The Democrats – Our vision for Israel as a liberal Jewish democracy

In these turbulent times, when faith in our governing institutions has been lost and our leadership is corrupt, when our society has been fractured and we remain plagued by uncertainty, and as we long for a vision for our nation's future, we, The Democrats, can provide a clear compass to lead toward security, equality, justice and civil unity.

These are not slogans. They are the foundations upon which Israel was established. Without them, our country will lose its way.

Today, more than ever, we need a brave, determined, liberal voice that would return Israel to its rightful path, a voice that would demand and fulfil the responsibility to counter populism, ensure equality and the rule of law in the face of incitement and violence and solidarity and a joint hope for the future, in the face of neglect and abandonment of the citizens of Israel.

The state of Israel needs leadership that would mend the rifts, return public trust and rebuild a society that is moral, resilient and free.

The Democrats Party was founded on the understanding that the current conflict is not just another political dispute, but a battle for the image and the future of Israel for generations to come. It is a struggle for equality and freedom for all citizens, a future for our children and an assured place among free nations in the world as a strong and advanced democracy.

This document outlines the Democrats' core principles and worldview.

We invite you, our supporters, to read, comment and highlight your views and most of all to suggest and promote practical ideas that reflect our liberal-democratic position.

We commit to listening, learning and improving together with each and every one of you and to unite with any person or entity that shares these values, so that we can build and develop the exemplary nation that was the basis of the Zionist movement founded by Theodor Herzl.

Our main points

- Repairing the fractured Israeli society
- Our political–security vision

- Democracy and the rule of law
- A curriculum of education at the foundation of Israeli society
- A socio-economic plan
- The relation between religion and state

1. The Repairing fractured Israeli society

Solidarity, Equality and national resilience

With our national unity under threat, our society fractured by populism and violent rhetoric, we must return to the basic principled outlined in our Declaration of Independence: Liberty, justice, equality and peace for all.

Solidarity

- **A unified curriculum in education** – one that emphasizes tolerance and inclusion: A divided system of education creates distance, alienation and misunderstanding among different sectors of the population.
- We intend to establish a national curriculum of education that would be available to all and would be based on our core values. (We will expand further in section 4.)
- Based on a common foundation, each sector would be free to incorporate specific cultural or religious programs.
- Unifying nationwide projects in economics, sciences, social studies and culture will be established.

We will build cross-sector programs with practical applications.

- **Innovation and entrepreneurship** – establishing joint centers of study for Jews, Arabs and Druze, religious, traditional and secular students.
- R**ebuilding** Israel's northern and southern regions, ravaged by the war and its low-income communities in real cooperation between sectors of the population.
- **Art and culture** – institutions, festivals and events that would fairly represent the full diversity of the population.

- **Health and Science** – services in the community in the field of medicine, education and sciences that would be made available to all citizens.

Equality

Equal rights and opportunities for all Israeli citizens

- We will return to the principle of equality as a cornerstone of the Jewish and democratic state for all genders, religions, national, ethnic and cultural groups.
- We will uproot racism, misogyny, violent religious and nationalist extremism, from the public discourse and from government policies and actions.
- We will promote legislation and policy to ensure equal access and opportunity for Arab, Haredi and immigrant citizens and for women and residents of the periphery of the country.
- Affirmative action for sectors suffering long-term neglect.
- Equal personal safety and protection of property for all citizens in all sectors, anywhere around the country.

Military service for all under the law

- The IDF is in need of troops from all sectors of society to serve in its ranks. Without egalitarian service, there can be no national resilience.
- We will revoke the special treatment that has been given to certain sectors and demand that all citizens of conscription age enlist and serve the country, in accordance with the existing Defense Service Law.
- We will provide significant National Service alternatives for those unable to serve in the IDF.

Resilience

- Truth and information – presenting a scope of views and facts.
    - Dependable and valid information from a free and responsible press is the cornerstone of democracy but in recent years, media platforms have become the source of lies, division and incitement.

