What can the Israeli case contribute to a comparative study?
by Lorenzo Kamel

One of the aims of comparative political sciences is - to borrow the words of Ragin and Rubinson - to find "invariant or at least highly consistent connections between causal conditions and outcomes" (Ragin and Rubinson 2009, 18). The comparative method can enable us to "broaden our understanding of the political world" and to "test hypotheses about politics" (Hague and Harrop 2004, 69). If we follow an ideal-typical method of comparison, namely Mill's method of the *most similar*[1] or *most different research design*[2] in comparative political science, then Israel is a very relevant case to study due to its uniqueness in many respects. With all her special features, Israel can be a most crucial "case" in testing existing theory of comparative political sciences, as well as in setting up new theory. In the following, I will make reference to existing theory in the fields of democratization, terrorism, religion and democracy, and the foreign policy behavior of democracies to show how the comparative study of Israel contributes to all of them.

Democratization

One of the most important areas of comparative political sciences is democratization research. The most important theorems, which evolved, are the modernization theory of Lipset (1960) and its further developments (i.e. a certain level of wealth, education, human development, strong middle class, relatively equal distribution of wealth, market economy); the cultural background (i.e. the Protestant culture as prone to democratization or – according to Huntington's (1996) clash of civilization – the Islamic culture as resistant); Putnam's (1993) social capital theory; low levels of external and internal conflicts; British colonization history, democratization by foreign intervention and democracy promotion; and the snowball theorem (i.e. the spill-over of democratization in a region in the world – Huntington's (1991) 'third wave' can also be seen in this scenario).

How can Israel be seen in this context? First of all, we need to go back to the establishment of the Jewish State and the set-up of democracy. Discussing

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[1] In this case, the key explanatory factor would be different for the case of Israel, while all other factors are held constant.

[2] In this case, the key explanatory factor is the same in Israel and other countries, but all other features vary.

the modernization theory, Israel was comparatively poor, but the immigrants who had come to Israel from Europe and Arab states were highly educated and in a short time managed to increase also the economic wealth. So, to the modernization theory, the case of Israel contributes highly in showing the important aspect of education actually preceding wealth. In addition, it shows the importance of egalitarianism and the high social capital, which existed in Israel in the early years of democratization. This binds a society together in going through economic ups and downs like inflation, which Israel suffered several times. Israel is also a special case in being part of the second wave of democratizations without a protestant cultural background. The case of Israel led researchers to accept that it is not the protestant background which matters, but the Judeo-Christian culture. In addition to this, a high level of external conflict did not prevent democratization in Israel as it did in many other cases. However, using a method of counterfactual reasoning, we could expect Israeli democracy to be much closer to the utopian "democracy" than it currently is with cuts in democratic freedoms like media freedom or freedom of movement or equal civil rights. Last, concerning the snowball theorem, Israel could be seen as a part of the European wave of democratization, in that the elite in Israel had been socialized in Europe. Furthermore, we can see that the states around Israel in the Middle East enjoy a higher level of "democratization" than other states in the Mashrek and Maghreb. If we look at Freedom House's (2009) map of the Maghreb and Mashrek, we see that Jordan and Lebanon enjoy higher levels of freedom than other Arab countries, except for Morocco, which is neighboring the European Union. There might be a correlation and qualitative case studies into this subject would be interesting. To sum up, the case of Israel can highly contribute to existing theories on democratization, especially when conducting qualitative studies which would show the concrete causal mechanisms at work.

Democracy and Terrorism

All Western democracies today fight with the challenge of how to reconcile the security needs of their citizens in face of terrorism with the liberal freedoms that the state has to guarantee. With all the cuts of liberal freedoms in Western democracies as an answer to terrorism today, one could say - by paraphrasing Toynbee (1948) - that civilizations, and for extension also democracies, die from suicide rather than murder. Political scientists are thus requested to provide possible answers on how to balance the security needs with the necessity of liberal freedoms. Israel, who suffered from a much higher level of terrorism than any other democracy, is thus a critical case to study. Naturally, much research in this field comes from Israeli universities and can highly contribute to Western political science research in this area. Hofnung and Weinshall, for

example, show that contrary to existing research which argues that supreme courts are reluctant to intervene in security-base decisions and to enforce human rights, the Israeli supreme court "does play a significant role in reducing human rights violations" (Hofnung and Weinshal 2009).

Jewish Democratic State

Another particularity of the State of Israel is that it is a Jewish and a democratic state. This can generate comparative insights into the role of religion in a democracy, which has also recently been discussed in Europe, when the debate of mentioning "Christian values" in a European constitution swept the European democracies. Also in Israel there was a debate, if the concepts of Jewish state and democratic state are compatible. Israeli Justice Aharon Barak believes them to be compatible, even complementary and harmonious as the "fundamental values of Judaism are the fundamental values of the state" (Barak, quoted in Elon 2008). Nonetheless, state and religion in Israel are less separated than in most other Western democracies, which makes Israel a crucial case to study. For example, marriage in Israel is regulated by the religious authorities, and there is no civil marriage in Israel (even though a civil marriage from abroad is accepted in Israel). The system is thus still based on the rules of the Ottoman period and rather mirrors the systems in the Arab neighboring states, than the typical system in Western democracies.

In addition, the concept of democratic and Jewish state also leads to legitimacy problems of the state in the eyes of its minorities. Symbols of the state like the flag or the national anthem do not include the Arab minorities, and, additionally, while having full political rights, the civil rights of the minorities are not full-fledged. Peled (1992, 432) for example argues that Israel is an ethnic democracy and that Arab citizen status is "much more restricted than the Jewish." Also Shultziner (2009) claims that today the "civil rights of the Arab citizens of Israel are far from equal to that of their Jewish counterparts." Guy Ben-Porat (2009) shows that Israel faces a multicultural and multiethnic reality with challenges to democracy. So, Israel also is a crucial case to study concepts such as ethnic or multicultural democracy.

Foreign Policy Behavior of Democracies

Finally, Israel also is a crucial case to study for international relations researchers, especially if they concentrate on studying the "democratic peace thesis" (see Doyle 1983a, 1983b), which implies that democracies do not wage wars against each other. In this respect, Israel could be an important case to study, as the Lebanon war could be portrayed as a possible exception to this law-like thesis of democratic peace. Second, some democratic peace theorists

also believe that democracies are generally more peaceful than non-democracies. In the "Perpetual Peace" Immanuel Kant (1795) hypothesized that republics are more peaceful, as people do not want to carry the burden of war and will thus decide against it. In the case of Israel, we can concretely study the internal mechanisms that lead to opposition to war or occupation. Thus, we can study if democracies give rise to internal mechanisms that indeed could make them more peaceful in their foreign policy behavior than non-democracies.

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