

Press Release (*embargo until 6 am on Wednesday, July 17*)

*New Shores Institution study
by Prof. Dan Ben-David*

Jerusalem and the increasingly Haredi towns: A PARABLE FOR ISRAEL

A new Shores study by Prof. Dan Ben-David focuses on Israel's municipalities and shows just how fast and how thorough the country's Haredization process is – and what it portends for the country as a whole when the national demographic distribution will increasingly resemble that of towns that have become Haredi, or are well on their way to becoming so.

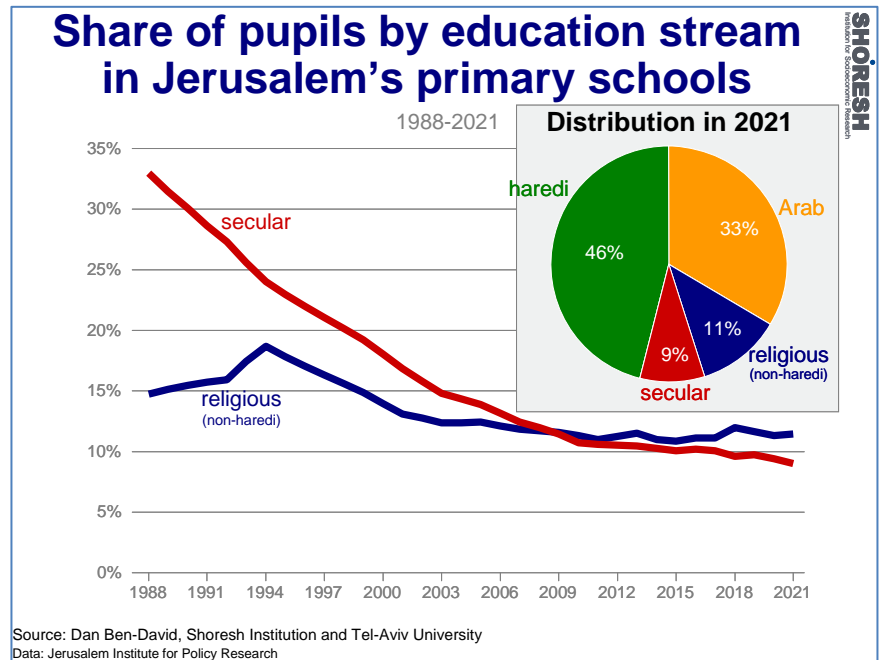
- Prof. Ben-David finds that out of all Israel's cities and towns, the four experiencing the sharpest socioeconomic decline since 1995 have been municipalities that have exhibited exceptionally fast growth in the Haredi populations and a collapse of their secular populations.
- The Shores study shows that Haredi fertility rates are roughly three times the fertility rates of secular Jews, traditional Jews, Christian Arabs and the Druze – and they are double the effective fertility rates of religious (non-Haredi) Jews and Muslim Israelis.
- Ben-David focuses on the vast discrepancies in fertility rates, finding that these are accompanied by a greater number of Jews becoming Haredim than those leaving the sect. The bottom line is reflected in a doubling of the Haredi share in Israel's population every 25 years. As a result of this exponential population growth, 26 percent of all toddlers and infants today are Haredim.
- An average of all PISA exams given since 2006 highlighted in the Shores study indicates that Israel's education system is one of the worst in the developed world. Haredi boys do not study a complete core curriculum. Of the remaining children who do, the secular pupils place below the majority of OECD countries, religious (non-Haredi) pupils place below 80% of the OECD countries while Arab speakers in Israel perform below many third world countries.

