# Introduction

Regions—subnational but supra-local governmental entities—are, scholars tell us, a fundamental and essential part of development[[1]](#footnote-1)and more equitable distribution.[[2]](#footnote-2) Important questions must be asked in this regard: *How can regions work towards greater prosperity and more distributive justice? And what are the potential benefits and risks of using regions in development plans?* To begin addressing these questions, I turn in this article to Israel’s thirty years’ experience with a region-based development and redistribution program. In the early 1990s, the government of Israel presented a plan to designate certain areas of the country as National Priority Regions (NPRs). The designated regions and their residents enjoy certain benefits, subsidies, and privileges intended to narrow socioeconomic gaps and promote equality between them and more affluent parts of the country. Despite being a central redistributive tool that reallocates billions of shekels annually, the NPR mechanism has drawn almost no scholarly attention.[[3]](#footnote-3) Aiming to fill the gap, I provide descriptive and theoretical accounts of NPRs. This account, I suggest, may be of interest to other polities that are already using regional distributive plans[[4]](#footnote-4) or to others that are considering it.

The history of NPRs can be conveyed in three parts. The first begins in 1971 with the antecedents of the plan. This early history shows how the objective of the plan was originally dual, motivated by the egalitarian rationales of narrowing socioeconomic gaps that drive the program to this day and at the same time imbedded in Zionist ideals that aim to encourage Jewish settlement in the national periphery. During the course of these early years, and especially during right-wing administrations, the NPR maps grew to include more and more Jewish localities while disproportionately excluding Palestinian-Arab ones. The second part of the NPR story describes the progressive moment of 2006, when the Supreme Court struck down the NPR map for overtly discriminating against Palestinian-Arab citizens of Israel.[[5]](#footnote-5) The third part examines what transpired after the court’s famous decision. Here I show how the government adhered to the ruling for the most part and gradually included most (but not all) of the relevant Palestinian-Arab localities in the map. While several Palestinian-Arab towns and villages are still excluded from the map, [[6]](#footnote-6) the NPRs map now includes about 40 percent of the country’s Arab residents, who account for 21 percent of the general population.[[7]](#footnote-7) Yet, during the same time frame, NPRs became a predominant and massive mechanism for allocating funds to Jewish settlement in the occupied West Bank—reaching, it seems, a kind of silent trade-off of greater (but not full) economic inclusion and greater opportunities for Palestinian-Arabs citizens at the price of strengthening and advancing the Jewish settlement project in the occupied territories.

Taking a step back, I suggest in this article that the Israeli case study points to the dangers of a regional system for redistribution. Regions, I show, are well situated to promote coordination and cooperation among localities and are essential for preventing discrimination between neighboring villages and towns. Concurrently, however, regions are highly susceptible to manipulation by the central government—overly benefiting some groups while excluding others. Nonetheless, I suggest that rather than relinquishing the concept of regions for distribution purposes altogether, more radical notion of regions as a governmental entity that mediates between central government and local needs may be applied to the NPR plan.[[8]](#footnote-8)

1. For example see - researchgate.net/publication/227625107\_Regions\_Globalization\_Development [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. להפנות למאמרים של בלנק ורוזן צבי בעברית אזוריות, ובאנגלית בסטנפורד. לחפש עוד ספרות שאומרת את זה [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Except for scholarship dedicated to the Supreme Court case concerning this policy. See part II.b Bellow. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. להדביק ה"ש של עומר על תוכניות אזוריות במקומות אחרים בעולם. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. להפנות ולועדת המעקב ולחלק IIB [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. להפנות לעתירה החדשה [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. <https://www.karmel.co.il/%d7%9e%d7%90%d7%91%d7%a7-%d7%94%d7%90%d7%93%d7%9e%d7%95%d7%aa/%d7%93%d7%9c%d7%99%d7%94-%d7%a2%d7%95%d7%a1%d7%a4%d7%99%d7%94-%d7%9e%d7%97%d7%95%d7%a5-%d7%9c%d7%9e%d7%a4%d7%aa-%d7%90%d7%96%d7%95%d7%a8%d7%99-%d7%a2%d7%93%d7%99%d7%a4%d7%95%d7%aa-%d7%9c%d7%90%d7%95%d7%9e%d7%99%d7%aa>

   וגם לחפש עוד סימוכין לעניין השמונה אחוזים – אולי בהחלטות ממשלה אולי בתשובה לעתירה אולי בתקשורת. אני לא זוכרת אבל קראתי את זה בעוד מקומות [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. להפנות למאמרים של ישי ואיסי באנגלית ובעברית (עיוני משפט וסטנפורוד) על אזוריות ולהפנות לסיכום [↑](#footnote-ref-8)