This chapter expands further on the construct of the ‘defending democracy’ by inquiring into the ‘pro-democratic civil society’ and its role in the context of the ‘defending democracy’ model. The following pages will underscore the significance of the actions of this non-state actor in the ‘defending democracy’s’ transition from the ‘militant’ to the ‘immunised’ model. The fundamental argument here submits that, as a result of its isolation from the State, ‘civil society’ in Israel probably plays a threefold role in safeguarding Israeli democracy.

First, in a country such as Israel, the official authorities have not yet forged a clear-cut policy on the central principles by which its future citizens should be educated. Therefore, there is ample space for intervention by non-state institutions seeking to promote an education in democratic values either by means of school courses or less formal avenues. A no less important role is reserved for civil organisations hoping to bridge the various and gaping social abysses of Israeli society.

Second, these same non-state bodies, operating in the social sphere, are also capable of responding to the expansion of extremism. They are very open to those extremist movements responsible for fuelling the flames of extremism well before they have developed into a political alternative and a veritable threat to the government. Consequently, as ‘civil society’ becomes more effective, the State feels less threatened by extremist elements and subsequently finds less cause for exercising aggressive tactics against them.

Third, the ‘pro-democratic civil society’ is capable of responding to the challenges presented by extremism; it also has the option of setting its sights on the ‘militant’-like ways of the State. That is, in order to bolster essential democratic values in circumstances where the State feels under attack, the latter must be protected both from its adversaries and from itself. This is because democratic governments under threat often tend to choose ‘militant’ routes of action
against elements they perceive as extremist, as was broadly demonstrated in chapter 2.

The ‘civil society’ on the one hand strives to reduce levels of extremism and so limit its manifestations, and on the other it attempts to restrain the government’s heavy hand in its fight against extremists. It is the bearer of one of the main keys to the solution of the ‘paradox of the defending democracy’. However, before proceeding on to its role in the struggle against extremism, this ‘civil society’ and its ample virtues should first be defined.

The term ‘civil society’ is not new to the social sciences. Numerous political scientists, among others Hobbes, Locke, Montesquieu, de Tocqueville, Hegel, Marx and Gramsci, have made use of it at one time or another, and in almost every case the term was used in a different sense, a fact which led it to become one of the most pliable constructs in the mainstream social-scientific literature. In order to avoid the pitfalls and snares of the multifarious senses of the term, this discussion adopts the approach of Yishai who, as a first step, chose to define ‘civil society’ by a process of elimination. According to this approach, ‘civil society’ is a realm whose activities are distinct from those of the domain of law enforcement (the state), of primordial ties (the family) and of competition, where the aim is to maximise profits (the marketplace). If so, what then is ‘civil society’? Yishai’s definition proposes that ‘civil society’ consists of those activities occasioned within an organisational context, whether established or transient, but which do not fall within the context of the private domain. A necessary (albeit insufficient) condition for the existence of the ‘civil society’ is that its groups are voluntary and based on civilian readiness to contribute energy, time and resources towards the goal of cooperation with fellow citizens.

Five principal types of organisation are featured in this definition of the ‘civil society’. First, there is the interest group acting in order to further the vested – most often, economic–professional – interests of its members, and, second the self-help group, which caters for either the disadvantaged or a population with special problems promoting a cause in which its members have a close and tangible interest. These first two may be relevant to the ‘defending democracy’, whereas the other three certainly have an important role in it. These are: social movements seeking to effect changes in society or on the state’s agenda; grassroots groups striving to influence their close environment and whose activities revolve around the community or neighbourhood; and, finally, volunteer associations consisting of citizens whose main objective is to help out and care for the welfare of their fellow men and women.

Debate on the notion of ‘civil society’ over the years has not been restricted to the attempt to delineate the boundaries of the concept. The main objective of the ‘civil society’, according to many scholars, derives from the assumption that groups and organisations included beneath its banner have a central role in bolstering the democratic process. The source of this assumption can be found in
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de Tocqueville’s writings, according to which voluntary associations in the United States at the turn of the nineteenth century were perceived as the basis of democratic life. In recent years, this view has gained much support in the works of Robert Putnam, who indicated a relationship between an active ‘civil society’ and a prospering democracy. Indeed, many studies based on this perspective underscored the contribution of ‘civil society’ to the democratic process as well as to processes of democratisation. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that recently there have been voices proclaiming the potential of ‘civil society’ in relation also to the safeguarding of new democracies from defiant elements whose source can be found in the extreme right.

However, this optimism regarding the role of ‘civil society’ in the democratic process has also been the subject of much controversy. One leading criticism accuses Putnam, by following in de Tocqueville’s footsteps, of neglecting the less democratic aspect of the ‘civil society’, specifically, its conflictual and violent aspect. In this latter context, Berman has demonstrated ‘civil society’s’ part in the rise of the Nazi regime in Germany, and Weinberg and Eubank have presented a similar position in relation to the fascist regime in Italy. In view of all the above, Foley and Edwards chose to introduce an analytical division of the construct into two principal types. Putnam’s use of the term was called ‘civil society I’, implying groups contributing to democratic life, whereas, ‘civil society II’ indicated the conflictual potential of ‘civil society’ associations. This second type included groups that were part of the social sphere and which engaged in organising opposition to tyrannical regimes. Booth and Richard supplemented the above classification with a third type, ‘civil society III’, or the ‘uncivil society’, in which they included active associations of a challenging and violent nature. The challenge in this case was not aimed at tyrannical regimes but rather targeted democratic systems of government. Examples of this type of association are the Ku Klux Klan, the white militias in the United States and the death squads of Central America.

Despite the widespread assumption that ‘civil society’ groups of all types, regardless of their aims or range of activities, constitute an important factor in the democratic structure, this analysis seeks to focus on the phenomenon we will call the ‘pro-democratic civil society’, i.e. a group of associations all with one objective, namely, the empowerment of democracy. Apart from its typological importance, the classification of ‘civil society’ into three distinct types can be helpful in defining the status and functions of ‘civil society’ in terms of the ‘defending democracy’ (see Figure 4.1).

The first (civil society I) and the second type (civil society II) show significant promise in their ability to protect democracy because these groups are united under one common goal, the fortifying of democracy; yet, at the same time, the targets of their activities differ. In other words, while civil society I invests most of its efforts in society, civil society II directs the bulk of its activ-
ties toward the state. The combination of the different targets of their activities is essentially that which grants valuable social facilitation to the ‘defending democracy’.

To elaborate further, the function of civil society I is to abet democracy principally by means of the erosion of extremist infrastructures underlying society and by attempting to reduce the scope of activities of civil society III which builds on these underlying foundations. The principal means at the disposal of civil society I include the following: raising public awareness and mobilising support for the denunciation of extremist phenomena; tracking the expansion of extremism and violence; providing succour for the victims of extremism; and, finally, the reinforcement of the democratic base of society particularly by means of education.
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The role of the second type of civil society is no less important. Whereas the thrust of the efforts of type I organisations is aimed at dealing with extremist phenomena, the second type of ‘pro-democratic civil society’ directs all its activities towards limiting the state’s response to a substantive conformity to the notion of the ‘rule of law’. From the perspective of the ‘defending democracy’, state accountability is just as important as containing anti-democratic elements because, as noted earlier, in the absence of this type of accountability, state legitimacy as well as its moral stature is put at risk.

On the whole, the ‘pro-democratic civil society’ embraces the sum of organisations whose declared goal is the fortification of democracy. This group is internally divided into two subgroups according to the target of their activities, i.e. civil society type I and type II groups. Nonetheless, it is important to point out that despite this typology of organisations according to the target of their activities, attributes of both the first and second types may appear concomitantly in certain cases.

‘Civil society’ in Israel

Research dealing in Israeli state–society relations and on the interrelations between these two as far back as the first days of its establishment consistently generates one conclusion: for a long period of time, the State of Israel has been distinguished by a ‘civil society’ reduced in scope and influence. The main explanation for civil society’s weakness in Israel is rooted, as put forward by Yishai, in the pre-State era when all Jewish settlement in Israel was governed by a political elite originating from Eastern Europe. Members of this elite brought with them a worldview according to which only a centralist and strong state capable of mobilising its people could lead to the realisation of national goals, foremost among which was the need to establish a stable Jewish sovereignty in the land of Israel. In line with this vision, a centralised and paternalistic state or, as termed by Yishai, a ‘guided democracy’, was instituted in Israel. It was David Ben-Gurion, the first prime minister of Israel, who encapsulated the distinctions of the ‘guided democracy’ in the words: ‘It is not important what the people want, more important is what is necessary for the people.’

