

The Impact of Religious Conflict on Democratic Elections: Israel 2013 and 2015

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Thesis Statement

The purpose of this thesis is to analyze and determine the impact of religious conflict in the Middle East on democratic elections in Israel. To do this, the 2013 and 2015 Israeli elections were considered. Specifically, the party platforms and campaigns leading up to the 2013 and 2015 elections were analyzed and compared with the election results, as well as the historic results of Israeli elections and positions of parties running for election to the Israeli Knesset. Ultimately, it was determined that while religious conflict does not maintain a direct impact on the outcomes of the Israeli democratic elections to the Knesset, the presence of issues relating to religious in the party platforms does, in fact, maintain a direct impact on the outcomes of the election.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Research Question

Israel is a rare state in the Middle East. Not only is it a Jewish state, counter to the predominantly Muslim heritage and traditions of the region, but also it is a democracy. In a region where conflict and political instability run rampant and religiously fueled conflicts create chaos, the future of a Jewish democratic state becomes unclear. An understanding of the role that Israel plays in both transnational religiously fueled conflicts, such as the rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), and internal religiously fueled conflicts, such as the Israeli-Palestinian issue, can help to determine the future of Israel and its position in the region.

The outcome of the 2013 Israeli Knesset election was expected to mirror that of the 2011 election. However, such was not the case. The surprising election results showed further fragmentation of the political landscape in Israel. The victory of the Likud party, led by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, was unexpected. The divide between the “right” and “left” political blocks essentially dissipated as party alignments shifted. As I will propose, due to a change in focus of the parties and therefore their platforms, the construct of the 2013 government and the impact it had on Israel was at the very least unexpected and in fact rather radical.

In the 2015 Knesset elections, the results of the election were again unexpected as the effects of the 2013 election were reversed, with a resurgence of the "right" and "left" political blocks. Furthermore, party alignments once again shifted, returning to a similar situation as before the 2013 election. Once again, I propose that this shift was caused by a shift in focus of the parties during the election, namely prominence of topics relating to religious conflict in the party platforms. Knowing the effect of the religious conflicts in the Middle East on these elections could provide essential information as to the future of Israel and its position in the Middle East.

Therefore, I present the following research question: What was the impact of religious conflict in the Middle East on the 2013 and 2015 Legislative Elections in Israel? For purposes of this research, "impact" is defined to be the effect of the religious conflict on the outcome of election results, if any; "religious conflict" is defined to be a conflict fueled by a claim of religious intent.

To answer this question, I will analyze the 2013 and 2015 elections to the Israeli Knesset. Specifically, I will conduct an analysis of the platforms of each of the political parties prior to and throughout the campaign cycle. Additionally, I will analyze the impacts that outside events – economic, social, international, and military – had on the party platforms and, henceforth, the elections.

1.2 Literature Review

There are currently a number of existing explanations as to why the 2013 and 2015 Israeli elections to the Knesset resulted in the outcomes that they did. While these theories do make sustainable arguments as to the reasons for the election results, I argue that when viewed simultaneously, the outcome of the elections is predicated on the presence and prevalence of religious conflict verbiage in the party platforms and election strategies – a revelation that can only be seen when the elections are analyzed together.

In regards to the 2013 election, Orkibi, Rahat and Hazan, and Roth each present different analyses and reasons as to the outcome of the elections. Orkibi argues that the results of the 2013 election were determined largely by the need to break from “old politics” and a call for “new politics” by the Israeli people, as evidenced in the social unrest and protests throughout the state in the summer of 2011.¹ This “new politics” involved not only a new political concentration on personalized politics and issues that mattered most to the Israeli citizens, but also a new way of campaigning using new media (i.e. social media). Campaigns began to use personal social media pages for both the parties and the leading candidates within the parties to personalize the campaign and create a connection between the candidate, party, and voter, something that had never been done before in Israel.

¹ Orkibi, Eithan. ““New Politics,” New Media - New Political Language? A rhetorical perspective on candidates' self presentation in the 2013 Israeli elections.” *Israel Affairs* 21.2 (2015): 277-292.

Rahat and Hazan analyze the voting patterns of Israelis between the 2009 and 2013 elections to determine that Arabs and ultra-religious parts of Israeli society typically vote for the same party, no matter the primary issue in the campaign, while secular voters shift their party support depending upon the focus of the campaign.² Thus, because the secular voters shift votes according to campaigns, they are responsible for the change in the construct of the Knesset between 2009 and 2013. The focus on “new politics” in the 2013 election accounted for the shift in support for the political parties.

Finally, Roth contends that the results of the 2013 election are the result of many Israeli citizens “coming home” to their religious roots, particularly Zionists.³ The change in focus of the election allowed the religious-Zionist parties to frame themselves in a different light, moving from the political periphery to the center stage. The ability of the Zionist parties to reframe themselves based on social developments as the parties of all Israelis helped them to gain attention, support, and seats, and therefore change the outcome of the 2013 elections.

While there are many explanations available for the 2013 elections, the explanations for the 2015 available at the time of this writing are far more limited. That being said, the writings of Peters and Pinfeld, and Hazan and Diskin offer

² Rahat, Gideon and Reuven Y Hazan. "Increased Personalization in an Unstable Party System: The 2013 Elections in Israel." *Representation* 49.3 (2013): 375-389.

³ Roth, Anat. "'Something New Begins' - religious Zionism in the 2013 elections: from decline to political recovery." *Israel Affairs* 21.2 (13): 209-229.

sustainable and differing arguments for the outcomes of the 2015 election. Peters and Pinfeld argue that the 2015 election results are the consequence of misleading polls throughout the election, as well as a belief by Netanyahu that he was rather invincible in the race for the majority.⁴ Additionally, according to Peters and Pinfeld, the election focused “almost exclusively on personalities and smears,” with little focus on the platforms and policies of the parties themselves.⁵ Thus, a combination of these factors led to variations in party positions from previous years, as well as a shift in public support for varying parties. This shift in public support led to drastically different outcomes in the 2015 election.

Contrastingly, Hazan and Diskin assert that the 2015 elections to the Israeli Knesset mirrored the first elections to the Knesset in 1949.⁶ The 2015 elections saw a shift in party positions, as well as a focus on religious conflict and foreign affairs as opposed to socioeconomic policies. This resulted in increased voter turnout and, ultimately, the reemergence of left-wing and right-wing party blocs. However, the prospects of success of the 20th Knesset, according to Hazan and Diskin, are slim.

The above arguments, while each contending different and plausible reasons for the shift between the 2013 and 2015 elections, do not fully capture the larger

⁴ Peters, Joel and Rob Pinfeld. "Consolidating right-wing hegemony: the Israeli election of 2015." *Mediterranean Politics* 20.3 (2015): 405-412.

⁵ Peters and Pinfeld, "Consolidating right-wing hegemony: the Israeli election of 2015": 407

⁶ Hazan, Reuven Y. and Abraham Diskin. "The 2015 Israeli Elections." *Electoral Studies* (2015): 1-8.

story as to why such dramatic changes took place. To understand the reasoning behind such dramatic changes, one must fully analyze both elections. Ultimately, it becomes clear that the presence or absence of religious conflict in Israel and the surrounding region is not, in fact, a direct determinant of the outcomes of the Israeli. By analyzing the 2013 and 2015 elections through the lens of party platforms, it becomes clear that the significant shifts in the construct of the government that resulted from the 2013 and 2015 elections resulted not from the impact of external factors, but instead from the nuanced changes in the party platforms.

In the next chapter, I will present an overview of the 2013 campaign and election, as well as an analysis of the 2013 election and its results; the third chapter does the same for the 2015 election. The fourth chapter is constituted by a summary of my analysis and findings, accompanied by my conclusions.

Chapter 2: The 2013 Israeli Elections

2.1 The 18th Knesset: Leading Up to the 2013 Elections

Since the founding of the Israeli state, one issue has been the focus of nearly every election to the Knesset: the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.⁷ A conflict that has endured for more than a century, the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict (from here on referred to as the PI Conflict) has created unrest throughout the states of Israel and Palestine, the region of the Middle East, and across the globe through international relations. While the foundations of the conflict date back to the first Jewish Zionist settlements in Palestine, the beginning of the PI Conflict can be stated as the Balfour Declaration in 1917^{8,9}. The Balfour Declaration, issued by British Foreign Secretary Arthur James Balfour to leading Zionist Lord Rothschild and approved by President of the United States Woodrow Wilson, called for the establishment of a National Home for Jewish People in Palestine.¹⁰ The Declaration also recognized the need to protect non-Jewish settlements in Palestine, as well as Jewish communities elsewhere in the world.¹¹ The end of World War I brought with it the relegation of

⁷ Rahat and Hazan, "Increased Personalization in an Unstable Party System: The 2013 Elections in Israel." , 2013: 375

⁸ Arian, Asher. *The Second Republic: Politics in Israel*. Chatham: Chatham House Publishers, 1998: 36

⁹ Kamrava, Mehran. *The Modern Middle East*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2011: 44

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

the Iraqi and Palestinian Mandates to Great Britain.¹² In the drafting of the Palestinian mandate, the British relied heavily on the incorporation of a Zionist program, essentially guaranteeing the immigration of Jews to Palestine and escalating the conflict to come.¹³

A prominent turning point in the PI Conflict came on November 29, 1947, the day that the United Nations (UN) issued Resolution 181(I and II), calling for the partition of Palestine into two separate communities, one designated for each of the two groups inhabiting the country^{14,15}. From the partition would theoretically emerge two separate states: Palestine and Israel. Under the plan, Israel was designated approximately 5,200 square miles of former Palestinian territory.¹⁶ The British mandate over Palestine ended on May 14, 1948, and the partition of Palestine took effect.¹⁷ Thus, the independence of Israel was proclaimed.

However, the Arab Higher Committee, an organization constituted of representatives from each of the Palestinian parties and formed in Palestine in 1936 to prevent the settlement of the Jews in Palestine, did not recognize UN Resolution

¹² Kamrava, *The Modern Middle East*: 46

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ United Nations General Assembly. "Resolution 181 (II): The Future Government of Palestine." 29 November 1947. *United Nations*. 23 January 2016.

<<http://domino.un.org/unispal.nsf/0/7f0af2bd897689b785256c330061d253>>.

¹⁵ Arian, *The Second Republic*: 36

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

181 and denied its legitimacy^{18,19}. Thus began a series of wars that would mark only the beginning of a battle for peace and security amongst Israel and Palestine in the decades to come.

