Solving Problems Informally

The Influence of Israel's Political Culture on the Public Policy Process

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ABSTRACT

This paper describes and explains the informal influence of Israeli political culture on the public policy process. I will demonstrate how informal elements are rooted in Israeli society and are an integral part of its public policy and administration. Specifically, I explain the impact of a particular type of political culture, called "alternative politics" in the Israeli literature, on public policy and institutional settings. Alternative politics is based on a "do-it-yourself" approach adopted by citizens to address their dissatisfaction with governmental services. When such a mode of political culture (whose purpose is to informally solve everyday problems) is diffused to all sectors and levels of society, all players, including bureaucrats and politicians, are guided by short-term considerations and apply unilateral strategies that bypass formal rules either through illegal activity or by marginalizing formal rules. Hence, the notion of alternative politics is not confined only to the Israeli experience, as elements of this issue emerge as part of the dialogue about political culture in Arab countries, as well as in other societies around the world.

Keywords: Alternative politics, Israeli politics, political culture, wasta.

Introduction

Informal behavior and activities are an integral part of many societies in the Middle East and considered part of the political culture in the region. In their classic research, Cunningham and Sarayrah (1993) identified the concept of *wasta,* which they defined as a "hidden force behind the Mediterranean society" and an explanatory variable of decision making in Mediterranean societies. Literally, the meaning of the word in Arabic is "middle" or in declension, to push two sides of a dispute to a middle point or compromise between them. Nevertheless, in recent decades the word has come to mean to "receive dividends from the government" (through connections) or a method of overcoming societal obstacles such as obtaining employment through connections (Al Ramahi, 2008; Kilani and Sakijha, 2002). We may refer to this phenomenon as an informal, culture-oriented strategy that bypasses formal rules in order to solve immediate problems.

While some may argue that the political culture in Western or democratic societies will always be completely different than the political culture in non-Western or non-democratic societies, in this chapter I will argue that such dichotomies will not always exist. Social processes do not need to be distinctive to a single national culture or to a cluster of culturally allied national cultures (Smith et al. 2012: 147). Hence, in some cases, we may point to behaviors that stem from informal, culturally based practices as a dominant factor that influences public policy processes – regardless of the type of political regime. Therefore, under certain conditions, even after decades of democracy, informal activities whose purpose is to solve immediate problems by influence policy results may still exist in a society – while 'traditional' channels of political participation are marginalized.

This article describes and explains the informal influence of Israeli political culture on the public policy process. In contrast to studies of formal public policy, the focus of the essay is on informal modes of influence and activities. As I will demonstrate, these informal elements are rooted in Israeli society and are an integral part of its public policy and administration. The chapter explains the impact of a specific type of political culture, called "alternative politics" in the Israeli literature, on public policy and institutional settings. Alternative politics is based on a "do-it-yourself" approach adopted by citizens to address their dissatisfaction with governmental services. These actions are described as *alternative*, because this informal behavior becomes an integral part of the political culture and political behavior processes. When such a mode of political culture is diffused to all sectors and levels of society, all players, including bureaucrats and politicians, are guided by short-term considerations and apply unilateral strategies that bypass formal rules either through illegal activity or by marginalizing formal rules in order to solve various problems. Hence, the notion of alternative politics is not confined only to the Israeli experience. Elements of this approach are evident in discussions about the political culture in Arab countries, as well as in other societies around the world.

The paper has four sections and is structured as follows. The next section presents and discusses cross-national examples of culture-based informal behavior whose purpose is to solve collective action problems. This review substantiates my claim that informal activities do not depend on the type of government or regime and the fact that this *modus operandi* is not unique to specific cultures. Rather, it exists in various societies around the world. In the second section, I will describe the functioning of the process of solving problems informally. I will provide further empirical support for my claim in the third section, in which I will describe the Israeli political culture. While demonstrating how informal initiatives became an integral part of Israeli political culture, I will show that this pattern of behavior slowly defused to most Israeli policy domains and political players. I will also show how alternative politics and elements associated with this problematic phenomenon are becoming a dominant explanatory variable in Israel's domestic and even foreign policy. The fourth section will be devoted to a discussion and a summary.

