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Abstract. The Israeli–Palestinian conflict is one of the most intractable conflicts in the world today. During the period of the 1990s and early 2000s, its salience was especially high. In this article, we explore the role of elections in the conflict, focusing on deliberation, legitimation, and representation. We analyze the five Israeli elections between 1992 and 2003. Our findings raise significant doubts as to the quality of deliberation on the conflict in these five election campaigns, and suggest that the campaigns and election interpretations did not contribute to legitimation of policy in this area beyond procedural legitimacy. Nevertheless, the elections had a major impact in molding the conflict through their role in transferring power and in producing dynamic representation. Although our focus is on a single case, this article falls within the body of empirical research about elections as instruments of democracy and their role in shaping the course of international conflicts.

Keywords: • Elections • Deliberation • Legitimation • Representation • Israeli–Palestinian conflict

Introduction

The Israeli–Arab conflict, the more than 100 years of conflict between Jews and Arabs over the small piece of land Jews call Eretz Israel and the Palestinians call Falastin, is one of the most intractable conflicts in the world today, at the center of international politics and media attention. Over the years it has fluctuated between periods of armed struggle and armistice, as well as between periods of peacemaking and apparent advances in conflict resolution. Any visitor's casual glance, in line with scholarly studies of Israeli society, attests to the overwhelming presence of this conflict in every aspect of Israeli collective and individual life.

How does a democratic society contend with the dilemmas that such a conflict raises in terms of foreign and security affairs, domestic concerns and priorities, and daily life? Obviously, the various apparatuses of state and society are at work,

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with greater and lesser success across institutions, realms of life, and times. One clear ramification is that security considerations reign, and the army and other security forces are a dominant force in society and politics. The conflict looms in the background of just about all institutions, culture, and social relations: the legal code and political economy, social stratification by gender, ethnic and Arab–Jewish relations, the welfare system, the role of religion, the media, and of course politics (for example, Arian, 1995; Bar-Tal, 1998; Kimmerling, 1985, 2001; Lissak, 1984; Shafir and Peled, 2002).

Politics is our focus. The conflictual relations of Israel with its Arab neighbors have always been an important dimension in Israeli politics. Since the Six Day War, they have become *the* major cleavage dimension, with the territories occupied in 1967 and Israeli–Palestinian relations its focal point. In line with the pervasiveness of the conflict in Israeli existence, this cleavage should not be seen as strictly one over borders or over security and foreign affairs, but also as one with ramifications for domestic politics, and as being closely tied to questions of collective identity. This is the major cleavage dimension of Israeli politics, and Israelis have been divided over it for years. Since the 1980s, the Israeli party system has had a two-bloc party structure, and the conflict defines the left and right camps and labels. Left means a greater willingness to compromise with the Arab side and greater emphasis on negotiations and talks than the right, which is more willing to employ force and less amenable to concessions. The left includes the Labor Party and, over the years, different small Jewish and Arab parties; the right comprises the Likud and smaller secular and religious Jewish parties.

We focus here on one particular aspect of politics, elections, and explore their role in the conflict. The question we wish to consider is how elections, as the most prominent mechanism of democratic politics, have molded the conflict. Are elections a meaningful tool for addressing this most fundamental issue that the society faces? To what extent do elections in Israel center on the conflict and provide ways to come to grips with it? How does the conflict play out in Israeli elections in terms of agenda? Do voters vote on this issue? Does the election discourse deal with it? Do elections become a constructive arena for debate and deliberation about the problems caused by the protracted conflict and ways to resolve it? To what extent do elections provide an efficient outlet for public opinion? Do elections translate public preferences into policy? Do they contribute to the legitimacy of political decisions in this area?

Representation, Deliberation, and Legitimation in Elections

Our focus is on Israel, but our study falls within the tradition of empirical research about elections as instruments of democracy, to use the terminology of Powell's (2000) landmark book. It builds on what is probably the strongest (normative and empirical) claim for elections as instruments of democracy, that is, "that the competitive election forges connections between the wishes of citizens and the behavior of policy makers" (Powell, 2000: 14). Our study is broader than Powell's or the more recent study of McDonald and Budge (2005), both of which concentrate on representation, because we also look at other important functions of elections which pertain to this connection between citizens and policy-making. Our study is narrower in that it is not cross-national and looks only at one country, albeit over several elections and through a great variation of circumstances. Obviously,

we do not consider Israel unique,[1] and rely in our study on established theory and comparative empirical research in setting up our hypotheses.

According to classical theories of democracy, elections are an essential tool of democratic governance, an avenue for the realization of democratic principles both for the individual citizen and for the democratic system. Modern theories of elections list multiple functions for elections, some of which are relevant to elections in general and others specific to elections in democracies (see Dahl, 1956; Katz, 1997, 2000; Rose and Mossawir, 1967). We shall focus on representation, deliberation, and legitimation.

Representation is the major aspect of popular sovereignty in modern democracies, and elections present the key democratic mechanism for achieving it through the transfer of power. Elections allow citizens to select their leaders, to hold those elected accountable for their performance in office by "throwing the rascals out," and to choose between policy alternatives. Elections have thus not only a direct role in governance and in representation, but also an indirect role. Elections provide for a reciprocal process between the public and its elected leaders, whereby leaders have to take into account their publics, and feedback is an essential component of the relationship.

Elections are also deemed a vital arena of the public sphere in which deliberation of public issues takes place and public opinion is formed. Deliberation is an important, recently invigorated aspect of democracy relevant to all five democratic values that Katz (2000) lists as having direct bearing on the democratic functions of elections: popular sovereignty, liberalism, personal development, community, and equality. Finally, elections have a major role in bestowing legitimacy on elected officials and the decisions they take. This function of elections applies to elections in democratic as well as nondemocratic settings. These three functions of representation, deliberation, and legitimation pertain to the roles that elections can play in giving citizens influence over policy-making.

Theories of democracy and of elections are often both normative and descriptive. In normative terms, they refer to what ought to be and provide justification for democratic elections. From an empirical point of view, the question is the one we posed above: how do elections work, in fact, in the real world of democracy? Recasting our research question in terms of these electoral functions of deliberation, legitimation, and representation, our study is organized around the following questions:

1. Have Israeli elections provided a forum for meaningful deliberation of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict and the underlying policy choices?
2. How did the elections fulfill their role of legitimizing elected leaders and their policy moves in this area?
3. To what extent did the elections provide for government responsiveness and representation along the conflict dimension in terms of transfer of power, choice between leaders of opposite camps, and choice among policy alternatives?