It is important to note that the basis driving the PI Conflict is essentially a competition of fundamental identity between the Israelis and the Palestinians, from which stems the battle of land claims and the refusal on each side of the right for the state on the other side to exist. From the start of the first *aliya* (or period of immigration of Jews to Palestine), the identities of either side promoted the belief that those of competing identities did not maintain the right to exist.²⁰ Zionism, forming to maturity within the context of Judaism throughout the late nineteenth century, is a manifestation of traditional Judaism with a focus on secular nationalism, driven by the anti-Semitic tendencies of Europe at the time.²¹ As the Jewish community in Palestine continued to grow, so did the intensity of the claims that the Jews, according to the Bible, were the rightful inhabitants of the land.²² In contrast to the distinct identity manifested by the Jewish settlers in Palestine, the Palestinian identity did not draw its support from religion but instead from territorial and economic prowess.²³ The essence of being a Palestinian arose from

¹⁸ Institute for Palestinian Studies. "The Arab Higher Committee Members." 2012. *Before Their Diaspora*. 23 January 2016. <<http://btd.palestine-studies.org/content/arab-higher-committee-members>>.

¹⁹ Arian, *The Second Republic*: 36

²⁰ Kamrava, *The Modern Middle East*: 217

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Kamrava, *The Modern Middle East*: 218

the historic significance of the state, as well as the territorial ownership which accompanied that significance. The unique identities found no common ground between them, and instead were established on entirely oppositional foundations. As each respective identity became more promulgated over time, the likelihood that the conflict would resolve on its own continued to diminish.

Beginning in 1947 and ending in 1949, the newly formed states of Israel and Palestine engaged in war. In what is known both as the Israeli War for Independence and the Palestinian Civil War, the Israelis and the Palestinians fought against each other for the right to exist. The first attacks were conducted by bands of Palestinian Arabs connected to the Arab Liberation Army in attempt to stop the partition from taking place.²⁴ However, once Israel was declared an independent state in 1948, the attacks intensified.²⁵ Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, and Iraq joined in the fight on the side of the Arabs, attempting to prevent the establishment of Israel by force.²⁶ However, at the end of the two-year war, Israel has secured an additional 2,500 square miles of territory, while Jordan controlled the West Bank, and Egypt controlled the Gaza Strip.²⁷ Jerusalem, designated in the UN Partition Plan to be an international city, was divided down the middle, with Jordan controlling the

²⁴ United States of America Department of State. *The Arab-Israeli War of 1948*. n.d. 23 January 2016. <<https://history.state.gov/milestones/1945-1952/arab-israeli-war>>.

²⁵ Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs. *Israel's War of Independence*. 2013. 23 January 2016. <<http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/AboutIsrael/History/Pages/Israels%20War%20of%20Independence%20-%201947%20-%201949.aspx>>.

²⁶ Arian, *The Second Republic*: 36

²⁷ Ibid.

east and Israel the west.²⁸ Additionally, 840,000 Palestinian Arabs were displaced during the war, marking the beginning of the Palestinian refugee crisis.²⁹ Ultimately, Israel proclaimed victory, emerged an independent state, and had control over a majority of what was formerly Palestine. Needless to say, this marked only the beginning of the confrontations that would become the PI Conflict.

The second significant turning point in the PI Conflict was the Six Day War of 1967. In 1966, as the United Arab Republic began to see secessions (particularly of Syria), Palestine began to doubt the support of the region to their cause.³⁰ As such, a push to unite the Arab world around disbanding Israel began, first with a series of attacks by the Fedayeen (Palestinian guerilla combatants) against Israeli targets.³¹ As the attacks intensified, members of the Arab world began forming alliances in hopes to deter Israeli engagement in war.³² However, Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) began marching towards the Egyptian border, marking the beginning of the Six Day War in June 1967.³³ At the end of the war, Israel had lost far fewer troops than each of the Arab states, as well as gained control of Jerusalem, the Sinai Peninsula, the West Bank, and the Golan Heights^{34,35}. Palestine, on the other hand, had strengthened its liberation movement, becoming more militarized. During and after

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Kamrava, *The Modern Middle East*: 233

³⁰ Ibid., 118

³¹ Ibid.

³² Kamrava, *The Modern Middle East*: 119

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Arian, *The Second Republic*: 37

³⁵ Kamrava, *The Modern Middle East*: 122

the Six Day War, the Palestinian Liberation Operation became more active, working with the National Liberation Movement (the Fatah) and the Fedayeen to establish a stronger front against the Israeli state.³⁶ The UN attempted to minimize the impact of the Six Day War by issuing Resolution 242. Resolution 242, amongst establishing a ceasefire, called for Israeli withdrawal from its newly acquired territories, as well as recognition of the Israeli state.³⁷ Accepted by Israel, Egypt, Jordan, Syria, and the PLO (in 1988), the Resolution ended the war.³⁸ (However, Israel did not withdraw from the newly acquired land, which became known as the Occupied Territories.³⁹) Essentially, the UN and the signatories of the agreement had established Israel as a sovereign state, a fact that the Arab world and international realm could not ignore.

Beginning soon after the Six Day War, the Israeli government began establishing Jewish settlements in the Occupied Territories.^{40,41} Most threatening of these settlements in the opinion of Palestine was the West Bank. The West Bank, protection of which was deemed a priority by the Palestinians, was one-third overtaken by Israeli settlements immediately following the Six Day War.⁴² The trend only continued, and by 1988 over 70,000 Jews lived in Jewish settlements on land

³⁶ Ibid., 124

³⁷ Ibid., 126

³⁸ Kamrava, *The Modern Middle East*: 126

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Arian, *The Second Republic*: 39

⁴¹ Sandler, Shmuel and Jonathan Rynhold. "Introduction: From Centrism to Neo-Centrism." *Israel Affairs* 13.2 (2007): 229-250: 238

⁴² Ibid.

claimed by both Israel and Palestine.⁴³ The number doubled by 1996, with 140,000 settlers in the Territories.⁴⁴

In 1973, the Ramadan War took place between Egypt, Syria, and Israel, in attempt to return Israel to its original borders.⁴⁵ While the war resulted in a ceasefire and no significant territorial gains or losses for either side, it did have an effect on the Palestinian identity.⁴⁶ Those Palestinians living in the Occupied Territories gained confidence and a stronger sense of what it meant to be Palestinian, leading to more active resistance to Israeli presence.⁴⁷ In culmination of this new found sense of establishment, the Palestinian National Front was erected to serve as an intermediary between the PLO and the Israeli forces in the Occupied Territories.⁴⁸ However, this only escalated the PI Conflict, as the Israeli response to the confidence of the Palestinians fueled violence and bloodshed on both sides of the Conflict.⁴⁹

The first extreme manifestation of this violence and bloodshed took place in 1987. The Palestinians continued to refuse the right of the Israelis to settle in the Occupied Territories. In December, the Palestinians launched a full-scale uprising

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Arian, *The Second Republic*: 40

⁴⁵ Kamrava, *The Modern Middle East*: 132

⁴⁶ Ibid., 137

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.,

⁴⁹ Kamrava, *The Modern Middle East*: 137

against the settlers and the Israeli government.⁵⁰ Known as the Intifada, the confrontation lasted for more than a year, and began to deescalate only when the government of the United States agreed to enter into discussions with the PLO, thereby acknowledging its existence as the representative body of Palestine.⁵¹ As a result of these discussions, in 1993 Israel and Palestine signed the Oslo Agreement, the first in a series known as the Oslo Peace Accords.⁵² The Accords established Palestinian self-rule of Gaza and Jericho, as well as divided the West Bank into zones for shared occupation.⁵³

While continued attempts to establish a long-lasting peace between the two sides continued, the attempts were unsuccessful. In 2000, a second Intifada erupted in the Occupied Territories when Ariel Sharon, a Member of the Israeli Knesset, visited the Al Aqsa compound in Jerusalem.⁵⁴ The compound, an area claimed as sacred by both Jews and Arabs, was a long-standing object of contention amidst the Israelis and Palestinians. As suicide bombings against Israelis began to increase, the IDF returned to the West Bank, increasing security measures and preventing travel for many between the two states.⁵⁵

⁵⁰ Arian, *The Second Republic*: 40

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Arian, *The Second Republic*: 41

⁵⁴ Thomson Reuters Foundation. *Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*. 23 July 2014. 23 January 2016. <<http://news.trust.org//spotlight/Israeli-Palestinian-conflict/?tab=briefing>>.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

In 2003, in attempt to bring an end to both the Second Intifada and the PI Conflict altogether, the United States, European Union, Russia, and United Nations engaged in the creation of a plan aptly named “The Roadmap for Peace.”⁵⁶ The Roadmap, “a performance-based, goal-driven plan, with clear phases, timelines, and benchmarks” calls for an end to all violence between the Palestinians and Israelis, the establishment of Palestinian institutions, transition to an independent Palestinian state, and peace between the Israeli and Palestinian states.⁵⁷ Presented to both Israel and Palestine on April 30, 2003, the Roadmap was accepted.⁵⁸ Between 2003 and 2006, Israel withdrew from Gaza and dismantled most settlements in both Gaza and the West Bank.⁵⁹ Therefore, the Palestine reclaimed the Gaza Strip as part of its own territory, and it seemed as if the peace negotiations were successful.

However, in 2006, Hamas won elections in the PLO, and became the primary party in the Palestinian Parliament.⁶⁰ This led to a power struggle between Fatah and Hamas, and the creation of two separate governments in Palestine for nearly eight years.⁶¹ Israel refused to acknowledge any government led by Hamas, and increased border security and restrictions as a result of the Hamas government.⁶²

⁵⁶ United States Department of State. *Roadmap for Peace*. 16 July 2003. 23 January 2016. <<http://2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/ei/rls/22520.htm>>.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Thomson Reuters Foundation, *Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Thomson Reuters Foundation, *Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*.

Although Fatah and Hamas reconciled in 2014, creating a joint government, Israel continued to refute the legitimacy of said government, stirring up emotions from the recent past.^{63,64} The resulting blockade of Gaza by Israel (and subsequently Egypt) further escalated events, as the economy and status of the Gaza Strip quickly deteriorated.

Further complicating matters, in 2008, the housing market of the United States of America collapsed. As the effects of the collapse reverberated throughout the U.S. economy, the impact was felt around the world. Faced with the worst economic recession since the Great Depression of the 1930s, people across the globe demanded help from their governments. The case was no different in Israel. This would play an essential role in the success of the 18th Knesset, which was elected in February of 2009.⁶⁵ These elections focused almost exclusively on the Palestinian-Israeli question, as had the majority of elections since the founding of the state.⁶⁶ The elections resulted in the inclusion of eleven parties in the 18th Knesset, as can be seen in Figure 1. The coalition government of the 18th Knesset, formed in March of 2009, was led by Likud (and hence, Prime Minister Netanyahu), and consisted of: Yisrael Beiteinu, Labor, Shas, United Torah Judaism, and the Jewish Home.⁶⁷ While

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Human Rights Watch. *World Report 2015: Israel and Palestine*. 2015. 23 January 2016. <<https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2015/country-chapters/israel/palestine>>.

⁶⁵ Rahat and Hazan, "Increased Personalization in an Unstable Party System: The 2013 Elections in Israel," 2013: 375

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

possessing many of the same views on external and foreign affairs, the coalition varied significantly on stances regarding internal Israeli issues, which would lead to problems in the near future.