Using Informal, Culturally Based Practices in Order to Influence Policy Results around the World

Behaviors stemming from informal, culturally based practices are a phenomenon evident in various societies around the world (Smith et al., 2012b). These behaviors all share the goal of solving social problems informally. The literature identifies at least six principal modes of interpersonal influence that have been proposed as important but culturally distinctive: *wasta* in Arab countries, *guanxi* in Chinese cultures, *jeitinho* in Brazil, *svyazi* in Russia, *jaan-pehchaan* in India and "pulling strings" in the UK.

Wasta is an Arabic word that means the intervention of a patron in favor of a client in an attempt to obtain privileges or resources from a third party. It is based on familial or clan loyalty, which Arabs leverage to obtain positions or promote their causes in government offices and sometimes academic institutions. If one is close with the group in power, he or she will receive preferable services. *Wasta* is a salient practice in many Arab nations (Ali and Al-Kazemi, 2006; El-Said and McDonald, 2001: 77; Kilani and Sakijha, 2002; Mellahi and Wood, 2003; Yahiaoui and Zoubir, 2006).

Wasta is a strategy that people use in order to solve everyday problems. *Wasta* is used when people are dissatisfied with the given conditions and believe that formal influence channels are blocked or may be more costly to use than informal channels. Hence, they can achieve their goals through links with key persons in positions of high status. These links are personal and most often derive from family relationships or close friendships (Cunningham and Sarayrah, 1993). Thus, although *wasta* is often portrayed as a part of corruption, Cunningham and Sarayrah (1993: 191) argue for its social value in giving "individuals a sense of belonging to a social entity that provides unconditional acceptance, and assistance to the novice in solving problems that are commonplace to someone more experienced. These functions are positive for the individual and for society."

By focusing on the political, economic and social context of the Arab world Mohamed and Mohamad (2011: 414-415) explain how internal and external threats lead Arab political leaders to create highly centralized administrations and place close confidants in key positions. Thus, in a short time, powerful elite emerged that ruled and dominated society. In the absence of institutional structures, social networking becomes the key to conducting transactions. In his 1945 novel *Cairo Modern*, the Nobel laureate Naguib Mahfouz portrayed *wasta* as a cause and consequence of an ailing society. Nevertheless, various findings lead scholars to claim that *wasta* is strengthening rather than diminishing in Arab societies (Mohamed and Mohamad, 2011: 416).

Informal, culturally based practices are not restricted to Arab societies alone. Scholars point to the phenomenon of *guanxi* ("connections") as an important aspect of many kinds of interpersonal relationships in Chinese cultures (Michailova and Worm, 2003) that can be used informally in order to solve immediate social problems (Gold, Guthrie and Wank, 2002: 3-20). This phenomenon shares many of the informal elements described in the Arab context. Chen and Chen (2004: 306) characterize it as "…an informal particularistic personal connection between two individuals who are bounded by an implicit psychological contract to follow the norm of *guanxi*, such as maintaining a long-term relationship, mutual commitment, loyalty and obligation…"

Guanxi is characterized by specific particularistic ties (Farh et al., 1998), the presence of perceived *guanxi* (Farh et al. 1998), the presence of specific behavioral consequences (Law et al. 2000), and especially by its pragmatic use in solving problems (Chen and Chen, 2004). Those who do not follow its informal rules may lose face, honor, or status (Luo, 2000).

As in the case of *wasta*, some describe *guanxi* relationships as making a positive contribution to societies (Xin and Pearce, 1996), while others disagree and stress their potential for nepotism and corruption (Dunfee and Warren, 2001). However, while *wasta* is inconsistent with Islam, *guanxi* is based on Confucian ethics that focus on strengthening collective ties (Batjargal, 2007).

In Brazil, there is another informal problem-solving strategy called *jeito* or *jeitinho*, which is sometimes recognized as positive (Amado and Brasil, 1991). Meaning "little way out," *jeito* or *jeitinho* is reported to be a strong characteristic of behavior in many segments of society in Brazil (Duarte, 2006). The concept refers to creative ingenuity in rapidly achieving short-term solutions to problems. It is a favor, and rules are bent if not broken. When there are positive personal feelings between the two parties, the request is made in a polite and friendly fashion, and the requestor puts himself at the mercy of the potential giver of the *jeito*.

