# Insights from the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict to determine the potential of democracy to Undermine Peace

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*This study argues that democracy can, at times, undermine a peace process. Israel's 'overly' democratic nature detracted from the potential success of the official peace process, from Oslo to Camp David, since its democratic–bureaucratic system diminished the influence of the moderate public opinion and vote. This argument is examined over two integrated and almost parallel timelines: the official peace process from 1991 to 2000 and Israel's change in electoral systems from 1992 to 2001. This study is the first to integrate these two processes—negotiations and elections—in a single empirical approach. I conclude that while the Israeli public shifted from a negative to a positive stance toward a Palestinian state, the Israeli government shifted in the opposite direction, from the success of Oslo to the failure of Camp David. Original electoral findings were analyzed after a personal visit to the Israeli Knesset.*

## INTRODUCTION

This study examines the effect of the Israeli democracy on the peace process between Israel and the Palestinians. Specifically, for the first time, it offers an empirical examination of how Israel's electoral system, the coalition structure, and public opinion influenced the official peace process. This study covers all the elections that took place during the peace process, from the Israeli general elections for the Thirteenth Knesset in 1992 to the special elections for the Premiership in 2001. These elections overlapped the official peace process that took place from 1991 until the failure of the peace talks at Camp David and the outbreak of the second Intifada in 2000.

I hypothesize that the Israeli bureaucratic and democratic institutions took away from the potential of the peace process. The electoral system and coalition

structure meant that the coalition-forming process was placed above the public's vote, resulting in a lack of full representation. While the Israeli public gradually shifted away from a negative position toward negotiations and a Palestinian state, the Israeli government shifted in the opposite direction; relations rapidly fell from the peak of the Oslo Accords to the second Intifada. The Israeli democratic structure undermined the potential success of the peace process. In fact, following Kibrik's typology of political research, the concept of "peace" shifted from a contested type to a destabilizing type, not only between official actors but between governmental and societal actors as well (Kibrik 2021).

The Israeli–Palestinian peace process began de facto at the Madrid conference in 1991 and officially intensified in 1993 with the beginning of the Oslo Accords. Until then, both sides had been in conflict and refused to recognize each other, and no official contact had taken place between the two sides since the establishment of Israel in 1948. But not only were the two sides in conflict with each other, they were each in conflict within their own political arenas.

To research this topic, I personally visited the Israeli Knesset, the National Archives, and the Israeli Democracy Institute several times in 2014–2015, gathering information on the original electoral platforms, electoral quantitative data, and public opinion polls. I also contacted Israeli political parties to examine their original party platforms. I examined all the elections using the same qualitative methodology of narrative analysis with the same format: an analysis of public opinion before the elections, an analysis of the elections themselves, and an analysis of the subsequent coalition-building process.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: DEMOCRACY, ELECTIONS, AND ISRAEL'S GOVERNMENTAL STRUCTURE

Democracy is based on the will of the people. The people elect their representatives, who should serve the people's will (Przeworski 2010, pp. 1–6). In a parliamentary govern- ment such as Israel, the people vote for a party from which a prime minister is elected to serve as the head of the executive branch (Shugart 2018, pp. 331–50). In most presidential regimes, the people elect the head of the executive branch directly—without the mediation of a party. In a third type of governance, which is a mix of these two types, the people elect both the party and the president (Katz 1997, pp. 10–26). The Israeli government is based on a British parliamentary model from the time of the British mandate. The Israeli regime is composed of an executive branch, a legislative branch, and a judicial branch (Herman and Newman 2000, pp. 107–53).

Since the establishment of the Israeli state in 1948, and even before, in the Jewish pre-state settlements, elections in Israel have been characterized by a harsh split of the vote across a large number of political parties, none of which wins a majority, followed by a process of coalition-building and management. This

means that a party cannot form a government unless it negotiates with other parties. However, the large number of parties gives Israeli voters the opportunity to express a wide variety of opinions, and almost every ideology has its place in the political arena (Arian and Shamir 2001a).

Until the early 1990s, the general elections in Israel were parliamentary and were proportional in practice. On 15 March 1990, a precedential motion of no confidence was passed in the Knesset due to differences between then Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir and Foreign Secretary Shimon Peres concerning the relations with Arab states. After negotiations, which included deals covering offices and ministries, a new government was established by the same party that had been taken down in the earlier no-confidence motion—the central right-wing Likud party (Herman and Newman 2000, pp. 107–53). That incident led politicians and voters to demand a change in the electoral system so that it would no longer require a process of bargaining and ideological concessions to form a coalition. The intent was to eliminate the need for political concessions so that voters could be sure their vote was properly represented by the elected officials. In March 1992, the Knesset adopted a new "Basic Law: The Government", which mandated a mixed method of elections, including direct elections for the office of prime minister. This was intended to ensure the position was isolated from political and coalitional bargaining (Arian et al. 2001, pp. 35–59, 85–105).

The new law divided the elections into two separate votes: one for the premiership and one for a party. This was also intended to change the behavior of the Israeli voter; theoretically, the Israeli voter could now vote honestly instead of strategically, without the fear of losing his vote during coalitional bargaining. Up to that point, many voters had voted strategically for the strongest party closest to their ideology since they believed a stronger party would represent a better use of their vote. A smaller party, on the other hand, could lose all its votes if it failed to reach the electoral threshold. The new electoral method and the associated change in voting behavior were meant to give the prime minister the necessary powers without fear of losing his mandate. However, in practice, this mixed method has not worked out as intended. By allowing voters to split their vote, it has resulted in an even larger number of small parties. The coalition has grown even larger and more complicated than before, and parties have to negotiate and adjust their ideologies accordingly—coalitional bargaining has not been eliminated (Barak-Erez 2012).