Deliberation

Elections provide an especially opportune setting for broad-based deliberation of public issues. Deliberation is an essential component of democracy involving a reasoning and justification process preceding decisions, and is tied to the notions

of popular sovereignty and legitimacy (Fishkin, 1991; Gutmann and Thompson, 2004; Habermas, 1984, 1996). Deliberation takes place in many settings in political institutions and in civil society. Deliberative theorists do not pay special attention to elections, despite the fact that they provide a unique setting for deliberation due to the inclusive wide-scale participation and publicity they entail. During an election campaign candidates and parties have to face the public and each other in a competitive process, and the public becomes by definition part of this process.

So much for prescriptive democratic theory, but is this opportunity actually seized upon? Do the national elections in Israel provide a forum for deliberation of peace and security issues? Is there meaningful discussion of dilemmas and of the merits of different choices? Are value priorities and trade-offs articulated? Are policies debated? Is there interaction between the competing parties and public opinion? Do elections allow for the political education of citizens?

The major arena of electioneering and thus of deliberation in elections in today's democracies is the media. This is also the case in Israel. Parlor meetings, public debates, mass rallies, and other campaign tactics typical of Israel in the past almost disappeared in the 1990s. Bulletin boards and the major intersections are still filled with stickers and posters, but, other than that, the election campaign is largely carried out in the media. Of course, there are the party activists and branches, and conversations and discussions take place among citizens (for example, see Huckfeldt et al., 2000). Nevertheless, the election campaign is focused in the media, the most public and inclusive sphere. Therefore an efficient and valid way to study public deliberation in elections is to look at the election campaign as it is mirrored in the media, and at the two major actors that structure the campaign: the political parties and candidates on the one hand and the media on the other (Kaid and Holtz-Bacha, 1995).

Given the primacy of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict in Israeli society and politics, one would expect the election campaign to largely focus on it. However, political communication theory and research warn us not to raise our expectations too high as to the quality of deliberation in elections. The political competitors approach the election strategically, their goal being vote maximization, which often leads them to blur messages, evade issues, and use catch-all tactics. Substantive information in political advertisements tends to be vague, retrospective, and to refer primarily to the past, and distinctions among the candidates on issues are fuzzy. The media tend to focus even less on the issues, and emphasize the game aspects of elections, strategy and tactics over substance, and persona over programs and ideology (Bennett, 2003; Boiney and Paletz, 1991; Iyengar, 1991; Just et al., 1996, 1999; Kahn and Kenney, 1999; Swanson and Mancini, 1996). While much of this research has focused on the US experience, it is widely acknowledged that the same political communication processes have been transposed to other democracies, including Israel.

Legitimation

Elections are today the major source of legitimacy for government – for elected leaders and for their subsequent policy moves. Generally, rulers elected in established democracies have the procedural legitimacy that goes with office and with highly regarded electoral rules of the game. Legitimacy (the voluntary deference to authorities) is established when those involved in power relations

share the belief that they are legitimate (Weber, 1968). Such beliefs, however, are not whimsical and are usually grounded in substantive reasons that justify them. Beyond the shared belief in the legitimacy of a regime, it is legitimate because it is congruent with people's values, satisfies their interests, and fulfills their expectations of it (Beetham, 1991). Thus legitimacy is affected by the meaning assigned to an election in public discourse. In particular, in cases in which governments initiate bold policy moves, the question of what their mandate is, what they were elected on, and whether they are authorized to move in new directions comes up. In the political science literature, the concept of mandate election has been used in this connection to denote those (rare) occasions on which elections are perceived as having sent a strong and clear message as to the public's preferences and decisions regarding who will govern and what policies it wants the government to pursue. Such an interpretation of the election in the corridors of power and in the general climate of opinion empowers the elected government and bolsters legitimacy for policy moves regarded as having been mandated by the public (Keeler, 1993; Peterson et al., 2003). Most elections are not mandate elections, but nevertheless go through a postelection process of interpretation as to their meaning. Since a great number of factors affect individual voting choices and election outcomes, establishing the meaning of an election is to a certain extent a matter of social construction (Grossback et al., 2006; Hale, 1993; Hershey, 1992). How the elections end up being interpreted is meaningful and consequential for the conduct of government and for the legitimacy of its actions in different policy areas.

Election interpretations and the legitimacy stemming from them depend on the election results and should at least to some extent be in tandem with the election campaign and the deliberation carried out in it. Powell (2000) has established that structural conditions for mandates are more likely to materialize in majoritarian than in proportional systems. Since the Israeli political system belongs to the family of proportional political systems, the likelihood of electoral mandates is not high. Nevertheless, we expect the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, as the primary cleavage dimension in Israeli politics, to be salient in both campaign deliberations and election interpretations, and when there is a clear winner, to bestow legitimacy on government actions on peace and security.

Representation

Election-based connections between citizens and policy-making are complex, multistage, and multidimensional. Indeed, definitions of representation abound. Representation involves many conditions and multiple routes, and may be gauged in different ways.

Our focus is on substantive rather than procedural representation[2] (Powell, 2004); the latter is almost impeccable under the Israeli proportional electoral system, with the whole country being one constituency and the representation threshold being 1.5 percent during the period we are studying. Given our research focus, we concentrate on dynamic representation, that is, on the responsiveness of government to public preferences in the sense that "if public opinion changes ... then public policy responds" (Stimson et al., 1995: 543; see also Erikson et al., 2002). Elections may bring about such responsiveness via two routes: the direct route, through the selection of leaders and change in the make-up of government, and the indirect route, whereby political actors who wish to be re-elected have to take

into account their publics through rational anticipation (Rose and Mossawir, 1967; Stimson et al., 1995). We will thus look at voters' electoral behavior, preferences and changes therein, government turnover, party positions, and policy under different governments.

Recent empirical research suggests that elections perform this function quite well, and even better in proportional systems (McDonald and Budge, 2005; Powell, 2000). We thus expect a high level of responsiveness in the Israeli case, given its proportional representation (PR) and multiparty system, the centrality of peace and security issues on the political agenda, and the intense involvement of the public (Cox, 1997; Holmberg, 2000; Miller et al., 1999; Powell, 2000, 2004; Rae, 1967).

Research Context and Methodology

We will focus on Israel in the 1990s and early 2000s, a period of more than a decade when the salience of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict was especially high.This was an era of unparalleled oscillation between peace initiatives and armed confrontation, between reconciliation and violence. It spans the period from the first to the second Intifada, with the Oslo peace process in between. During the period we are studying there were momentous shifts in public opinion, dramatic policy initiatives, and growing awareness of the dilemmas Israel faces in the context of this conflict. Moreover, Israel went to the polls frequently and at important crossroads. During this relatively short period of time there were five national elections (1992, 1996, 1999, 2001, and 2003), providing for an efficient research design for the study of our research questions.

