

Democracy NGO: Livni Party among least democratic

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Likud, Labor, Meretz, Bayit Yehudi, and Balad are the most democratic parties in country, Israel Democratic Institute study finds.

Likud, Labor, Meretz, Bayit Yehudi, and Balad are the most democratic parties in Israel and the Tzipi Livni Party is among the least democratic, according to a study published Sunday by Professor Gideon Rahat, research director of the Israel Democracy Institute's political reform project.

Rahat developed the Party Democracy Index, a mechanism that allows voters to evaluate the degree of internal democracy in the parties. The index assessed each party's inclusiveness, representation, competition, accountability, and transparency.

The study evaluated to what extent parties involve their members in choosing their leader, Knesset candidates, and platform. Rahat checked each party's participation of women, reserved slots for sectors, the involvements of its institutions in decision-making, and how easy it is to obtain the party's bylaws, history, and details about contributors.

The IDI found that there is no connection between the size of the party and the level of its internal democracy, and parties that exhibit robust internal democratic processes exist across the political spectrum. IDI president Arye Carmon said citizens should take into account the party's level of internal democracy when deciding for whom to vote.

"Today, the electorate votes based on who is in the party and not what the party stands for," Carmon said.

Besides the Tzipi Livni Party, the parties that fared poorly in the study included both the Degel Hatorah and Agudat Yisrael factions of United Torah Judaism, Am Shalem and the United Arab List. Kadima, Shas, and Israel Beytenu also scored better than Livni's Party.

MK Meir Sheerit, who is fifth on the Livni list, mocked the findings of the study, calling them not smart. He said a new party could not be expected to already have members, institutions, and primaries.

"You can't compare old and new parties," Sheerit said. "It's like comparing cucumbers and watermelons."

Rahat responded that there were criteria in the study that favored both new and old parties. He said Sheerit should not be surprised that a party founded because its leader lost a primary in another party was not at the top of such a list. "I understand why he is upset," Rahat said. "But we were fair with the same criteria for all the parties. We did it systematically."