercion. By secularizing aspects of public life, egalitarian pluralism could empower secular and non-Jewish citizens, fostering a more inclusive societal identity. It would also mitigate conflicts between religious and secular Jewish communities, creating a more harmonious society. Reducing religious influence could shift the political landscape by weakening the power of ultra-Orthodox parties and encouraging policies that reflect broader societal interests. For example, it could lead to more progressive stances on gender equality, LGBTQ+ rights, and minority protections.

Egalitarian pluralism seeks to redefine Israeli identity as inclusive of all its citizens, not just Jews. This involves recognizing the cultural and national identities of Arab citizens while maintaining Israel's Jewish character. Policies promoting cultural recognition and economic equality could foster a sense of belonging among Arab citizens, reducing alienation and grievances. A more inclusive national identity could foster greater cooperation and mutual respect between Jewish and Arab communities. By fostering pluralism, this model challenges ethnocentric narratives and encourages Jewish citizens to view diversity as a strength rather than a threat. However, it could also face resistance from groups that perceive these reforms as diluting Israel's Jewish identity.

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Egalitarian pluralism aligns more closely with liberal democratic principles, emphasizing equality, individual rights, and minority protections. It aims to strengthen Israel's democratic legitimacy both domestically and internationally. Adopting egalitarian pluralism could enhance Israel's standing as a democracy by addressing criticisms of systemic inequality. This shift would also strengthen alliances with liberal democracies and improve relations with international bodies.

The debate between ethnic democracy and egalitarian pluralism reflects deeper divisions within Israeli society. Proponents of ethnic democracy align with nationalist and right-wing ideologies, while supporters of egalitarian pluralism are typically found among left-wing and progressive groups. These divisions manifest in contentious policy debates, such as those over the Nation-State Law or reforms to religious authority.

Egalitarian pluralism offers a pathway toward greater social cohesion by promoting equality and mutual respect. In contrast, ethnic democracy risks deepening societal divides by perpetuating inequality and alienation among minorities. While egalitarian pluralism offers a compelling vision for reform, its implementation faces significant challenges, including resistance from religious and nationalist groups. This contrasts Ethnic democracy, which aligns more closely with the status quo, making it easier to maintain but less likely to address underlying tensions.

Commonalities and Differences

Sammy Smootha's concept of ethnic democracy and Gila Stopler's advocacy for egalitarian pluralism offer two frameworks for analyzing Israel's dual identity as a Jewish and democratic state. Both principles address the tension between the state's Jewish character and democratic commitments. However, they diverge in their goals, assumptions, and solutions for reconciling this dual identity. The following discussion analyses the similarities and differences between these two approaches and explores how they conceptualize the relationship between ethnicity, democracy, and minority rights in Israel.

Both Smootha and Stopler agree that Israel's identity as a Jewish and democratic state creates inherent challenges. Smootha acknowledges the tensions between privileging Jewish citizens and maintaining democratic structures that include minority rights. Stopler argues that these challenges are not insurmountable and advocates for a framework to reconcile these dual aspects through structural reform. Both frameworks are rooted in the reality that Israel defines itself as a nation-state of the Jewish people while also granting citizenship to Arab and other non-Jewish minorities.

Both models operate within the framework of democracy, emphasizing the importance of democratic institutions. Smootha's ethnic democracy relies on functioning democratic mechanisms such as elections, political representation, and civil liberties. Stopler's egalitarian pluralism similarly emphasizes democratic principles, notably equality and civil rights for all citizens, as a cornerstone of reform. Despite differing scopes, both perspectives acknowledge the centrality of democracy to Israel's political system.

Both approaches recognize the systemic inequalities faced by Arab minorities in Israel. Smootha explicitly describes the limited inclusion of Arab citizens in the political and social fabric of the state, framing this as a necessary consequence of prioritizing Jewish ethnic dominance. Stopler also acknowledges that Arab citizens face institutional discrimination and marginalization but views this as a problem to be addressed through egalitarian reforms. The difference lies in their responses: Smootha sees inequality as inherent to ethnic democracy, while Stopler argues that it must be minimized through systemic changes.

Both frameworks maintain that Israel's Jewish identity is central to its character. Smootha frames Jewish dominance as a defining feature of Israel's political system, which he argues is consistent with the concept of ethnic democracy. Stopler accepts the Jewish character of the state but seeks to balance it with democratic inclusivity by promoting pluralism and reducing ethnic dominance.

However, there are significant differences in their core assumptions. Smootha assumes that ethnic dominance is a natural and legitimate feature of Israel's political system, given its founding purpose as a Jewish homeland. His model justifies privileging Jewish citizens while maintaining democratic structures for minorities. This descriptive framework focuses on how ethnic dominance functions within a democratic context. In contrast, Stopler rejects the inevitability of ethnic dominance, arguing that Israel can and must achieve a balance between its Jewish and democratic identities. Her approach is prescriptive, proposing reforms to reduce inequality and promote inclusivity.