Indeed, guided by Ben-Gurion’s ‘statehood’ orientation, the State was successful in harnessing non-governmental bodies, among them, the Keren Kayemet L’Yisrael (‘Jewish National Fund’) and the Histadrut (‘Labour Federation’12) to its exclusive interests and, by the same token, was almost completely successful in suppressing challenging groups, such as Shurat Hamitnadvim (‘Line of Volunteers’), a group founded some years after the State’s establishment and whose goal was to alert attention to and exhort against corruption in the governmental system.13

However, it was not only non-political oppositional bodies or movements
that were absorbed by the State: political parties which were central actors in the Israeli political system in its early years also underwent a similar process. Although researchers such as Keane or Foley and Edwards perceive the institution of the political party to be part of the ‘civil society’, political parties in Israel proved to be instruments of the State and assumed an accompanying role in permeating many aspects of the citizen’s life. The considerable centralism and ideological control of the State over Israeli society eventuated in a condition describes by Ben-Eliezer as one of ‘democratic coma’.

In the last few decades the State of Israel has undergone a series of changes that provided a window of opportunity for the emergence of an active yet at the same time somewhat detached ‘civil society’. These were economic changes, manifested mainly in the form of reduced governmental involvement in the economy and an increase in the quality of life, as well as political changes and, especially, the decline of the old-guard party blocs of Labour and Likud, traditionally identified with the State. Further political changes included the burgeoning of smaller parties founded on sectoral interests (Shas, Yisrael B’al’iyah, Shinui) which were more closely in tune with certain parts of society, and changes in the security situation, particularly the growing public fatigue with the state of incessant tension largely resulting from over-extended IDF control over the territories of Judea and Samaria.

Changes in the Israeli ‘civil society’ are specified by Yishai according to six criteria:

1. A significant growth in the number of civil associations (non-profit organisations) from 3,000 registered in 1982 to 27,000 in 1998;
2. A change in the profile of the ‘civil society’, manifested primarily in the decline of large groups closely affiliated to the State, on the one hand, and the development of grassroots social groups, both nationwide and local/community-based, on the other;
3. Permutations in patterns of ‘civil society’ action and a significant increase mainly in public protest;
4. Leaders of various movements gained increasing access to policy-makers and policy-making processes;
5. A greater degree of state response to the demands of the ‘civil society’; and, finally,
6. The growing legitimacy accorded to the ‘civil society’ by the State.

Unlike times past, when the State fought head-on with ‘civil society’ organisations, the strategy adopted by the State towards the end of the 1990s was to recognise their legitimacy and to expand the scope of their activities.

However, despite the rapid growth of the ‘civil society’ in Israel, both Yishai and Ben-Eliezer demonstrate redoubled caution when endeavouring to define its status, especially vis-à-vis the State. Ben-Eliezer adopts a critical stance and
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regards the recent flourishing of the many non-profit organisations (NPOs) in Israel as deceptive. The gist of his argument is that the hegemonic structure of the State of Israel was both versatile and prudent enough to absorb NPO politics, gradually reducing the gap between the State and ‘civil society’ to the point where the latter, in effect, has been deprived of one of its main roles.21 Yishai puts forward a somewhat less decisive view and attempts to demonstrate that while in regard to certain aspects of the ‘civil society’ – particularly, its opposition role to the government – the State imposes economic, legislative and even moral limitations on its activities, with regard to groups acting in the interest of the polity’s stability the State in fact enables them to develop and fulfil their goals.22

From the perspective of the ‘defending democracy’, three questions arise. First, is there in fact a group of organisations in Israel which can be identified as constituting a ‘pro-democratic civil society’? Second, if it is indeed possible to detect a viable ‘pro-democratic civil society’, will the bulk of its activities, in accordance with Yishai’s assertion, be directed at the stability of society? And will those groups whose target is the State suffer from a lack of autonomy and remain ineffectual? Or, perhaps, in accordance with Ben-Eliezer’s argument, will all organisations be rendered ineffectual and suffer inclusively from a lack of autonomy? And, third, with regard to the internal distinctions characteristic of this ‘pro-democratic civil society’ and its relationship to its environment, are there indications that one is speaking of a substantive body capable of establishing itself in a forthright manner as a central social actor at the juncture between the social and political systems, or is one simply speaking of a passing phenomenon? In order to answer these questions, I have chosen not to settle for one research method but rather have combined the findings of a qualitative analysis together with an analysis of the results from a survey conducted among associations of the ‘civil society’.

The ‘pro-democratic civil society’ and the ‘defending democracy’ in Israel

Tracing the evolution of the ‘pro-democratic civil society’ in Israel turned out to be no easy matter, to a large extent because of the relative novelty of the phenomenon in question. The literature documenting it is sparse and the ability to detect the various groups comprising it is limited. In order to identify as many groups as possible, a cross-comparison of findings from a number of principal sources was conducted: the Israeli guidebook to self-help organisations, the guidebook to bodies operating in voluntary fields, the NPO Registrar, the list from the ‘New Israel Fund’ and a list of bodies supported by Shatil (Hebrew acronym for Empowerment and Training Centre for Social Change; literally, ‘plant’ or ‘seedling’). After an initial classification according to their objectives and the targets of their activities, a list was drawn up of 156 associations which
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met the previously specified criteria of pro-democracy organisations. Each was sent a questionnaire, and out of 156 80 ultimately responded, which constituted 51 per cent of the total population of associations. At a later stage, in-depth interviews were conducted with representatives of a number of prominent associations from various fields.23

Data analysis was performed in two stages contingent upon the questions we sought to answer and methodological constraints. In the first stage, based on the data gathered from associations and in-depth interviews with representatives of the various groups, our intent was to delineate ‘pro-democratic civil society’ activities according to the target of its activities (society, ‘uncivil society’ and the State), and to evaluate which of these targets received more emphasis in practice. Moreover, we attempted to discern features of the interrelations among the various organisations on the one hand and between those organisations and the Israeli State and society on the other, and to gain insight into their degrees of success as reported by representatives in relation to their activities. The second stage was based on quantitative findings collected from all the relevant factions, and its main purpose was to put forward an additional perspective in our evaluation of the support which the ‘pro-democratic civil society’ could potentially provide to the ‘defending democracy’ in Israel. Included in this evaluation was an analysis of variables related to the ‘pro-democratic civil society’ itself and variables pertaining to the relationship of these organisations with their external environment.

The ‘pro-democratic civil society’ in Israel: targets and prominent organisations

At first glance, both quantitative and qualitative data already provide at this stage a fair indication, albeit partial, of the answer to the first question, regarding the existence in Israel of the ‘pro-democratic civil society’. Findings show that alongside ‘civil society’ associations in Israel which are intent on advancing various ends – and, as a secondary activity, also have a hand in promoting democracy – it is possible to detect a group of organisations (not particularly large, i.e. 10 per cent of the total population) whose declared objective is to defend and build up democracy while directing its activities at those same three targets included in the above definition of the ‘pro-democratic civil society’.

Society-oriented organisations

A close look at the internal classification of organisations according to the targets of their activities shows that there is a clear preponderance, more than 80 per cent, of associations which may be called ‘society-oriented’. This large
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group has chosen as its goal the mitigation of the prospects of the extremism that most likely stems from the dangerous cleavages which divide Israeli society in general and Jewish society in particular. As for the features of the activities of society-oriented groups, the majority define their objective as an effort to strengthen the role of democratic values in Israeli society and to bridge the deep cleavages cutting across it. These bodies are distinguished by two principal aims: first, the effort to reduce alienation among different groups in Israeli society and, second, the dissemination of and education in democratic principles.

The group of organisations working to reduce alienation among various sectors of Israeli society is distinguished by a relatively low level of institutionalisation (reflected in certain practical features and their local nature, for the most part). The activities of associations of this type primarily focus on initiating meetings among Jewish and Arab citizens, and in the last few years – following the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin – have also attempted to foster dialogue among secular and religious domains. The combination of their local, oftentimes community, non-institutional character and the nature of their activities, i.e. encounters among various groups, places them low on the scale in terms of their potential for promoting Israeli democracy. The same cannot be said for the group of associations which aims at strengthening the democratic foundations of society through educational means.