## Coalition Building

In a parliamentary system, the coalition structure is an important factor that determines the legitimacy of a government, especially in a proportional electoral system such as that of Israel. Parties, large and small, can form a coalition and receive legitimacy from the public (Barak-Erez 2012)—legitimacy they would not

otherwise obtain. Additionally, by joining a larger party, a small one can represent its voters in government (Blander 2009).

Three major factors influence the coalition structure and, consequently, governmental policy. The first factor is coalition size. A large coalition is one in which there are more Members of Knesset (MKs) than needed to form a government. Importantly, in this case, the resignation of a small party would not topple the government, thereby protecting its efficiency. A minimal coalition includes only the minimum number of MKs needed to form a government. In Israel, it is customary to form a government that includes at least 61 MKs of an overall 120 members, although it is not required by law. A minority coalition is one in which there are fewer MKs than needed but where, at the same time, the opposition fails to form a coalition of its own (Back 2008).

The second factor is ideology. Parties with similar ideologies are more likely to form a coalition. Additionally, since their ideology is more flexible, center-wing parties have a greater chance of joining with either left- or right-wing parties. In Israel, most coalitions have been large ones that have comprised parties with similar ideologies, excluding extreme or Arab parties. A third factor is the distribution of budgets among coalition members. Budgets are distributed to positions (offices) and influence policy. Therefore, a party with a certain ideology will want positions and offices pertaining to said ideology; however, as rational players, parties also focus on gaining more positions and influence (Korn and Shapira 1997).

## Public Opinion and Decision Making

A democracy is measured by the manner of its decision making—that is, whether the public has sufficient influence over the government. However, most voters care more about domestic affairs than foreign policy, and most of the time, the public lacks the skills and knowledge to make the proper decisions (Risse-Kappen 1991). In that case, the leaders must provide a policy. This raises the question: Who influences whom? Does the public influence their decision makers or vice versa? In some cases, such as in Israel, politicians use well-known narratives to guide their policies (Zellman 2015).

There are two dichotomous approaches to this question. The first is a "top-down" approach, in which decision makers use their status, resources, and knowledge to persuade the public to accept their point of view. In this case, the public has no solid opinion and only responds. Even when the public does have a strong opinion, in this approach, decision makers try to change it. The second is a "bottom-up" approach, in which the public, the voters, influence the decision makers. In practice, voters elect decision makers and, in doing so, influence decisions. Despite these dichotomous approaches, this paper will consider an intermediate third approach, in which the decision makers dictate policies, but these policies are only accepted if the public consciously supports them. In the

case of Israel, decision makers often nurture and dictate policies that are not always accepted by the public. However, Israeli decision makers are influenced by the public's reaction to certain policies, as well as by voters' support and the structure of the political landscape (Risse-Kappen 1991).

In addition, other factors influence policies and decisions, such as the social environment—embodying public norms, beliefs, and concepts—the political structure, the government structure, legislation and authority, the election structure, and advocacy and influence groups. The decision maker's character plays a major role as well, i.e., whether he is an idealist or a pragmatist, a liberal or a conservative (See McCormick 2012). In Israel's case, decision making is specifically influenced by three factors: the geopolitical environment, the parliamentary system, and the relative inefficiency of civil security insti-tutions, such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or the National Security Council,1 compared to the influence of the military and intelligence agencies (Freilich 2013).

## THE PEACE PROCESS: FROM THE MADRID CONFERENCE TO THE SECOND INTIFADA

Israeli public opinion on the relations with Arab states and the Palestinians often does not sufficiently influence decision makers. Since the end of the Six-Day War in 1967, the public has been of the opinion that no territorial concessions should be made, unless to achieve a comprehensive and sustainable peace. However, decision makers have often ignored that opinion with contradictory policies (Freilich 2006). On the other hand, the Arab states' failure in the Six-Day War led the Palestinians to conclude that there would be no significant results without political and armed organization. Yasser Arafat and Khalil al-Wazir, the two main founders of Fatah,2 decided on a modus vivendi that included freedom of decisions and armed terror rebellion. Fatah used terror attacks to act against Israel, and its formal policy was to reject all negotiations with Israel. Fatah later became the largest party in the PLO3 and continued these actions. Therefore, Israel rejected all negotiations with Fatah, which it designated a terror group (Kabha 2013, pp. 255–331).

The Madrid Conference took place in 1991 and brought about a conceptual and practical change of viewpoints. Unlike the viewpoints arising from events in 1948 or 1967, there was a shift in ideas. In Madrid, the Arab states, the Palestinian delegation, and Israel all shifted their outlook from a zero-sum game to a mutual gain perspective (Office of the Historian 1991). The Conference was precedential as for the first time in the history of the conflict, Israel and the Palestinian delegation, part of the Jordanian delegation, negotiated with each other (Herman and Newman 2000, pp. 107–53). As an indirect result of the Conference, in October 1994, Israel and Jordan signed a peace agreement (Barak 2005).