We rely upon multiple data sources for each of the three topics of our study.

Deliberation: The Election Campaign

While democratic deliberation in elections occurs in different contexts, the foremost arena is the mass media and, even more specifically, TV. We thus focus solely on the TV election campaign. As discussed above, deliberation around elections may also take place in other forums and in interpersonal communication networks. However, the media campaign is the focal point of elections nowadays, and the most public and inclusive sphere, and we therefore limit our empirical analysis to it, relying on content analyses of the media and political advertising. Systematic content analysis of TV election coverage provides data on the issue dimensions around which the campaigns were run and the relative focus upon substance versus campaign strategy and candidate traits. Data are based on the main news programs and the special election magazines on television throughout each election campaign.[3] Systematic content analyses of the two major political parties' TV spots provide their campaign agendas and appeals.[4]

Legitimation: Election Interpretations

In order to study the role of elections in the legitimation of elected leaders and their policy moves, we examined postelection media interpretations and the politics around the Gaza disengagement and the Oslo accords. The postelection media interpretations are based on a systematic and exhaustive content analysis of all postelection reports in *Ha'aretz* and *Yedioth Ahronoth* in the two weeks following

each of the elections. The data include all explanations of the election results and mandate references.[5]

Representation

We rely on several sources for the study of representation. Public opinion and voting behavior are gauged through the surveys of the INES (Israel National Election Studies),[6] which provide voters' perceptions and voting considerations. The analysis of public opinion trends is based on data from the Public Opinion and National Security project of the Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies.[7] Party policy positions on the conflict dimension are based on expert judgments of the policy positions of Likud and Labor and analysis of the party platforms.[8] Policy analysis is based on official and other chronologies of developments in the Israeli–Arab conflict during the period studied.[9]

Findings and Analysis

Deliberation: The Election Campaign

Do the elections provide a forum for deliberation and meaningful discussion of peace and security issues emanating from this intractable conflict? Let us consider first the political parties' advertising. We rely on two systematic content analyses of the political spots broadcast by the two major parties, Likud and Labor, in the five election campaigns. Table 1 presents data relevant to this question.

We find, first, that the conflict is indeed high on the agendas of both parties in all the elections, although to a lesser degree in 1992 (see the first and fifth rows of Table 1). When we compare conflict to domestic issues, an interesting difference emerges. The Likud focuses almost exclusively on issues related to the conflict,

TABLE 1. *Content Analysis of Labor and Likud Political Spots (1992–2003)*

	1992	1996	1999	2001	2003
Likud					
Peace/security issues in political spots (I)	93	202	169	137	158
Domestic issues in political spots (I)	107	11	33	<1	37
Stands on controversial peace/security issues (M)	3	4	0	0	10
Stands on controversial domestic issues (M)	0	1	0	0	0
Labor					
Peace/security issues in political spots (I)	74	133	114	168	108
Domestic issues in political spots (I)	92	48	148	39	121
Stands on controversial peace/security issues (M)	5	na	0	11	9
Stands on controversial domestic issues (M)	18	na	0	3	5

Sources: See note 4 and notes immediately below.

Notes: (I) The Israel Democracy Institute Election Study; Shamir et al. (forthcoming, Table 2). Figures represent the percentage of items making reference to each category. These figures may exceed 100 percent because most spots included more than a single issue, up to three main substantive issues per spot were coded, and the count was cumulative. (M) Mendilow (2003: Tables 5.3, 6.1, 7.1, 7.3, 7.4; 2004, Tables 1 and 2). The figures represent the percent of net broadcast time of each party devoted to the controversial policies shown.

whether in power or in opposition, in all but the 1992 election. In the other four elections, the proportion of these issues to domestic, non-conflict-related issues is greater than 80:20. Labor's focus, on the other hand, varies over elections. When in opposition (1992, 1999, and 2003), it hammers at domestic issues; when it is in power (1996 and 2001), it emphasizes peace and security issues, although never as much as the Likud.

How do the major political parties address conflict issues? According to Mendilow's (2003, 2004) in-depth analysis of these election campaigns, the two parties did little to present their stands on controversial conflict-related issues or debate their opponent's positions. Mendilow's content analysis categories distinguish between valence and position-based electoral appeals. As reported in rows 3, 4, 7, and 8 of Table 1, appeals based on the parties' stands on controversial domestic and on controversial defense and foreign policy issues[10] comprised little of the broadcast time of Likud and Labor: respectively, only 3 percent and 5 percent in 1992; 4 percent of Likud's electoral appeals in 1996;[11] 0 percent for both parties in 1999; respectively, 0 percent and 11 percent in 2001; and 10 percent and 9 percent in 2003 (Mendilow, 2003: Tables 5.3, 6.1, 7.1, 7.3, 7.4; 2004: Tables 1, 2). In all elections, there was very little explicit discussion of the genuine and significant policy differences between the parties. The parties talked about the conflict, but they did so primarily in valence terms. They discussed peace and security as consensual goals and focused on retrospective and prospective performance evaluation and images (Mendilow, 2003: Chs 5, 6, 7; 2004).

This was evident in 1992, when, according to Mendilow's (2003) content analysis, only 3 percent of the Likud's and 5 percent of Labor's political advertising time was devoted to controversial security and foreign affairs policy issues. The 1992 election was held following the Gulf War and the 1991 Madrid peace conference, with a right-wing Likud-led coalition government in office and a high level of polarization between the left and right camps. Yet Labor shied away from controversial issues and chose to "turn the election into a plebiscite on the Likud's leadership [and] economic stewardship" and on national priorities, and "most of the interparty sparring was indeed over valence issues" (Mendilow, 2003: 149, Ch. 5; see also Arian and Shamir, 1993).

The 1996, 1999, and 2001 elections were held under rules providing for the direct election of the prime minister.[12] The two candidates contended in a Downsian type of majoritarian competition with centripetal, converging dynamics. This competition centered on the major cleavage dimension of the conflict, now defined by the Oslo agreement. However, both sides did all they could "to occupy the center in a polarized society" in their television messages (Mendilow, 2003: 168, Chs 6, 7; see also Hazan, 1999). The focus of the campaigns was on the personalities involved: on credibility, trust, and performance. The 2003 election was held under PR rules without direct election of the prime minister, and yet the campaign was very similar to the previous ones.