(details on following pages)

Among the Shores study's main findings:

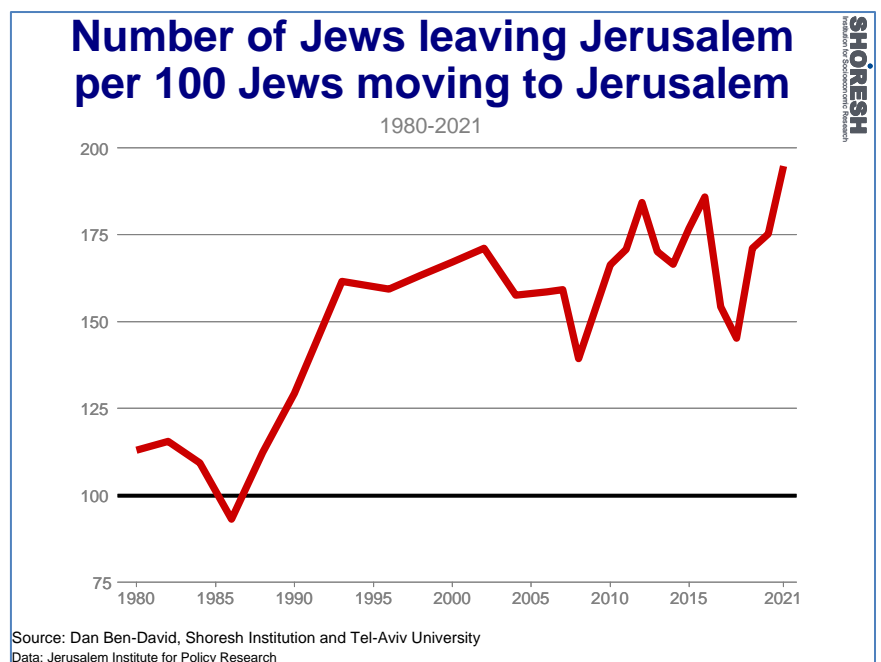
1. Israel's capital city, Jerusalem, encapsulates a transformation process that is informative for the direction that the country as a whole is headed.

- The Ben-David study shows that the share of secular Jewish pupils in Jerusalem's primary schools has collapsed from 33 percent to 9 percent in just over three decades.
- Religious (non-Haredi) schools also exhibited a drop in their relative share to 11 percent, though that fall is not close to the reduction in the secular share.
- As of 2021, the Shores Institution indicates that nearly half of the city's primary school pupils are Haredim (46 percent) while a third are Arab pupils.

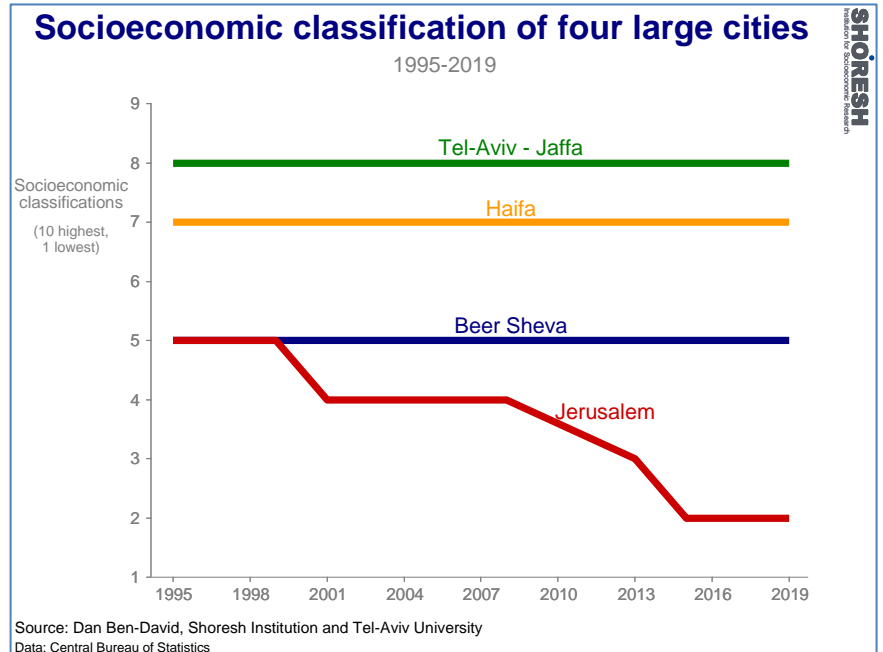


2. Prof. Ben-David finds that in the 1980s, the number of Jews leaving Jerusalem was just slightly higher than those moving to the city.