The description in chapter 3 of the relatively marginal status of democratic studies in Israel can help explain the ‘groundwork of opportunities’ setting the way for the inception and activities of organisations of this type, particularly beginning in the mid-1980s, when there was an increase in the tendency towards political extremism among older and younger generations alike. One of the more prominent organisations at that time was the Adam Institute for Democracy and Peace, founded in commemoration of the peace activist Emil Greenzweig, who was murdered in 1983 by a Jewish perpetrator during the course of a demonstration against the war in Lebanon. The aim of this association was to devise and implement educational projects whose purpose was to promote democracy and peace, an education in active citizenship, an awareness of equal human rights, the prevention of violence and the resolution of conflicts in peaceful ways. Use was made of workshops geared to a more adult population whose primary aim was to promote discussion of the fundamentals of the democratic notion. Another, more central, activity was the delivery of instruction in democratic subject matter at state-run schools. The Adam Institute was one of the organisations to be adopted by the Division for Democracy and Coexistence in the Ministry of Education (eventually to become, the Board for the Education of Values) and, through this collaboration, educators working for the ‘Adam Institute’ were also able to make contact with school pupils. Although these educational activities were not officially part of the school system, the programme still presented school pupils with a forum for the
The Adam Institute was not the only association to be favoured with the State’s approval. The Institute for Democratic Education and the Foundations Institute similarly gained access to the formal education system. Much like the Adam Institute’s programme, the Institute for Democratic Education sought to inculcate democratic values among school pupils. The Institute founded the periodical Panim L’khan U’Tkhah (roughly, ‘There Are Two Sides to Things’) which intended ‘to assist the educational system in reinforcing an education in citizenship and democracy, to foster a culture of dialogue, encourage involvement in current affairs, develop critical thinking, cultivate political education, encourage a tolerance of different opinions and cultivate a democratic personality’. Perusal of the journal’s contents reveals that it indeed dealt with an impressive variety of subjects, including: democratic involvement, the civil status of Israeli Arabs, tolerance and ethics. According to Institute director Shlomo Tzidkiyahu 67 per cent of state-run schools made use of the periodical’s subject matter within the context of their school programme, a claim that was true of the late 1990s. This fact, in his view, demonstrates the Institute’s success at the time when he was director. The modus operandi of the Foundations Institute is somewhat different. Its target population is the religious–national public in Israel and members focus their efforts on introducing educators in religion to a more holistic worldview which integrates religious belief and values on the one hand with democratic principles on the other. Rabbi David Azmon, a senior moderator of the Institute, uses utmost caution when attempting to evaluate the degree of Foundations’ success, yet notes that evidence of the effect of its programmes can be detected in the promotion of pluralistic values among many educators from the national–religious education sector.

However, the relative success of associations promoting education in democratic principles in establishing themselves and building closer ties with the object of their activities – Israeli society – gives rise to the problematic aspect noted by Yishai and Ben-Eliezer: specifically, the State’s role as their custodian. Ben-Eliezer colourfully describes this phenomenon ‘the State’s paternal embrace’ (his exact term is ‘bear hug’); Dryzek refers to the process of ‘inclusion’ undergone by these groups.

One of the main reasons for their survival and their ability to further their goals is that the state-run education system originally opened its doors to them, thus allowing them to operate in state ‘territory’. This enabled the associations to increase the scope of their activities, while simultaneously fostering their institutionalisation because they were compelled to adjust the nature of their activities to conform with state dictates. The growing affinity between organisations and State was, however, manifested beyond their access to the education system. Several willingly fell victim to a process of inclusion with deeper roots:

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that is, they became financially dependent on the Ministry of Education and the activities of many of them were entirely reliant on governmental budgets. Indeed, in 1999, when the Ministry of Education introduced a policy discontinuing the funding of those associations engaged in school instruction, the Coalition of Organisations for the Empowerment of Democracy appealed to the minister of education and informed him that this decision to defer payments would in effect lead to a complete suspension of their activities.32

This led to a state of ambivalence, particularly for those same organisations wishing to operate in the fully state-controlled field of education. On the one hand, state cooperation was vital in order to gain access to school pupils but, on the other, as ties grew closer between the State and ‘civil society’, the autonomous status of the latter would suffer. If Israeli ‘civil society’ were to become dependent on the State for its budget, it would, in effect, assume the properties of a state affiliate, as claimed by Yishai and Ben-Eliezer, who base their argument on Dryzek’s idea of inclusion, and units of this type were thus drawn away from the social ‘civil’ sphere and absorbed into the political one.

Results from interviews with these organisations’ executives, as well as the quantitative data (see p. 156), demonstrate that although they did tend to be financially dependent on the State in the first years of their activities, in the course of time and subsequent to recurrent changes in Ministry of Education policy, they were able to increase their economic autonomy from the State of Israel, henceforth making it easier for them to operate independently.33

Nevertheless, still unresolved is the predicament in which organisations that are financially autonomous still depend upon the State for access to the education system. In the absence of other programmes providing education in democratic values, state-run schools remain the main objective for such associations, so that ultimately the State continues to wield significant power over them.

‘Uncivil society’-oriented organisations

The circle of ‘uncivil society’-oriented organisations represents an additional problem associated with the activities of the ‘pro-democratic civil society’ in Israel. In many European countries, it is often possible to detect earnest participation in the civil realm, manifested, for instance, in demonstrations by extremist and pro-democracy groups congregating on opposite sides of the street. North America is populated with large, well-established, associations which often engage in tracking and charting the operations of the ‘uncivil society’ and which subsequently offer ways of combating the phenomenon. In Israel, on the other hand, conditions are widely different and the fight against the ‘uncivil society’ in Israel has over the years been especially circumscribed. The reasons are varied; however, the most salient explanation appears to be that the divided
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nature of Israeli society make it difficult to determine which is the ‘civil’ and which the ‘uncivil’ side in the public debate taking place within the context of the Jewish and democratic State (and this latter definition is itself fraught with a number of paradoxes, several of which have already been discussed in previous chapters).

Therefore, even when we consider the imposing demonstrations launched by the Haredi public against the Israeli judicial system in early 1999 and the counterdemonstrations mounted by the secular public in support of the judicial system, to simply subsume these events under the general heading of the ‘civil society’s fight against the ‘uncivil society’ is problematic. In the first place, this is primarily because the above events reflect a struggle among political, religious and secular bodies, a struggle painted in bold partisan colours. Second, both sides display attitudes which to a great extent conform to state doctrine. While the secular public sought to support the judiciary and in this fashion underscore the importance of the democratic element in the State of Israel, the ultra-orthodox public attempted to restrain judicial measures that in their view had great consequence for the priorities in the country, and in this way aimed to bolster its Jewish element.

Therefore, aside from the grassroots initiatives mounted against the various guises of ‘Kahanism’ which marked the second half of the 1980s and constituted an exceptional example of public protest against ‘uncivil’ elements, the majority of public action in Israel would be easier to classify according to the cleavages cutting across the society rather than on the basis of the analytic framework of the ‘civil society versus the uncivil society’.34

Another explanation for the dearth of active public objection to ‘uncivil society’ tendencies is closely linked to the discussion presented in the second chapter, to wit, the state’s close monitoring of extremist and violent elements and the exercise of significant force in cases when associations of certain types were considered dangerous. The almost absolute control of the State in response to ‘uncivil society’ activities leaves open only a narrow opportunity for ‘civil society’ associations which seek to be active in this realm. One of the problematic outcomes of extensive state control and the forceful nature of its operations is the ensuing damage to basic democratic rights and, in consequence, the great need for organisations of the type of ‘civil society II’ which will contest such forceful policy. The role played by these associations in Israel is discussed below.