Smootha sees the marginalization of minorities as an unavoidable consequence of Israel's ethnic democracy. While Arab citizens have formal rights (e.g., voting and political participation), their practical equality is limited by policies and structures that favor Jewish citizens. He views this as a necessary compromise to preserve the Jewish character of the state. In contrast, Stopler strongly emphasizes strengthening minority rights. She advocates for reforms to eliminate systemic discrimination and ensure equal access to resources, representation, and opportunities for all citizens, including Arab minorities. Her approach aims to transform Israel into a genuinely egalitarian society.

There is a significant difference in the role of religion in both theories. Religion plays a secondary role in Smootha's ethnic democracy framework, while Stopler identifies the dominance of religious authority as a significant barrier to achieving egalitarian pluralism. According to Smootha, while Jewish identity encompasses cultural, national, and religious dimensions, he focuses more on ethnicity and national identity as sources of dominance. In contrast, Stopler advocates for secular reforms, such as introducing civil marriage and divorce, regulating religious monopolies, and protecting individual freedoms from religious coercion.

As his model is primarily descriptive, Smootha does not propose significant reforms to address inequalities. He implies that Israel's ethnic democracy is stable and sustainable as long as the state maintains its democratic institutions while preserving Jewish

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dominance. In contrast, Stopler's egalitarian pluralism is explicitly reformist. She calls for legal and institutional changes to reduce ethnic dominance and religious influence.

As a result, both scholars have different visions for the future. Smootha envisions a future where Israel remains an ethnic democracy, with its Jewish character preserved through ethnic dominance. He does not advocate for fundamental changes to this system. In contrast, Stopler envisions a more inclusive and equitable Israel, where Jewish identity coexists with democratic values on an equal footing. Her transformative vision is to create a society where all citizens enjoy full equality and civil liberties.

Both scholars also differ in their global comparisons. Smootha situates Israel within a broader category of ethnic democracies, such as Estonia and Latvia, where one ethnic group maintains dominance while minority rights are subordinated. In contrast, Stopler does not rely on global comparisons but focuses on developing a uniquely Israeli model of pluralism that balances its Jewish and democratic commitments.

Smootha's model is relatively stable in the short term because it reflects the status quo, where Jewish dominance is deeply entrenched. However, it risks deepening social divisions and international criticism over minority discrimination. In contrast, Stopler's approach faces significant political and social resistance, particularly from religious and nationalist groups. Nonetheless, it offers a long-term solution to reducing inequality and fostering national unity.

This aspect emphasizes their contrasting views on the impact on minority relations. Smootha's ethnic democracy perpetuates systemic inequalities, which may exacerbate tensions between Jewish and Arab citizens. In contrast, Stopler's egalitarian pluralism seeks to bridge these divides by promoting inclusion and equal rights, potentially fostering greater social cohesion.

Reconciling Identity and Democracy

This research discusses the contrasting frameworks of ethnic democracy and egalitarian pluralism related to Israel's dual identity as a Jewish and democratic state. It examines the inherent tensions and challenges of balancing Israel's Jewish character with its democratic commitments. These differences show that Sammy Smootha's concept of ethnic democracy, which describes Israel as a democratic state that prioritizes Jewish identity and ethnic dominance, integrates democratic institutions with policies that favor the Jewish majority. In contrast, Gila Stopler's vision of egalitarian pluralism advocates for structural reforms to create a more inclusive and equitable society by challenging the status quo by proposing measures to reconcile Israel's Jewish identity with universal democratic values, ensuring equal treatment and opportunities for all citizens, regardless of ethnicity or religion. It frames the choice between ethnic democracy and egalitarian pluralism as a critical decision point for Israel, with profound consequences for its political trajectory, intergroup relations, and alignment with democratic ideals.

These models highlight the tension between maintaining a Jewish national character and upholding democratic principles of equality and inclusiveness. Smootha's ethnic democracy focuses on preserving Jewish dominance within democratic structures, allowing ethnic prioritization while granting non-Jewish minorities limited rights. This approach highlights the compromises Israel makes to balance ethnic identity with democratic mechanisms but underscores the systemic inequalities and marginalization experienced by Arab citizens. Stopler's egalitarian pluralism, in contrast, advocates for a transformative vision that promotes inclusivity and equality, challenging the structural prioritization of Jewish identity. This model seeks to redefine the balance by emphasizing democratic ideals that accommodate the diverse identities within Israel.

The discussion relates to reconciling identity and democracy by presenting these models as competing approaches to addressing the complex interplay of ethnicity, governance, and societal cohesion in Israel. It underscores the critical decisions Israel faces in determining whether to prioritize its ethnic character or pursue a more inclusive democratic system, framing the broader debate over how identity and democracy can coexist in a deeply divided society.

Smootha's ethnic democracy and Stopler's egalitarian pluralism present sharply contrasting frameworks for understanding and addressing the complexities of Israel's dual identity as a Jewish and democratic state. Smootha offers a descriptive analysis of the existing system, characterizing Israel as an ethnic democracy - a model that integrates democratic institutions with policies favoring the Jewish majority. In contrast, Stopler advocates for egalitarian pluralism, a normative vision aimed at reforming the existing structures to achieve greater inclusivity and equality for all citizens.