By 2021, nearly two Jews left for each Jew who moved to Jerusalem.

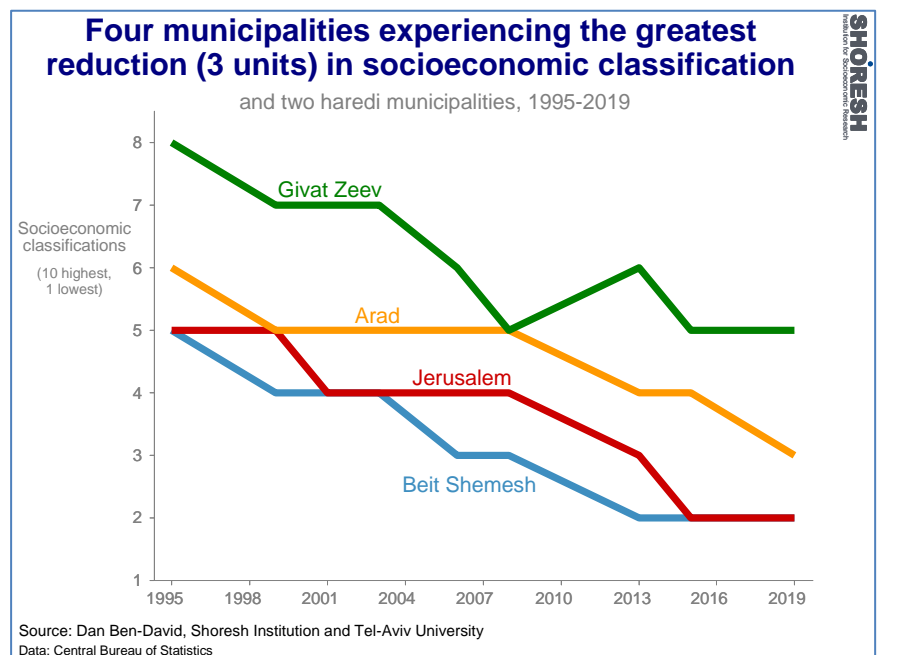


3. The uniqueness of the Jerusalem experience is shown in a Shores Institution comparison with three other large Israeli cities: Tel-Aviv-Jaffa, Haifa and Beer Sheva. In contrast with those cities, which remained steady throughout the period, Jerusalem fell by three socioeconomic classifications, from classification 5 to classification 2, within just two and a half decades.



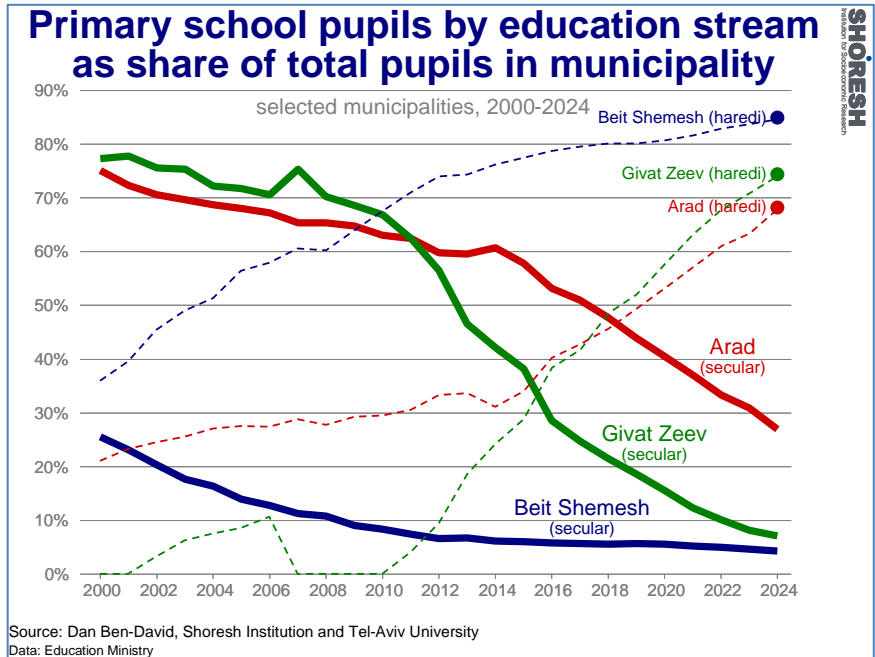
4. Prof. Dan Ben-David finds that only three other towns experienced such a large drop in socioeconomic classifications – falling of three socioeconomic classifications each.