Evidencing a further change in viewpoints, in 1993, secret talks took place in Oslo between unofficial representatives of Israel and the Palestinians—the beginning of the Oslo Accords. The talks were kept secret, with no commitments from either side, in order to evade public pressure, especially after the First Intifada in 1987 (Lieberfeld 2008; Kelman 2007). The following year, the talks took on the formal shape of negotiations. On 9 September 1993, Yasser Arafat, Chairman of the PLO, sent a letter to the late Israeli Prime Minister, Yitzhak Rabin; in that letter, Arafat promised to recognize Israel's right of existence, accept UN Security Council Resolutions 2424 and 338,5 negotiate in a non-violent way, and moderate all organizations under the PLO. Israel, in response, recognized the PLO as the representative of the Palestinians. On September 13 of that year, the Declaration of Principles between Israel and the PLO, which mutually agreed the former's existence and the latter's sovereignty, was signed in Washington DC—the First Oslo Accord (Oslo A). The Declaration set out agreements on several issues: the establishment of an interim Palestinian government with an independent electoral system, the transfer of Gaza and Jericho to the Palestinians, and various economic agreements (Herman and Newman 2000, pp. 107–53).

Once the first agreement had been signed, more agreements were launched. On 29 April 1994, the Paris Protocol on future economic relations was signed. The Gaza and Jericho Agreement was signed on 4 May, confirming the transfer of these areas to Palestinian control and establishing the independent Palestinian Authority. Another agreement that included the transfer of some civil authorities between Israel and the Palestinian Authority was signed on 29 August. A year later, on 27 August 1995, another civil agreement was signed, expanding the previous civil agreement (Herman and Newman 2000, pp. 107–53). The most important agreement that followed was the second Oslo Accord (Oslo B), which was signed on 28 September 1995. This agreement was meant to strengthen what was now the Palestinian Authority and give it responsibility for all internal affairs. In this agreement, the territories were divided: Area A was under the full security and civil authority of the Palestinian Authority; in Area B, Israel was responsible for security, and the Palestinian Authority for all civil matters; Area C was under both the security and civil authority of Israel. Due to the agreement, 90% of the Palestinian population was transferredover to full Palestinian responsibility, on about 30% of the West Bank area. The plan was for Israel to withdraw from Area A in its entirety, but due to the assassination of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, this was postponed (Herman and Newman 2000, pp. 107–153).

The center-left party that managed the Oslo Accords, the Ha'avoda, lost the 1996 general election, and power transferred to the center-right Likud party. Likud's Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, insisted that the agreements with the Palestinian Authority be further negotiated in what is known as the Hebron Protocol from 15 January 1997, onwards (Herman and Newman 2000, pp. 107–

53). At the same time the elections were taking place, negotiations concerning a Permanent Status were held at the Israeli–Egyptian border in Taba on 5 and 6 May 1996. The delegations discussed issues that had been avoided in the Oslo Accords due to their complexity and importance: East Jerusalem, Palestinian refugees, the Israeli settlements, and the establishment of a fully sovereign Palestinian state (Karmi 1998). This negotiation process caused nationalist Likud and Ha'avoda MKs to sign an agreement refusing to ratify any arrangement resulting in a transfer of settlements or parts of Jerusalem to the Palestinians (Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1996).

The Wye River Memorandum was negotiated between Israel and the Palestinian Authority on 18 October 1998, under American supervision. Israel pledged that 13% of claimed Palestinian land would be turned over and promised to allow an airport to be built in the Palestinian Authority. The Palestinians promised to reduce terror attacks. Both sides were promised an American economic incentive of 500 million dollars. However, as time passed, the Palestinians did nothing to reduce terror and extremism on their side. Israel started a partial withdrawal, as promised, but on 21 December 1998, the Knesset called for an early dissolution and the Netanyahu government fell apart. In the mixed general elections of 1999, Ehud Barak won the Premiership (Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1996).

Ehud Barak tried to revive the faltering peace process. Following the Oslo Accords, Barak sought to negotiate the key issues that had thwarted the negotiations and had not been directly negotiated in Oslo: East Jerusalem, the refugees, the settlements, and a sovereign Palestinian state. On 4 September 1999, Barak and Arafat signed the Sharm El Sheikh Memorandum, which sought to bring about the implementation of previous negotiations and key agreements, including the Second Oslo Accord, protocols on the further transfer of powers and responsibilities, and the Wye River Memorandum. About a month later, on 5 October 1999, another agreement was signed: the Safe Passage Protocol; this pertained to the regulation of a passage between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank (Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1996).

Further negotiations took place during the Camp David Summit under US supervision on 11–25 July 2000. Barak, the Israeli Prime Minister, offered Yasser Arafat a deal that included the establishment of a Palestinian state on more than 90% of the West Bank, the evacuation of most Israeli settlements from the West Bank, a division of Jerusalem and recognition of the Al-Aqsa Mosque area as the capital of the Palestinian state, co-ownership of the Temple Mount area, and permission for refugees to return to the Palestinian state (Sher 2006, pp. 93–104, 105–18). Nonetheless, at the end of the summit, Arafat rejected the terms; the process failed (Swisher 2004, pp. 312–34). It is important to note that Barak attended this summit without the confidence of the Israeli public and with only 42 MKs left in his coalition. Upon his return to Israel, he managed to stay in office

after winning a no- confidence motion by 54 votes in his favor and 52 votes against him (Cohen-Almagor 2012). While he kept his promise to withdraw from Lebanon, Barak lost public and coalitional support with the outbreak of the Second Intifada in September 2000. Barak tried to save his position, gain public support, and save the peace process at the Taba Summit from 21 to 27 January 2001 (Cohen-Almagor 2012). Barak promised conditions similar to those proposed at the Camp David Summit: a Palestinian state on 97% of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, co-ownership of the Temple Mount area, and the return of Palestinian refugees (Barak 2005). Once again, Yasser Arafat rejected the terms, demanding full ownership of the Temple Mount, and a full-scale return of Palestinian refugees. Arafat also argued that he could not be the leader who denied Palestinians' rights to all of the Israeli territories. Inthat moment, the Israeli public lost what faith it had in Arafat as the Palestinian leader. In an attempt to gain more support, Barak resigned from office to try to win another election (Pressman 2006).