Of course, parties approach elections strategically, and their major goal is to run a campaign that will increase their share of the vote and win the election. To do so, they identify an opportune agenda and a public worth courting, and design their message accordingly (Iyengar and Simon, 2000; Kahn and Kenney, 1999; Mendilow, 2003). The Likud's appeal is in the security area, and it plays on this advantage; Labor's strength lies in the social and economic domains, thus it focuses on them. However, all of these campaigns converged on the median

voter, blurred messages, evaded issues, and emphasized persona. It is worthwhile noting that since 1999 there have been no televised face-to-face debates between the Likud and Labor candidates for prime minister.

Let us look now at the Israel Democracy Institute (IDI) content analysis of TV election coverage. As Table 2 makes clear, there was a very strong focus by the media on campaign strategy as compared to substance. In four of the five election campaigns, there was more reference in news items to the campaign strategies and tactics of the parties and candidates, to divisions and struggles within the parties, and to bad-mouthing, deals, polls, and so on than to substance (compare rows 1 and 2 of Table 2). This was true in all elections but that of 1996, when a large proportion of the coverage was on the "Grapes of Wrath" military operation against Hizbullah in Southern Lebanon, which played out in the month before the election.

Furthermore, coverage of typical domestic issues (such as the economy, the state and religion, education, health, crime, and corruption) often outweighs issues relating to the conflict: peace policy, the peace process, security, terror, war, and the Israeli Arab minority (compare rows 3 and 4 of Table 2). This pattern was especially pronounced in the election campaigns of 1992 and 2003. It was also evident in 1999. In these three election years, police investigations, crime, corruption, and scandal dominated domestic issues. In 1992, charges of corruption against Likud officials and the damaging state comptroller's report, issued shortly before the election and recommending criminal investigations, were on the agenda. In 1999, corruption scandals associated with Aryeh Deri, Ariel Sharon, and Benjamin Netanyahu were at the forefront. In 2003, charges of bribery, vote selling, and the involvement of activists with criminal records in Likud's list-selection process surfaced. Prime Minister Sharon became personally implicated through a loan he and his sons received, and further corruption scandals involved Labor Party candidates.

In 1996, conflict issues were high on the media agenda, in particular the military operation in Lebanon, as well as negotiations with the Palestinians, settlements, and terror. Again in the 2001 election, held four months into the Al-Aqsa Intifada, these issues dominated. To the fore were terror, negotiations with the Palestinians, and Israeli Arabs, following their October demonstrations, which had turned into riots and resulted in the killing of 13 demonstrators by the police.

TABLE 2. *Content Analysis of Campaign Media Coverage (1992–2003)*

	1992(%)	1996(%)	1999(%)	2001(%)	2003(%)
Campaign strategy	57	33	66	90	70
Substance	34	56	59	50	62
Peace/security issues' coverage	11	62	36	60	39
Domestic issues' coverage	37	18	46	14	89

Sources: Israel Democracy Institute (IDI) Election Study (see note 3). Shamir et al. (forthcoming, Table 2).
Notes: Figures represent the percentage of news items making reference to each category. The campaign category includes campaign strategy, party organization, and candidate factors. The substance issues category combines domestic as well as security and peace issues. Percentages may exceed 100 percent because most items included more than a single issue and the figures are cumulative. Total percentages of substantive issues may also be lower than 100 percent, because many news items included only strategic issues.

Thus it is evident, just as political communication scholars suggest, that the focus of the media during elections is upon the salient, the unexpected, and the dramatic, that is, what they consider to be newsworthy. This affects the substantive focus, and also the prominence of campaign tactics and strategy, given the media's emphasis on the game aspects of elections, on the personal and immediate over social processes, and on the episodic and concrete over the thematic (Bennett, 2003; Iyengar, 1991; Just et al., 1996; King and Schudson, 1995; Patterson, 1994; Weimann and Wolfsfeld, 2002).

In conclusion, we find that the major political parties do talk about the conflict; however, the way they do so does not entail enlightened and enlightening deliberation of the issues and of alternatives. Rather, they converge, blur differences, evade issues, adopt ambiguity, talk valence and not position, and focus on personalities and performance. Media coverage of the election campaign does not remedy the situation, as it focuses largely on campaign tactics, diverting attention from substance, and zeroes in on the conflict only when there are developments deemed newsworthy. We may add that the Israeli public as well as pundits have repeatedly expressed discontent with such political campaigns. This dissatisfaction was articulated in direct questions in polls, in media commentaries, and in the ratings of political advertisements on TV (Mendilow, 2003; Weimann and Sheafer, 2004; Wolfsfeld, 1995).

Legitimacy

How do the elections fulfill their role of legitimizing elected leaders and their policy moves on peace and security? Beyond procedural legitimacy, we argued that it depends on how the elections are interpreted. Table 3 presents the "conventional wisdom" about the elections, as indicated by postelection media interpretations, the content of which was analyzed two weeks after each election.

First, note that explanations not relating to policy issues or to the public's views (such as campaign strategy, candidates' virtues or deficiencies, and party organization factors) account for much of the election explanation in each year, averaging more than 40 percent (row 2 in Table 3). Of these explanations, only about 3 percent referred to the character or leadership advantages of the winning candidate in 1996 through to 2003, and 6 percent to Rabin in 1992.

TABLE 3. *Postelection Media Content Analysis of Election Interpretations (1992–2003)*

	1992(%)	1996(%)	1999(%)	2001(%)	2003(%)
Election explanations					
Substance issues	47	55	51	52	53
Campaign strategy	56	39	41	37	36
Peace/security	28	31	22	40	37
Domestic	31	34	38	15	25
Mandate references					
Total	24	6	10	14	13
Net (acknowledgment minus denial)	16	5	9	3	11

Source: See note 5. Shamir et al. (forthcoming, Table 4).

Notes: Figures represent the percentage of articles making reference to each category. Categories may sum to more than 100 percent because of multiple references in the articles and also to less than 100 percent due to the other category.

At the same time, we can see that about half of the articles across all elections included election explanations cast in substantive policy issue terms (see row 1 of Table 3). In all elections, except for 1992, these explanations outnumbered campaign strategy explanations. However, these substantive interpretations did not necessarily focus on peace and security issues. On the average, around 30 percent of articles carried an explanation of the election in terms of peace or security (row 3 of Table 3). But in only two elections, in 2001 and 2003, did such explanations outnumber explanations based on domestic matters. In 2001, three-quarters of substantive explanations were cast in terms of peace and security. Again in 2003 a majority of such explanations were in this issue domain; in 1992 and 1996, substantive election attributions were split about half and half between this focus and explanations in the realm of domestic politics; in 1999, only about a third of the attributions were conflict related.

