

Israel

Self-rule

INSTITUTIONAL DEPTH AND POLICY SCOPE

Israel became a state on May 14, 1948 and since then has been divided in six *mehozot* (districts), twelve *nafot* (sub-districts), and at the local level, a system of cities, local councils, and regional councils (Law No. 286/1957 and No. 5724/1964).¹ Israel does not have a written constitution, so intermediate and local governance is regulated through laws, ordinances, and bylaws.

Mehozot have an average population exceeding one million and function as deconcentrated state administrations responsible for enacting national legislation within the district. The *mehoz* is headed by a district commissioner who is appointed by the central government and responsible to the ministry of interior. *Mehozot* are further subdivided into *nafot* for the country as a whole, excluding Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. Each *mehozot* is headed by an officer who is directly responsible to the respective *mehozot* commissioner. Notwithstanding a steep increase in population, territorial governance has remained centralized (Meydani 2010; Razin 2004).

Local governance consists of municipal councils (for cities), local councils (for municipalities not large enough to constitute a city), and regional councils (that combine small rural settlements) (Elazar 1988*a, b*; Elazar and Kalchheim 2001; Meydani 2010). Each local government has a directly elected council and, since 1978, a directly elected mayor. Local governments may also combine to create larger, task-specific municipal bodies, called confederate cities. Governance is not meaningfully different between larger cities (including Haifa, Jerusalem, and Tel Aviv) and smaller local governments.²

Self-governance is deeply embedded in Israeli political culture, but territorial governance is often viewed as its weakest link (Elazar 1988*a*: 3). Self-governance has tended to be organized along cultural–ideological or religious–communal lines, though these communities can, and often do, have recognizable territorial boundaries. For example, most municipalities are homogeneously Jewish, Arab, or Druze, and so communal self-governance is de facto territorial.³ Elazar and Kalchheim (2001: xxix) characterized Israel as “a compound of communities, including local communities ... Israel was created out of a series of local foundings which were only subsequently formed into a single countrywide community and still later, into a state.”

¹ We do not include the contested areas of Golan, Judea, and Samaria.

² One of the basic laws of Israel declares Jerusalem to be the capital. The basic law states that the government shall allocate special funds for the development and prosperity of Jerusalem including an annual special capital city grant (Law No. 5740/1980, Art. 4).

³ In recent decades this has begun to break down as some urban municipalities have become more culturally diverse (Elazar 1988*a*).

FISCAL AUTONOMY

Mehozot and *nafot* are deconcentrated state administrations with no tax authority. They are dependent on intergovernmental transfers.

BORROWING AUTONOMY

Mehozot and *nafot* have no borrowing authority.

REPRESENTATION

Mehozot and *nafot* are headed by a centrally appointed commissioner and officer, respectively.

Shared rule

There is no shared rule for *nafot* and *mehozot*.

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Self-rule in Israel

			Institutional depth	Policy scope	Fiscal autonomy	Borrowing autonomy	Representation		Self-rule
							Assembly	Executive	
Mehozot	I	1950-2018	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Nafot	II	1950-2018	1	0	0	0	0	0	1

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