For example, while large portions of the Israeli public called for the provision of civil marriages, the religious parties within the 18th Knesset prevented this from becoming reality.⁶⁸ Additionally, the differing opinions on the definition of citizenship, instigated by Yisrael Beiteinu's call to predicate citizenship on the premise of loyalty to The Jewish State of Israel, created a number of internal divides.⁶⁹ Finally, the economic policies of the parties in the 18th Knesset, particularly those of Labor and Likud, were at odds with each other and would cause problems as the economic crisis took its toll on the 18th Knesset.

In 2009 and 2010, Israel began to feel the real effects of the economic crisis. Disagreement over joining the Likud-led government coalition led to the division of the Labor Party in January 2011, into the Labor Party and the Independence Party.⁷⁰ Upon this division, the Labor Party withdrew from the coalition government, henceforth reducing the number of Members in the coalition from 74 to 66.⁷¹ Additionally, the first months of 2011 saw an increase in the effects of the economic

⁶⁸ Hansel, Lars. "Elections to Israel's 18th Knesset." *Auslandsinformationen* (2009): 144-148: 144 <http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas_16132-544-2-30.pdf?090406131438>.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 146

⁷⁰ Rahat and Hazan, "Increased Personalization in an Unstable Party System: The 2013 Elections in Israel,": 376

⁷¹ Ibid.

crisis on Israel.⁷² Prices on everything, from basic necessities to housing, increased.⁷³ Beginning in the summer of 2011, numerous protests and mass rallies began throughout the state.⁷⁴ Members of the Israeli middle class took to the streets, calling for better socio-economic conditions.^{75,76}

Figure 1: Construct of the 18th Knesset

Party	Seats
Coalition Government	
Likud	27
Yisrael Beiteinu	15
Labor*	13
Shas	11
Jewish Home	7
United Torah Judaism	5
Total	78
Opposition	
Kadima**	28
United Arab List	4
Hadash	4
Meretz	3
Balad	3
Total	42

*Labor split from the coalition government in 2011 – see below

** Kadima joined the coalition government for a brief period in 2012 – see below

Also creating problems across the globe, but particularly in the Middle East beginning in 2011, was the rise of an Islamic extremist and militant movement known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, or ISIL (also known as the Islamic

⁷² Ibid., 377

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Lewin, Eval. "The 2013 Israeli Elections and Historic Recurrences." *Israel Affairs* 21.2 (2015): 293-308: 295

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Rahat and Hazan, "Increased Personalization in an Unstable Party System: The 2013 Elections in Israel,": 377

State of Iraq and Syria, or ISIS).⁷⁷ While ISIL had been in existence since 2005, the withdrawal of the United States of America from Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as increase turmoil throughout the Middle East, paved the way for ISIL to gather momentum and support.⁷⁸ This movement, combined with calls throughout the greater Arab world to rid the Middle East of a Jewish state, externally threatened Israel continually beginning with the 18th Knesset.⁷⁹

Realizing that the coalition government was ill-designed in the face of an economic crisis, Yair Lapid, an Israeli journalist, saw his chance to make an impact.⁸⁰ In January of 2012, Lapid formed the political party Yesh Atid, or There is a Future, a center party designed to stress socioeconomic issues.⁸¹ Upon its founding, the platform of Yesh Atid focused primarily on what was determined to be an unfair divide in Israeli society between secular and ultra-Orthodox Israelis regarding required military service, taxation, and the cost of living.⁸² Highlighting military service, the party called for equal military service by all members of Israeli society regardless of religious exemption.⁸³ Yesh Atid also placed a significant amount of

⁷⁷ Laub, Zachary and Jonathan Masters. "What is the Islamic State?" *PBS Newshour*. 16 November 2015.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Kamrava, *The Modern Middle East*: 334

⁸⁰ Spyer, Jonathan. "The Nineteenth Israeli Knesset Elections: Lackluster Election, Significant Results." *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 17.1 (2013): 92-99: 93

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ The Israel Democracy Institute, *Yesh Atid*. 2015. 28 November 2015. <<http://en.idi.org.il>>.

importance on education and its necessity in Israeli society.⁸⁴ By focusing on social and civic issues, the party made little mention of the most divisive issues in Israeli culture – security and the occupied territories – and created appeal amongst middle class and younger voters.⁸⁵ Lapid intentionally formed Yesh Atid as a more centrist than left-wing party,⁸⁶ focusing on internal issues rather than those of security to distinguish the party and attract an array of voters from various sectors of Israeli life.⁸⁷

Further complicating matters for the coalition government of the 18th Knesset, in February of 2012 the Israeli Supreme Court ruled that the Tal Law, or the law that authorized exemption from military service for ultra-religious Jews, to be null and void on the premise that it violated equality.⁸⁸ The issue became internally divisive for the coalition government, and parties began to fragment. While the Labor Party vowed to pass the law provided it was in place for no more than a year, Shas threatened to withdraw from the coalition if the law was not passed.⁸⁹ Netanyahu, struck by both fragmentation within the coalition and rising favorability of Kadima, the main party in the opposition, called for early elections on

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Hazan and Diskin, "The 2015 Israeli Elections," : 4

⁸⁶ Spyer, "The Nineteenth Israeli Knesset Elections: Lackluster Election, Significant Results.": 93

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Rahat and Hazan, "Increased Personalization in an Unstable Party System: The 2013 Elections in Israel.": 376

⁸⁹ Gradstein, Linda. "Controversy grows in Israel over extension of Tal Law granting haredim army exemptions." *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*. New York, 31 January 2012.

May 7, 2012.⁹⁰ However, amidst the legislative process for dissolving the 18th Knesset, Likud and Kadima negotiated a way to keep the current government in power.⁹¹ Overnight, Kadima and Likud came to an agreement that Kadima would join the coalition government, therefore keeping the coalition in power and halting early elections.⁹² This agreement was made with the rationale that, if Kadima and Likud were to join forces, the likelihood of creating and passing a new conscription law to replace the Tal Law would be much simpler.⁹³ However, on July 19, 2012, after only 70 days of being a part of the coalition and continued frustrations from failed compromise on the creation of a new conscription law, it was clear that continued attempts to compromise were futile and the party withdrew from the coalition.⁹⁴

Internally, Israel was faced not only with an unstable government coalition, but also with an increase in the religious violence between Israel and Palestine.⁹⁵ Beginning in the end of June 2012 and continuing to escalate throughout the latter half of 2012, Hamas, one of the two primary political parties in the Palestinian Authority as well as a militant movement that serves as an armed resistance against

⁹⁰ Rahat and Hazan, "Increased Personalization in an Unstable Party System: The 2013 Elections in Israel.": 376

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Rahat and Hazan, "Increased Personalization in an Unstable Party System: The 2013 Elections in Israel.": 376

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 379

Israel, continued to shell southern Israel, as well as launch rockets into the state.^{96,97} Israel's response, further detailed below, was to bomb strategic targets throughout Gaza.⁹⁸ While many were critical of the coalition for not sending ground troops into Gaza, Likud, Labor, and Yesh Atid received positive responses in the polls due to their support of the air strikes.^{99,100}

In September of 2012, budget discussions began in the Knesset.¹⁰¹ The people of Israel, making it clear that they were unhappy with their economic situation through protests throughout the 18th Knesset, were relying on their government to make effective change.¹⁰² Netanyahu, realizing the need to respond to the calls of the people and attempt to counteract the international economic crisis, realized that the budget would have to be cut nearly USD 4 billion.^{103,104} However, given the construct of the government, this would prove to be a nearly impossible task. Proposed cuts to the military created a stagnation in the discussion

⁹⁶ Council on Foreign Relations. *CFR Backgrounders - Hamas*. New York, 1 August 2014.

⁹⁷ Hazan and Diskin, "The 2015 Israeli Elections.": 379

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Gerstenfeld, Manfred. "The Run-Up to Israel's 2013 Elections: A Political History." *Israel Affairs* 21.2 (2013): 177-194: 179

¹⁰¹ Spyer, "The Nineteenth Israeli Knesset Elections: Lackluster Election, Significant Results.": 92

¹⁰² Rahat and Hazan, "Increased Personalization in an Unstable Party System: The 2013 Elections in Israel.": 377

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Sanders, Edmond. "Israel's Benjamin Netanyahu calls for early elections." *Los Angeles Times*. LA, 9 October 2012.

due to opposition from the hawkish parties, as well as the Israeli Defensive Forces, and proposed cuts to education led to uproar from students across the state.¹⁰⁵

Therefore the coalition government, unequipped to handle such issues as the economic crisis and the overturning of the Tal Law with one voice, and in the face of one of the most difficult and essential budget battles to ever face the state of Israel, realized the impossibility of successfully completing its tasks and, on October 15, 2012, voted for early elections.¹⁰⁶ Thus, the campaign for the 2013 Israeli elections to the 19th Knesset began.

2.2 2013 Election: The Campaign

In the 2013 elections, 34 parties ran for the 120 seats in the Knesset at a two percent threshold to attain seats.¹⁰⁷ Prior to the dissolution of the 18th Knesset, polls showed a steady decrease in the favorability numbers of Likud, while also showing a steady increase in the favorability numbers for Kadima, the largest party in the opposition of the 18th Knesset.¹⁰⁸ Thus, upon the announcement of new elections,

¹⁰⁵ Friedman, Ron. "Treasury to raise university tuition prices." *Times of Israel*. Jerusalem, 9 April 2013.

¹⁰⁶ Cohen, Tamir. "Polls and Numbers: The Story of Israel's 2013 Election." *Haaretz*. Jerusalem, 20 January 2013.

¹⁰⁷ Inter-Parliamentary Union. *Israel Knesset*. n.d. <http://www.ipu.org/parline-e/reports/arc/2155_13.htm>.

¹⁰⁸ Rahat and Hazan, "Increased Personalization in an Unstable Party System: The 2013 Elections in Israel.": 378

Netanyahu also announced the creation of a joint party list between Likud and Yisrael Beiteinu.¹⁰⁹ Yisrael Beiteinu was the second largest party in the coalition government of the 18th Knesset, and ideologically a seemingly natural fit for a joint list with the Likud party.¹¹⁰ The joint list, Likud-Beiteinu, did not publish a party platform, instead relying on the assumption that the people of Israel knew Netanyahu, what he stood for, and that he would continue to lead the government in a way that would be what was best for the state.^{111,112} Throughout the short and tumultuous campaign, the party list placed most of its focus on the economic success of the previous Netanyahu governments, as well as promises of socioeconomic development.¹¹³ Primary campaign talking points during rallies, press conferences, and debates, included the creation of 350,000 jobs and a revolution of the cellular telephone market.¹¹⁴ Additionally, sparing mentions of the expansion of an Islamic Middle East and the increasingly aggressive policies of Iraq and Turkey towards Israel were made throughout the campaign.¹¹⁵

Faced with the fact unsuccessful coalition negotiations between Likud and Kadima in the 18th Knesset, Kadima, the primary opposition party in the 18th

¹⁰⁹ Yiftachel, *Liberal Colonialism? Israel's 2013 Elections and the "Ethnocratic Bubble"*, 2013: 55

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² Katz, Yisrael. *Yoman Channel 1*. 11 January 2013.