On 6 February 2001, Ariel Sharon won the special elections for Prime Minister with 62.4% of all votes. Still in the midst of the Intifada, Sharon attempted to de-escalate the uprising and prevent the collapse of the Palestinian Authority, which had grown into an important institution since the Oslo Accords. Another issue was the international support for the Palestinian Authority; Sharon recognized the need to prevent criticism from being directed at Israel. However, the Israeli de-escalation efforts failed on 27 March 2002, when a Palestinian suicide bomber murdered 30 people and injured more than 130 on the Passover Seder (Cohen-Almagor 2012). The Israeli government was under immense pressure from the public and right-wing coalition parties. Governmental meetings took place that same night, and a day later, the Israeli government decided to launch Operation "Defensive Shield" (Al-Krenawi 2017, pp. 65–73).

## ELECTIONS AND THE PEACE PROCESS

### 1992 General Parliamentary Elections

The general elections took place on 23 June 1992, employing the traditional parliamen- tary method after political turmoil. A no-confidence vote had been brought against Yitzhak Shamir, the Prime Minister, who led a right-wing coalition. This led the public to demand a change in the electoral system, which was later indeed implemented through the intro- duction of a new electoral system and in-party primary elections (The Israel Democracy Institute 1992).

In the time shortly before the elections, public concern on several key issues had increased. On the topic of security issues, the First Intifada, which had begun in 1987, weakened Israeli citizens' sense of security. The Shamir administration had failed to quell the Intifada's security threats, and the Israeli public began to

wonder whether the right-wing hard-liners could manage to suppress the Palestinian terror with military force rather than negotiations. In this respect, the Madrid Conference in 1991 had opened up a negotiation channel with the Arabs and indirectly with the Palestinians (The National Library 1992).

Regarding issues of state and religion, Shamir's large coalition collapsed with the attempt made by Shimon Peres to form a new government in 1990. Shamir, who originally had 97 MKs in his large coalition, dropped to a minimal coalition of 62 MKs. The structure of the minimal coalition weakened the main parties and gave disproportionate power to the smaller, religious parties. These parties subsequently tried to enforce legislative acts concerning the prohibition of public transport on the Sabbath and publicity restrictions. Regarding economics, the bad state of security Israel had been in while keeping forces in Lebanon, as well as the Palestinian terror and demands, burdened the Israeli economy. The public felt that its public funds and taxes were being invested, divided, and managed incorrectly (The National Library 1992).

## Public Opinion

Survey Trends6: In total, 48.5% of the interviewees held the opinion that territory should be negotiable and that some of the disputed territories such as Gaza and the West Bank should be given to the Palestinians in return for peace. Moreover, 57.6% stated that they accept a Palestinian Autonomy. Regarding negotiations with the PLO, 42.8% stated that they would not accept them, even if the PLO gave up terrorism. Another 62.4% believed that a Palestinian Autonomy would arise in the future but were against an independent state. However, the interviewees claimed that neither a Palestinian Autonomy nor a Palestinian State would risk Israel's security and that, eventually, such a State would arise. The general trend amongst interviewees regarding the Palestinians and the peace process was positive and accepting, even when asked to consider some territorial concessions (Arian and Shamir 1992).

## Elections, Coalitions, Agreements

The 13th Knesset served from 13 July 1992 to 17 June 1996. The 25th government was led by Yitzhak Rabin of the center-left Labor party—Ha'avoda. Following Yitzhak Rabin's assassination on 4 November 1995, the government continued to serve until the 22nd of that month. After the event, a provisional, 26th government served, led by Shimon Peres, until June 1996 (The National Library 1992). The 26th government was a minority coalition since the religious party Shas withdrew after the Declaration of Principles was signed. Interestingly, although the coalition continued to weaken after the declaration and the assassination, the right-wing opposition could not manage and form a coalition

with the Arab parties, so the government was not replaced by the opposing parties (See Goldberg 1994).

Between the Declaration of Principles and the end of its term, the government signed the following agreements with the Palestinians:

- Declaration of Principles (Oslo A)—13 September 1993;
- Paris Protocol—29 April 1994;
- The Gaza-Jericho Agreement—4 May 1994;
- Agreement on the transfer of authorities between Israel and the Palestinian Authority— 29 August 1994;
- Israeli–Jordanian Peace Treaty—26 October 1994;
- Extending Protocol on the transfer of authorities between Israel and the Palestinian Authority—27 August 1995;
- Second Oslo (B) Accord—28 September 1995;
- Agreement of Understanding, Lebanon–Israel—26 April 1996.