- Beit Shemesh, began at classification 5 and fell to classification 2 over the period 1995-2019, similar to Jerusalem.
- The Negev town of Arad fell from classification 6 to classification 3.
- The Jerusalem suburb of Givat Zeev was ranked at classification 8 in 1995 and fell to classification 5 over the years.



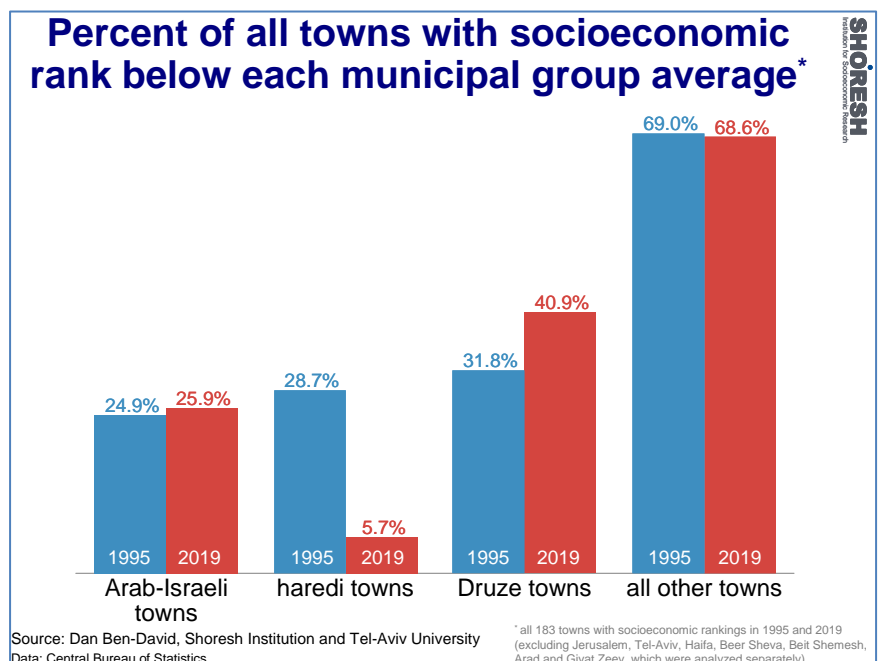
5. As highlighted in the Shores study, the rapid socioeconomic decline of Beit Shemesh, Arad and Givat Zeev was accompanied by very rapid Haredization in their populations.

- Over a third (36 percent) of Beit Shemesh primary school pupils were in Haredi schools in 2000, just over a quarter (26 percent) were in the Jewish secular schools, while all of the remainder were in Jewish religious (non-Haredi) schools (not shown in the graph). By 2024, the Haredi share rose to 85 percent and the secular share fell to just 4 percent.
- In 2000, Arad was a relatively secular town, with three-quarters of its primary school pupils studying in secular schools and just 21 percent in haredi schools. Within just 24 years, those demographics flipped, as the haredi share rose to 68 percent and the secular share declined to 27 percent.
- In Givat Zeev, there were literally no children registered in Haredi schools at the turn of the millennium. Within just two and a half decades, the secular share of primary school pupils plummeted from 77 percent to 7 percent while the Haredi share rose from 0 percent to 74 percent.