¹¹³ Gerstenfeld, "The Run-Up to Israel's 2013 Elections: A Political History.": 186

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ Yiftachel, *Liberal Colonialism? Israel's 2013 Elections and the "Ethnocratic Bubble"*, 2013: 53-4

Knesset, held an internal primary election for the leader of the party.¹¹⁶ Tzipi Livni, the leader of the party throughout the 18th Knesset, was replaced.¹¹⁷ With its new leader Shaul Mofaz, Kadima announced its run for reelection in 2013 shortly after the government was dissolved.

Kadima was founded as a centrist party in 2005 as the result of a split within the Likud based on internal disagreements during the disengagement from Gaza.¹¹⁸ The party attracted many members from both the Labor and Likud parties, and throughout history tended to lean more towards the left than the right. Economically, a centrist pillar of the party platform in 2013 was to minimize the gaps between classes, as well as eliminate poverty.¹¹⁹ Kadima sought to increase transparency in the government regarding the allocation of funds, as well as reallocate these funds to better suit the needs of the Israeli people.¹²⁰ Additionally, Kadima upheld Israel's existence as a Jewish state, but also believed in the necessity of a solution to the Palestinian-Israeli issue through a peace process that creates two states for two peoples.¹²¹ This skepticism of the likelihood of reaching a peaceful settlement, combined with the willingness to attempt peace negotiations, accompanied by the call to preserve Israel as a Jewish democratic state made

¹¹⁶ The Israel Democracy Institute, *Kadima*. 2015. 28 November 2015.
<<http://en.idi.org.il>>.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ The Israel Democracy Institute, *Kadima*.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

Kadima a strong and appealing centrist party in 2013.¹²² Ultimately at the heart of Kadima's platform in 2013 was the call for peace negotiations with the Palestinians.^{123, 124}

On October 30, 2012, Yesh Atid, the party of Yair Lapid, announced its entrance into the 2013 elections with the release of its platform.¹²⁵ Its 2013 party platform focused entirely on socioeconomic issues.¹²⁶ Primary campaign talking points included an overhaul of the current educational system, a complete government reform, economic growth reinforced by free market principles and free competition, support to small and local businesses, and equality in economic and military national responsibilities.^{127, 128} Additionally, the campaign also focused predominantly on the need for the establishment of an Israeli constitution to promote the stability and security of the Israeli state.¹²⁹

Furthermore, realizing the need for a more stable government coalition, the New National Religious Party and Tekuma, the two religious-Zionist parties, announced their entry into the 2013 elections as a joint party list on November 7,

¹²² Sandler and Rynhold, "Introduction: From Centrism to Neo-Centrism.": 244

¹²³ The David Project. "Israeli Elections 2013 Discussion Guide." n.d. *The David Project*. 19 February 2016. <<http://www.davidproject.org/wp-content/uploads/Israeli-Elections-2013-Discussion-Guide.pdf>>.

¹²⁴ "Guide to Israel's Political Parties." *BBC World News*. 21 January 2013.

¹²⁵ Zion, Ilan Ben. "Laying out party's foreign policy, Yair Lapid calls for talks with Palestinians." *Times of Israel*. Jerusalem, 30 October 2012.

¹²⁶ The David Project, "Israeli Elections 2013 Discussion Guide."

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ Lewin, "The 2013 Israeli Elections and Historic Recurrences.": 295

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

2012.¹³⁰ This joint party list, called Habeyit Hayehudi or The Jewish Home, based its 2013 platform on the notion that the party could make an impact for its followers by engagement in the political process.¹³¹ For the first time in the history of a Zionist party, the party was open to accepting new registrants, and announced that it would hold primary elections to better integrate the two parties and fairly determine the party list for the 2013 elections.¹³² Central campaign messaging focused on the ability of the party to represent Israel as a whole, and do what is best for all in shaping and strengthening the Jewish-Zionist character of the state.¹³³ While a minor portion of the party platform was devoted to opposition to the creation of a Palestinian state, the primary party platform rested on constructing and reinforcing free market policies in the Israeli economy, equal educational opportunities, and strengthening connections between Israel and Jewish communities around the world.^{134, 135}

Labor, what had historically been the traditional opponent to Likud, announced its entrance into the 2013 elections on December 24, 2012.¹³⁶ During the 2013 elections, Labor primarily ran its platform on the notion that it would not join

¹³⁰ Kalman, Aaron and Sam Ser. "Jewish Home chooses young face to lead old party." *Times of Israel*. Jerusalem, 7 November 2012.

¹³¹ Roth, "‘Something New Begins’ - religious Zionism in the 2013 elections: from decline to political recovery.": 209-10

¹³² *Ibid.*, 217

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 219

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 220

¹³⁵ Lewin, "The 2013 Israeli Elections and Historic Recurrences.": 300

¹³⁶ Lis, Jonathan. "Labor Releases Party Platform." *Haaretz*. Jerusalem, 24 December 2012.

a Netanyahu-led government coalition.¹³⁷ Additionally, feeding off of the calls throughout Israeli society for the government's resolution of many socioeconomic issues facing Israel, Labor further reinforced its ranks with leading members of the social unrest protests from the summer of 2011, and centralized its platform on social democratic issues and a socioeconomic agenda.^{138,139} Additionally, the party made many promises focusing on socioeconomic aspects of Israeli society, such as the need to end privatization of public infrastructure and increase the minimum wage.¹⁴⁰

Shas and United Torah Judaism, two ultra-Orthodox religious parties, focused their 2013 election platforms on identity politics. Shas, a party whose base is largely constructed of disadvantaged Israeli Jews of Asian or North African origin, firmly believes that the Israeli state should be organized according to Jewish law, or halacha.^{141,142,143} In other words, the state and all of its institutions should adhere to Orthodox rabbinical law. Similarly, United Torah Judaism bases its platform on religious belief, and works primarily to represent the interests of the Haredi community in Israel, specifically regarding special interests in education and

¹³⁷ "Guide to Israel's Political Parties." BBC World News.

¹³⁸ The David Project, "Israeli Elections 2013 Discussion Guide."

¹³⁹ Yiftachel, Liberal Colonialism? Israel's 2013 Elections and the "Ethnocratic Bubble": 56

¹⁴⁰ "Guide to Israel's Political Parties." BBC World News.

¹⁴¹ Arian, *The Second Republic*: 311

¹⁴² Spyer, "The Nineteenth Israeli Knesset Elections: Lackluster Election, Significant Results.": 94 page

¹⁴³ Arian, *The Second Republic*: 214

military service due to religious beliefs.^{144,145} In 2013 specifically, the two parties reinforced calls for a return to the Jewish character of the Israeli state, and the need to protect its Jewish identity from infiltration.¹⁴⁶ Ultimately, the parties called for the maintenance of strict religious requirements regarding conversion to Judaism, a practice which they accused minority populations of degrading by supporting lax requirements.¹⁴⁷

After being replaced in her position as the leader of Kadima, in November of 2012, Livni left Kadima and announced the formation of a new party: Hatnua or The Movement.¹⁴⁸ Essentially a one-issue party, Hatnua focuses almost solely on the Palestinian-Israeli issue.¹⁴⁹ It positioned itself to be the central political power on the issue, working to renew the peace process with the Palestinians.¹⁵⁰ The party attracted dissatisfied members of the Kadima and Labor parties, and announced its entrance into the 2013 race on November 28, 2012.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁴ The Israel Democracy Institute, *Shas*. 2015. 28 November 2015.
<<http://en.idi.org.il>>.

¹⁴⁵ The Israel Democracy Institute, *United Torah Judaism*. 2015. 28 November 2015.
<<http://en.idi.org.il>>.

¹⁴⁶ Yiftachel, Oren. "Liberal Colonialism? Israel's 2013 Elections and the "Ethnocratic Bubble"." *Journal of Palestinian Studies* 42.3 (2013): 48-67: 56

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ The Israel Democracy Institute, *Hatnua*. 2015. 28 November 2015.
<<http://en.idi.org.il>>.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

Throughout the 2013 election, Hatnua as well as Meretz, a left-wing Zionist social democratic party primarily concerned with issues of social justice and equality, focused their party platforms on the issue of peace.^{152,153} This peace would be founded upon continued negotiations with the Palestinians, as well as an end to Israeli occupation.¹⁵⁴ Additional platform points included the need for a democratic socioeconomic policy, and the promotion of civil rights.¹⁵⁵ Furthermore, the Arab parties in the 2013 election, Hadash, Balad, and the United Arab List, centered their political platforms around the need to restructure Arab-Israeli relations.¹⁵⁶

On November 14, 2012, shortly after the aforementioned parties had announced their platforms, the 2013 campaign was overshadowed by another event. On that day, Israel launched Operation Pillar of Strength, a combined ground and air operation which launched rockets and attacks into Palestine.¹⁵⁷ Lasting one week, this operation led to the short and temporary forestalling of extreme conflict between Palestine and Israel.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵² The Israel Democracy Institute, *Meretz*. 2015. 28 November 2015. <<http://en.idi.org.il>>.

¹⁵³ Yiftachel, Liberal Colonialism? Israel's 2013 Elections and the "Ethnocratic Bubble": 57

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ The David Project, "Israeli Elections 2013 Discussion Guide."

¹⁵⁶ Yiftachel, Oren. "Liberal Colonialism? Israel's 2013 Elections and the "Ethnocratic Bubble".": 57

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Rahat and Hazan, "Increased Personalization in an Unstable Party System: The 2013 Elections in Israel.": 379

Following Operation Pillar of Strength, the 2013 elections proceeded as if there had been no disturbance. However, on December 18, 2012, Lieberman, the leader of the Labor Party, was indicted for fraud and breach of trust during the 18th Knesset.¹⁵⁹ The public, calling for the creation of “new politics” in the 2013 election, reacted rather poorly to this indictment.¹⁶⁰ Likud-Beiteinu, which for some time had been projected to win at least 37 seats, quickly fell to 34 seats.¹⁶¹ For the first time in the election, Netanyahu was faced with the fact that his majority might be surpassed.

As election day grew closer, the parties began to focus more intensely on their platforms, as well as the platforms of each other. On December 20, 2012, nearly one month before election day, the Jewish Home took a stronger stance in regards to the Palestinian-Israeli issue by announcing that it would refrain from evacuating the Israeli settlements in the occupied territories.¹⁶² After this, support for Jewish Home reached a new peak, and the party was projected to win more than 14 seats in the election.¹⁶³ In retaliation, on December 27, Likud-Beiteinu launched attacks against the Jewish Home, based on loyalty to the state.¹⁶⁴ On January 8th,

¹⁵⁹ Bar-Zohar, Ophir. "Lieberman Indictment Hearing Set for January 17 read more: <http://www.haaretz.com/lieberman-indictment-hearing-set-for-january-17-1.405161>." *Haaretz*. Jersulsam, 3 January 2012.