Moreover, none of the elections were defined as mandates. In all five elections, there were few mandate attributions: in no more than a quarter of the articles (in 1992) was there reference to a mandate, and the highest number of net mandate attributions (that is mandate claims minus mandate denials) was 16 percent.

To summarize then, no election was declared a mandate election. In all of them, the postelection interpretations were widely dispersed. In terms of substance, the media interpretations were split between domestic and conflict-related meanings, with only 2001, and to a lesser extent 2003, focused on the conflict. In all elections much of the election explanation related to the campaign. In other words, the media portrayed the elections to a large extent in terms of campaign strategy and tactics – a pattern that cannot be disconnected from a similar focus during the campaign. The effect of this is to blur the substantive messages that the elections may have, and to impede the legitimacy that elections may confer on innovative policy moves.

During the period under study, two ground-breaking policy initiatives loomed large: the Oslo accords and the Gaza disengagement. Both involved a massive struggle over legitimacy. Following the signing of the Oslo accords in 1993, culminating in the assassination of Prime Minister Itzhak Rabin on November 4, 1995, and preceding the Gaza disengagement carried out by Ariel Sharon in August 2005, Israel saw mass protest of an unprecedented volume, duration, and violence. In both cases, it was aimed at delegitimizing the policy decisions, the leaders personally, and the democratic institutions, and at preventing the bold policy steps that eventually were taken. In both cases, the elections preceding these policy turnabouts did not lend legitimacy to undertaking such initiatives beyond the standard procedural legitimacy elections bestow. The 1992 election was held in the fifth year of the first Intifada, and followed the October 1991 Madrid peace conference. However, the major parties, and in particular Labor headed by Rabin, shunned controversial foreign policy and security issues, and addressed these mainly in valence terms and via wedge issues. Moreover, both the election campaign coverage and the postelection interpretations focused on strategic campaign issues much more than on substance, and in terms of substance, domestic concerns were more prominent than peace and security affairs. The 2003 election was held in the third year of the second Intifada. During the election campaign, domestic issues were as prominent as security and foreign affairs. Sharon's Likud party focused on peace and security issues in its political spots, but the messages were vague and in no way hinted at what was about to come. As a matter of fact, it was

Sharon's major opponent, Labor leader Amram Mitzna, who suggested during the election campaign a minor version of a Gaza disengagement, and his defeat was colossal. Neither election could be considered as having conferred legitimacy on the bold initiative each of these leaders undertook shortly thereafter, and, in effect, their challengers emphasized this lack of an electoral mandate for their policy as part of their struggle to delegitimize them.[13]

Representation

Let us look now at representation. We begin with whether voters have coherent preferences on peace and security, whether they see differences between the competing parties on these issues, and whether they vote on them – otherwise votes are not communicating policy information and the representation linkage breaks right there. The Israeli public is considered to be attuned to politics, highly involved, and politically sophisticated (Arian et al., 2003: 139–40), and, as we have already mentioned, the cleavage regarding the issues of peace and security, encapsulated in the debate over the territories, is at the center of politics, with left and right defined along this dimension.

Beyond this general assessment, the data in Table 4 provide ample support for this link. The first two groups of rows present logistic regression coefficients representing the impact of voters' positions on the conflict, state/religion, and socio-economic issues and the impact of their performance evaluations in the security and economic realms on their vote for left versus right blocs or candidates. We can see that voters vote on the basis of the conflict issue, although of course this is not the only consideration. But the conflict weighs much more in their vote calculus than other, domestic issues; in all elections, it is the most important consideration both in terms of position and in terms of performance evaluation (with the exception of 1999, when performance evaluations in the domestic domain overrode performance considerations on the conflict, even if the conflict remained the most potent issue in terms of position). In the third group of rows in Table 4, we can see that in all elections voters say that conflict-related issues have a great effect on their votes, and always more so than domestic issues. Finally, at least in the mind of the voters, there are identifiable options before them (the fourth group of rows in Table 4). The electorate sees differences between the major parties on this issue dimension: between approximately 60 percent and 80 percent say they perceive large or very large differences on peace and territories, while 38–67 percent see differences on how to deal with terrorism. Note that many more perceive differences on this dimension than on economic and social policy (30–43 percent), in line with experts' assessments.

Having established the primacy of the conflict issue in voters' considerations, we move on to look at dynamic representation in terms of the substance of the conflict. We follow voters' preferences and changes therein, corresponding government turnover, party positions, and policy under different governments.

Unlike Israel's early electoral history, during the period we are studying, turnover in government was high, and Israelis have consistently used the elections in order to transfer power and choose between leaders of opposite camps. As a matter of fact, in four of the five elections there was a complete change of guard: prime minister, leading party, and ruling coalition.[14] Figure 1 places these elections together with policy landmarks and public opinion data on two survey questions, which serve as indicators for means and ends in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict.

TABLE 4. *Voting Behavior (1992–2003)*

	1992	1996	1999	2001	2003
Issue voting[1]					
Peace/Territories	.92	1.07	1.10	.92	1.03
Socio-economic	.34	(.20)	(.23)	.30	.56
State/religion	(.20)	.24	.49	(.03)	(.35)
Performance evaluations[1]					
Security performance evaluation	1.51	1.28	1.52	1.99	2.13
Economic performance evaluation	.67	.93	2.44	1.29	1.76
Vote considerations (%)[2]					
Peace/territories	71	74	67	54	67
Terror	82	68	62	66	66
Jerusalem	n/a	55	42	61	46
Economy	n/a	34	58	54	63
Social policy	77	n/a	51	48	51
State/religion	56	n/a	48	41	52
Corruption	70	n/a	n/a	n/a	53
Perceived differences (%)[3]					
Peace/territories	61	79	59	72	61
Terror	n/a	61	38	67	51
Jerusalem	n/a	54	27	73	48
Economy	43	30	35	35	34
Social policy	n/a	n/a	38	41	40
State/religion	n/a	n/a	47	47	49

Sources: Data from INES pre-election surveys (see note 6), Shamir and Arian (Model III: 1999, Table 2; 2002, Table 2; 2005: Table 1 and 2.

Notes: Data for Jewish respondents only.