We must ensure that public discourse is based on:

* **credible facts** and not propaganda or emotional manipulation.

* **A diversity of views** and opinions within the boundaries of the law and through respectable dialogue.

* **All media outlets**, whether electronic, in print, or online, privately owned or independent, **must act responsibly.**

- **Social media platforms** have become the tools for divisiveness, the spread of lies, personal attacks, emotional terrorism and the silencing of opinions. It is vital, therefore, to institute a balanced national policy that includes:
    - **Transparent algorithms** so as to prevent the spread of violent or incendiary content.
    - **Legislation** that would not limit freedom of speech but would protect the public sphere.
    - Educational programs in schools, to promote online erudition and skills.
    - Support of alternative social media platforms with an emphasis on geographic and cultural diversity and with community oversight.
- We will work to strengthen **public and independent press**, to increase access to media outlets, to **support initiatives and** to **protect journalists and media outlets** from attempts to silence them either through legal action or by violent rhetoric on digital platforms.
- **We are committed to bolstering Israel's Public Broadcasting Corporation** and ensuring its continued operation as an independent and forward-facing media outlet.

2. Our policy and security vision

On October 7, 2023, Israel's prevailing conception of security, which advocated for strengthening Hamas, failed. That policy was maintained by successive governments over the years with the aim of avoiding any meaningful dialogue with the Palestinian's natural representation – the Palestinian Authority.

Rather than initiating a strategy that could advance an end to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Israeli government opted to promote extremism and advance a de facto annexation of areas in the West Bank, while ignoring the enemies that were increasingly entrenched on our borders.

At the same time, Israel exhibited strategic weakness and a lack of initiative to respond to the threat from the axis of evil: Iran, Hezbollah, Hamas and the Islamic Jihad, and enabled a regional coalition of terrorists to arise, one that is still active today.

The Democrats present a safe and responsible plan that differentiates between ally and foe, extremists and moderates, destruction and a Jewish, Democratic state.

The basic principles of Israel's security and political policies:

1. **An Israeli initiative promoting separation between Israelis and Palestinians, rejecting attempts at annexation.**

In order to advance an end to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the two societies must separate and all efforts to annex territory must end.

Israel must present a plan to separate from the Palestinians from a position of strength and responsibility, based on the traditional Zionist principles.

- **Defining clear national borders** while protecting the Jewish majority.
- **Establishment of a demilitarized future Palestinian** state that would not pose a security threat.
- **Israeli control of the eastern border** with Jordan and other vital locations.
- **Putting an end to all efforts of annexation** of West Bank territory to prevent a critical shift in the demographics that would endanger the Jewish majority or threaten Israel's moral and international standing.
- **Rebuilding trust** through joint educational and social programs, moderate discourse and a commitment to joint values.

2. **Strategy to deal with Iran and its proxies.**

Contrary to the claims made by the government, the threat from Iran was not removed during the war. On the contrary, it is growing on our northern border, in Iraq, in Yemen and in Syria.

Israel must take the initiative including:

- Pre-emptive strikes on forces attempting to entrench on our borders.
- Disruption of weapon knowhow and funding transferred from Iran to its proxies.

- Strategic alliances with the United States, European nations and regional partners and moderate Muslim states with an emphasis on Saudi Arabia, Gulf nations and Indonesia, in the face of the threats from Iran.
- A deterrence based on a clear doctrine that any threat would be met with a decisive and immediate response

3. The plan for the Gaza Strip

Gaza can no longer be a terrorist stronghold. We will work to:

- Complete demilitarization of the Strip. We must remove offensive weapons from the terrorist factions and from the governance of Gaza.
- Independent Israeli security control of all border crossings.
- Establishment of an Arab-International body that includes Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Jordan and others, tasked with the rebuilding and rehabilitation of the Strip.
- Establishment of a governing body of moderate professionals while neutralizing Hamas and Islamic Jihad infrastructure.
- Incorporating dependable international observers to stabilize the area long-term.