No money changes hands, there is no expectation of a return in kind from the individual who has granted the favor, and reciprocity is maintained between these stakeholders as well as "with society" (McCarthy et al., 2012: 30-31). As Duarte (2006: 509) describes it, it is a "social mechanism that entails bending or breaking the rules in order to deal with difficult or forbidding situations…" Barbosa (2006, as cited in Smith et al, 2012) positions *jeitinho* in between favors and corruption. However, as in the case of *wasta* and *guanxi*, it may sometimes be viewed as positive, as it essentially involves ways of achieving one's goals that are quick and indirect but do not threaten the preservation of harmony (Torres and Dessen, 2008).

In Russia, there is likewise an informal problem-solving strategy called *blat/sviazi*, an unofficial system of exchange of goods and services based on principles of reciprocity and sociability (Fitzpatrick, 2000). This exchange of favors evolved under the conditions of shortages and a state system of privileges. This strategy provides access to public resources through personal channels and connections (Ledeneva, 1998: 37). *Blat*/*Sviazi* is usually accomplished through personal connections with families, friends and peers. It involves a favor grantor and a favor recipient, and society as a participant in the sense that the obligation to utilize *blat*/*sviazi* as a member within one's personal network is a culturally embedded expectation (McCarthy, et al., 2012: 31).

India provides another example of a culture in which problems are solved informally through a system called *jaan-pehchaan.* The term refers to close-knit relationships that can lead to increased cohesiveness and efficiency in decision making by leveraging personal connections. The use of *jaan-pehchaan* has at times reduced the opportunity costs borne by millions of Indian citizens trying to navigate around the country's slow, inflexible, and bureaucratic rules of government, an example of weak formal institutions (McCarthy et al., 2012: 32).

The above cross-national examples come from non-Western cultural contexts. However, that does not necessarily mean that such behaviors exist only in non-Western societies. Scholars have already suggested that such informal activities exist in Western democracies. For example, the British term "pulling strings" is an idiomatic phrase that refers to a method of obtaining favors particularly through links with influential persons. Smith et al. (2012: 5) explain that this phenomenon has not been the subject of academic study, and there are no published suggestions that the phrase refers to a process that is indigenous to the United Kingdom (ibid).

To conclude, the literature points to the existence of various methods around the world for solving social problems informally. Many of the cases are in non-Western or non-democratic countries. However, the existence of terms such as "pulling strings" in the United Kingdom indicates that this type of phenomenon may exist, at least to some degree, in any society. As I will show next, the Israeli case provides a good exemplar of my claim that under certain conditions this pattern of behavior may slowly diffuse and became a dominant element of the political culture and public policy processes.

Using Informal Initiatives in Order to Influence Policy Results

Such actions arise when the government fails to provide public goods and services in the quantity or quality that satisfies the public. Citizens, therefore, take matters into their own hands and find other means of satisfying their needs. This pattern of activity is known in the literature as "alternative politics."

As in the cases of *wasta*, *guanxi*, *jeitinho, svyazi*, *jaan-pehchaan* and pulling strings, individuals adapt in order to solve immediate problems such as obtaining more responsive and better quality services from the government (Mizrahi, 2012). This pattern of behavior includes increased use of alternative channels for the immediate provision of services in areas such as education, social welfare and internal security. Originally, a process of this kind was meant to help achieve specific goals in the short run. When this process includes a wide range of policy areas and lasts for decades, it becomes internalized within the Israeli public as an acceptable approach to acquiring public goods and services (Cohen, 2012). The public comes to believe that the regular channels will not fulfill their needs, so they must make use of alternative channels. Thus, many Israelis participate in alternative politics rather using normative political participation.

Alternative politics is a multi-dimensional term that refers to the use of informal institutions by individuals and organizations to acquire the public goods or services which, according to the social contract, the government is supposed to supply. This term has both narrow and broad definitions. The narrow definition of alternative politics relates to the self-supply of public goods in which individuals and groups are involved without the interference of administrative factors. The informal elements include both the supplier (individuals and groups as opposed to the government) and the manner in which the products are supplied. Such "do-it-yourself" actions fall within a gray area because they tend to be semi-legal or illegal (Cohen and Mizrahi, 2012).