[1] Issue voting and performance evaluation: data represent b estimates from multivariate logistic regression models predicting the left/right bloc vote in 1992 and 2003, and the prime ministerial vote in 1996, 1999 and 2001. The estimates are partial coefficients indicating the unique impact of issues and performance evaluations, controlling for all other demographic and attitudinal variables. Non-significant variables appear in parentheses.

[2] Vote considerations: The figures shown represent the percentage of those whose response was "will have much effect" to the question "To what extent will each of the following issues affect or not affect your vote?" In 1992, the questions asked differed from those in other election years, and concerned a much longer list of factors, while responses were restricted to "will affect" or "will not affect" voting, so figures are not strictly comparable across these elections. With no "Peace/territories" category in 1992, we report the average effect response for 3 items: the beginning of peace talks, government handling of peace talks, and Likud's settlement policy. Instead of "Terror", "Social Policy", and "Corruption" the categories reported are "Intifada", "unemployment", and "corruption in government and the state comptroller's report", respectively. In 2001, instead of "Peace/territories", respondents were asked about "agreement with the Palestinians".

[3] Perceived differences: The figures shown represent the percentage of those whose response was "very large differences" and "large differences" to the question "In your opinion, are there or aren't there differences in the major parties' positions on the following issue?" In 2001, the questions referred to prime ministerial candidates. In 2001, instead of the "peace and territories", "agreement with the Palestinians" was referred to, while in 1992 the item referred to "territorial compromise" (giving up territories).

The first question asked what means Israel should emphasize in order to prevent war, whether peace talks or military power. The second question asked about agreement or opposition to a Palestinian state as part of a peace settlement as a long-term solution to the conflict. These two questions are not unrelated; however they exhibit two very different trends over the period we are studying.

It is apparent from Figure 1 that there is a long-term dovish trend of growing willingness to compromise and accept a Palestinian state, beginning at the start of the first Intifada, continuing through the Oslo years, and seemingly leveling off toward the end of the 1990s and into the second Intifada. This trend line indicates significant value change in Israeli society. The other item which measures the public's preference for either diplomatic or military means for dealing with the conflict shows much oscillation over time, and is cyclical. This is indeed what one

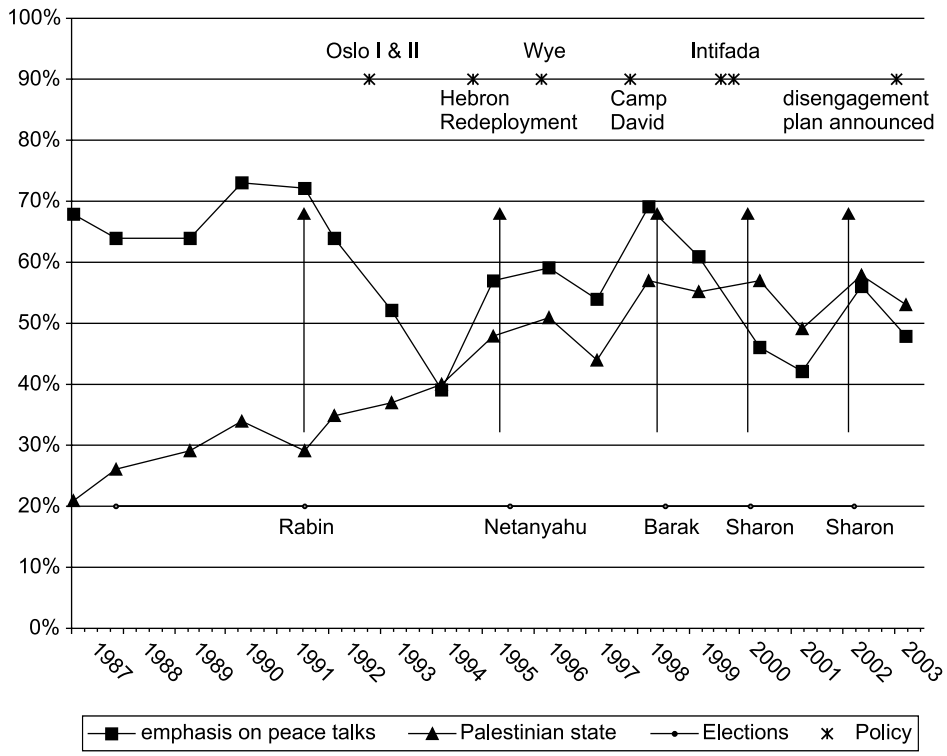

FIGURE 1. *Elections, Public opinion, and Policy*

Sources: Public Opinion and National Security, project of the Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies at Tel-Aviv University (see note 7).

Notes: The emphasis on peace talks is measured by the percentage answering "concentrate on peace talks" (rather than "increase its military power") to the question "What do you think Israel should emphasize in order to avoid war with Arab countries?" Palestinian state is measured by the percentage of those answering "agree" and "definitely agree" (rather than "disagree" and definitely disagree") to the question "In your opinion should Israel agree or not to the establishment of a Palestinian state in Judea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip as part of a peace setlement?"

would expect from such a question about policy means, which should be highly responsive to the measures government is taking as well as to developments in the conflict.

How do the election results and policy correspond to these public opinion preferences? Clearly, the dynamic element is the public's preference for negotiations versus military means for dealing with the conflict. Following its trend line, we can see that growing yearning for peace talks leads to the election of left-wing Labor governments (Rabin in 1992 and Barak in 1999). These are the two highpoints in time in terms of public preferences for peace talks over military means. Hawkish trends for greater emphasis on military power lead to the election of right-wing Likud governments (Netanyahu in 1996 and Sharon in 2001 and 2003). The elected government indeed acts in the direction of the public opinion shift concerning negotiations: the Labor governments of Rabin and Barak initiated and immersed themselves in negotiations; Netanyahu's and Sharon's Likud governments shied away from them. Netanyahu was dragged by developments on the ground, public opinion, and international pressures into the Hebron Redeployment and the Wye agreement, and Sharon took the unilateral path. Figure 1 also shows that following the elections, this trend as to which means are to be preferred is reversed in conjunction with policy change, or even in anticipation of it, as in a thermostat model (Erikson et al., 2002; Wlezien, 1995): the public adjusts its preferences for a more or less diplomatic (versus military) emphasis in response to what it expects of the elected government and actual policy moves (Feniger, 2003).