¹⁶⁰ Orkibi, "New Politics, New Media - New Political Language? A rhetorical perspective on candidates' self presentation in the 2013 Elections", 2015: 277

¹⁶¹ Cohen, Tamir. "Polls and Numbers: The Story of Israel's 2013 Election." *Haaretz*. Jerusalem, 20 January 2013.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ Cohen, Asher. "The Religious Parties in the 2006 Election." *Israel Affairs* 13.2 (2013): 325-345.

2013, two weeks before election day, the last nationwide polls showed Likud-Beiteinu at 34 seats, Yesh Atid with 20, Labor with 17, Jewish Home with 14, Shas with 11, Meretz with 6, and Kadima with 3.¹⁶⁵ Elections took place on January 22, 2013.

2.3 2013 Election: The Results and the Establishment of the 19th Knesset

Voting for the 19th Knesset took place on January 22, 2013. For the first time in a number of years, voter turnout increased from the previous election, as 67.78 percent of all registered voters turned out to the polls.¹⁶⁶ The most recent polls taken before election day projected that the Likud-Beiteinu party list would easily take the most votes, and therefore the most seats in the Knesset.¹⁶⁷ Due to these polls, it was ultimately expected that the party list would achieve nearly the minimum amount needed (61) to form a majority government, and therefore would create a more stable coalition government.

However, while the polls were not incorrect in the projection that Likud-Beiteinu would take the most votes, the expected number of votes and seats garnered by the party was significantly higher than the actual seats attained. In the

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Spyer, "The Nineteenth Israeli Knesset Elections: Lackluster Election, Significant Results.": 96

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

18th Knesset, Likud held 27 seats, and Yisrael Beiteinu 15, leading to the projection that the combined list would garner at least 42 seats.¹⁶⁸ However, on Election Day Likud-Beiteinu walked away with only 31 seats – a decline of eleven seats from the previous government.¹⁶⁹

Instead, Yesh Atid significantly outperformed its expected results, and took 19 seats in the 19th Knesset.¹⁷⁰ This made Yesh Atid, a newly founded party, the second largest party in the 19th Knesset. Followed by Yesh Atid was Labor, which won 15 seats.¹⁷¹ Although Labor gained two seats, up from 13 in the 18th Knesset, this was seen as a failure on behalf of the party which expected to pull a significant amount of the votes that ultimately went to Yesh Atid.¹⁷²

The Jewish Home, in a remarkable victory for the party, gained nine seats from the previous Knesset, bringing its total in the 19th Knesset to 12 seats.¹⁷³ Kadima, the second largest party in the 19th Knesset, was all but kept out of the 19th Knesset, losing 26 of its seats and keeping only two.¹⁷⁴ Finally, the Arab parties –

¹⁶⁸ Perliger, Arie and Eran Zaidise. "The Peculiar Victory of the National Camp in the 2013 Election." *Israel Affairs* 21.2 (2015): 195-208: 199-200

¹⁶⁹ Spyer, "The Nineteenth Israeli Knesset Elections: Lackluster Election, Significant Results.": 96

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Perliger and Zaidise, "The Peculiar Victory of the National Camp in the 2013 Election.": 199

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Spyer, "The Nineteenth Israeli Knesset Elections: Lackluster Election, Significant Results.": 96

discussion of the budget, creation of a plan to remove draft exemption for ultra-Orthodox Israelis, promises of reducing subsidies given to ultra-Orthodox Israelis, and the division of cabinet posts.¹⁸¹ The creation of a Jewish Home and Yesh Atid negotiating alliance forced Netanyahu to, for the first time in more than a decade, prevent ultra-Orthodox parties from being included in the government in order to reach the minimum number of seats for a coalition government within the 40 day deadline.¹⁸² As can be seen in Figure 2, the final government coalition consisted of 68 Members of the Knesset from Likud Beiteinu, Yesh Atid, Jewish Home, and Hatnua.¹⁸³

Although a coalition government was formed, the coalition formed was based upon a likeness of socioeconomic opinions. As the 19th Knesset progressed, it would become clear that the focus of the Israeli citizenship on economic and social rights would be short lived, and the more pressing matters of religion and religious conflict would once again arise. In regards to foreign policy, the viewpoints of the parties involved in the coalition differed drastically.¹⁸⁴ The primary threat to the sustainability of the coalition government of the 19th Knesset was the Palestinian-

¹⁸¹ Spyer, "The Nineteenth Israeli Knesset Elections: Lackluster Election, Significant Results.": 97

¹⁸² Rahat and Hazan, "Increased Personalization in an Unstable Party System: The 2013 Elections in Israel.": 388

¹⁸³ "Israel's 33rd Government Formed: Benjamin Netanyahu Reaches Coalition Deal, Presents Lineup To Shimon Peres." 16 May 2013. *Huffington Post*. 22 February 2016. <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/03/16/netanyahu-government-formed-coalition-deal-israel_n_2892713.html>.

¹⁸⁴ Spyer, "The Nineteenth Israeli Knesset Elections: Lackluster Election, Significant Results.": 97

Israeli issue, and religious conflict.¹⁸⁵ Yet the coalition agreement constructed by the parties made very little mention of foreign policy stances, and specifically omitted the word “Palestine” in favor of an overarching statement to “combat terrorism.”¹⁸⁶ The coalition, comprising a range of views from Greater Israel to a two-state solution, would soon prove to be divided beyond repair.¹⁸⁷

Figure 2: Construct of the 19th Knesset

Party	Seats
Coalition Government	
Likud-Beiteinu	31
Yesh Atid	19
Jewish Home	12
Hatnua	6
Total	68
Opposition	
Labor	15
Shas	11
UTJ	7
Meretz	6
United Arab List	4
Hadash	4
Balad	3
Kadima	2
Total	52

¹⁸⁵ Rahat and Hazan, “Increased Personalization in an Unstable Party System: The 2013 Elections in Israel.”: 388

¹⁸⁶ Yiftachel, Oren. “Liberal Colonialism? Israel’s 2013 Elections and the “Ethnocratic Bubble”.”: 54

¹⁸⁷ Rahat and Hazan, “Increased Personalization in an Unstable Party System: The 2013 Elections in Israel.”: 388

2.4 2013 Election: Analysis of the Campaign and Electoral Results

The 2013 campaign signified a momentous shift in the Israeli political construct: no longer was religious conflict the center of the election, but instead, socioeconomic issues. As can be seen in Figure 3, very few parties focused their political platforms around the issue of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, or even the rise of political Islam. In fact, for the first time since the founding of the state of Israel, the territorial issue was irrelevant in the Knesset elections.¹⁸⁸ Particularly revolutionary in this process was the shift in the party platform of the center-left parties. In previous elections, the Palestinian-Israeli issue, and even more so the legitimacy (or lack thereof) of the occupied territories, were central pillars to the party platforms. Particularly focused on this effort were Yesh Atid and Labor, two of the leftist parties closest to the center on the Israeli political spectrum. In an effort to claim electoral victory by focusing on those issues that appeared to matter most to Israeli's at the time, the future of the occupied territories and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict altogether were treated as peripheral issues.¹⁸⁹ Instead, these parties focused on welfare issues and working class rights, marginalizing the roll that the territorial conflict would play in the 2013 elections.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁸ Roth, "‘Something New Begins’ - religious Zionism in the 2013 elections: from decline to political recovery.": 224

¹⁸⁹ Perliger and Zaidise, "The Peculiar Victory of the National Camp in the 2013 Election.": 201

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

Figure 3: 2013 Election – Primary Party Platforms

Party	Top Three Platform Issues
Likud-Beiteinu	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Economic success of Netanyahu - Socioeconomic development (promise to create 350,000 jobs/revolutionize the cellular phone market) - A move towards free market economic policies
Kadima	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Peace negotiations with the Palestinians resulting in the creation of two states - Maintain a Jewish majority in Israel by conceding land to the Palestinians - Jerusalem remains under Israeli control
Labor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - End privatization of public infrastructure - Increase the minimum wage - Would not join a Netanyahu-led coalition government
Yesh Atid	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Equality in economic and military responsibilities - A move towards free market principles and free competition to support small and local businesses and encourage economic growth - Complete reform of the government and election process
Jewish Home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Equal educational opportunities for all Israelis - Constructing and reinforcing free market principles in the Israeli economy - Strengthening connections between Israel and Jewish communities throughout the world
Shas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Return to the Jewish character of Israel/protection of the Jewish identity of Israel - Maintain Strict religious requirements for conversion to Judaism - Opposition to budget cuts to welfare, education, and health services without also cutting the defense budget
UTJ	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Return to the Jewish character of Israel/protection of the Jewish identity of Israel - Maintain Strict religious requirements for conversion to Judaism - Protect ultra-Orthodox interests in regards to social welfare and education
Hatnua	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - End Israeli occupation - Stronger democratic socioeconomic policies that promote social equality for the younger generations in Israel

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mandated military conscription for the ultra-Orthodox
Meretz	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Social justice and greater religious freedom - End to Israeli occupation/complete withdrawal from the West Bank - Promotion of environmental policies
Hadash	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increase in the minimum wage and benefits - End to privatization of public companies - Equal rights for women, minorities, and workers
Balad	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “Adoption of a just tax policy aimed at the equitable distribution of social resources” - The creation of an Israeli state which is not Jewish - Right of return for Palestinians
United Arab List	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Equal rights for Arab citizens - Creation of a Palestinian state according to the 1967 lines - Exemption of Arabs from conscription to the IDF

The results of the 2013 elections in Israel illustrated a significant shift in the primary issues facing the electorate at the time. Historically, the parties in power in Israeli society focused economically on privatization, cutting government spending, and limiting government involvement.¹⁹¹ These economic views, however, were never the focal point of any campaign. Instead, campaigns focused on the greater issue at hand – the Palestinian-Israeli issue, and the threats of an Islamic Middle East. Yet in the 2013 campaign, when these economic viewpoints became the central focus of the campaigns, those parties upholding economic views of privatization, cutting government spending, and limiting government involvement (such as Likud, Yisrael Beiteinu, and Kadima) lost seats.¹⁹²

¹⁹¹ Yiftachel, Oren. “Liberal Colonialism? Israel’s 2013 Elections and the “Ethnocratic Bubble”.”: 59

¹⁹² Ibid.

The 2013 election also marked the first election since 1977 when a religious-Zionist party, the Jewish Home, received such widespread support from the electorate.¹⁹³ For the first time in a number of years, part of the dynamics of the elections were focused on returning the Israeli state to its historic Jewish identity. What made this movement to return Israel to its Jewish roots so successful was the appeal to all Israeli citizens, not just ultra-Orthodox or Zionist Jews.¹⁹⁴ A call for inclusiveness of all Israelis unified a heterogeneous group in the electorate, and upheld a limited presence of religion in the 2013 elections.