At this point, it is necessary to emphasize that the legal consumption of various services and goods in the private market is *not* alternative politics. Alternative politics relates to the self-supply of public goods and services illegally or semi-legally. Individuals who make use of alternative politics are dissatisfied with the public goods that the government institutions supply and feel that they cannot participate effectively in the decision-making processes that affect them. They also do not trust those institutions to supply the desired goods in the future. Instead, they would rather bypass those institutions if they can afford to, seeking the goods and services they want through other channels and thereby creating *faits accomplis.*

The literature that deals with alternative politics also considers the structural conditions that promote such behavior. Researchers (Lehman-Wilzig, 1991, 1992; Mizrahi and Meydani, 2006) have pointed to deep gaps between social groups, financial issues, the need to allocate large amounts of the national budget to security, political instability and the centralization of administrative systems, all of which limit the ability of decision makers to govern effectively. Given this context, we can view issues such as corruption, bribes and the use of personal connections as part of the broader perspective of individuals trying to solve supply problems independently within a political and cultural system that acknowledges alternative politics as an acceptable approach.

Alternative politics is generally embedded as an integral part of a given culture. Therefore, we expect it to diffuse to most of the layers and actors in the society. Hence, the broad definition of the term alternative politics also refers to the manner in which public goods are supplied, which includes the activities of the suppliers of public goods and services, namely, the politicians and the bureaucrats (Cohen, forthcoming). Thus, the decision makers themselves use informal institutions during the process in which they supply public goods (Mizrahi and Meydani, 2003). When structural conditions prove difficult, we should expect to see the phenomenon in many areas, not confined to specific areas of policy or

particular public groups (Mizrahi and Vigoda-Gadot, 2009; Mizrahi, Vigoda-Gadot and Cohen, 2009). Indeed, interest groups, politicians and bureaucrats will all resort to alternative politics in order to achieve their desired results. As the public comes to understand through collective learning that such practices work, the use of alternative politics will be extended to all sectors and layers of society. Those in the area of public policy will pay greater heed to short-term demands and create unilateral initiatives that bypass the formal rules through illegal or semi-legal activities.

Alternative Politics in Israel

As demonstrated in the literature (Ben-Porat and Mizrahi, 2005; Cohen 2012; Cohen and Mizrahi, 2012; Mizrahi, 2012; Mizrahi and Meydani, 2003), a variety of structural factors and social processes lead many members of Israeli society to adopt a pattern of behavior that can be described as creating *faits accomplis.*

The Origins of Alternative Politics in Israel

Israeli political culture, as well as its influence on public policy processes and reforms, has recently been the focus of many studies. Although one cannot ignore the strong influence of the Ottoman Empire on the Jewish community in Palestine, Israeli society and political culture were largely shaped under the British Mandate in Palestine from 1917 to 1948. As Mizrahi and Meydani explained (2003), the Jewish community in Palestine under the British Mandate had a relatively large measure of autonomy to manage its own affairs in most fields of life (Arian, 1998; Horowitz and Lissak, 1978, 1989; Sprinzak, 1999). The Jewish leadership, elected via a relatively independent political system, created its own organizations, separate from those of both the British authorities and the Arab community, to accelerate economic development, to provide public services such as health, education and welfare, and to develop infrastructure such as electricity, roads, water supply and buildings. Thus, the idea that the Jewish community should not trust others and had to create its own institutions and organizations gradually became a building block of the Zionist ethos.

At the same time, facing significant challenges from the Arab population and a British ban on widespread Jewish immigration, as well as the aspiration to expand Jewish settlement in Palestine, the Jewish leadership gradually built illegal para-military forces that had three main goals: fighting the Arab para-military forces, organizing illegal Jewish immigration and establishing and defending illegal settlements. These channels of activity were not only "alternative," but also illegal as far as British mandatory law was concerned. The political culture passed down to generations of Israelis included not only improvisation as a dominant characteristic of Israeli public administration (Sharkansky and Zalmanovitch, 1999), but also the idea that acting via unilateral initiatives that might skirt the letter of the law, and sometimes even operate outside formal regulatory structures, was not only permitted, but actually served national goals. To a large extent, this became the modus operandi of Israeli society (Lehman-Wilzig, 1992; Sprinzak, 1999).

Due to a high level of centralization, the Jewish, and later the Israeli, institutional setting enabled politicians to repress similar initiatives directed towards the Jewish, or Israeli, system itself (Aharoni, 1998; Horowitz and Lissak, 1989; Sprinzak, 1999). Nevertheless, as explained elsewhere, in the 1970s and 1980s the central systems consistently failed to respond to the demand for public services (Ben-Porat and Mizrahi, 2005). Faced with a situation that they interpreted as blocked influence channels, significant groups in Israeli

society turned back to a problem-solving approach they knew well – unilateral initiatives and alternative politics.