Does the public's increased willingness to compromise, as indicated by its slow-growing acceptance of Palestinian statehood, register with the politicians? We examine the parties' policy positions, relying upon experts' surveys and platform content analysis, as well as their policy moves while in office. Data collected from experts in 1989 and in 2003 indicate a small and similar change in Likud and Labor policy positions in the dovish direction: in 2003, the Likud obtained a score of 13.7, down from 15.7 in 1989; Labor's score fell in the same period from 7.3 to 5.5.[15] Data from another expert survey project[16] suggest that Labor moved between 1988 and 1996 in the dovish direction (its scores were –.25 in 1988, –.57 in 1992, and –.75 in 1996). Likud, however, did not change in any meaningful way, and, if anything, moved to the right (its scores in 1988, 1992, and 1996 were .39, .42, and .47, respectively). Similarly, the platform analysis shows that Labor moved more significantly and more quickly than the Likud; however, it suggests that the Likud also moved, adapting itself to the Oslo reality. In 1992, Labor's platform acknowledged the national rights of Palestinians, hinted at a willingness to talk with the Palestine Liberation Organization, and provided greater details of peace terms and willingness to compromise. In the Likud's platform there was no significant change and it still emphasized the Israeli claim and right to sovereignty in Judea, Samaria, and Gaza. In 1996, both platforms exhibited change. Labor's platform no longer expressed explicit opposition to a Palestinian state and provided recognition of the Palestinian people. The Likud adjusted in response to the changes dictated by the Oslo accord and accepted the Oslo reality. It still mentioned a right to "the Land of Israel," but did not include an explicit claim to sovereignty. It also did not speak about the importance of keeping all the territories, and for the first time there was no reference to the settlements' contribution to security. In 1999, Labor's platform indicated willingness to accept

a Palestinian state; Likud's platform showed no further significant change and emphasized requirements from the Palestinians (Oren, 2005: Ch. 13).[17]

These indicators are thus not fully consistent. However, the chronology of the conflict points toward a similar conclusion as that reached from the platform analysis: both parties moved to the left, but in an uneven manner. Obviously, the major policy move during this period was the Oslo accord signed by the Rabin government in 1993. The next moves were incremental; and as part of the Oslo process, both parties when in power relinquished territory and sovereignty to the Palestinians (including Netanyahu). So, too, did Sharon's disengagement plan, announced in December 2003 and implemented in August 2005. The Gaza disengagement, however, represented a different approach to the conflict due to its unilateral logic. More interesting from the perspective of representation is the fact that in the January 2003 election the electorate actually voted against a similar proposal which had been put forward by Amram Mitzna, Labor's leader. Nevertheless, by the end of 2003, the fact that public opinion was clearly yearning to break the stalemate, together with other considerations, brought Sharon to initiate his plan (Shamir, forthcoming).

While both Labor and Likud moved in the compromise direction and away from the Greater Israel vision, they did so differentially, with Labor governments making the big moves (the Oslo breakthrough and Barak's negotiations at Camp David) and Likud moving in smaller steps. This is indicated by the changes in their platforms just as by the actual policy implemented by each of them while in office. Obviously, who is in power does make a difference in terms of the substance of policy on peace and security, and who is in power changes in accordance with changing public preferences. However, there is an overall shift of the parties and of policy toward compromise, corresponding to the change in public opinion.

This analysis of course misses the internal political dynamics, domestic issues, the international context, and above all the other side of the conflict. But it provides a consistent interpretation of the representation nexus on peace and security during this period as a dynamic process of representation in which elections play a crucial role.

Summary and Conclusion

The Israeli–Palestinian conflict is at the core of Israeli life, and for many years it has been the major dimension of politics in the country. In this article, we set out to explore the role of elections in molding the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. From the perspective of elections as instruments of democracy, we asked how elections fulfilled three essential functions in a society involved in a protracted conflict: first, to provide an opportunity for broad-based and meaningful deliberation of the conflict and conflict resolution; second, to provide legitimacy for elected leaders in their policy moves; and, third, to synchronize government policy with voters' preferences along the conflict dimension.

Our analysis of the elections between 1992 and 2003 shows that they fulfilled these functions only partially. To begin with, the election campaigns did not produce high-quality deliberation on the conflict. The two major parties focused extensively on the conflict, but they did so mainly in valence and image terms, without serious discussion of the substantive issues. In addition to parties, the media

have an important role in structuring the deliberation sphere during election campaigns. In the media, newsworthiness criteria reigned, and conflict-related issues were therefore not necessarily at the center of each campaign. Exceptions were the 1996 election, held in the shadow of terrorism and a military operation in Lebanon, and that of 2001, following the collapse of the Camp David talks and the eruption of the second Intifada. In the three other elections, domestic issues prevailed, with police and corruption stories looming large. In addition, the media focused their election coverage to a large extent on campaign strategy and tactics; in most elections, more items dealt with those matters than with issue substance. In short, while the conflict was on the agenda of the election campaign, it was the focus of the campaign mainly in connection to concurrent events, much attention was always given to campaign strategy and tactics, and above all no serious deliberation of the issues at stake, the alternatives, or possible trade-offs and their costs took place.

As to election interpretations, these always focused greatly on campaign tactics, leadership, and organizational kinds of explanations, much like the media coverage of the elections during the campaign. In terms of substance, election interpretations included both domestic and peace/security interpretations, the proportion of which varied across elections. Only in 2001, and to a lesser extent in 2003, were the substance explanations of the elections predominantly framed in terms of the conflict dimension.

The election interpretation constructed in the media in the days following the election becomes "conventional wisdom" and a social fact. This shared normative construal of what the election was about and what it conveys to the conduct of politics in its aftermath is important and affects legitimacy. Of special significance for legitimacy is the case of mandate elections, which provide a clear signal as to the public's policy preferences. If an election is defined as delivering a mandate, it provides a major boost to legitimacy, empowering elected government officials and legislators as well as the general public, and thus contributes to a government's ability to pass legislation and carry out significant policy innovation. However, none of the elections we studied was defined as a mandate election. Moreover, when election campaigns do not spell out the debate around peace and security, and the elections are not interpreted in these terms, whatever legitimacy elections may confer on policy moves in this area is inevitably lessened. In this sense, the patterns of election interpretation and deliberation we observed do not contribute to the legitimation of policy in this area beyond procedural legitimacy. The implications of these processes stand out when governments initiate innovative and controversial moves and legitimacy is especially needed, and we analyzed in these terms the internal political turmoil around the Oslo agreement, the Rabin assassination, and Sharon's disengagement from Gaza.