## Ideology and Coalitional Agreements

Analyzing the party platforms and comparing them to the coalitional agreements sheds light on certain issues. First, the largest party, from whence the Prime Minister is appointed, was in a weakened position since it had to make concessions in order to rule. In 1992, the large Ha'avoda party made these concessions to the smaller Shas and Meretz parties. Ha'avoda gave up its objections to a full Palestinian state and changed its position towards left-wing Meretz. Ha'avoda made concessions to the right wing as well; it gave up the option for a territorial compromise with the Palestinians when it signed an agreement with the religious Shas, approving the people's right to a referendum regarding issues of territory return. It is clear that the smaller parties exert a disproportionate influence.

## 1996 General Mixed Elections

The general elections for the 14th Knesset took place on 29 May 1996—about six months after the assassination of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin—while Shimon Peres served as premier. For the first time in Israel's history, the elections were conducted using a mixed method, according to the new "Basic Law: The Government" (Arian and Shamir 2001a). The Israeli voters elected a party for the Knesset and a Prime Minister to rule the government. During the campaign, the larger parties emphasized their candidates for the premiership and neglected the Knesset elections. However, the smaller parties turned their resources toward the elections for the Knesset (The Israel Democracy Institute 1996).

The focus for these elections was on several relevant topics, as was the case in 1992. Regarding security, the Palestinian terror attacks were ceaseless and

continued to affect citizens' sense of security. In these elections, the Israeli public was significantly more concerned about security and foreign affairs than in 1992—20% more. The public was also much less focused on social and economic issues. The Palestinian terror had increased since the establishment of the Palestinian Authority, led by Yasser Arafat, and the signing of the Oslo Accords, especially in 1994 and 1995. This bolstered support for the right-wing parties, even though a right-wing assassin had murdered Yitzhak Rabin (The National Library 1996). In 1996, Hezbollah rockets along the northern border caused the Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres to respond with a military offensive— Operation Grapes of Wrath.

Israel executed several strikes and maneuvers, but despite precautions, an artillery shell hit a UNIFIL7 outpost near Qana (Lebanon), causing the death of more than 100 people. This incident brought pressure from the international community down on Israel, and the offensive was stopped without achieving any solid goals—though the right-wing parties won more public support (Reich 2008, pp. 132–206).

## Public Opinion

Survey Trends8: In total, 50.3% of the interviewees held the opinion that most citizens are in favor of peace and that more citizens would accept a Palestinian state in the future. Furthermore, 66.4% of the interviewees believed that in about ten years, such a state would exist. Although most were in favor of peace, 54.2% thought that a withdrawal of Israeli military forces from the largest Palestinian cities would negatively impact their personal security, which had been affected following the Oslo Accords. Moreover, 58.1% stated that they were not sure whether the Palestinians really wanted peace. Interviewees stated that terror would only decrease after successful negotiations. Regarding the territorial dispute, 74.3% stated that they were willing to hand over some territories to support the peace process (Arian and Shamir 1996).

## Elections, Coalitions, Agreements

The 14th Knesset served from 17 June 1996 to 7 June 1999. The Government was a right- wing one led by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu from the center-right Likud-Gesher- Tzomet coalition. This coalition was a bit larger than the minimal, but with 66 seats, it was not large enough for comfort. The resignation of just two of the smallest parties would result in a minority coalition, thus risking disassembly. Though the center-left Ha'avoda party won more support, Netanyahu was approximately 1% more popular than Shimon Peres, and since the elections were mixed, Netanyahu won the Premiership (The Knesset n.d.).

During this government's term, the following agreements were signed:

- The Hebron Protocol—15 January 1997;
- Eitan–Beilin Protocol—22 January 1997;
- Wye River Memorandum—23 November 1998.

While the Hebron Protocol and Wye River Memorandum were negotiations and concessions between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, it was the Eitan–Beilin Protocol that was most significant to the peace process. The Protocol represented Israeli domestic convergence towards negotiation with the Palestinians and was signed by MK Michael Eitan from the right-wing Likud party and the MK from the center-left Ha'avoda. It also served as an important assurance of Israeli sincerity for the Palestinians since the largest parties in Israel had agreed that negotiations with the Palestinian Authority must continue in order to establish peace, security, and a permanent arrangement. Additionally, the Protocol states that Jerusalem is the Israeli capital, and will remain such, although Palestinian residents would be permitted and would share responsibility for the city (The Knesset 1997).

## Ideology and Coalitional Agreements

The coalitional agreements between Likud and the other parties made no mention of the peace process with the Palestinians. An analysis of the parties' platforms suggests that they had no concerns about this issue. A logical and realistic explanation for this is that all parties were right-wing and had no intention of deviating from their right-wing ideology. The parties did discuss issues of religion, welfare, the economy, and immigra- tion (The Knesset n.d.). The all-right-wing coalition strengthened the Prime Minister's governance power.

## 1999 General Mixed Elections

The General Elections for the 15th Knesset took place on 17 May 1999. These elec- tions came about after some members of the Knesset put forward a no-confidence motion following a few conflicts surrounding the annual budget. It was the second time Israeli voters cast two votes—for a party and for a prime minister. In these elections, Ehud Barak, from the party Israel Ahat, challenged the incumbent Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu from Likud. Three more individuals, Benny Begin, Yitzhak Mordechai, and Azmi Bishara, ran for office but eventually withdrew (The Israel Democracy Institute 1999). Several topics dominated these elections, as in 1992 and 1996, and they specifically dealt with the consequences of the Oslo Accords and the Palestinian terror, which was unrelenting.