4. International and regional alliances – assets that must be maintained and expanded.

Regional alliances are more than a diplomatic interest. They are essential for our national security. The Democrats will lead initiatives to bolster and expand existing alliances and forge new ones with natural partners.

- We will maintain and strengthen peace agreements with Jordan and Egypt including increased security, economic and civil cooperation.
- Expand the Abraham Accords and create a pathway to a possible agreement with Saudi Arabia.
- Incorporate Israel in further layers of the alliance with the United States and the West, including in the fields of technology, energy, security and intelligence.

5. A strong IDF that takes initiative and is prepared to face the challenges of the future.

National security is a pre-requisite for a thriving economy, for education and for the existence of the nation.

The IDF must be:

- **Strong** in manpower, preparedness and technological advances and innovation.
- **Proactive**, initiating action in accordance with strategic policies on all fronts.
- **Coordinated with the requirements of protecting national resilience**. Providing a strong home front, on alert and invested in cutting edge defense systems.
- **Egalitarian**. Comprised of all sectors of the population including Haredi and minority sectors.

3. Democracy and the rule of law

Israel's constitutional crisis was not born from a mistake or from circumstance. It was initiated by the government amid its attempts to weaken safeguards, expand its control and dismantle the system of checks and balances, giving the executive branch an advantage over other branches of Israeli democracy.

Since January 2023, rather than strengthening public trust, the government and those working on its behalf have conducted an assault on the legal system, the media, the Knesset and especially on basic civil rights of Israelis.

With the aim of returning Israeli democracy to its proper course, we present a plan dealing with three basic foundations:

- **Legislation**: Basic laws that would regulate the structure of government, the relation of its branches, authorities and oversight.
- **Restrictions**: Term limits and authority, first and foremost of the prime minister and heads of national entities and institutions.
- **Decentralization**: Transfer of authority and resources to local government and the strengthening of municipalities' ability to serve the public more efficiently.

The five pillars of a stable and working democracy:

1. A clear separation of branches

- We will strengthen the independence of the courts and protect the constitutional responsibility of the High Court of Appeals to oversee legislation.

- No branch of the government, judicial, legislative, or executive, would have the authority to control other branches. We will ensure that there will be no legislation to override the authority of the courts.

2. **Increasing the strength and ensuring the independence of gatekeepers**

We will **ensure the independence of the Attorney General**, protect the independence of the State Controller, the Civil Service Commissioner and the legal councils in government ministries along with other gatekeepers.

We will work to ensure:

- The **appointment of qualified professionals to public service** positions is made by an independent commission.
- To provide **funding for the legal system separate from the government's budget**, with a dedicated allocation of funds to the courts and the State Prosecution.
- **Improve public access to legal services**, including shorter waiting time, accessibility in more parts of the country and online access.

3. **Protection of civil rights**

We will present a constitution that defines Israel's basic values and judicial system as a Jewish and democratic state that will include:

- **Universal civil rights** with equality to all Israelis whether Jewish or Arab, religious or secular, male or female.
- **Freedom of religion, expression and affiliation.**
- A new definition of the relation of religion and state, while maintaining the freedom of religion and the freedom from religion.
- Revoking the 2018 Basic Law: Israel as the Nation-State of the Jewish People, known as the **Nation State Law** and replacing it with a basic law that is based on the Declaration of Independence that incorporates Israel's Jewish identity with its commitment to full equality for all citizens.

4. **Strengthening the legal authority and status of the Federation of Local Authorities in Israel. (FLAI)**

We will promote **a national effort to transfer authority** over education, health, social services, culture, environment and infrastructure **to municipalities and local authorities.**

- We will increase budgets, institute economic engines and infrastructure for fiscally struggling lower-income communities.
- We will pass legislation increasing the authority of FLAI's and its relation with government ministries.
- We will include local authority leaders in decision-making processes for social issues
- We will reduce the number of local authorities.