An extensive examination of the entire population of organisations currently active in Israel brings to the fore one particular group: Keshev (‘attentiveness’, ‘ear to the ground’) – The Centre for the Protection of Democracy in Israel. Keshev’s principal goal is the restraining of the ‘uncivil society’, and it concentrates on the documentation and exposé of trends, groups and activists which and who might pose a threat to democracy in Israel. Keshev was instituted
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by a group of intellectuals, attorneys, academicians and public figures in the
wake of the Rabin assassination and it tenaciously protects its autonomy and
finances its campaigns on donations alone. In this fashion, it prevents any ges-
tures of inclusion proffered by the State and preserves its standing as a critical
and a fairly state-defiant association. In operational terms, Keshev systematically
collects information and investigates trends involving the delegitimisation of
state institutions, groups with anti-democratic ideologies and practices, inci-
dents of incitement to violence out of ideological motives, and the enforcement
of the law on these issues. Accumulated information is then analysed and pub-
lished by staff members in the form of investigative findings, reports and infor-
mation sheets. Comparable to American ‘civil society’ organisations engaged in
similar issues, such as the Anti-Defamation League, Keshev submits the reports
it has prepared to government offices in order to draw attention to extremist ten-
dencies and encourage the State to respond with law enforcement, to initiate
new legislation, monitor policy or introduce changes in policy. Although the
principal target of the group is the ‘uncivil society’, Keshev members do not settle
for those activities alone, but, directs resources also towards the State and
society at large. Within the context of its social activities, Keshev is involved in
information campaigns, training and education; it takes part in study days and
seminars, and it assists students and pupils wishing to research democracy and
the threats it faces. Their activities in relation to the State are restricted to those
cases where Keshev members find authorities remiss in enforcing legislation or
when objects of enforcement are chosen on the basis of partial interests, such
as political or ideological preferences.

As for its achievements, the managing-director of Keshev, Yizhar Be’er,
much like his colleagues in other associations, brings up the difficulty involved
in estimating its degree of success in implementing its goals. Still, in his opinion,
the very existence of the organisation and its persistent efforts in detecting anti-
democratic tendencies in the social sphere helps keep these issues on the public
agenda in Israel and requires the State to respond accordingly. Be’er’s cautious
statements are certainly thoughtful and to the point. Although Keshev enjoys
full autonomy and is a relatively well-established institution, it still provides an
insufficient basis for the claim that significant action is in fact taken against the
‘uncivil society’ in Israel when, after all, that action is based on this single and
not very large organisation.

State-oriented organisations

Compared to the highly circumscribed arena of organisations with ‘uncivil
society’ tendencies, the state-oriented bodies and their activities are more sub-
stantial: 18 per cent of those included in the survey explicitly asserted that their
actions were directed at the State in the attempt to impact and change policy on
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various issues. However, not all of them can be classified as ‘civil society II’ or oppositional organisations whose work is devoted to keeping the State’s struggle against extremists within the limits of the ‘rule of law’ and in this fashion to make inroads into the non-liberal elements characteristic of Israeli counter-active policy. In effect, a great number of the organisations which aim to serve the interest of Israeli democracy, while directing their activities at the State have academic affiliations, such as the Israeli Democratic Institute and the Carmel Institute for Social Research, which conduct research and hold discussions in which the principal aim is to propose alternative policies designed to reinforce the status of state democratic institutions.

Yet, alongside these, there are more militant organisations whose primary goal is to keep state action within the limits of democratically accepted conventions. The Movement for Quality Government in Israel, for example, has set its sights on inculcating democratic norms among public representatives and government officials, on improving political culture as well as the ethical climate in the State, and on the assimilation of a scale of values based on foundations that include democratic principles, sound public administration, ethics and the rule of law. While the Movement employs information campaigns and even extra-parliamentary means of protestation, the main part of its activity is concentrated on the media and the judiciary. Despite the notable reputation earned by the Movement’s deeds, its efforts at limiting state action to the substantive boundaries of the ‘rule of law’ do not apply directly to instances where there are ‘irregularities’ in the State’s response to extremists. In this type of event, the Movement refers appellants to the Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI) – the large and most active such organisation in Israel, which mainly concentrates on promoting the viability of democracy by means of restraining the government’s heavy-handedness and by protecting civil rights.

The main rights which ACRI (established in 1972) fights for are equality, freedom of expression, freedom of religion and the right to a fair trial. The Association, whose moral dictates are based on the universal proclamation on human rights ratified by the United Nations Assembly in 1948, and also on the State of Israel’s Proclamation of Independence, focuses the bulk of its efforts on the legislative (draft laws on the subject of human rights) and judicial (litigation for various legal instances, often before the Supreme Court) levels. Its defiant nature requires the ‘Association’ to maintain as much autonomy as possible from the State. Admittedly, in many cases, in order to move forward various legislative initiatives the help of Members of Parliament is needed, so that activists must frequent the corridors of power. However, there is no evidence of the ‘inclusion’ of ACRI by sundry governmental bodies, and all of its activities rely on state-independent sources of finance, whether one is speaking of supporting funds or membership dues.
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Much like other organisations, ACRI does not limit itself to specific targets of action. Granted, its principal target is the State and its goal is the attempt to constrain the nature of the latter’s counteractive policy, but it still devotes a considerable part of its resources to social issues, particularly for promoting ideas related to civil and human rights both on educational and public levels. This is done by its publishing of study and didactic materials and the sponsoring of in-service training and workshops at universities and schools. Furthermore, ACRI operates work with the security forces (army, police, prison services and border police) with the intention of raising awareness of and sensitivity to the rights of detainees and suspects in particular and civil rights in general.

Like the majority of groups which comprise the ‘pro-democratic civil society’, ACRI reports significant accomplishments in the advancement of its goals. Freedom of expression and political action are two major fields in which the Association has scored significant points, particularly in the judicial sphere. As befits a movement which champions liberal values and is not affiliated with any particular political bloc, the Association has intervened on behalf of members of all protesting groups, no matter whether they are Arabs or Jews, secular or religious, left-wing or right-wing. In fact, it has even made efforts to protect the civil rights of Jewish settlers in the occupied territories and members of the Kach Movement. The achievements of ACRI underscore the vital importance of civil society type II groups in terms of helping the ‘defending democracy’ advance in the direction of the ‘immunised’ pole of the spectrum. The very fact that one is speaking of an organisation which advocates democratic-liberal values, and does not work under the auspices of any specific group, empowers its status and enables it to raise essential concerns related to the quality of democracy and place them on the public and judicial agendas of the State of Israel.

Following the establishment of ACRI, and in the wake of its successes, two additional associations with similar goals joined the ‘pro-democratic civil society’ in Israel. The first is the Israeli extension of Amnesty International, famous for defending individual liberties and directing its actions at State authorities as well as society. The second organisation is B’Tselem, a local group which strives to protect human rights in Judea, Samaria and Gaza, so that the major part of its activities involves protecting the rights of Palestinians. However, as just mentioned, on occasion it will also act to defend the liberties of Jews who live in those areas.

By this juncture, we should have some grasp of the dimensions of the ‘pro-democratic civil society’ in Israel, having mapped out the range of its activities and demonstrated its prominent features. The above analysis points, however, to a particular obstacle standing in the way of the entire population of organisations in general and society-oriented ones in particular: the ‘danger’ of inclusion by the State and the subsequent weakening of the ‘civil society’. But is
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one speaking of foregone conclusions? In what follows an attempt is made to
describe a workable resolution to this obstacle, one which also has the potential
of building up the status of ‘civil society’ associations. I refer here to a certain
type of organisation, the foremost example of which is the New Israel Fund,
whose main goal is to aid in the growth of the ‘civil society’ in Israel.