With respect to security issues, Israeli civilians were feeling less insecure; terror attacks had declined, and the Hebron Protocol, along with the Wye River Memorandum, brought about an increased sense of security. However, the

elections took place in the context of a harsh rift between the right-wing parties and Netanyahu since he had managed to ratify the Wye River Memorandum with the support of the opposition—specifically, with the support of the Arab and left-wing parties. Furthermore, concerning the northern border and Lebanon, the presence of Israeli forces in the Security Belt continued to exact a heavy price, both on an economic and human level. Protests became more frequent, with political and civilian organizations calling for recalcitrance and a withdrawal from Lebanon. These protests only increased after the Israeli Helicopter Disaster in 1997. Barak promised to withdraw.

On the topic of social matters, a large wave of immigration from the Commonwealth of Independent States, formerly the Soviet Union, began to change the face of Israeli society, including its politics (Kievel and Reich 1991, pp. 17–18). Immigration parties such as Natan Sharansky's Yisrael BaAliyah and Avigdor Lieberman's Yisrael Beiteinu managed to influence the political sphere and demand rights for the new citizens. The new citizens comprised a fair share of new votes to be courted. After the resignation of the former head of Nativ,9 Yakov Kedmi, and some corruption affairs in Shas, the new immigrants backed away from the right wing and moved towards Ehud Barak (The National Library 1999).

## Public Opinion

Survey Trends10: In total, 65.9% of interviewees stated that they were in favor of the peace process and supported some territorial returns and exchanges for peace. Additionally, 76.8% stated that they opposed any breaks in the process if such a break could lead to war or military operations. In addition, 73.8% of interviewees stated that their sense of security was increasing due to the decline in terror attacks. Interviewees stated that they believed 47.2% (average) of Israelis were in favor of a Palestinian state and that such a state should be established. Furthermore, 75.7% thought that in about ten years, more citizens would support a Palestinian state and that such a state would arise (Arian and Shamir 1999).

## Elections, Coalitions, Agreements

The 15th Knesset of Israel served from 7 June 1999 to 17 February 2003.11 The 28th Government was established with Ehud Barak as its Prime Minister. The second-largest party, Likud, did not enter the coalition despite winning 19 seats since the elected Prime Minister was from Israel Ahat. The new coalition comprised seven parties and formed a large, 75-seat coalition. If all parties had been ideologically similar, this would have been an advantage. The fact that religious Shas, left-wing Meretz, and a majority of right-wing parties were in the same coalition weakened it (The Israel Democracy Institute 1999).

During this government's term, the following agreements were signed:

- The Sharm El Sheikh Memorandum—4 September 1999;
- The Safe Passage Protocol—5 October 1999 (part of the Sharm El Sheikh Memorandum).

The Sharm El Sheikh Memorandum was a significant step in the negotiations. Signed between Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat in Egypt, under the United States' supervision, it dealt with the implementation of the Second Oslo Accord. In effect, it set out a timeline for implementing the interim agreement (Oslo) and all previous agreements between Israel and the Palestinian Authority since 1993. The Memorandum was witnessed and co-signed by Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak andKing Abdullah of Jordan. This co-signature meant that the peace process had the blessing of at least some in the Arab world (Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1999).

## Ideology and Coalitional Agreements

An analysis of party platforms and coalitional agreements shows almost no mention of the peace process or issues concerning the Palestinians. The only party that thought it worthy of mention was the left-wing Meretz, who pointed out the need to discuss a partition of Jerusalem. Meretz changed its stance since the 13th Knesset in 1992, when it rejected a partition of Jerusalem. However, the fact that Meretz was the only left-wing party in the coalition limited its possibilities of action.

## 2001 Special Elections

These elections took place on 6 February 2001. The elections were not general but special, following the resignation of Ehud Barak from the premiership and the weakening of the coalition. The large, 75-seat coalition that arose from the general elections of 1999 lacked the ideological similarity needed for success and unity. That fact made Ehud Barak ineffective as prime minister and weakened his governance. A year before the elections, Barak, along with the Palestinians, had accepted the American offer to facilitate and mediate negotiations at Camp David. However, after rigorous talks that lasted about two weeks, the negotiations reached an impasse (Arian and Shamir 2001a).

Ariel Sharon's visit to the Temple Mount in September 2000 with other members of Likud created turmoil among Palestinians and Israeli Arab citizens. Eventually, violent riots broke out. The beginning of the violent riots marked the beginning of the Second Intifada, and the Israeli people's sense of security started to decrease dramatically. Although he was already on a decline, these events hurt Barak politically. In September 1999, the religious party Yahadot HaTorah had withdrawn from the coalition due to differences concerning the Sabbath; in June 2000, Meretz also withdrew after losing power to Shas. In the lead-up to the Camp David Summit, three more parties left the coalition—Yisrael BaAliyah,

HaMerkaz, and Shas. On 28 November 2000, the Knesset passed a no-confidence motion, and general elections were announced (Cohen-Almagor 2012).

Afraid of the results of the general elections, afraid of failing to form another coalition, and in an attempt to gain public support, Barak resigned on December 10. His resignation resulted in special elections being held for the first time in Israel's political history in February 2001. As the New 'Basic Law: The Government' set out, the elections were to take place sixty days after the resignation. In a final attempt to influence the peace process, Barak sent Shlomo Ben-Ami and a team of negotiators to negotiate with senior Palestinian executives in Taba; however, the meeting failed (Arian and Shamir 2001a).