However, the rise of Zionism in the 19th Knesset elections both coincides directly with the success of the religious parties in the elections and simultaneously serves as a bit of an anomaly in the election, given the character of the majority of the parties in this election. Overall there was a general shift away from the involvement of religion in party platforms, and a shift toward more secular policies. This shift toward secular and nationalist platforms within the religious parties drew support from the general electorate towards the typically religious parties, creating a significant impact on the focus of the elections.¹⁹⁵ The fundamental issues in the election became socioeconomic in nature, and essentially unrelated to religion.

¹⁹³ Roth, “‘Something New Begins’ - religious Zionism in the 2013 elections: from decline to political recovery.”: 209-10

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 218

¹⁹⁵ Perliger and Zaidise, “The Peculiar Victory of the National Camp in the 2013 Election.”: 198

Additionally, an increase in the Israeli-Arab vote showed the power of the shift in the demands of the electorate. After nearly two decades of declining numbers in Arab voter turnout, a two percent increase to 55 percent voter turnout was seen in 2013.¹⁹⁶ While this can partially be attributed to the policies in the 18th Knesset which consistently attacked Arab citizenship and rights, the strength in turnout can largely be attributed to the shift away from the focus of the Palestinian-Israeli issue in the election, as well as the need to replace those in the government who continued to politicize the issue.¹⁹⁷ For the first time, the election was not focused on the unwillingness of the Palestinians to negotiate with the Israelis. Instead, the election was focused on the socioeconomic interests of the Israeli citizenship as a whole. This allowed Arab parties to turn their focus from defending their stance in the territorial issue, and instead focus on their positions as citizens of Israel. Movements to protect the rights of Arabs began to feed off of the greater movements to expand minority rights, drawing attention to taking down Netanyahu and bringing voters to the polls.¹⁹⁸

Furthermore, the shift away from the importance of religion in the 2013 elections and towards socioeconomic interests can be seen in the seemingly contradictory yet significant increase of ultra-religious Members of the Knesset elected. As has been stated, prior to the 2013 elections, the central and most integral

¹⁹⁶ Yiftachel, Oren. "Liberal Colonialism? Israel's 2013 Elections and the "Ethnocratic Bubble".": 63

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

issue in Israeli elections was religious conflict that affected the state, both internal and external. Beginning with the 15th Knesset, the total number of ultra-Orthodox and ultra-religious Members of the Knesset stayed at ten in every Knesset (increasing to 11 only once, in the 16th Knesset).¹⁹⁹ Typically, these ultra-religious Members of the Knesset were from ultra-Orthodox or religion-centered parties. However, in 2013, when there was little to no emphasis on the role of religion within the parties, more religious Members of the Knesset were elected.²⁰⁰ In the 2013 election, 40 ultra-religious Members were elected to the Knesset, constituting 32.5 percent of the total body of the Knesset.^{201, 202} This significant increase can be partially attributed to the rise in the impact of religious Zionism in this election, but can be most significantly attributed to the fact that neither the Israeli people nor the parties were focused on religion, religious conflict, or the place of either in the government in this election. Instead, ultra-religious Members of the Knesset were elected because they were focused not on the divisive issue of religion, religious conflict, and the role of each in Israeli society, but instead on issues that were both integral and uniting for the Israeli electorate.²⁰³

¹⁹⁹ Perliger and Zaidise, “The Peculiar Victory of the National Camp in the 2013 Election.”: 202

²⁰⁰ Yiftachel, Oren. “Liberal Colonialism? Israel’s 2013 Elections and the “Ethnocratic Bubble”.”: 52

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Perliger and Zaidise, “The Peculiar Victory of the National Camp in the 2013 Election.”: 202

²⁰³ Ibid.

Additionally, beginning with the 2013 elections, an increase in the use of new media led to a substantial increase on the focus of the particular candidates leading the political parties, and not the parties themselves.²⁰⁴ Spurred by the unrest in Israeli society due to the economic situation, and call for a new government and new way of governing, the parties began to shift their campaign strategies.²⁰⁵ A new way of governing could only begin with a new way of campaigning. As such, for the first time in Israeli politics, during the 2013 campaign party leaders saw themselves more so than their parties as candidates.²⁰⁶ Using social media, candidates reverted away from the typical “monologue style” of talking at the people and moved towards a dialogue with the people.²⁰⁷ Candidates made personal Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube pages to align with and personalize those of the party.²⁰⁸ In fact, a majority of the traffic that the campaigns received online was directed towards the individual pages of the candidates.²⁰⁹ Through the use of social media, candidates were able to personalize themselves to the public, and provide the public with the feeling that the candidates wanted them to be informed.²¹⁰ Additionally, candidates began to record their campaign activities through the use of blogs, essentially serving as personal diaries for supporters to read, feel involved, and stay

²⁰⁴ Orkibi, “New Politics, New Media - New Political Language? A rhetorical perspective on candidates’ self presentation in the 2013 Elections”: 277

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 278

²⁰⁶ Rahat and Hazan, “Increased Personalization in an Unstable Party System: The 2013 Elections in Israel.”: 377

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ Orkibi, “New Politics, New Media - New Political Language? A rhetorical perspective on candidates’ self presentation in the 2013 Elections”: 278

²¹⁰ Ibid., 282

informed.²¹¹ This new media created a sense of community amongst candidates and the public, certainly helping to drive attention to the campaigns. For the first time, the Israeli political parties were personalized and the party members were valued not just as politicians but as people and members of society.

Finally, the most essential factor that determined the outcome of the 2013 election was the emergence of an Israeli middle class. The effects of the recession hit the Israeli people hard; those belonging to the highest classes in society lost their jobs and their income. A class emerged of well-educated people who were no longer receiving the income that they had grown used to.²¹² These people became a nationalistic middle class that demanded answers and solutions. They determined the party platforms of the 2013 election: the lack of presence of religion, the marginalization of the territorial conflict, and the focus on socioeconomic issues. As a result of the shift in party platforms, the construct of the Knesset varied significantly from the 18th Knesset to the 19th Knesset. Figure 1.4 illustrates the shift in seats won or lost during the 2013 elections.

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Perliger and Zaidise, "The Peculiar Victory of the National Camp in the 2013 Election.": 204

Figure 4: Comparison of the 18th and 19th Knessets

The 18 th Knesset		The 19 th Knesset		Change in Seats
Party	Seats	Party	Seats	
Likud + Yisrael Beiteinu	27 + 15	Likud-Beiteinu	31	-11
Kadima**	28	Kadima	2	-26
Labor*	13	Labor	15	+2
		Yesh Atid	19	+19
Shas	11	Shas	11	+/-0
Jewish Home	7	Jewish Home	12	+5
United Torah Judaism	5	United Torah Judaism	7	+2
United Arab List	4	United Arab List	4	+/-0
Hadash	4	Hadash	4	+/-0
Meretz	3	Meretz	6	+3
Balad	3	Balad	3	+/-0
		Hatnua	6	+6

However, the lack of involvement of the Palestinian-Israeli issue in the party platforms, and henceforth the election, served to create and adverse stigma that, because it was not a focal point of the election, the current situation was ultimately satisfactory.²¹³ What was once a central and integral issue in the electoral construct of the Israeli government was now rarely mentioned, and seemingly forgotten. The focus of both the parties and the people during the 2013 Knesset elections was on other issues, signifying the possibility that perhaps the Palestinian-Israeli issue had finally been surpassed in importance. This created the belief that the needs of Israeli citizens, both Arab and Jew alike, were more important than the century-long debate over the territory.

²¹³ Ibid.

Yet this hope and belief were quickly proved wrong. The 19th Knesset was elected to fix the economic problems facing Israel in the best interest of the people, with little to no frame of reference on how the larger issues facing Israeli society, which had temporarily been swept under the carpet, would be managed. This would prove to be a problem that could not be overcome.

Chapter 3: The 2015 Israeli Election

3.1 The 19th Knesset: Leading Up to the 2015 Election

On March 18, 2013, the coalition government of the 19th Knesset was sworn in. This coalition was formed upon the foundation of the economic platforms of the parties, as that was what mattered most to the Israeli citizenry at the time. However, two days following the construction of a coalition government in 2013, President of the United States Barak Obama visited Israel to discuss peace prospects in regards to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, among a number of additional foreign policy agenda items. Following this visit, United States Secretary of State John Kerry began to lead negotiations between the United States, Israel, and Palestine.²¹⁴ In July of 2013, the three states reached an agreement in which Israel would, over time and in waves, release 104 Palestinian terrorists imprisoned in Israel, and Palestine would conduct peace negotiations with Israel for nine months, set to be completed by April 2014.²¹⁵ Thus, less than four months into the lifespan of the 19th Knesset, issues regarding foreign affairs and religious conflict were quickly taking hold as the primary focus in the Israeli government.

Throughout the negotiation process, a number of events took place internally within parties in the 19th Knesset that made the future less clear for the coalition

²¹⁴ Hazan and Diskin, "The 2015 Israeli Elections.": 2

²¹⁵ Ibid.

government. First, on October 7, 2013, a spiritual leader of Shas, Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, passed away rather suddenly.²¹⁶ Upon his passing, the party began to divide internally, disagreeing over the best policies to encourage the livelihood of the party moving forward.²¹⁷ These disagreements, which substantially divided the party internally, led to the division of the party altogether into Shas and Ha'am Itanu on December 15, 2014.²¹⁸ Additionally, on November 21, 2013, the Labor Party held its internal party elections for party leader.²¹⁹ The leader of the party during the 18th Knesset, Shelly Yachimovich, was blamed for the failure of the party to secure as many seats as it had expected to secure, and was therefore soundly defeated by Isaac Herzog.²²⁰ The election of Herzog to the head of Labor, and therefore the head of the opposition, led to a shifting ideology both within the party and the opposition.²²¹ While Yachimovich refused the possibility of Labor joining a Netanyahu government until the Knesset further considered a peace treaty with Palestine, Herzog ran in the party primaries on the platform that Labor needed stronger socioeconomic policies, as well as demands that Israel sign a peace treaty with Palestine.^{222,223}

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ Hazan and Diskin, "The 2015 Israeli Elections.": 2

²¹⁹ Ibid

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ Hazan and Diskin, "The 2015 Israeli Elections.": 2

²²² Azulay, Moran. "Drama in Labor party: Herzog beats Yachimovich for chairmanship." *YNet Israel News*. Jerusalem, 22 November 2013.

²²³ Azulay, Moran. "Yachimovich faces 'number 2' in Labor Party elections." *YNet Israel News*. Jerusalem, 21 November 2013.

