The Tal Law is dead. This is not only a good thing, but indeed essential to the future viability of an indivisible Israel.

In 2012, a clear and overwhelming defeat of the Tal Law was engineered by the government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, marking one of the most significant concessions to the population and with high poverty levels by the government in the name of foreign defense, versus a culture that chooses to live according to different rules, or exacerbates many aspects of contemporary society, and to a great extent denies the need for the shared sacrifice of public service.

Even the more conservative elements of the parliamentary leadership know that the time has come to truly bring all age-appropriate children into the fold. The law, named after a noble leader who had served with distinction, would deter army service until 23, at which point a student would complete his full-time study, serve 16 months in the army, or devote a year to national service. But it didn’t really work as planned. By the time students hit age 23, many already were married with children and thus exempt or in the middle of studies, or fulfilling their mitzvah.

As Linda Gradstein pointed out in a recent JTA article on the subject, quoting Yehuda Ben Meir of Tel Aviv University: “The Tal Law has failed. It has not been able to weave the community off the idea of not serving and not working. There is now a generation that believes this is the way they should live.”

The problem is disturbing in and of itself, but the overall implications for the State of Israel are causing immense social unrest. First, there is an accurate perception that different rules apply to one segment of the Jewish population, and that distinction is an unfair one. Second, the population that is exempt from service is that subset of Jewish Israel with the highest birth rates, largest families and with high poverty levels by virtue of the number of men whose full-time occupation is Torah study. Moreover, that study historically has failed to consistently produce the type of math, science and other subjects that are necessary to the cultivation of secular job skills. This dynamic has caused significant social unrest to be imposed upon the whole of Israeli society.

Third, the issue is now painted against a backdrop of gender politics, with a large swath of the Israeli population extremely unhappy with gender practices on streets, buses and other venues practiced by Haredi. Moreover, a number of violent and abusive episodes that have resulted from a small and out-of-control, albeit unrepresentative, portion of the Haredi population have exacerbated the fraying social friction.

Overall, the utmost is yet to come in the fabricating of a fair and progressive Jewish majority, that honors egalitarian principles and is conscripted into service at a young age in the name of foreign defense, versus a culture that chooses to live according to different rules, or exacerbates many aspects of contemporary society, and to a great extent denies the need for the shared sacrifice of public service.

The Tal Law was an effort by the government of Prime Minister Ehud Barak in 2002 to address the issue of vastly multiplied exemptions. The law, named after a retired justice, would defer army service until 23, at which point a student would complete his full-time study, serve 16 months in the army, or devote a year to national service.

The Tal Law has now become deeply entrenched and essential to the future viability of an indivisible Israel.