## Public Opinion

Survey Trends12: Most interviewees (59.4%) opposed the plan to give away about 95% of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, excluding major settlements. Furthermore, 68.6% op- posed the partitioning of Jerusalem, and only 25% supported a small number of Palestinian refugee returns. In addition, 44% supported turning over parts of East Jerusalem. Interest- ingly, 69.2% of the interviewees thought that in the future, due to the chain of events, most citizens would oppose or would not accept the peace process; 72.7% stated that peace with the Palestinians would not end the wider Israeli–Arab conflict (Arian and Shamir 2001b).

## Elections, Coalitions, Agreements

The new government was formed on 7 March 2001. Ariel Sharon had managed to establish a large coalition of seven parties, totaling 73 seats. Three weeks later, Yahadot HaTorah also entered the coalition, bringing the total to 78 seats altogether (Arian and Shamir 2001b). During this government's term, no agreements were officially signed with the Palestinians or the Arabs. However, a few proposals were made, such as the Arab PeaceInitiative in 2002, the Road Map for Peace plan in 2002, and the Geneva Peace Initiative in 2003.

## Ideology and Coalitional Agreements

Seven coalitional agreements were signed between the main Likud party and the remaining parties when Ariel Sharon took up the role of Prime Minister (The Israel Democ- racy Institute 2001). None of the coalitional agreements mentioned the peace process with the Palestinians, and the party platforms from the 15th Knesset remained as they were. However, a new type of document was written: The Government's Basic Guidelines, which only stated that Israel would act to ensure peace with its neighbors (The Knesset n.d.). Though a new premier had entered office, no coalitional changes had been made since the general elections for the 15th Knesset and the 28th Government.

## ANALYSIS

The survey conducted before the 1992 general elections revealed that although the Israeli public resisted negotiations with the Palestinians due to the PLO's terror policy, it was not against territorial concessions if they led to an arrangement that increased security. The context influencing the public's sense of security before these elections was the 1987 Intifada and the first Gulf War in Iraq. At that time, Israeli citizens believed that a Palestinian state would eventually arise, although they preferred a Non-State Autonomy. The center-left Ha'avoda party managed to form a minimal coalition of 62 seats, risking disassembly. In forming this coalition, Ha'avoda was influenced by smaller parties, including left-wing Meretz and religious Shas. Ha'avoda, which had denied the acceptability of a Palestinian state in its public platform, surrendered this ideology since Meretz stipulated it as a condition of its entrance to the coalition. Later, Shas made its entrance to the coalition conditional on any territorial concession being brought to a referendum. The large Ha'avoda party had to make these concessions to establish a coalition with the smaller Shas and Meretz.

In the process of building the 25th government, Israeli public opinion was thus partially ignored. Moreover, the government began its term with a high risk of disassem- bly. Nonetheless, Ha'avoda, led by Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, promoted the Israeli– Palestinian negotiations, and the First Oslo Accord and the Peace Treaty with Jordan were signed during this government's term. On 13 September 1993, the government was on the brink of a breakdown; Shas, which did not support the Oslo Accords, had withdrawn from the coalition. After their withdrawal, the coalition held a minority of the seats (56) and should have been disassembled; however, the opposition, which included the large right-wing parties, failed to establish a government due to ideological disagreements—the right- and center-wing parties could not agree on terms with the extreme left or the Arab parties. Before the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin, another party, the center-right Yeod, joined the coalition, bringing the minority coalition up to 59 seats.

The 26th provisional government was led by Shimon Peres. The general elections for the 14th Knesset took place about six months after Rabin's assassination. Following the new "Basic Law: The Government" of 1992, the elections in May 1996 were the first in Israel's history in which citizens voted for both party and prime minister. Before the elections, surveys were conducted; this was after Oslo and the intense terror attacks of 1994–1995. Most interviewees stated that they believed the majority of Israelis thought a Palestinian state would be established within about ten years, but they would not support a withdrawal of military forces from the big Palestinian cities because they lacked a sense of security. Although most were in favor of peace, they stated that they were not sure

whether the Palestinians really wanted peace. Interviewees stated that terror attacks would only diminish after successful negotiations. Additionally, interviewees stated that they were willing to make some territorial concessions to bring about peace.

The 27th Government, led by center-right Likud and Benjamin Netanyahu, held 68 seats, a coalition large enough to withstand the withdrawal of a small party. Since the coalition was composed of right-wing parties, no coalitional agreements had to be

signed; there were no ideological disputes, at least on key issues such as Jerusalem, Pales- tinian refugees, settlements, and a Palestinian state. In 1997, Netanyahu's government made changes, mostly cosmetic, to the Oslo Accords and signed the Hebron Protocol with the Palestinians. The Hebron Protocol agreed to the withdrawal of the military from most Palestinian cities, thus countermanding public opinion as recorded in the surveys, which stated that such a withdrawal would decrease the citizens' sense of security. The Wye River Memorandum determined a timetable for military withdrawals and combat against terrorists but was not fully executed due to the disassembly of Netanyahu's coalition.

The general elections for the 15th Knesset were held on 17 May 1999 and were the second elections in which the citizens chose both a party and a prime minister. The surveys preceding these elections were conducted after the Oslo Accords, the Hebron Protocol, the Wye River Memorandum, minor military withdrawals, and after a calmer period with respect to Palestinian terror attacks. Most interviewees were in favor of peace and, unlike in 1992 and 1996, were in favor of a fully independent Palestinian state. Ehud Barak won these elections and constructed a large, 75-seat coalition. During the government's term, the Safe Passage Protocol and the Sharm El Sheikh Memorandum were signed. Barak's large coalition, which theoretically was supposed to be stable, was actually not. The reason for its instability was that the parties that composed it had a variety of ideologies. By the time of the failure of the Camp David Summit and the outbreak of the Second Intifada, Meretz, Shas, Yahadot HaTorah, Gesher, and Yisrael BaAliyah had all left the coalition. Thus, the Knesset decided to call new general elections. Afraid of the outcome, Barak resigned his position to keep the current Knesset and run for the premiership again. Although Barak's actions were partially in line with Israeli public opinion, the small parties prevented them from being carried out.