Further complicating matters on the international front, on November 24, 2013, the United States, France, Germany, China, Russia, and the United Kingdom announced their entrance into a nuclear agreement with Iran.²²⁴ This agreement, which lifted some of the economic sanctions placed on Iran by the aforementioned states in exchange for the reduction of Iran's store of uranium, caused significant unrest and outrage within the state of Israel.²²⁵ Israel viewed the agreement as a direct attack on its safety within the Middle East, as many believed that the agreement meant that the United States entirely averted its promise to Israel that it would remain strong against Iran, a state which had continually called for eradication of the "Jewish State."²²⁶

The combination of internal party divisions with the continued resurgence of focus on foreign affairs and religious conflict made 2014 an increasingly difficult year for the 19th Knesset. True cracks in the coalition government became apparent as the negotiations between Israel and Palestine became strained. In January of 2014, violence began to escalate between Hamas in Palestine and Israel.²²⁷ As a result, negotiations became stalled, and the Jewish Home refused to release any more prisoners until negotiations began moving again. Yesh Atid took this one step

²²⁴ Castillo, Mariano, Elise Labott and Catherine E Shoichet. "Optimism as Iran nuclear deal framework announced; more work ahead." *CNN News*. 2 April 2015. Web.

²²⁵ Hazan and Diskin, "The 2015 Israeli Elections.": 2

²²⁶ *Ibid.*

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, 3

further, and threatened to withdraw from the coalition altogether because of the lack of success in negotiations.²²⁸

Due to increased violence between Palestine and Israel, in March of 2014, the Knesset proposed the Governability Law, a law which amended the Basic Law: the Government and the Knesset Elections Law by raising the minimal threshold in Knesset elections from two percent to three-and-a-quarter percent in an attempt to keep Arab parties out of the Knesset in the future.^{229,230} This was a significant increase over the previous threshold set by the Basic Law, which was two percent. The law quickly passed, and beginning with the elections to the 20th Knesset, each party list would need to attain a minimum of three-and-a-quarter percent of the vote to gain any representation in the Knesset.²³¹

Because of disagreements of how to best proceed with negotiations with Palestine and bring an end to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, in April of 2014 the cooperation between and joint list of Yisrael Beiteinu and Likud ended, resulting in the reversion to the two separate parties.²³² Some Members resigned, and Likud dropped down from 20 to only 18 Members, making it the second largest party in the Knesset after Yesh Atid.²³³ Further complicating matters within the 19th Knesset,

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ Hazan and Diskin, "The 2015 Israeli Elections.": 2

²³⁰ Lindenstrauss, Gallia. "What Has Been Is What Will Be: The 2015 Israeli Elections and the State of Turkish-Israeli Relations." *Insight Turkey* 17.1 (2015): 19-25: 20

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Hazan and Diskin, "The 2015 Israeli Elections.": 2

²³³ Ibid., 3

at the end of April of 2014, Fatah and Hamas made the decision to end a years-long disagreement within the government and announced an agreement to serve as a unity government in the Palestinian Authority.²³⁴ The 19th Knesset, refusing to negotiate with an organization that they believed to be a terrorist organization, ceased all negotiations with Palestine until Hamas was no longer part of the government.²³⁵

This left the coalition government in a precarious position. By April of 2014, Hamas had fired 125 rockets into the state of Israel.²³⁶ Now that negotiations had stalled indefinitely and the 19th Knesset appeared to be quickly dissolving, Netanyahu had to act in a way that would both protect the state as well as appeal to the people. Therefore in July, Israel launched a combined air and ground operation in Palestine, beginning a 50-day war between the two states.²³⁷ That month alone, violence continued to escalate, and Hamas fired more than 2800 missiles into Israel.²³⁸

Throughout the escalation of the conflict with Hamas in Palestine, the Israeli coalition was subject to constant disagreement. Likud continued to call for a ceasefire, while Jewish Home and Yisrael Beiteinu opposed limiting the military

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ Peters and Pinfeld, "Consolidating right-wing hegemony: the Israeli election of 2015.": 405

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ Hazan and Diskin, "The 2015 Israeli Elections.": 3

operation.²³⁹ Yesh Atid called for an end to the conflict in order to preserve Israeli relations with its allies, primarily the United States, a demand that created further unrest amongst the cabinet.²⁴⁰ Tensions within the Knesset were exacerbated to the point that, on July 15, Netanyahu fired the Deputy Minister of Defense, a Member of the Likud Party, for disagreeing with Netanyahu's call for a ceasefire.²⁴¹ On August 26, 2014, an Egyptian-brokered ceasefire led to a temporary break in the rocket-fire between Israel and Palestine, and promoted a shift in focus within the government towards internal Israeli affairs, namely the need for the creation of a new budget.²⁴²

In September, budget negotiations within the 19th Knesset began.²⁴³ Constraints that the financial costs of the military operation placed on the budget quickly became apparent, and only further degraded the situation amongst the coalition.²⁴⁴ Particularly, significant disagreements between Likud and Yesh Atid ensued, causing delays in the budget process.²⁴⁵ While Likud firmly supported paying off the recent military operations as well as increasing funding for future operations, Yesh Atid argued that it was imperative that that money be used to combat the price of housing for couples whom were first-time home buyers with an

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ Hoffman, Gil. "Netanyahu fires Deputy Defense Minister Danon for attacking him." *The Jerusalem Post*. Jerusalem, 15 July 2014.

²⁴² Hazan and Diskin, "The 2015 Israeli Elections.": 3

²⁴³ Ibid.

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

²⁴⁵ Azulay, Moran and Azital Lahav. "Lapid sets ultimatum to coalition: Pass budget or we go to elections." *YNet Israel News*. Jerusalem, 14 November 2014.

18 percent VAT.²⁴⁶ Ultimately, no compromise was reached, and at the end of September the coalition government agreed to raise the debt ceiling.²⁴⁷

On October 8, 2014, the budget committee approved the 2015 budget, and sent it to the body of the 19th Knesset for approval.²⁴⁸ However, passage of the budget by the whole body became entangled with two pieces of polarizing legislation. First, on November 12, a bill which called for an end to funding for free distribution of a pro-Netanyahu newspaper, *Israel Today*, and was supported by the four parties in the Netanyahu-led coalition government except for Likud, passed preliminary voting and made its way to the entire body for voting.²⁴⁹ The second bill, which was the most disruptive of the two, was a piece of legislation updating the Basic Law so that it declared Israel the national home of the Jews.^{250,251} On November 23, despite the outcries from Yesh Atid and Hatnua, passed preliminary voting.²⁵² Yair Lapid and Tzipi Livni (the leaders of Yesh Atid and Hatnua, respectively) refused to allow this change to the Basic Law, and continued to protest vocally to the Israeli people.²⁵³ Netanyahu, interpreting their protests as continual

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ Bassok, Moti. "Cabinet Approves \$88 Billion Budget for 2015." *Haaretz*. Jerusalem, 8 October 2014.

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

²⁵⁰ Hazan and Diskin, "The 2015 Israeli Elections.":

²⁵¹ Meir, Yehuda Ben. "Insight No. 678 Israel: The 2015 Elections." 29 March 2015. *INSS*. 22 February 2016.

<<http://www.inss.org.il/uploadImages/systemFiles/No.%20678%20-%20Yehuda%20for%20web121046376.pdf>>.

²⁵² Hazan and Diskin, "The 2015 Israeli Elections.": 3

²⁵³ Ibid.

attacks on the 19th Knesset from within, fired Lapid and Livni from their positions within the cabinet on December 2, ultimately leading to the withdrawal of both Yesh Atid and Hatnua from the coalition government.²⁵⁴ This forced the coalition to lose its majority, and a vote to dissolve the government and call for new elections passed on December 8, only 22 months after the government was sworn in.²⁵⁵ Thus, on December 8, 2014, the campaign for the 2015 elections to the Israeli Knesset began.

3.2 The 2013 Election: The Campaign

In the 2015 elections, which took place on March 17, 2015, 26 party lists ran for election.²⁵⁶ Due to the increase in the electoral threshold, passes by the Knesset in March of 2014, numerous party lists merged, accounting for the decrease in the number of party lists running from the 2013 to 2015 elections. The 2015 Israeli elections were shaped almost entirely by forces involving religious conflict both within and outside of Israel. It was clear that the 19th Knesset, elected on the basis of economic and social promise, was unqualified and unable to handle those issues most pressing to Israeli society – religious conflict and security concerns. Thus, the 2015 elections were essentially solely focused on defense and foreign affairs.²⁵⁷

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

²⁵⁵ Hazan and Diskin, “The 2015 Israeli Elections.”: 3

²⁵⁶ Central Elections Committee. *Final Results of the Election for the 20th Knesset*. n.d.

²⁵⁷ Hazan and Diskin, “The 2015 Israeli Elections.”: 1

Immediately after the dissolution of the 19th Knesset, the Labor Party (now under the leadership of Herzog) announced its joint list with Hatnuah to form a party list known as the Zionist Union.²⁵⁸ Quickly, the Zionist Union was able to frame their campaign strategy as a contrast between Likud and Zionist Union, specifically in regards to the need to replace Netanyahu, exemplified by their slogan "It's Us or Him."²⁵⁹ The Zionist Union platform was based almost entirely on bringing an end to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Primarily, the party promised to secure borders for Israel once and for all, demilitarize the Palestinian State, and keep the West Bank and Jerusalem under Israeli sovereignty.²⁶⁰

Soon after the dissolution of the 19th Knesset, Kulanu, a new party created on December 11 of 2014, released its platform.^{261, 262} While the party platform was centered on domestic economic issues, statements were made by the party during the campaign regarding the unviability of a Palestinian partner in negotiations, and the need to annex the land that belongs to Israel.²⁶³ In much the same way, United Torah Judaism maintained its focus on domestic social issues, and refrained from

²⁵⁸ Israel Elections 2015, *The Parties*. n.d. 23 February 2016.

<<http://www.israelection2015.org/parties/>>.

²⁵⁹ Peters and Pinfeld, "Consolidating right-wing hegemony: the Israeli election of 2015.": 407

²⁶⁰ Hoffman, Gil. "Zionist Union platform aims to set Israel's final borders." *The Jerusalem Post*. 08 March 2015.

²⁶¹ Israel Elections 2015, *The Parties*.

²⁶² Hoffman, Gil. "Kahlon officially registers new Kulanu party." *The Jerusalem Post*. Jerusalem, 11 December 2014.

²⁶³ Institute for Middle East Understanding. *2015 Israeli Elections Guide*. Tustin, 12 March 2015.

much comment on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.²⁶⁴ In the 2015 elections, the party campaigned on the issue of obtaining increased funding for Haredi communities.²⁶⁵

Yesh Atid, the rising star of the 2013 elections and ultimately the largest party in the 19th Knesset, released its platform on December 4.²⁶⁶ The platform was focused on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The party platform called for a regional agreement between Israel and Palestine, and is an adamant supporter of a two-state solution (however Jerusalem is not up for debate).^{267,268} Additionally, it called for Israel to join a coalition of “moderate countries” in the Middle East to protect against and prevent security threats from radical Islamic organizations, as well as nuclear threats.²⁶⁹ The party, while also maintaining a smaller national economic agenda, promoted the idea that the best way to improve the Israeli economy is through a peace agreement with the Palestinians.²⁷⁰

On November 28, Yisrael Beiteinu, running once again as an individual party, published a new party platform for the 2015 elections.²⁷¹ This platform, which was

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

²⁶⁵ Israel Elections 2015, *The Parties*.