Nevertheless, dynamic representation was achieved. Elections may foster representation both directly and indirectly. It appears that during the period we studied the principal route to representation on the conflict dimension has been the direct one: in four of the five elections, the voters threw the "rascals" out and changed the make-up of the government. Consequently, the elected government acted according to public preferences for more or less emphasis on negotiation. The overall trajectory of policy during this period also seems to have responded to the public's increasing willingness to compromise. Policy is incremental, and

after the major policy innovation of the era, the Oslo agreement, both parties in government continued in this direction, albeit at a different pace and probably with different motives. This means that the indirect route, building on elected officials' anticipated reactions, was also in effect, although it seems to have had a lesser role compared to the direct route.

Elections in Israel from the first Intifada and through the peace process and the second Intifada were thus meaningful in bringing about government responsiveness on this most fundamental issue in Israeli society. This conclusion concurs with recent research in comparative politics, and corroborates it in a fragmented society involved in an acute and protracted conflict. At the same time, the results raised significant doubts as to the quality of deliberation on the conflict in these five election campaigns, and suggested that the campaigns and election interpretations did not contribute to legitimation of bold policy initiatives in this area beyond procedural legitimacy. While these findings agree well with established research in political communication, they raise normative and empirical questions that scholars interested in elections as instruments of democracy should explore further.

Notes

1. See also Barnett (1996) and Mendilow (2005).
2. Procedural representation addresses the correspondence between votes cast for a party and seats won in the legislature.
3. These data originate from the Israel Democracy Institute (IDI) Election Study Project initiated in 1996, and directed by Gabi Weimann, Gadi Wolfsfeld, and Tamir Sheafer. This analysis was expanded to the 1992 election in collaboration with Tamir Sheafer. The main news programs and the special election magazines on the first and second television channels throughout each election campaign were analyzed. All items that mentioned the campaign, parties, or candidates were coded. For each news item, the three (or less) main substantive issues and the three (or less) campaign-strategic topics were coded. Inter-coder agreements were no less than 90 percent.
4. We rely on two content analyses of all political spots broadcast by the two major parties, Likud and Labor, during special daily programs sponsored by the state on the two television channels. The first source is the IDI Election Study Project (see note 3 above). Here, too, we expanded the analysis to 1992, following the same coding rules. The three (or less) main substantive issues appearing in each spot were coded. Inter-coder agreements were no less than 90 percent.

   The second source we rely on, for the analysis of valence and position appeals, is Mendilow's in-depth content analyses of these same election campaigns and spots as reported in Mendilow (2003, 2004). For these analyses, seconds are the units of analysis (and not spots). Two panelists independently reviewed the party political spots and divided them into content segments (party jingles and time devoted to broadcasting party acronyms were deducted). Each segment was timed and categorized according to a prepared list of content appeals. In cases of disagreement between the two panelists, the author served as judge. Since each broadcasting second may contain more than one of the content items, the total percentage of content items to broadcasting time can exceed 100 percent.
5. Data cover all news articles, editorials, and Op-Ed pieces with election interpretations in these two leading Israeli newspapers two weeks following each election. *Yedioth Ahronoth* is the most widely circulated daily newspaper in Israel; *Ha'aretz* is the third largest newspaper. The first is a popular newspaper, while the second is a broadsheet.

All explanations of the election results and their sources were coded as well as mandate references (distinguishing between mandate claims and rebuttals). The unit of observation was the statement, and all statements that imputed an explanation of the election were coded. The unit of analysis was the article. Inter-coder agreements were 84 percent for the election explanation codes and 92 percent for the mandate codes.

6. The INES pre-election surveys are directed by Asher Arian and Michal Shamir, and are available through the Israel Social Sciences Data Center at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (http://isdc.huji.ac.il). We analyze here only Jewish respondents. One reason for this decision is the fact that the 1992 study did not include Arab respondents. However, Arab and Jewish voters are commonly analyzed separately. In terms of our research concerns, the inclusion of Arab respondents would confound the analysis of all three dimensions of representation, deliberation, and legitimation, given their social and political marginalization.
7. The Public Opinion and National Security project of the Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies at Tel Aviv University is directed by Asher Arian, and has consisted since 1985 of a yearly survey of the Jewish adult population (http://www.tau.ac.il/jcss/memoranda/memo67.pdf).
8. We draw on two projects based on expert surveys, which provide estimates of the positions of the political parties on particular policy dimensions. We use their estimates of Labor and Likud positions on the conflict dimension. One is a comparative project, directed by Laver, Hunt, and Benoit, in which data were collected twice, in 1989 and 2003 (Benoit and Laver, 2006; Laver and Hunt, 1992; personal communication with Ken Benoit). The other project, directed by Itai Sened, concentrated on Israel, and provides similar data for 1988, 1992, and 1996 (personal communication with Itai Sened). We also relied on systematic content analysis of the two parties' platforms through 1999 (Oren, 2005).
9. We relied mainly on the US State Department Middle East Peace Chronology (http://usinfo.state.gov/mena/middle_east_north_africa/me_vision/me_vision_timeline.html) and the chronologies published by the Israel Foreign Ministry (for example, http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Foreign%20Relations/Israels%20Foreign%20Relations%20since%201947/1995–1996/CHRONOLOGY%20OF%20EVENTS-%201995–1996).
10. Foreign affairs and defense policy in Israel are basically tantamount to conflict-related policy.
11. For 1996, Mendilow (2003) provides this analysis only for the Likud.
12. During the period under study Israel changed its electoral system twice. In 1992, the Knesset legislated the direct election of the prime minister, producing a double-ballot system whereby the prime minister was directly elected by popular, majoritarian ballot and the Knesset was elected as before under PR. This system was in effect in 1996, 1999, and 2001, although in 2001 only a special election of the prime minister was held. Following its deleterious effects on the larger parties, direct election of the prime minister was repealed shortly after the 2001 special election, and the previous strictly parliamentary PR system was reintroduced.
13. It may be argued that in both of these cases, the opponents of these compromising policy initiatives would not accept their legitimacy irrespective of election results and interpretations. While this may indeed have been the case for parts of the settler community and the extreme right, who spearheaded the opposition to these moves, for others, electoral legitimacy mattered, and it definitely was part of the public discourse during these turbulent periods of political strife.
14. All of the elections with the direct election of the prime minister (1996, 1999, and 2001) were turnover elections, but turnover occurred also under the old PR system in 1992.

15. The Laver, Hunt, and Benoit scores fall along a 1–20 scale, with a high score indicating a hawkish position (Laver and Hunt, 1992: 230; personal communication with Ken Benoit).
16. Personal communication with Itai Sened.
17. Likud in 1996 is indeed hard to decipher. Mendilow (2003: 172–85) discusses the Likud dilemma following Oslo and its "strategy of contrived polarity" at length.

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