Aid for the development of organisations

Indeed, aside from the fact that, over the years the State of Israel has lessened
restrictions originally imposed on ‘civil society’ activities, the most significant
assistance which has contributed to the growth of the pro-democratic civil
society in Israel has been related to the establishment of the New Israel
Fund in 1979. The New Israel Fund, the dominant body in financial assistance
for pro-democracy organisations, is a public body launched as a joint initiative
by American and Israeli Jews. The Fund’s main goals, in its own words, are
to act in the interests of democracy, equality and social justice. The Fund’s assets
come from contributions donated by private individuals who find the goals of
the Fund close to their hearts, and resources are then distributed to non-profit,
non-partisan, organisations active in society and community. However, Fund
activities involve more than bestowing financial assistance. In 1982, directors
of the New Israel Fund founded Shatil. The decision to set up Shatil crystallised
after lessons were drawn from the experience of the first three years of its
operation, that is, after the ‘New Israel Fund’ had financed a number of associ-
ations that proved to be only partially successful. The directors arrived at
the conclusion that aside from making monetary contributions, there was also
the need for professional consultation services which could provide assistance
to organisations in the relevant areas, from their registration as an NPO and
the initial raising of capital, to staff and work management, as well as promot-
ing policy changes by means of lobbying and making use of the media. In
view of the declared goals of the New Israel Fund, Shatil provides professional
training services to NPOs which specialise in the following fields: civil and
human rights; the rights of the Palestinian society in Israel; women’s rights;
Jewish–Arab co-existence; religious pluralism; social justice; and environmen-
tal issues.42

According to Itzik Shanan, media department director of the New Israel
Fund, since its establishment in 1979 the ‘Fund’ has been successful in strengthen-
ing liberal elements of the Israeli democracy mostly by its considerable
support for organisations which represent peripheral groups, including women,
Arabs, Eastern Jews and in fact the homosexual minority of the country.
However, the combined activities of the New Israel Fund and Shatil have
also laid the ground for organisations seeking to constrain the State’s actions
and keep them within democratic limits. Approximately one-half of the ACRI
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fiscal budget, for example, has for many years been underwritten by the Fund’s sources.43

We can therefore assume that the ‘pro-democratic civil society’s’ future in
Israel is rooted, to a great extent, in the ability of pro-democracy bodies to attract
resources and establish their operations while, at the same time, remaining
detached from the State’s strong embrace. The New Israel Fund constitutes a
propitious foothold for these same ventures, especially if they are grassroots
associations which have to rely on limited financial resources. As more
resources are made available to organisations such as the New Israel Fund or
the Jewish Agency (which also has joined the group of benefactors providing
financial assistance), the chances will increase that organisations belonging
to the ‘pro-democratic civil society’ – especially those in the early stages of
development – will attempt to attract financial support from independent
funds rather than from the State and in this fashion help build up the autono-
ous status of the ‘pro-democratic civil society’.

To sum up, a number of conclusions can be presented. For some years now,
a perceptible ‘pro-democratic civil society’ consisting of organisations targeting
the various objects included in the above definition has been at work in Israel.
But, at the same time, it must be noted that this population consists of a rela-
tively small number of initiatives which are disproportionately divided in terms
of the targets of their activities. When speaking of activities in relation to the
challenges of extremism in society, we can find a wide variety of organisations
operating in different ways. However, the number of those challenging the State
amounts to one-quarter of the total, and the sum of the organisations active
against the ‘non-civil society’ comes to one.

In the nature of things, it can be assumed that the number of associations
endeavouring to establish democratic values in Israeli society and which operate
in various regions of the country will be greater than the number operating
vis-à-vis the State. However, the almost negligible amount of activities aimed
at ‘uncivil’ groups reflects the problematic tendency to blur the boundaries
between the ‘civil’ and the ‘uncivil’ in Israel, and the confusion generated by the
prescriptions of the ‘non-liberal democracy’ among its citizens. Active represen-
tatives also revealed in interviews a marked bias in estimating their organi-
sation’s ability to advance its objectives. In general, these officials reported
degrees of success, albeit limited. A closer scrutiny reveals that one of the major
pitfalls in their path concerns the operational as well as the ideological aspect
of the ‘non-liberal democracy’. Organisations whose objectives do not present a
challenge to the State of Israel and instead aim to further causes which in many
cases coincide with State objectives often find themselves in a delicate situation.
They become primary targets for ‘non-liberal democracy’, which, because of its
centralist nature, seeks to control as much as possible those activities which take
place in both the political and the social sphere. In operational terms, the State
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attempts to assimilate this field of operations by creating an economic dependency on the State. In terms of values, the State endeavours to shape these organisations in its own image and thus in effect prevent them from presenting pupils with topics and subject matter which do not fully conform to the values that the State itself is built on and those it wishes to promote.

These conclusions present the reader with a relatively surprising finding. Contrary to Ben-Eliezer’s assumption that the general population of organisations will fall victim to the State’s ‘bear hug’, and perhaps even in contradiction of Yishai’s position, that the more ‘challenging’ will be the major target of the State’s arrows, the activities of the ‘pro-democratic’ groups demonstrate that by their very defiance of the State these associations of civil society type II maintain their distance from it and are therefore protected from its policy of inclusion while, in fact, society-oriented organisations (civil society type I), in need of the State’s auspices, may be subject to its manipulations.

Features of the ‘pro-democratic civil society in Israel’: quantitative assessment

The next step was to take stock of the current state of affairs as well as to try to chart future implications. Therefore, on the basis of the organisations’ survey results, an attempt was made to estimate the ‘pro-democratic civil society’s’ utility in the ‘immunisation’ of the ‘defending democracy’ in Israel. The considerable methodological hindrance involved in the quantification and measurement of this facilitating potential and in particular the impact of pro-democratic groups on the robustness of the ‘defending democracy’ in Israel, led to the use of a number of variables derived from an index developed by Yishai to evaluate ‘civil society’s’ contribution to democracy. This index includes predictive factors on two levels. The first level focuses on inter-organisational variables, including the socio-demographic and political features of the organisations themselves. The second level deals in variables concerning the status of the organisations in relation to the external environment, including their degree of reported financial and operational autonomy in relation to political parties and the State, and the degree of cohesion among the different bodies which constitute the ‘pro-democratic civil society’.

In the final stage, a comparison was conducted between activists’ own reports on successes in advancing their goals, and the public assessment of the activities of these organisations based on an opinion poll that was devised specifically for this part of the research. As already noted, findings from the survey were compiled at the beginning of 2001 and therefore have the potential to provide a profile that is up-to-date and at the same time put the account of the evolution of the ‘pro-democratic civil society’ as portrayed above in a comparative diachronic perspective.
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The emergence of the ‘pro-democratic civil society’ in Israel

Before attempting to appraise the potential of the ‘pro-democratic civil society’ in helping the ‘defending democracy’, a finding which provides important insight to the evolution of the organisations included in this group is presented.

Figure 4.2, which charts these organisations’ evolution according to the year they were founded, demonstrates that, regarding both the majority of ‘civil society’ organisations in Israel as well as the ‘pro-democratic civil society’, the initial significant growth in their number began in the early 1980s (33 per cent emerged in that decade in contrast to 6 per cent in the previous decade). This was the result of several prominent factors, foremost among which were the window of opportunity which opened following the State’s resolve to allow more freedom of operation to non-state organisations, the commencement of New Israel Fund initiatives and, beyond doubt, the unfolding radicalisation in Israeli society that elicited a sense of discomfort among many population groups, which in consequence felt the need to respond to this tendency. Figure 4.2 also shows the gradual increase in number of these associations, while the 1990s proved to be the peak of growth in their number so far – 49 per cent were founded between the years 1990 and 1999.

Figure 4.2 The emergence of a ‘pro-democratic civil society’ in Israel 1950–2000
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Internal features of the organisations

One of Putnam’s central assertions regarding the civil society’s capability in supporting democracy addresses the internal heterogeneity of organisations and the fact that ‘civil society’ guarantees ‘political equality’. In other words, by virtue of their membership, all organisations are guaranteed equal rights, and relations among them are vertical and not horizontal. That being the case, we shall arrange the internal features of the organisations of the ‘pro-democratic civil society’ according to two major categories. The first consists of the socio-demographic features of their members, in order to verify the extent of heterogeneity. The second attempts to gauge the nature of these organisations in order to see whether democratic practices are also practised internally.

SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC FEATURES

Survey findings indicate that the tendency of Israeli society in recent years to split into sectarian subgroups on the basis of ethnicity, religion and ideology, which, according to Madison and Olson, presents a threat to democratic states, has eluded the ‘pro-democratic civil society’. All organisations participating in the survey reported high levels of heterogeneity among their ranks. Close to 72 per cent reported that the majority of members did not belong to the same age group; 73.7 per cent indicated heterogeneity in terms of ethnic origin and community of members; 75.3 per cent claimed that their association integrates native-born Israelis and new immigrants; 81.8 per cent reported that the majority of members do not live in one settlement; while 67.5 per cent stated that members did not belong in the same income group. The lowest finding, as anticipated, pertained to the question of nationality: only 45.5 per cent could claim that their organisation integrates Jews and Arabs. Surprisingly, even this low figure addressing the integration of Jews and Arabs in various contexts is indicative of a positive trend. Close to half reported cooperation between the two nationalities, and this in a society where there is an almost complete separation between these two sectors in all other walks of life.

