

MEMMO

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Israel: A Beacon of Freedom and Civil Rights

As the Middle East's lone democracy, Israel far exceeds its neighbors in the rights and civil liberties it provides to its residents and is comparable to other Western democracies. Characterized by its stable electoral democracy, inclusive and accessible government, and freedom of speech, religion and assembly, Israel has dedicated itself to protecting the rights of Israelis from all political, economic and religious backgrounds. Women, Arabs and members of the LGBTQ community serve openly in elected office. Journalists, academics and ordinary citizens alike are able to criticize the government freely without fear of retribution.

Vibrant Press and Legal System:

Israel values the freedoms of press and speech, resulting in countless private news outlets and publications that represent all viewpoints of society. A broad range of civil rights are guaranteed by law, and guarded by myriad private organizations and citizen action groups. Israel is easily the most advanced and tolerant country in the Middle East on matters such as the right to a fair trial and protection of minority rights. The right to a fair trial and protection of minority rights are enshrined in the country's laws. Israel also maintains an independent judicial system, and the Israeli Supreme Court provides a powerful check on the other two branches of government.



Freedom of Religion: While 75 percent of Israeli citizens are Jewish, the country's Declaration of Independence ensures freedom of religion for all of its citizens. In stark contrast to its neighbors, Israel provides a safe and welcoming environment for people of Christian, Muslim and Bahai faiths. In fact, it is the only country in the Middle East where the Christian population has grown since 1948. Since Jerusalem's 1967 unification, Israel also ensures freedom of access to the city's holy sites for all religions.

Women's Rights: Israel's Declaration of Independence enshrines equality for both sexes, and this core value is protected by numerous statutes. The Knesset passed the Women's Equal Rights Law in 1951, guaranteeing equal protection under the law and providing legal basis for gender equality in all spheres of life. In 1969, Israel became the third country in the world to elect a female prime minister. Women have held key roles throughout Israel's political system, including chief justice of the Supreme Court, speaker of the Knesset and permanent representative to the United Nations. Israel is a champion of women's and minority rights. In 2018, a record number of women served in the Knesset.

Minority Rights: Israel's minorities are guaranteed the same rights as the country's majority Jewish population. Israeli Arabs serve on Israel's Supreme Court and are free to vote and run for office in the Knesset. Currently, 13 Israeli Arabs and four Druze hold seats in the Knesset. Israeli Arabs also serve as diplomats and generals, as well as in other influential and high-ranking government positions.

LGBTQ Rights: Israel is a world leader in upholding the rights of its lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer citizens. Accordingly, Israel's LGBTQ community enjoys equality and inclusion throughout society. Under Israeli civil law, same-sex and heterosexual couples enjoy the same rights, including tax breaks, hospital visitation, inheritance rights, housing aid and litigation. Every year, Israel hosts more than 200,000 people from around the world for its Tel Aviv Pride event, which includes the largest LGBTQ pride parade in the Middle East and Asia.