- **Israel's democracy is in crisis by design.** The Democrats are committed to building a balanced system of government that will be stable and strong and will serve the public rather than control it, to ensure a liberal, egalitarian Jewish democracy, which is critical for the country's ability to thrive in the long term.

5. **An Independent and responsible media landscape (see chapter 1)**

4. An education system is the foundation of Israeli society

- Education is the foundation of a healthy, principled and united society. It is the main engine forging future generations that must create a sense of commitment to the country and community, and provide the tools to participate in a rapidly changing and competitive world. More than any other field, education defines Israel's values and future and is the key to a democratic, egalitarian and moral society that strives for excellence, inclusion and equal opportunity.
- Beyond its social implications, education has a direct impact on the economy, the well-being of citizens and on national resilience. In a world changed by digital technology, primarily AI, that impacts the workforce and our way of life, it is incumbent on our education system to ensure that every Israeli child receives the

relevant tools to develop critical thinking, agility, creativity and moral responsibility that would enable active participation in society and the economy.

- Over the years, separate school systems emerged, catering to different sectors of society, contributing to inequality and social gaps that result in a divided public discourse and alienation and weakening rather than unifying society.
- The Democrats are committed to instituting deep rooted change in Israeli education so that it fulfills its role in creating a citizenry that is well equipped with the knowledge and tools needed for critical thinking, moral behavior and participation in a society well suited for the 21th century. One, unified, strong system of education is the path to building a society that is based on solidarity, trust, which can build a strong, egalitarian, knowledge-based economy, with equal opportunity for all.

The five pillars for education

1. **One national education curriculum with joint values and equal funding**

- All sectors of society: Jewish, Arab, religious and secular will share the same high-standard core curriculum needed for a democratic civil society.
- Funding will be the same for every Israeli child regardless of sectorial affiliation or geographic location, to ensure no child is left behind and each student is given an equal opportunity for success.
- Students will learn the core subjects of Hebrew, English, math, sciences, history, Jewish identity, democracy and civics.
- Communities will be able to incorporate their particular cultural and religious studies as long as they are compatible with the basic values of equality and the law.
- All pre-school-age children will have access to quality education.

2. **Bolstering the position of educators.**

Teachers are the heart of the education system but over the years their professional standing has been weakened. We will work to return the teaching profession to its rightful, respectable and desired position with adequate compensation.

- Better pay for members of educational teams, including guidance counselors, teachers' assistants, pre-school teachers and more.
- Special emphasis and incentives for attracting quality educators to areas in the periphery of the country including incentives
- Extensive training in AI that will fundamentally change the role of the teacher in class.

3. **Curriculum and the establishment of an independent education commission**

We will establish an independent national commission for education to develop our core curriculum, educational programs and pedagogic policies.

Core subjects:

- **Democracy and civics:** To educate for the rule of law, tolerance, human rights, conflict resolution and civic responsibility.
- **Jewish pluralism and the study of other faiths:** An education in the streams of Judaism and the principles of other faiths taught out of respect for all.
- **A high level of English and Mathematics:** To prepare students for work a global market and academia
- **Science, Technology and advanced skills:** Providing tools for scientific thinking, problem resolution, creativity and innovation.
- **Languages, history and culture**: Teaching Israeli and Hebrew culture as well as other cultures, improving language skills in both Hebrew and Arabic.

*** Instilling values will begin at pre-school age and will continue throughout the years leading up to and including military service.

4. **Advanced and secure learning environments**

We will improve infrastructure for learning:

- Fewer students in classrooms even at the cost of fewer teaching hours.
- Combating violence by increasing educational and counseling staff

- Incorporating advanced technological tools.
- Expanding pre-school educational programs.

5. Investment in higher education, research and the social sciences

Higher education is not only an engine for technological advances but is also the beating heart of education and Israel's principled identity.

We will allot a considerable investment in:

- Strengthening scientific, medical, technological and social research.
- Make higher education accessible for all.
- Rebuild the study of social and liberal studies as a foundation for critical moral and principled thinking.