The next stage, despite the smaller population sample, which itself constitutes a methodological limitation, sought to examine the relationship between the variable of heterogeneity in an organisation and the other variables used. Indeed, there was a nearly significant correlation between heterogeneity and year of establishment ($r = 0.211, p = 0.067$). This meant that the later the year of establishment, the higher the degree of heterogeneity among its ranks. This finding is perhaps a positive indication of the democratising processes to which organisations of the ‘pro-democratic civil society’ were subject to over the course of time and the possible effect of these processes on society.
Another, no less important, finding concerns the degree of democracy within the organisations themselves: for, if they declare their support for democracy but at the same time do not practise a democratic organisational culture, this might raise suspicions regarding their true nature and their ability to support democracy. Furthermore, according to Putnam, ‘civil society’ organisations tend to instil among their members cooperative norms and motivate them to this effect. As a matter of fact, he calls these associations ‘schools in democracy’. According to the statements made by some of their representatives who participated in the survey, the ‘pro-democratic civil society’ in Israel does in fact tend to adhere to democratic principles with regard to all aspects of organisational culture: 95 per cent of representatives reported that management is closely attentive to the needs of their members; 97.5 per cent reported that their members do not hesitate to express opinions that conflict with those held by the leadership. Nearly 79 per cent claimed that there was no one person or group in their organisation who or which asserted a dominant role in terms of decision-making. Although it would be naive to assume that these associations are free of oligarchic tendencies, the high percentages of organisational democracy reported nevertheless give strong indication that one is speaking of a group which not only assembles under the banner of democracy but practises democratic procedures ‘at home’.

Of the findings so far presented it can be concluded that, internally, organisations of the ‘pro-democratic civil society’ generally tend towards heterogeneity, that is, members from different population sectors take part in their activities and, as a result, in effect they serve as a bridge among the various segments of society. With regard to intra-organisational practices, it appears that from the high percentage of those reporting substantial leadership openness to members regarding the transmission of information and decision-making processes, one is speaking of organisational apparatuses distinguished by a very low pyramid structure. In other words, there is a very short distance between rank-and-file members and directorship, thereby allowing for greater access to democratic decision-making procedures.

Organisations and their external environment

There is wide agreement among scholars in the field that in order to promote the democratic process, organisations of the ‘civil society’ must enjoy autonomy in relation to the State. In accordance with Yishai’s approach, this analysis will try to show that in addition to independence of state bodies, the autonomy of associations in the ‘civil society’ must demonstrate independence in respect of
political parties in close proximity to the State.\textsuperscript{56} However, an organisation’s autonomy in relation to its surrounding environment does not include its autonomy in relation to other civil society organisations. In order to realise its goals, the ‘pro-democratic civil society’ needs to develop a ‘cohesion’ among associations which make up the ‘society’ so that it can broaden its contact with society, on the one hand, and increase its access to the State, on the other.\textsuperscript{57} So it is necessary to try to determine the extent of organisational autonomy in relation to the State and the political parties, and, at the same time, evaluate the degree of internal ‘cohesion’ among organisations of the ‘pro-democratic civil society’.

**Organisational Autonomy**

One of the most significant obstacles in the path of the ‘pro-democratic civil society’ in Israel – as already discussed at length – relates to the repeated efforts at inclusion by the State and the tendency of groups, in return, to welcome state initiatives. As noted, one of the most convenient and effective instruments at the disposal of a state interested in containing the ‘civil society’ is economic leverage. Broadly speaking, the majority of organisations active in the civil sphere are caught up in a constant search for donors or financial resources which will enable them to pursue their activities. The state, on the other hand, commands great resources, thus providing it with the means to lure organisations and include them under its wings. Therefore, to what degree do associations of the ‘pro-democratic civil society’ in Israel, in 2001, enjoy economic autonomy from the State? The answer to this question is not unequivocal; but, in general, an optimistic forecast can be made for these groups. Nearly half (45.5 per cent) reported that they do not receive economic support from any governmental office, local authority or quasi-governmental body. Another encouraging figure reflecting on most of the organisations is that 58.4 per cent reported that more than half of their revenues stem from various non-governmental funds (e.g. the New Israel Fund and the Jewish Agency) or contributions, while 22.1 per cent indicated that more than 90 per cent of their budget relies on these sources. On the other hand, only 10.4 per cent claimed that more than half of their annual budget relies on governmental sources, and of these only 2.6 per cent reported that their entire budget derives from state or state-affiliated authorities. However, the most significant finding in this regard emerges from an analysis of the relationship between the year of establishment and the inclination of its directorship – as they themselves reported – to depend on non-governmental sources of revenue.\textsuperscript{58} The correlation ($r = 0.331, p = 0.003$) demonstrates a significant and substantial relationship between the two, leading to the probable conclusion that the newer the organisation, the greater the likelihood that it will choose to refrain from close ties with the State. This finding was reinforced during the course of face-to-face interviews with some of the directors. From their responses, it may be concluded that newer organisations have internalised
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the lessons of their predecessors about to the snares involved in the State’s ‘embrace’ and henceforth elected an economic course that was autonomous as possible.

In view of the above, it can be concluded that only a minority of ‘pro-democratic civil society’ organisations in Israel can in truth be called an ‘appendage’ of the State. These place the means for their very existence in the hands of the State by foregoing the recruitment of resources from other sources. A larger circle of associations combines both governmental and other revenues, while the decisive majority, and especially those more recently founded, rely on external (support funds) and internal (membership dues) sources of income. The conclusion to be drawn from the above is that notwithstanding its past successes in absorbing the ‘civil society’ and also numerous pro-democracy associations, the State’s grasp does in fact gradually slacken. This leads to the potential increase of the ‘pro-democratic’ associations’ contribution to the strengthening of the ‘immunised’ foundations of the ‘defending democracy’.

TIES WITH POLITICAL PARTIES

A further indication of the ‘pro-democratic civil society’ s’ growing autonomy is found in the weak ties these organisations have with political parties. Granted, the research literature tends to wrestle with the question whether political parties themselves are not part of the ‘civil society’. Still, in this period of the ‘cartel party’, particularly with regard to the Israeli ‘party-state’, it seems more probable that the parties’ relation to the State is much stronger than their affinity to society and therefore, as far as the ‘civil society’ is concerned, a lack of dependence on political parties would be preferable. Indeed, 97.4 per cent of the surveyed groups declared that they never worked for a political party. Over 97 per cent reported that there was no political partisan involvement in organisational activities. Slightly more than 96 per cent stated that they were not engaged in any type of cooperation with political parties, while 70.5 per cent reported there was no affinity between their own goals and the aims of any one of the parties. This last finding, which is relatively low, does not necessarily imply the existence of any type of association between them and the parties, but is more likely an indication that an ideational resemblance exists among some of the organisations and some political parties.

The degree of cohesion in the ‘pro-democratic civil society’

While organisational abstention from ties with the State and with political parties appears to be a factor contributing to their activities and potential in supporting democracy, at the same time, higher levels of cooperation among organisations themselves may in fact increase the potential impact of the
‘pro-democratic civil society’ and, by the same token, help contribute to the process of the ‘immunisation’ of the democracy. Having said that, only 33.3 per cent reported cooperation with other groups, when approaching decision-makers. Only 22.4 per cent collaborate with other civil society organisations in public action such as demonstrations, and only 22.1 per cent engage in joint information campaigns for the public at large. These findings, which clearly indicate low levels of cooperation, can be explained by the fact that many organisations perceive the empowerment of democracy in this country in different ways, while, in addition, both their targets and their strategies of action may be diverse. These facts limit their ability to work together. Still, it appears that the tendency to collaborate increases when organisations confront the State. This finding can be explained by the assumption, perhaps made by the members themselves, that in order to take full advantage of their potential effectiveness and pressure, it is most profitable to approach authorities in joint forces. And, indeed, survey results confirm this last assumption. An examination of the correlation between the index of cooperation among organisations and the index of accessibility to decision-makers generated a significant and high figure ($r = 0.445, p = 0.001^{**}$). That is to say, as the degree of cooperation among organisations increases, their level of access to the State improves as well. This finding is further corroborated by the positive and significant relationship between the index of accessibility and the degree of government response to their demands ($r = 0.255, p = 0.027$). This means that high levels of cooperation among them were also found to be in high correlation with the State acceding to their demands.