During the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s, many groups and individuals in Israeli society used non-institutionalized initiatives to create alternatives, often illegal or extra-legal, to governmental services. The 1980s were characterized by a significant growth in the black-market economy – particularly the illegal trade in foreign currency (Bruno, 1993), grey-market medicine – the semi-legal, private supply of health services using public facilities (Chernichovsky, 1991; Cohen, 2012), grey-market education – the employment of privately paid teachers and the evolution of independent private schools (Yogev, 1999), and pirate cable television – all of which were alternatives to inadequate government services (Lehman-Wilzig, 1992). These processes intensified during the 1990s and the 2000s (Mizrahi, Vigoda-Gadot and Cohen 2010, 2009), when unilateral initiatives and alternative politics were expanded to other policy areas such as internal security, social welfare (Gidron, Bar and Katz 2003) and even the policy towards the Arab-Israeli conflict (Ben-Porat and Mizrahi, 2005).

Indeed, in recent decades, it became clear to many that, for the most part, only initiatives of this kind could help people access the services they needed (Mizrahi and Meydani, 2003). Furthermore, the Israeli government responded positively to these initiatives by changing its policies in the direction demanded by the groups. In this process the legislative and the executive branches of government were weakened, while the Supreme Court, which enjoyed public legitimacy and trust (Sperling and Cohen, 2012), gained considerable strength (Mizrahi and Meydani, 2003). As government financing shrank, the prevalence of alternative politics in Israeli society and the learning processes the society had undergone also encouraged the evolution of quasi-exit strategies. How does alternative politics affect various policy areas in Israel?

Alternative Politics in the Israeli Health Care System

Cohen's (2012) typology of informal payments for health care identifies black market payments as the most discussed and critiqued type of informal payments for health care. These payments are in essence the clients' attempts to obtain services on their own via semi-legal and illegal channels. Black market payments for health care are corrupting and considered part of the shadow economy (Schneider, 2007; Schneider and Buehn, 2009). Nevertheless, scholars see them as an integral part of the Israeli health care system (Cohen, Mizrahi and Yuval in press), making them a classic exemplar of alternative politics.

However, as in the other cases around the world reviewed above, the literature also indicates that informal payments for health care may be paid in indirect and circuitous ways, further complicating the identification of the phenomenon. Suppliers of public health care services may not be paid directly or immediately. They may be paid for their services in the future or in another area of services. Those who are close to the group in power receive preferential treatment, including health care services. Hence, in the context of health care, the Israeli term "*protektsia*" (receiving preferential treatment from a friend or a family member) became a synonym in the Israeli literature for grey medicine (Lachman and Noy, 1998). This phenomenon also became an integral part of the Israeli health care system and recently has received even limited support in Israeli public opinion. When asked in a recent survey (Cohen, Mizrahi and Yuval in press) to indicate on a 5-point scale where 1 indicated "strongly disagree" and 5 indicated "strongly agree" the degree to which they agreed with the statement, "When it is necessary and I am able to, I would use my personal connections to

provide a member of my family or myself with preferable health care or educational services," the average response was 3.34 (SD: 1.39).

Cohen and Mizrahi (2012) claim that alternative politics is likely to expand to all levels and sectors in society, and thus also characterizes the responses of governmental players such as politicians and bureaucrats. They demonstrate that in recent decades such actions have expanded throughout society. They are now evident in the process through which the basket of health care services is decided and the process and activities that led to the decline in the public share of financing the health care system. Hence, alternative politics has seeped into various elements in the Israeli health care system and characterize the behavior of the public, interest groups, politicians and bureaucrats (Cohen, in press).

Alternative Politics as Political Participation through the Judicial System

By using Hirschman's (1970) model of *exit, voice and loyalty*, Mizrahi and Meydani (2003) argue that in an attempt to create alternative policy decisions, many groups in Israel appeal to the Supreme Court. They adopt this approach as part of a quasi-exit strategy, having little faith in other avenues of political participation. Although all sectors of Israeli society are potentially capable of adopting this strategy, those who do so must be suitably knowledgeable and well informed in order to overcome the problem of collective action. In addition, they must possess a measure of self-interest that will make the appeal worthwhile.