Israel needs one unified public education system — equitable, intelligent, and values-driven, a system that will nurture a new generation of curious, moral, and caring citizens, partners in building and strengthening an enlightened, Jewish and democratic state. The Democrats will hold the creation of such a system at the top of their aspirations.

5. Our social-economic plan

A modern nation is committed to providing its citizens, primarily those who work, serve, pay taxes and contribute to society, to live honorably, work, raise a family and build a future, without having to struggle to meet basic needs on a monthly basis.

But over the past decade**, Israel has failed in its ambitions as a functioning social state and has opted for a sectorial distribution of funds.** Minority groups that had managed to secure political power have enjoyed a disproportionate portion of the budget. This is especially true for the Haredi sector which is closely linked to the government and has enjoyed considerable funding while working Israelis carry most of the burden of taxation, is faced with the increasingly high cost of living, suffers from deteriorating public services and a growing economic gap between rich and poor.

The Democrats have taken upon themselves to change the adverse trajectory of Israel's economy by two central means:

1. Increasing productivity by creating new economic engines and by distributing resources equally, including a larger investment in education.
2. Investments in innovation, infrastructure, health and a modern job market, so as to ensure that the fruits of economic growth will be enjoyed by all citizens and not only by those who enjoy political

The Democrats commit to building a resilient and fare economy that will bring long-term growth and prosperity and will ensure a just distribution of resources. We will seek an economy that will enable all citizens to enjoy the fruits of their labor and live with honor as part of Israel's success story.

The five pillars for a democratic economic policy

1. **Reducing the cost of living, braking monopolies and increasing competition.**

Israel is the most expensive country in the OECD.
Food, housing, transportation, and service prices in Israel are hundreds of percent higher than the average among developed countries.
Instead of taking advantage of the global market and acting in the interest of consumers, the country has seen over the past few years, a rise of monopolies, concentrated wealth, and improper ties between money and power.

High cost of living is the result of:

- Not enough competition in the food, energy, housing, finance and transportation sectors.
- Interest groups with ties to the government receiving favorable treatment at the expense of consumers.
- Weak and insufficient regulation.

The economic burden on families in Israel is the result of a failed government policy. We will work to institute radical changes to divert funds away from particular sectors and use them to reduce the cost of living and provide affordable housing.

- We will increase competition in the food industry.
- We will make government owned land available to reduce housing prices
- Bolster Israel Competition Authority (ICA) and adding restrictions on monopolies
- Transparency in pricing, clever consumer regulations and legislation to protect consumers from large cooperations.

2. **Better access to health and social services for a better quality of life**

Israel social and health services are strained and eroding under the increasing needs of the population, the growing social and economic gaps and the loss of public trust in state institutions.

Our aims are to:

- **Increase public spending on services** including in the public health system, with an emphasis on struggling communities, the disabled, elderly, single-parent homes and at-risk youth.
- Add hospital beds, doctors and nurses to the public health sector
- Add public transportation and community-based services
- Institute better balance in work hours, to ensure better quality of life and economic security.

3. **Investment in growth engines for the economy including infrastructure and innovation with an emphasis on the periphery.**

Israel's periphery in the north and south have not reached their full potential. During the war those areas bore the brunt and require an immediate allocation of funds and

investments to rebuild and repair so that the population that had been evacuated would be able to return live in security in their communities and thrive economically and emotionally.

- We will invest in infrastructure: roads, trains, renewable energy water and technology.
- We will provide reliable public transportation which is the key to bringing all parts of the country together and strengthen the economy. This will ensure:
    - A reduction in the cost of living.
    - Greater access to employment and services
    - Increased productivity
    - Better quality of life and a safer less polluted environment.
- Investment in clean-tech, bio-tech, cyber technology, advanced industry and agriculture in cooperation with universities and private sector companies.
- Incorporation of Haredi and Arab sector workers in the job market through financial and social incentives.
- Rehabilitation of areas damaged by war
    - A comprehensive rebuilding plan for the Galilee region and the Gaza border area that includes dedicated investments in transportation, education and health.
    - Incentives to attract industry from areas in the center of the country to the effected regions.
    - Government funding for psychological, emotional and social assistance to the population after the traumas of war.