6. On the basis of each town's socioeconomic ranking, the Shores Institution study was extended to all 183 Israeli towns that were ranked in both 1995 and 2019.

- The average rank of Arab-Israeli towns in 1995 was above 25 percent of all municipalities. This average rank was almost identical in 2019, above 26 percent the municipalities.
- The average Druze town ranked above 32 percent of all towns in 1995. The



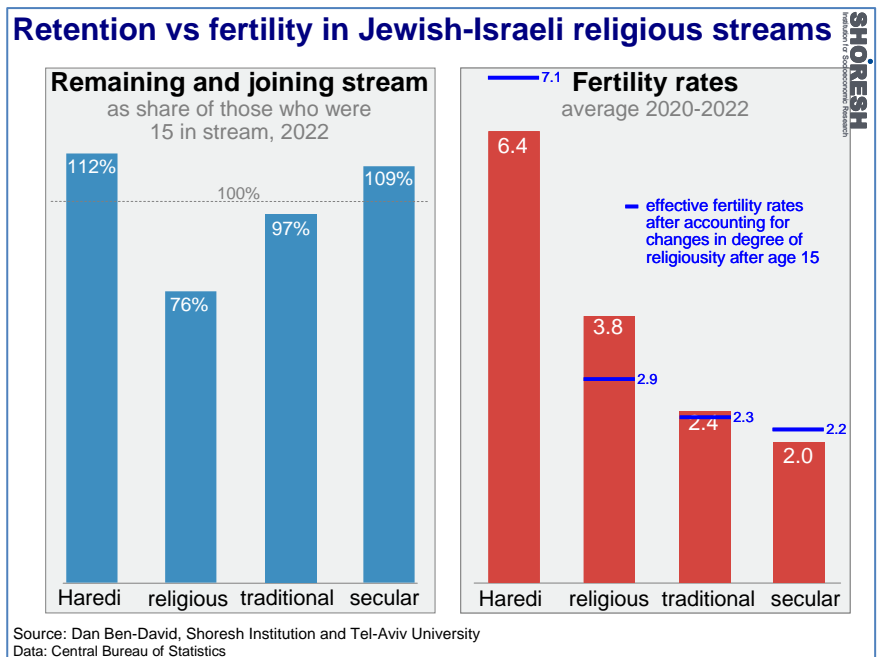
relative situation of the Druze towns improved over the years, raising their average to above 41 percent of the towns in 2019.

- The average rank of all other non-Haredi towns was relatively stable, exceeding 69 percent of the towns in 1995 as well as in 2019.
- In sharp contrast to the other municipal groupings, Ben-David shows that the average for predominantly Haredi towns was above 29 percent of the municipalities in 1995 – falling to above just 6 percent of the municipalities by 2019.

7. When all those joining a Jewish stream are added to those who remain since childhood, the Shores study shows that

- the Haredi stream grows by 12 percent;
- the secular stream grows by 9 percent;
- the traditional stream remains relatively stable;
- and the religious group falls by 24 percent as group’s leavers outnumber those who join the group.

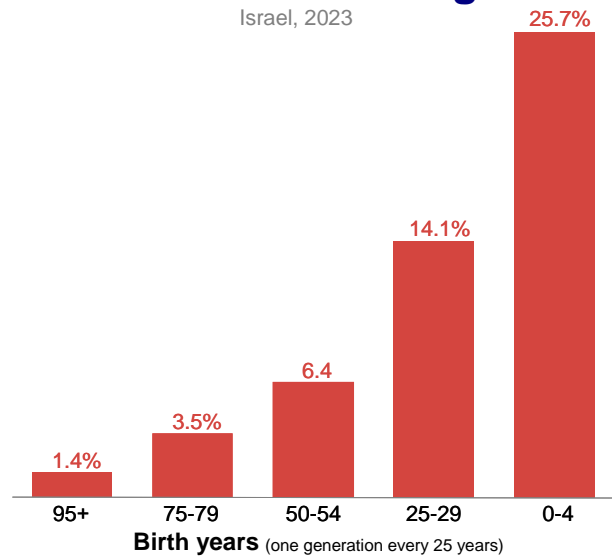
But this does not provide a full perspective since it leaves out the primary determinant of Israel’s demographic changes: fertility rates.