Both frameworks engage with the inherent tensions between Israel's Jewish identity and its democratic commitments. However, they diverge in their underlying assumptions, objectives, and strategies. Smootha's model prioritizes maintaining the dominance of the Jewish majority while preserving democratic mechanisms, albeit in a limited capacity for minorities. Stopler's approach challenges the status quo, proposing systemic reforms to reconcile Jewish identity with liberal democratic ideals.

Ethnic democracy, as articulated by Smootha, depicts a state where democratic principles coexist with ethnic dominance. Israel operates under a system that guarantees formal political rights to Arab citizens, such as the right to vote, run for office, and engage in political discourse, while simultaneously privileging Jewish citizens through cultural, legal, and institutional mechanisms. Policies like the Law of Return and the Nation-State Law reinforce Jewish dominance, embedding preferential treatment in areas such as citizenship, resource allocation, and national identity.

Despite its democratic facade, the system fosters significant disparities. Arab citizens often face institutionalized discrimination in housing, education, employment, and political representation. These inequalities perpetuate a sense of disenfranchisement among Arab minorities, highlighting the challenges of achieving genuine equality under an ethnic democracy framework. While Smootha

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acknowledges the inherent tensions between democracy and ethnicity, he positions ethnic democracy as a pragmatic compromise rather than an ideal model.

Critics of ethnic democracy, including scholars like Yiftachel (2006), argue that the model insufficiently addresses systemic inequities and suggest that Israel's governance may align more closely with ethnocracy. This ethnic-based system undermines democratic principles. While prioritizing Jewish identity fosters national solidarity among Jews, it exacerbates divisions with non-Jewish minorities, contributing to intergroup tensions and international scrutiny over Israel's democratic image.

Stopler's egalitarian pluralism, by contrast, advocates for a transformative shift towards inclusivity. This model envisions a society where all citizens, regardless of ethnicity or religion, are treated equitably within a genuinely democratic framework. Such a vision challenges entrenched structures and calls for reforms that balance Israel's Jewish identity with universal democratic values. It aims to dismantle systemic discrimination, promote integration, and ensure equal access to resources and opportunities for all citizens.

The choice between these frameworks carries profound implications for Israel's societal and political trajectory. Smoocha's model preserves the current balance, prioritizing Jewish dominance while sustaining basic democratic institutions. Stopler's vision demands a reimagining of the state's identity and governance, with the potential to redefine Israel's relationship with its minority populations and its global democratic standing. Ultimately, the path Israel chooses will shape its future as both a Jewish and democratic state, influencing its internal cohesion and external relations.

CONCLUSION

This research explored the interplay between Israel's Jewish identity and its democratic commitments through the lenses of two theoretical frameworks: Sammy Smoocha's concept of ethnic democracy and Gila Stopler's model of egalitarian pluralism. Each framework offers a distinct approach to addressing the inherent tensions between these dual commitments, reflecting divergent priorities and values in navigating Israel's identity as a Jewish and democratic state.

Ethnic democracy, as articulated by Smoocha, seeks to preserve the Jewish character of the state while maintaining democratic institutions. It legitimizes the dominance of the Jewish majority and acknowledges minority rights within a limited and subordinate framework. This model views the prioritization of the Jewish ethos as essential for national cohesion and survival. However, it does so at the expense of complete equality, often alienating minority groups and generating domestic and international criticism. Ethnic democracy presents itself as a pragmatic solution, but it perpetuates structural inequalities and undermines Israel's democratic aspirations.

In contrast, as proposed by Stopler, egalitarian pluralism aims to create a more inclusive society by enhancing minority rights, reducing the influence of religious authority, and fostering equality. This model is rooted in liberal democratic ideals and emphasizes reconciling Israel's Jewish identity with universal principles of justice and fairness. Egalitarian pluralism seeks to transform the status quo by advocating for structural reforms that address systemic inequalities and promote a more cohesive and democratic society. While this framework aligns with global democratic norms, it faces significant resistance from those who fear that such reforms could dilute Israel's Jewish character.

The comparative analysis of these frameworks highlights insights. First, the frameworks reveal competing visions for the future of Israeli society—one focused on maintaining ethno-national dominance and the other on fostering inclusivity and pluralism. Second, each approach has profound implications for governance, intergroup relations, and Israel's international standing. Ethnic democracy reinforces existing power structures and prioritizes stability, while egalitarian pluralism offers a transformative vision to enhance social cohesion and democratic legitimacy. Finally, the research underscores the challenges inherent in reconciling identity and democracy in a deeply divided society.

The path forward for Israel lies in striking a delicate balance between preserving its Jewish identity and upholding its democratic ideals. While ethnic democracy provides a framework for managing the status quo, egalitarian pluralism offers a vision for a more equitable and sustainable future. The choice between these models reflects broader questions about the nature of democracy, the role of identity in nation-building, and the principles that should guide governance in diverse and divided societies. As Israel continues to navigate these complexities, the frameworks of ethnic democracy and egalitarian pluralism remain critical tools for understanding and addressing the challenges of its unique dual identity.

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