Hirschman (1970) argues that when people are dissatisfied with a certain product or their place of work, they may choose either the voice option and protest for better outcomes or the exit option and simply leave the product or their place of work. The choice between the two options depends on the level of loyalty to the brand name or to the place of work. As the level of loyalty increases, the greater the chance of the voice option being chosen, and vice versa. Transferring this model to the political arena, dissatisfaction with policy outcomes or the whole political system may lead people to protest or exit depending on the level of their loyalty. However, argue Mizrahi and Meydani (2003), when protest activities do not succeed in bringing about fundamental changes in political performance, the public may turn to alternative channels.

In its encouragement of appeals and its willingness to accept petitions without over-questioning the justifiability and standing of these petitions, the Israeli High Court of Justice has become a willing partner in this use of alternative channels for advancing organizational and political interests (Mizrahi and Meydani, 2003). Demonstrated how groups dissatisfied with government decisions would bring their grievances to the Supreme Court. As a result, politicians started to consider the possible attitudes and positions of the Supreme Court in any policy making process. Thus, the Israeli parliament's (Knesset) legal adviser now activates a system that checks the fit of any legal proposal brought to the legislature with the Basic Laws (fundamental pieces of legislation that function as an informal constitution). In that way, the parliament avoids even considering bills that contradict the Basic Laws and actually adopts an approach of restraining legislation (Mizrahi and Meydani, 2003: 131).

Alternative Politics and the Transformation of Society-Military Relations

Levy and Mizrahi (2008) analyzed alternative politics strategies with regard to society–military relations in Israel. According to their analysis, alternative politics is the

result of the undermining of what is termed the *republican contract*. This contract represents the willingness of citizens to sacrifice their lives and wealth by bearing the costs of war and the preparations for it in return for civil, social, and political rights as well as other rewards granted to them by the state. Levy and Mizrahi suggest that when citizens are dissatisfied with their relationship with the army and their obligations to it, they first try to improve their outcomes through conventional channels of influence by utilizing a wide range of strategies of collective action targeted at the state's civil institutions and the army. However, if citizens feel that these channels of influence are blocked, they will turn to other strategies of alternative politics in a way that pressures the government through semi-legal or even illegal activities.

Indeed, in an attempt to influence Israeli policy, some groups have used strategies such as conscientious objection. *Yesh Gvul* ("There is a Limit" also: "There is a Border"), which emerged during the 1982 Lebanon War, was the first Israeli conscientious objection movement. It members were not pacifists but rather called for the right to selectively refuse to serve ("yes to military service and no to Lebanon"). When the first Intifada broke out in December 1987 and when the Al-Aqsa Intifada led to the renewal of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank in 2002, *Yesh Gvul* continued to object to the use of the military. In the 2000s, *Yesh Gvul* was joined by Courage to Refuse, a movement that selectively refused to serve in the Occupied Territories. Courage to Refuse distinguished itself from *Yesh Gvul* by positioning itself at the heart of the Zionist-left camp. Within this framework of illegal political action, more than 280 members of Courage to Refuse have, in fact, been court-martialed and jailed for periods of up to 35 days. Unlike previous displays of disobedience, the refusal—of groups such as Courage to Refuse and other groups consisting of high-ranking officers, pilots, and members of elite units—to serve in the Occupied Territories were considered more effective (Levy and Mizrahi, 2008: 43).

Whereas explicit refusal to serve may demand a high personal cost, gray refusal is far more widespread, and hence more problematic, from the Israeli army's perspective. Thus, officers and soldiers express their discomfort with sensitive missions that might involve attacks against civilians, negotiate with their commanders, and have removed themselves from assignments (ibid). Another example of alternative politics with regard to the army is the rebellion of reservists. In this case, soldiers who feel they are being discriminated against relative to their peers who do not serve and feel ignored by civilian politicians but still feel obliged to honor their military commitments may embark on an alternative politics strategy that takes the form of a revolt (ibid: 45-46). Last is the example of Machsom Watch (Checkpoint Watch), a civil rights movement founded in 2001. The members of this organization monitored the behavior of soldiers and police at the checkpoints through which Palestinians enter Israel in order to ensure that their human and civil rights were protected, and reported the results of their observations to the public. As in the above cases, the activists of this organization believe that neither the reliance on the internal military networks of information nor the reliance on the institutional, voice-produced modes of civilian supervision of the army will bring about the restraint of aggressive behavior at the checkpoints. Hence, they choose to bypass the formal participation channels and influence public policy through this unique type of monitoring.