4. **Rehabilitation of public services and their efficient administration**

- Hiring qualified professionals regardless of their political party affiliation or proximity to power.
- Adequate pay, professional training and a path for advancement.
- Incorporation of digital technologies and reduction of red tape.
- Incorporating data-driven governance for real-time solutions.

5. **Education in the service of society and prosperity (See section 4)**

6. The relation between religion and state

Israel is a Jewish and democratic nation that is committed to the values in its Declaration of Independence and to its traditions. Jewish tradition contributes to the national identity but the state must ensure that one religious doctrine does not discount all others. Israel's Jewish identity, therefore must be democratic, egalitarian and pluralistic, ensuring full freedom of religion and rights to all its citizens, both Jews and non-Jews.

1. **Saturday is the National Day of Rest**

Shabbat symbolizes both Jewish and universal values of rest and sanctity, yet there is a need to balance its traditional character with the needs of modern society.

- Public transportation will be available on the Sabbath in a limited capacity and in secular or mixed secular and religious areas and will not be available in areas with a religious population. Local government will be authorized to decide on the availability and the scope of public transport in accordance with the needs and desires of its residents.
- Entertainment and culture institutions: Venues for entertainment and culture will be open on Saturday while providing staff with appropriate rest hours.
- Alternative day of rest. In recognition of religious practices, non-Jewish workers will have the option of choosing an alternative day of rest, compatible with their religious preferences.

2. **Marriage and Divorce – the freedom to chose**

Current Israeli law for marriage and divorce leaves many citizens behind. The Democrats will work to institute civil marriage alongside religious ones for Jewish, mixed and same-sex couples and for people who do not identify with any religious faith with the same rights.

- The Rabbinical courts provide marriage services for those who chose it but will improve accessibility and services.
- Couples who have opted for a civil marriage will be able to divorce in a civil court free of rabbinical intervention.

3. Who is a Jew

The question 'who is a Jew' has been a bone of contention in Israeli society and in the Jewish world. The Democrats commit to reducing tension between Israelis and the Jewish diaspora by:

- **Recognizing conversions of all streams of Judaism**: Orthodox, Conservative and Reform conversions will be recognized by the state while maintaining minimal standards to ensure credibility of the conversion process.
- **Non-Orthodox conversions in Israel**: We will institute a non-religious conversion system with an emphasis of inclusion and reduced bureaucracy.
- **Bolster ties with the Jewish diaspora:** Israel will strengthen the cooperation with Jewish communities around the world with respect for local customs and will thrive to provide universally acceptable answers to questions regarding Jewish identity.

4. The rabbinate and religious public services

Non-Orthodox conversions in Israel: We will institute a non-religious conversion system with an emphasis of inclusion and reduced bureaucracy.

The monopoly of the Orthodox rabbinate over religious services has caused alienation and a sense of estrangement for many Israelis. The Democrats will work to change that by:

- Providing equal funding and authority to all streams of Judaism including Conservative and Reform communities.
- Privatizing religious services: We will establish a system providing religious services that will allow local authorities and members of different communities to choose what they desire and who they want to supply such services.
- Reform of the rabbinate: We will institute a reform of the Israeli rabbinate that will work in transparency for its public, reduce waiting time and bureaucracy.

5. Jewish culture and education to bolster a pluralistic Jewish identity

Education is key to bolstering Jewish identity for future generations. (See chapter 4)

- **Pluralistic Jewish education:** incorporating the teaching of a Jewish pluralism, Jewish history and tradition.

- **Support for cultural institutions:** Equal funding for institutions that promote different thought, streams of religion and communities while advancing respectful dialogue.