A summary of the findings concerning organisations’ activities and their environment shows that there is an impressive development of organisational autonomy in respect of both State institutions as well as the political parties closely enmeshed with those institutions. Autonomy in relation to the State is twice as important, in particular regarding pro-democracy associations operating against the non-liberal State. The more they are able to maintain their distance from the State, their ability to be critical of it increases without fear of reprisal. This is true for organisations whose target is society and who wish to introduce citizens to values different from those inculcated by the State. In particular, it applies to those whose goal is to constrain State activities. For associations of this sort to perform their role effectively, freedom from State controls is a necessary condition.

As for the low levels of cohesion among pro-democratic organisations, this can be an indication of the local nature of most associations. They are relatively small groups whose limited resources prevent them from searching for potential associates aspiring to similar goals. However, the correlations presented above demonstrate that, at least in terms of their activities vis-à-vis the State and despite the obstacle just noted, if they do in fact manage to increase
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levels of cooperation among themselves, they will be of greater assistance in the advancement of the goals of the ‘pro-democratic civil society’.

Organisational achievements

The evaluation of the degree to which organizations fulfil their goals and, moreover, of their ability to help the ‘defending democracy’ move in a more ‘immunised’ direction is a complex task due to the nature of the dependent variable and the existence of numerous intervening variables which are liable to obscure the picture. Of course, it is possible to rely on statements made by the organisations’ directors while attempting to assess the outcomes of their labours, as I did in the first part of the chapter. However, to obtain a clearer picture, it was decided to adopt additional indices which might at least provide corresponding indications of success. Therefore, the survey included an open question in which representatives were asked to estimate the degree of organisational success in reaching the goals they had originally set for themselves. The answers to this question indicate that the majority (more than 80 per cent), and in particular those whose main target of activities was society, tended to be satisfied with their degree of success in furthering their goals, although, as in the in-depth interviews, the bulk of respondents noted that there was still a long way to go before they could say that they had realised those goals. The target of their actions, Israeli society, also revealed relatively high levels of satisfaction about the activities of these organisations. This item is confirmed by the outcome of the survey, which included a representative sample of the adult Jewish population in Israel. The majority of subjects, 68.7 per cent, expressed high levels of satisfaction with pro-democratic voluntary activities which struggled to reinforce the promulgation of democratic values and which also made an effort to bridge the gaps dividing the various sectors of Israeli society. Furthermore, 17.5 per cent of respondents reported that they themselves were taking part (at the time of the interview), or had done, in activities fronted by organisation of this type. The composite of these findings proves that the Israeli public welcomes activities of civil society type I. The reason for the considerable show of support is, in my opinion, that these organisations by their very existence emphasise the importance of bringing people together and of providing an education in values, and as a result have acquired a more positive public image.

In terms of their activities vis-à-vis the State, organisations also report significant gains. Success, in this case, was measured according to the degree of organisational access to policy-makers and the extent to which the latter responded to their demands. In terms of accessibility, 52.5 per cent of representatives reported that they appeared at least once a year before one of the Knesset committees. As for contacts made with representatives of the executive
authority. 85.7 per cent reported having met in the course of the previous year with a high-ranking governmental official: 59.7 per cent met with a director-general or vice-director-general of a governmental office; 62.7 per cent met with a governmental minister; and 15.7 per cent with the prime minister himself. These findings demonstrate a relative openness on the part of the State and its various authorities towards organisations of the ‘pro-democratic civil society’. But is this openness a type of lip-service or does it in fact reflect a willingness of the State to in fact meet the demands of these associations? The answer to that question is quite surprising, for 71.8 per cent of organisational officials reported that State authorities generally acceded to their demands and only 28.2 per cent reported a more indifferent response.

From the findings so far presented, a rather optimistic picture emerges which implies that both Israeli society and governmental elites display considerable tolerance to activities of the ‘pro-democratic civil society’ and in fact reveal a noticeable inclination to be of some assistance to them. However, the survey we conducted also produced one finding that may temper these optimistic results and is liable to raise doubt over the Israeli public’s apparent whole-hearted willingness to move in the direction of the ‘immunisation’ side of the continuum. This finding is an indication of the public’s attitude to organisations attempting to constrain the State’s heavy-handedness in its response to extremists and in particular its attitude to the Association for Civil Rights. About 52 per cent of the respondents stated that actions taken by associations such as ACRI, the aim of which is to constrain the State’s response to extremism, pose a threat to state security. A prudent look at the data reveals that despite the apolitical character of ACRI and the many instances in which it laboured to defend the civil rights of radical right-wing activists, the political affiliation of the individual survey respondent influences his/her attitude to ACRI. Respondents who defined themselves as inclining toward the extreme right-wing, right-wing or centre of the political spectrum, displayed a greater degree of hostility toward ACRI’s activities (57.7, 61.1 and 51.2 per cent, respectively) in comparison with left-wing and extreme left-wing supporters (37.3 and 11.1 per cent, respectively).62 Notwithstanding the political significance of this finding, it also underscores results presented in earlier chapters demonstrating that in Jewish Israeli society there is still a longing for a hard-line security establishment which is not obliged to adhere to liberal values and would be able to respond to political extremism as its sees fit. The most prominent finding, in my view, has to do with the fact that, ironically, a noteworthy per centage of respondents who described themselves as pro-left-wing and extreme left-wing expressed reservations regarding ACRI activities. This finding is further evidence of the weakness of the liberal component in Israeli society and its willingness to proceed only hesitatingly in the direction of the ‘immunised’ road to democracy.
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Conclusions

In the first part of this chapter, it was suggested that the ‘pro-democratic civil society’ and its activities have significant potential in moving the ‘defending democracy’ from the ‘militant’ pole to the ‘immunised’ pole of the continuum. Despite the considerable difficulty in determining a causal relationship between the activities of the ‘civil society’ and the ‘immunising’ process of the ‘defending democracy’ in Israel, the findings presented here have important implications for this assumption. However, before discussing these results, a summary of the conclusions drawn from the findings is presented.

First and foremost, over the last few decades it has become evident that a group of organisations which can be called the ‘pro-democratic civil society’ has flourished in the State of Israel, and the rate of growth of these organisations is gradually increasing. A classification of this population of associations according to their targets and a review of their activities reveal that the decisive majority of these organisations work with their sights set on Israeli society, and their goals include an effort to bridge between the various sectors of the population and so strengthen the democratic foundations of society. A smaller group of organisations directs its work at the State in the attempt to constrain governmental responses to extremism and political violence within the accepted limits of the ‘rule of law’ in a democratic society. Finally, the smallest group, actually a single organisation, defines the ‘uncivil society’ as the principal object of its operations, which consist in raising the alarm about anti-democratic groups and working in opposition to them.

Still, the bare existence of the ‘pro-democratic civil society’ in Israel does not yet indicate whether it is capable of moving the ‘defending democracy’ from the ‘militant’ to the ‘immunised’ end of the continuum. Therefore, two questions were included in the survey to investigate the extent of this capability. The first question aimed to assess the degree of organisational autonomy in relation to the State and the effects of this autonomy on the civil society’s potential ‘immunising’ capability. The second question was an elaboration of the first, and attempted to include, among the factors contributing to its ‘immunising’ potential, additional elements concerning the internal dimensions of organisations and the relations of organisations with their environment.

In order to reach conclusions that would help answer these questions, an additional – evolutionary – perspective appeared necessary because, as explained above, the State of Israel has for many years persistently acted to constrict the autonomy of certain bodies not within its custodial reach. It also carried out a similar policy with regard to organisations of the ‘pro-democratic civil society’. However, contrary to expectations, the group of associations that actively questioned state policy was not the group to suffer from the State’s ‘bear hug’, which was reserved for the group whose goal was the assimilation of
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democratic values by Israeli society. Yet, a (diachronic) look to the future seems
to imply some weakening of the State’s strength. As figure 4.2 illustrates, the
number of organisations populating the ‘pro-democratic civil society’ is signifi-
cantly increasing. The more recently established organisations mentioned above
are operating in a more favourable environment than had their predecessors. In
the first place, this is because of the widening possibilities of financial backing
provided by extra-state organisations. Second, newer groups have internalised
the lessons of the past, and thus assume an attitude of ‘respect and suspicion’
towards the State while maintaining as great a distance as possible from the long
arms of its ‘paternal embrace’. Therefore, in answer to the first question, I would
tender the view that the degree of autonomy of these organisations appears to
be growing, thus improving the prospects of establishing a ‘pro-democratic civil
society’ in the State of Israel.

