# Introduction

Regions—sub-national but supra-local governmental entities—are, scholars tell us, a fundamental and essential part of development,[[1]](#footnote-1)and a more just distribution.[[2]](#footnote-2) *How can regions work towards greater prosperity and distributive justice? And what are the potential benefits and risks of using regions in development plans?* This article turns to Israel’s thirty years’ experience with a region-based development and redistribution program to start answering these questions. 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 this article provides descriptive and theoretical accounts of NPRs. This story, I suggest, could be of interest to other polities that are already using regional distributive plans,[[4]](#footnote-4) or to others who are considering it.

The history of NPRs can be told in three parts. The first part, starts at 1971 with antecedents of the plan. This early history shows how the objective of the plan was originally dual. Motivated by the egalitarian rationales of narrowing socio-economic gaps that carry the program to this day, and at the same time imbedded in Zionist ideals aiming to encourage Jewish settlement in the periphery of Israel. It than shows how over time, and especially during right-wing administrations, the NPR maps grew to include more and more Jewish localities, while disproportionately exclusion Palestinian-Arab ones. The second part describes the liberal moment of 2006, when the Supreme Court struck down the NPRs map for overtly discriminating Palestinian-Arab citizens of Israel.[[5]](#footnote-5) The third part examines what happened after the famous decision. It shows how the government, to the most part, adhered to the Court decision 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% Arab residences, while they are 21 percent of the general population.[[7]](#footnote-7) Yet, during the same time period, NPRs became a predominant massive mechanism to allocate funds to the 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 to Palestinian-Arabs citizens of Israel, at the price of strengthening and advancing the Jewish settlement project in the occupied territories.

Taking a step back, this article suggests that the Israeli case-study, points to the dangers of a regional system for redistribution. Regions, this Article shows are well situated to promote coordination and cooperation between localities, and is essential for preventing discrimination between neighboring villages and towns. But at the same time, regions are very susceptible to manipulation by the central government—over benefiting some groups, while excluding others. Yet, instead of giving up on regions all together, I suggest that a more radical notion of regions as a governmental entity that mediates between the central government and the local needs, can be applied to the NPR plan.[[8]](#footnote-8)

1. Foe 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)