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What the Israeli Left Would Rather Forget

It has abandoned its prior proposals for judicial reform because the religious right now proposes them.



A protest against Israeli judicial reform in Tel Aviv, July 1. PHOTO: ARIEL SCHALIT/ASSOCIATED PRESS

In “Israel’s Anti-Majoritarian Majority” (Politics & Ideas, June 28), William Galston mistakes Israel’s loud protesters for a silent majority. His piece, however, points to the real issue: The left has abandoned its prior judicial-reform proposals because the religious right now proposes them.

Mr. Galston acknowledges that a majority of Israelis don’t want judicial reform to be abandoned. The reason is clear: Both left and right have pushed for reform of the Israeli Supreme Court for years. The heightened level of protest is detached from how similar the various parties’ judicial-reform positions have been.

Mr. Galston rightly notes that the controversy is “due in part to the distinctive features of Israel’s institutions,” but he fixates on the parliamentary system rather than the “distinctive features” of Israel’s court. He worries about the “political independence” of a

reformed Israeli court appointed by politicians. But if, as in Israel, a court's membership were largely controlled by its own members, its rulings weren't bound by a constitution, and it were to have expansive powers to decide who could stand before it, calling it "politically independent" would miss the point. The court would be unhinged from the people over whom it purports to rule.

That is the problem that Israel's left and right have wanted to solve for years. This government intends to solve it—moderately—as it was elected to do. That's democracy, and pointing out that the government has religious Jewish members isn't an argument.

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