- Haredi fertility rates are roughly three times those of traditional and secular Jews, and two-thirds greater than religious Jews’ fertility rates.
- To the extent that each groups’ retention and migration behavior remain unchanged in the future, the resultant effective fertility rates only exacerbate the fertility differences even more.

8. The Shores study finds that the Haredi share in Israel's population doubles roughly every 25 years – or, roughly every generation. For example, while haredi grandparents are just 6 percent of all 50-54 year old grandparents, their grandchildren are 26 percent of all infants and toddlers ages 0-4.

Share of Haredim in each generation



Source: Dan Ben-David, Shores Institution and Tel-Aviv University
Data: Israel Democracy Institute (2023)

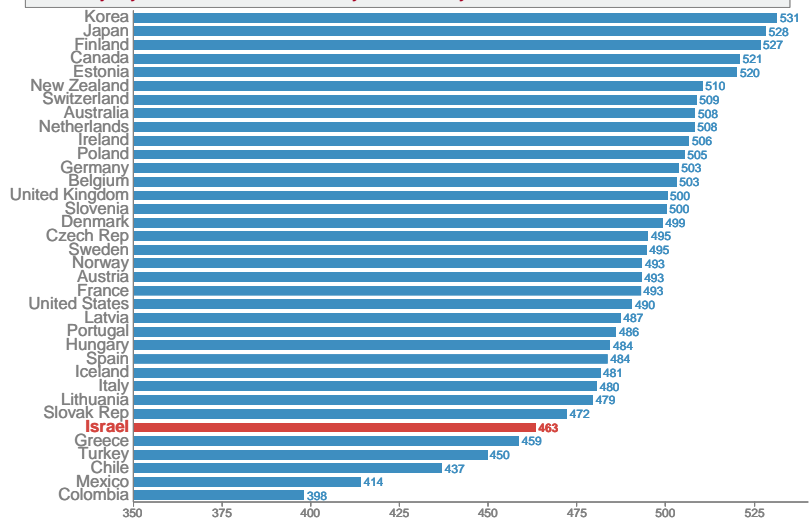
9. In a comparison of Israel to all 36 OECD countries that have participated in at least 17 of the 18 PISA exams (in math, science and reading) administered between 2006 and 2022, Israeli achievement levels are below nearly all of the developed world.

- Prof. Ben-David notes that this outcome is not due to Haredi boys in Israel. The vast majority of them do not study the

Multiyear national average of PISA score in all exams

all 36 OECD countries participating in at least 17 of the 18 exams, 2006-2022*

Vast majority of ultra-Orthodox Jewish boys do not study the material – and do not take the exams



Source: Dan Ben-David, Shores Institution and Tel-Aviv University
Data: OECD

* Average scores in math, science and reading. Each country participated in all 18 exams given during 2006-2022, except the U.S. and Spain, who participated in 17 of the exams.

material and do not participate in the exams – otherwise, the Israeli average would be even lower.

- The average multiyear score (between 2006 and 2022) in the PISA exams for the secular Jewish schools was 493, placing them below the majority of OECD countries.
- Israel's religious Jewish schools attained an average score of 480, which placed them below 80 percent of the OECD countries.
- The average score of Israel's Arabic speakers (383) placed them below all of the OECD countries and many third world ones as well. In the most recent exam, administered in 2022, Israel's Arabic speakers placed below three of the six Arab countries that participated in the exam.