On 6 February 2001, special elections took place for the first time in Israel's history. Israeli voters went to the polls to elect only a new prime minister. The surveys conducted before the elections were carried out in the context of the success of the Oslo Accords but the failure of Camp David. Most interviewees opposed giving away about 95% of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, excluding major settlements, as was suggested at Camp David. Most opposed a partition of

Jerusalem and supported only a small number of Palestinian refugee returns. Almost half of the interviewees supported turning over parts of East Jerusalem. Interestingly, most interviewees thought that in the future, due to the chain of events, most citizens would oppose or not accept the peace process. Most stated that peace with the Palestinians would not end the wider Israeli–Arab conflict. These opinions went directly against the outline for peace adopted at the beginning of the peace process in 1992.

Ariel Sharon won the special elections and created a large, 73-seat coalition, which a few weeks later grew to a 78-seat coalition with the addition of Yahadot HaTorah. Unlike Barak's coalition, Sharon's coalition consisted mainly of parties with a similar ideological outline. During this term, no official agreements were signed with the Palestinians or the Arabs.

## CONCLUSIONS

This study has examined the influence of the Israeli democracy on the peace process with the Palestinians. Three key aspects of Israeli democracy have been examined: the electoral system, the coalition structure, and public opinion. These have been analyzed over the course of the official peace process, contemporaneously with Israel's changing electoral system. Aside from the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, an internal debate was taking place between the public and the government, which clearly influenced the peace process. As was hypothesized, one can identify a positive trend in which the Israeli public shifted over the years from a negative position in the early 1990s, in which they denied a Palestinian state or accepted only a limited Autonomy, towards a positive view in favor of peace and an independent Palestinian state. The general trend in all surveys was in favor of territorial concessions for peace and security, although some key issues, such as Palestinian refugees or East Jerusalem, were insufficiently addressed. Interestingly, over the same period, Israeli democracy, elections, and particularly the coalition structure undermined the peace process, which shifted from the positive position of the Oslo Accords towards a negative position, resulting in the failure of the peace process and the beginning of the Second Intifada.

There is a clear connection between Israel's democratic characteristics and the peace process. While the coalition-building process neglected some of the moderate public's opinions, it is clear that despite changes in election systems and governments, the peace process remained relevant throughout the 1990s. Additionally, it is important to note that this study has dealt only with the Israeli side of the conflict. One can assume that the Palestinian side was also unstable since Yasser Arafat rejected the final deal reached during the Camp David Summit. Further research that integrates the two sides is needed.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The author declares no conflict of interest.

## NOTES

1. A decision was made in 1992 under the new "Basic Law: The Government" on the establishment of the National Security Committee. It was established in 1999 and in 2008 became the National Security Council.
2. Fatah—formerly the Palestinian National Liberation Movement, founded in 1959 as a political movement through which its founders promoted independent action. From 1964, Fatah acted as a political party.
3. PLO—the Palestine Liberation Organization, founded in 1964.
4. UNSCR 242—a resolution adopted by the UN Security Council after the 1967 war for an Israeli withdrawal from occupied territories and a Palestinian recognition of Israel.
5. UNSCR 338—a resolution adopted by the UN Security Council after the 1973 war calling for a ceasefire on all sides as well as the implementation of UNSCR 242.
6. Public opinion surveys were conducted before the 1992 general elections by the Dahaf research institute, led by Professor Asher Arian and Dr. Michal Shamir. They sampled 1192 adult Jewish Israeli civilians from all parts of the country, excluding civilians in the West Bank (Arian and Shamir 1992).
7. (United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (n.d.)—created by the United Nations Security Council in March 1978 to confirm Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon, restore peace and security, and assist the Lebanese government to maintain its authority in the area. For further details see: https://unifil.unmissions.org (accessed on 8 May 2020).
8. Public opinion surveys were conducted before the 1996 general elections by Professor Asher Arian and Dr. Michal Shamir of the Civil Intelligence Research Institute. They sampled 1168 adult Jewish Israeli civilians from all parts of the country, excluding civilians in the West Bank (Arian and Shamir 1996).
9. Nativ—the Liaison Bureau, founded in 1952. Responsible for maintaining contact with Jews from the Eastern Bloc.
10. Public opinion surveys were conducted before the 1999 general elections by Professor Asher Arian and Dr. Michal Shamir from the Mahshov research institute. The surveys sampled 1225 adult Jewish Israeli civilians from all parts of the country, excluding civilians in the West Bank (Arian and Shamir 1999).
11. The 29th Government served under the same Knesset from 7 March 2001, and was led by Ariel Sharon.
12. Public opinion surveys were conducted before the 2001 general elections by

Professor Asher Arian and Dr. Michal Shamir from the Mahshov research institute. The surveys sampled 1249 adult Jewish Israeli civilians from all parts of the country, excluding civilians in the West Bank. Additionally, on this occasion, 168 Arab interviewees were surveyed as well (Arian and Shamir 2001b).

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