Alternative Politics in Israeli Foreign Policy

The use of alternative politics as a major element in Israeli political culture is evident not only in its domestic policy, but also in its foreign policy and even the policy towards the

Arab-Israeli conflict. As Ben-Porat and Mizrahi (2005) explained, segments of the public may undertake semi-legal or illegal initiatives that eventually shape foreign policies. They define these initiatives as alternative politics. Using an empirical analysis of the dynamics of Israeli society from 1992 to 2004 and the debates over the territories occupied in the 1967 war, they explain how the public can threaten the government's monopoly on public products, compelling politicians to change foreign policy in accordance with the public's demands. Ben-Porat and Mizrahi find this mode of behavior to be a central feature of the political culture in Israel and a significant explanatory factor of both domestic and foreign policy processes.

According to Ben-Porat and Mizrahi's analysis, during the 1990s and the 2000s, Israeli policymakers adopted two policy paradigms. The first, the "New Middle East," highlighted the role economic cooperation could play in the transformation of the conflict. The second, "unilateral withdrawal and the security fence," was based on Israeli perceptions that there was no partner on the Palestinian side with whom they could discuss peace. While the New Middle East never materialized and proved to be a disappointment to the Arab business communities as well (Cohen and Ben-Porat, 2008), unilateral withdrawal and the security fence were translated into a concrete plan. According to Ben-Porat and Mizrahi, the main difference between the two paradigms lay in the changes in the political culture and participation patterns of Israeli society. While the "New Middle East" paradigm was a top-down effort by policymakers and the economic elite, the unilateral initiatives and the security fence were a bottom-up process compatible with the transformation of Israel's political culture. Hence, the construction of a separation fence between Israel and the Palestinian territories in the West Bank begun in the summer of 2002 by the Likud-led government was a response to both pressures from the public for security and the political culture of unilateral initiatives. Hence, the Israeli public is likely to adopt such strategies under certain cultural and structural conditions in which other influence channels are blocked. When the peace process encountered more obstacles and was further undermined by new cycles of violence, ideas about cooperation and a "New Middle East" gave way to interim agreements and a zero-sum dynamic between the negotiating sides (Ben-Porat and Mizrahi, 2005: 188-189).

Summary and Discussion

This paper describes and explains the informal influence of Israeli political culture on the public policy process. One of the main claims in this paper is that political culture is an integral part of public policy – regardless of the type of political regime. I described the phenomena of *wasta, guanxi*, *jeitinho, svyazi*, *jaan-pehchaan* and pulling strings as elements that exist, in various degrees, in many societies around the world. While these elements are often discussed within the context of business organizations, one cannot ignore the fact that these elements will never be limited to a specific scenario. Political culture will always be influenced by the local culture. Hence, under certain conditions, informal activities may become an integral part of the political culture and a widespread, dominant part of the policy process in all societies, not just non-democratic societies.

Through examples from the Israeli health care system, the political system, the relationship between society and the military, and foreign policy, we can see how alternative politics has become a dominant pattern of behavior in Israel. When such a process, originally intended to help achieve specific, short-term goals begins to encompass a broad range of policy areas and persists for decades, it engenders a particular type of activity. As a result of this shift to a broadened and longer term mentality, the Israeli public concluded that

participation in the regular channels could not assure receipt of the required public goods or services, leading individuals to take extra-legal actions in order to obtain these goods and services for themselves. It follows that that the political activity of many Israeli citizens is based on alternative politics rather than on more traditional routes of political participation (Mizrahi, Vigoda-Gadot and Cohen, 2009: 153).

Some will claim that, in normative terms, the development of alternative politics in Israeli society is not necessarily a negative phenomenon, as it, in the bottom line, a type of political participation. According to this claim, alternative politics may strengthen political participation, increase citizens' involvement in public policy and the civil society and serve as a 'safety valve' in a complex world. This claim, however, is incorrect. Such a political culture poses a danger to the stability of the democratic system, especially the mentality that condones illegal activity or activity that falls in a gray area, and the instilling of social norms based on circumventing the existing formal apparatuses. As these norms become engrained in the national culture, Israelis feel compelled to think in the short term and to find courses of action that circumvent the democratic rules of the game and the standards of proper administration. Consequently, in the long run, the effects of this phenomenon can be destructive to Israel's democratic values.

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