Policy recommendations emanating from the Shores Institution study

A. Two policy overhauls that will enable high living standards in a growing economy, low poverty, and the ability for Israel to defend itself:

- **Overhauling the education system**

- A universal top-tier education will be the game changer. Basic tenets of such an overhaul need to include:
 - A significant upgrade of the entire system's core curriculum to provide (a) the tools to work in a competitive global economy and (b) an understanding of liberal democracies' underlying fundamentals;
 - The core curriculum must be uniform and compulsory in all schools, including each religious and haredi school;
 - Complete ban on the involvement of individual political parties in the school system's educational content.
- Children with a firm grasp of the basic skills will have opportunities for economic and social mobility that they might not otherwise have, while contributing to economic growth at the national level and reducing their personal dependency on others.
- A universal top-tier education will provide a clear understanding of the dos and don'ts of a liberal society – regardless of choices along the religious-secular spectrum – teaching the type of critical thinking that will diminish the appeal of populist and charlatan leaders proposing dangerous and simplistic solutions to complex existential problems.
- Better educated adults will also understand the incumbent requirements of parenthood and will be more judicious in their fertility decisions.

- **Overhauling governmental budgetary priorities**

- including:
 - Total cessation of funding for schools not teaching the complete core curriculum;
 - Discontinuation of benefits that incentivize non-work lifestyles;
 - Full budgetary transparency so that the public will know what are Israel's actual national priorities – and among them, who the government supports and how much they receive.
- Getting people to accept an education overhaul of the type described above requires an overhaul in budgetary priorities.
- Money, or lack thereof, helps focus attention and spur compliance.
- The massive change that is needed in budgetary priorities should be based on a national agenda rather than on sectoral ones – an agenda that eliminates Israel's very biased and unequal system of benefits, subsidies, discounts and exemptions.

Prof. Ben-David emphasizes that the essential overhaul of the education system and of government budgetary priorities should not be directed against Haredim. He states that it must be based on a national perspective that enhances equality in rights and obligations among all citizens while laying down the foundations for the State of Israel's continued existence.

- B. Safeguarding the changes to ensure that Israel remains on its new, sustainable, long-run trajectory
- **Electoral reform**
 - including:
 - cabinet ministers with expertise in their ministry's realm within an executive branch able to implement its decisions and enforce the law;
 - creation of effective checks and balances between the three branches of government.
 - To be able to pass and implement overhauls of the magnitude described above requires a government that comprises cabinet ministers who understand what their ministries do, an executive branch capable of implementing its decisions and enforcing laws, alongside the implementation of effective checks and balances between the three branches of government to ensure that no lines are crossed.
 - **Drafting and ratifying a constitution**
 - To make it more difficult for subsequent governments to overturn the systemic overhauls in education and budgetary priorities, there is a need to draft and pass a constitution setting in stone the national foundations that protect fundamental rights and the new system of government.
 - Given the rapidness of Israel's demographic changes, this constitution needs to hold for at least the next two or three decades – until the overhauls in education and benefits begin to have an effect on future generations so that there will not be a majority in Israel interested in weakening the foundations of Israel's democracy.

Prof. Dan Ben-David concludes: "The social, economic and political processes that Israel has been undergoing for decades have brought the nation to its moment of truth. While many Israelis may recognize the symptoms, most do not grasp the full picture depicted above, nor the fact that this picture is changing at an exponential pace – with existential implications for Israel's future. Jerusalem and the other towns described here have Israel to safeguard their economic and defense needs. But Israel has only itself."

The Shores Institute for Socioeconomic Research, headed by Professor Dan Ben-David, is an independent, non-partisan policy research center providing evidence-based analyses of Israel's economy and civil society. The Shores Institute informs Israel's leading policymakers and the general public, both inside and outside the country, through briefings and accessible publications on the source, nature and scope of core issues facing the country, providing policy options that ensure and improve the well-being of all segments of Israeli society and create more equitable opportunities for its citizens.

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**For details, or to arrange an interview, please contact the study's author,
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