The second question raised above asked whether, in addition to their
increasing autonomy, organisations also enjoyed conditions conducive to their
development and which have an effect on the nature of the Israeli ‘defending
democracy’. The answer to this question is, in the main, positive. The survey
shows that with regard to their internal characteristics, Israeli associations
conform to the theoretical conditions posed by Putnam in respect of the ‘civil
society’. In the case of Israel, one is speaking – in socio-demographic terms – of
a highly heterogeneous group and of organisations which adhere as much as
possible to a democratic and egalitarian framework. As for their relation to the
external environment, aside from their growing independence of the State, they
also enjoy autonomy from political parties, a fact which reinforces the view that
the ‘pro-democratic civil society’ has indeed chosen the path of self-sufficiency.
But, this state of affairs also gives rise to the question: can one be speaking of
too much autonomy? According to the results of our study, there is limited coop-
eration amongst organisations, a fact which may potentially weaken their pres-
ence and diminish their accomplishments. Indeed, figures indicate that high
levels of collaboration are found to be correlated with high levels of accessibil-
ity to the State and its institutions, and there is no reason not to suppose that
these concerted efforts will also be effective vis-à-vis society. Therefore, it seems
that if the ‘pro-democratic civil society’ continues to maintain its autonomy
from the State and state agencies and at the same time improves levels of cohe-
sion among its various organisations, this may very well lead to a growth of its
effective potential.

Yet, after the relatively optimistic appraisals of the civil society’s potential
impact on the ‘defending democracy’ in Israel, a number of reservations of not
insignificant merit deserve attention. First and foremost, the ‘pro-democratic
civil society’ in Israel consists of a limited number of organisations which, when
classified according to the targets of their organisational activities, present us
with a clearly unbalanced picture. A prominent example of this disproportion-
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te profile concerns the single organisation whose object is the ‘uncivil society’. As noted above, the reasons for the dearth in this category are numerous and complex, whereas the number of extremist groups is not small and the job of dealing with this sector remains entirely in the hands of the State, which is predisposed to ‘militant’-like counteractive strategies, often substantially straying from the narrow confines of the idea of the ‘rule of law’ in a democratic society. This weak spot is liable to hamper the progression of the ‘defending democracy’ in the direction of the ‘immunised’ pole of the continuum.

Another principal issue, related to the emergence of the ‘pro-democratic civil society’ in Israel, was articulated in the results of the public opinion survey. Despite the support professed by the adult Jewish population for the ‘pro-democratic civil society’, it appears that this approval is somewhat reserved and limited to those organisations dealing in educational and strictly humanitarian causes while, in the same breath, the public expresses considerable disaffection toward those groups which attempt to constrain the heavy-handedness of state security. These findings are similar to other attitudes evidenced by the survey which demonstrate that liberal democratic principles are not exactly at the top of the agenda of the Jewish public in Israel. This is particularly true when those principles clash with concerns related to state security or the country’s Jewish nature.

A final point of reservation warranting attention derives from the integration of findings from chapter 3 with those of the present chapter. The expansion potential of the ‘pro-democratic civil society’ is contingent upon the evolution of a new generation of citizens who find democracy and its values dear to its heart. One of the principal ways of establishing such a generation, according to those engaged in the field of citizenship education, is via the education system. Results from a survey we conducted at Israeli high schools demonstrate that the mobilising potential of the ‘civil society’ among adolescent students from state-run schools is not substantial. As was described at length in chapter 3, despite receiving civics lessons at school, graduates of the Israeli education system are not characterised by high levels of support for liberal democratic values. This finding was even more pronounced among adolescents from the group that did not study civics. It is moreover pertinent to note here that for pupils in the Haredi–independent and national–religious education systems, the democratic component of their education is altogether marginal. The conclusion is that in the absence of further reformation of the study curricula in the country, a dark shadow will continue to hover over the prospects of establishing a ‘pro-democratic civil society’ in Israel.

NOTES

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11 Yishai, *Civilian Society in Israel towards the Year 2000*, pp. 26–8.
16 Yishai, *Civilian Society in Israel towards the Year 2000*.
18 Yishai, ‘Civil Society in Transition: Interest Politics in Israel’; Ben-Eliezer, ‘Is Civil Society Emerging in Israel?’
19 A non-profit association or organisation (NPO) is an organisation registered in accordance with the Law of Associations (1980). A registered association enjoys various rights with regard to tax authorities, the right to hold property and the right to appear as a public body in court (Ben-Eliezer, ‘Is Civil Society Emerging in Israel?’).
23 The main reason why many organisations did not respond is that the various lists included organisations which had suspended operations and were dismantled.
24 From an interview with Okie Miroshak-Kellerman, pedagogical coordinator, the Adam Institute (16.4.2001).
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28 From an interview with Dr Shlomo Tzidiyahu (16.3.1999).
29 From an interview with Rabbi David Atzmon, senior moderator, Foundations Institute (18.4.2001).
30 Ben-Eliezer, ‘Is Civil Society Emerging in Israel?’
32 Correspondence, 7 May 2000.
33 From an interview with Okie Miroshak-Kellerman, pedagogical coordinator, Adam Institute (16.4.2001).
35 From an interview with Yizhar Be’er, chairman of Keshev (18.4.2001).
36 From an interview with Shuki Lebanon, spokesperson, Movement for Quality Government in Israel (14.4.2001).
38 From an interview with Miriam Lidor, manager, Office for Foreign Relations, Association for Civil Rights in Israel (24.4.2001).
39 See ACRI website: www.nif.org/acri/acintro.html
40 Interview with Miriam Lidor, manager, Office for Foreign Relations, the Association for Civil Rights in Israel (24.4.2001). See ACRI website: www.nif.org/acri/achebrew.html
41 See B’Tselem website: http://www.btselem.org
42 From an interview with Itzik Shanan, public relations director, New Israeli Fund (18.4.2001).
43 Interview with Itzik Shanan (18.4.2001).
44 As noted above, the population included in the survey was relatively small (n = 80). Furthermore, and despite the fact that organisations could be distinguished according to the object of their activities (the State, ‘un-civil society’ or ‘civil society’), most of them tended to cross the defined boundaries and aimed their activities at additional objects. These two conditions led the quantitative analysis to address all organisations as one population and not to make a distinction among them according to the object of their activities.
45 For a discussion of difficulties in measuring the influence of organisations, see Yael Yishai, Interest Groups in Israel: The Test of Democracy, pp. 29–30.
46 Yael Yishai, Civil Society in Israel (unpublished manuscript, 2001).
47 The effort to quantitatively assess degrees of autonomy was meant to complete the picture engendered by interviews with organisation representatives and to extend the concept of autonomy from the economic perspective to other perspectives.
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52 The measure of homogeneity inside organisations was built on the composite of those questions which measured different aspects of heterogeneity. The measure produced a relatively high degree of internal reliability (Cronbach’s Alpha = 0.707). Examination of the relationship with organisations’ years of inception was conducted by means of Pearson’s index.


55 Dryzek, ‘Political Inclusion and the Dynamics of Democratization’.

56 Yael Yishai, Civil Society in Israel.

57 Yael Yishai, Civil Society in Israel.

58 The tendency of organisations to rely on non-governmental funding sources was examined according to the question: ‘In your opinion, is the organisation dependent upon public sources of finance for its outlays or can it rely on other budgetary sources?’

59 Yael Yishai, Civil Society in Israel.

60 The index of accessibility was computed according to the combination of questions which appears later (pp. 161–162 and 164). The internal reliability of the index was found to be high (Cronbach’s Alpha = 0.875). The measure of cooperation was calculated according to the combination of questions which appeared above. The reliability of this measure was found to be high (Cronbach’s Alpha = 0.796). A favourable attitude on behalf of the Government was measured on the basis of the statement, ‘In general, our demands are favourably received by the Government’.

61 For employment of ‘accessibility’ and ‘response’ as measures for organisational success, see Yishai, Interest Groups in Israel, pp. 30, 179.

62 Findings are produced which were found to be significant: Chi-square p = 0.001.