²⁶⁶ Azulay, Moran. *Center-left bloc considers uniting behind 'anyone but Bibi' platform*. Jerusalem, 4 December 2014.

²⁶⁷ Yesh Atid Party. *Our Platform*. n.d. 23 February 2016.

<<http://www.yeshatid.org.il/defense?languagecode=en>>.

²⁶⁸ Israel Elections 2015, *The Parties*.

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

²⁷¹ Ravid, Barak. "Lieberman's 'Peace Plan': Pay Israeli Arabs to Move to Palestinian State read more: <http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/1.629008>." *Haaretz*. Jerusalem, 28 November 2014.

rather vague in regards to Israel's land boundaries, that status of Jerusalem, or the Israeli settlements, clearly addressed Arab citizens.²⁷² While the party supports the creation of Palestinian state created by land exchanges between Israel and Palestine, this plan took it one step further so as to use economic incentives to encourage Arab Israelis to move from Israel to Palestine.²⁷³ Additionally, the platform also called for a peace agreement between not only Israel and Palestine, but also Israel and the rest of the proximate Arab world.²⁷⁴

Shas, now under the leadership of Aryeh Deri after the passing of its leader Rabbi Yosef, saw a shift in its party platform. The platform Shas released for the 2015 elections in December 2014 took a far more dovish stance in regards to foreign policy, particularly with the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.²⁷⁵ First and foremost, it called for a longstanding interim agreement with the Palestinians, claiming that the Israeli economy is simply not ready to annex Palestine and would collapse if annexation were attempted.²⁷⁶ Additionally, Shas framed itself as the only Israeli party to care about "the Arab public – the public, regardless of race or ethnicity."²⁷⁷

²⁷² Ibid.

²⁷³ Ibid.

²⁷⁴ Ravid, "Lieberman's 'Peace Plan': Pay Israeli Arabs to Move to Palestinian State."

²⁷⁵ Nachshoni, Kobi. "Eli Yishai announces Shas departure, new party." *YNet Israel News*. Jerusalem, 15 December 2014.

²⁷⁶ Hoffman, Gil and Jeremy Sharon. "Deri calls for long-term Palestinian peace deal." *The Jerusalem Post*. 4 January 2013.

²⁷⁷ el-Chai, Lior. "Tensions in Shas reach boiling point." *Israel News*. 3 December 2012.

Following the fractionation of Shas in December 2014, Ha'am Itanu and the Otzma Heyudit party created a combined party list known as Yachad.²⁷⁸ The Yachad platform, which was released on November 14, 2014, focused almost entirely on hawkish policies regarding the Palestinians.²⁷⁹ The platform involved calls to end negotiations with the Palestinians as long as they would not concede territory, as well as demands that the Israeli settlements continue in order to continue to build the Land of Israel.²⁸⁰ Furthermore, the party directly called for the deportation of all Palestinians from Israeli territory and the occupied territories, while refuting the right of a Palestinian state to exist.²⁸¹

On December 2, 2014, the three Arab parties vying for election in 2015 announced the creation of a combined party list, which would become known as the Joint List (or Joint Arab List), in attempt to counteract the three-and-a-quarter percent threshold set for the 2015 elections.²⁸²²⁸³ Comprised of Hadam, Ra'am-Ta'al, and Balad, the party focused on both domestic and foreign policy issues in its 2015 campaign.²⁸⁴ Domestically, the party called for an end to racism in Israel against Palestinian citizens and Israeli Arabs, as well as equality for all of Israel's citizens.²⁸⁵

²⁷⁸ Institute for Middle East Understanding, 2015 Israeli Elections Guide. , 2015

²⁷⁹ Ibid.

²⁸⁰ Israel Elections 2015, *The Parties*.

²⁸¹ Institute for Middle East Understanding, 2015 Israeli Elections Guide.

²⁸² Solomon, Ariel Ben. "Israeli Arab parties seek unity for upcoming elections." *The Jerusalem Post*. Jerusalem, 02 December 2014.

²⁸³ Peters and Pinfold, "Consolidating right-wing hegemony: the Israeli election of 2015.": 408

²⁸⁴ Institute for Middle East Understanding, 2015 Israeli Elections Guide.

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

In regards to foreign policy, the Joint List calls for adherence to the decisions made by the United Nations in 1967, specifically: “to end the occupation of all territories conquered in 1967, to dismantle all settlements and the racist separation fence, to release the political prisoners, to establish a sovereign, independent Palestinian state within the June 4, 1967, borders, with its capital in East Jerusalem, and to find a just solution for the problem of the Palestinian refugees which assures the right of return under UN Resolution 194.”²⁸⁶ Additionally, while the Joint List refused to take part in any coalition government (given the fact that the coalition rules the occupied people), the List did call for all other parties to prevent the creation of a fourth term for Netanyahu leadership.²⁸⁷

The Jewish Home released its platform on December 1.²⁸⁸ The platform focused entirely on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in the 2015 election, and permitted the campaign to of party to fervently support the Israeli settlements in the occupied territories.²⁸⁹ The party adamantly opposed the creation of a Palestinian state, and instead called for the annexation of the West Bank into Israeli territory, returning the land to the original layout as determined by the Oslo

²⁸⁶ Solomon, Ariel Ben. "Arab Joint List rejects idea of joining Herzog-led government." *The Jerusalem Post*. 3 March 2015.

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

²⁸⁸ Newman, Marissa. "Jewish Home MKs threaten split to right-wing camp." *Times of Israe*. Jerusalem, 1 December 2014.

²⁸⁹ Israel Elections 2015, *The Parties*.

Accords.²⁹⁰ Additionally, The Jewish Home demanded full control of Jerusalem by Israel.²⁹¹

On the other hand, Meretz, a left-wing Zionist party primarily concerned with issues of social justice and equality, centered its campaign around peace with the Palestinians and full support for a two-state solution.^{292,293} The party campaigned against Netanyahu and his settler policies, as well as against the previous government's Jewish State Bill.²⁹⁴

Likud, the party of former Prime Minister Netanyahu, once again did not release a party platform. Instead, the party relied on public support and awareness of Netanyahu to carry the election.²⁹⁵ However, throughout the election the party relied primarily on hawkish statements regarding the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.²⁹⁶ While mentions of economic growth under the former governments were made, the primary focus of the statements made by the party during the election focused opposing making concessions to the Palestinians and protecting Israel from security threats.^{297,298}

²⁹⁰ Institute for Middle East Understanding, 2015 Israeli Elections Guide.

²⁹¹ Israel Elections 2015. *The Candidates*. n.d. 23 February 2016.
<<http://www.israelelection2015.org/candidates/>>.

²⁹² Israel Elections 2015, *The Parties*.

²⁹³ Institute for Middle East Understanding, 2015 Israeli Elections Guide.

²⁹⁴ Israel Elections 2015, *The Parties*.

²⁹⁵ Peters and Pinfeld, "Consolidating right-wing hegemony: the Israeli election of 2015.": 407

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁷ Israel Elections 2015, *The Parties*.

²⁹⁸ Israel Elections 2015, *The Candidates*.

Thus, when January of 2015 began, the election had been framed as a choice for or against Netanyahu.²⁹⁹ Given this, the campaign of each party began to focus on the personalities of the heads of the parties more than ever before, with the parties themselves making their leaders the center of the campaigns. Advertisements for the parties featured candidates and the name of the candidates, followed by the name of the party.³⁰⁰ Even more prominently, the attacks on the opposition were not made against the parties, but against the candidates themselves, particularly regarding attacking the personal lives of the candidates, as well as their friends and family.³⁰¹

Throughout the month of February, polls showed the gaps between Likud and Zionist Union growing increasingly smaller.³⁰² Terrified that this, may in fact, be the end of the reign of Likud, and therefore Netanyahu as Prime Minister, on February 25, Netanyahu made a statement to the press condemning the two-state solution for the first time in his political career.³⁰³ Betraying the hopes of Likud, the polls released throughout the beginning of March predicted the Zionist Union as the

²⁹⁹ Peters and Pinfeld, "Consolidating right-wing hegemony: the Israeli election of 2015.": 407

³⁰⁰ Ibid.

³⁰¹ Ibid.

³⁰² *Knesset Jeremy*. 29 January 2015.

³⁰³ Peters and Pinfeld, "Consolidating right-wing hegemony: the Israeli election of 2015.": 407

winner of the 2015 elections, in a sound defeat of Likud.³⁰⁴ Elections took place on March 17, 2015.

3.3 The 2015 Election: Results and the Construction of the 20th Knesset

The election for the 20th Knesset took place on March 17, 2015. Voter turnout increased by nearly five percentage points from the previous election, with 72.3 percent of eligible voters turning out to the polls.³⁰⁵ Throughout the campaign, polls showed an increasingly tight race between Likud and the Zionist Union and ultimately predicted that the Zionist Union would win the largest number of seats.³⁰⁶ Additionally, exit polls on election day predicted that the results would be extremely close.³⁰⁷ However, both were incorrect. Likud was the clear victor in the 2015 elections, winning 30 seats in the Knesset.³⁰⁸ The Zionist Union became the second largest party in the Knesset with 24 seats.³⁰⁹

In a surprising victory, the Joint Arab List won 13 seats in the election.³¹⁰ The increase in the threshold backfired, and instead of keeping the Arab party out of the Knesset, it became the third largest party in the Knesset. Additionally, Kulanu, a

³⁰⁴ *Knesset Jeremy*. 29 January 2015.

³⁰⁵ Hazan and Diskin, "The 2015 Israeli Elections.": 4

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁸ Central Elections Committee. *Final Results of the Election for the 20th Knesset*.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*

party created for the 2015 elections, won ten seats in the 20th Knesset, making it the fifth largest party.

However, most of the parties lost seats in the 2015 election. Yesh Atid, the rising star party of the 2013 elections, lost eight of the 19 seats it maintained in the 19th Knesset, but remained the fourth largest party with 11 seats.³¹¹ The Jewish Home lost four seats, decreasing from 12 to eight seats in the 20th Knesset.³¹² Similarly, Yisrael Beiteinu decreased from 11 to six seats.³¹³ Shas lost seats, claiming only seven in the 20th Knesset, and the United Torah Judaism lost one, receiving six.³¹⁴ Figure 5 illustrates the change in the number of seats for each party from the 19th to the 20th Knessets.

Figure 5: Comparison of the 19th and 20th Knessets

19 th Knesset		20 th Knesset		Change in Seats
Party	Seats	Party	Seats	
Likud-Beiteinu	31	Likud + Yisrael Beiteinu	30 + 6	+5
Yesh Atid	19	Yesh Atid	11	-8
Labor + Hatnua	15 + 6	Zionist Union	24	+3
Jewish Home	12	Jewish Home	8	-4
Shas	11	Shas	7	-4
United Torah Judasim	7	United Torah Judasim	6	-1
Meretz	6	Meretz	5	-1
United Arab List + Hadash + Balad	4 + 4 + 3	Joint Arab List	13	+2
Kadima	2			-2
		Kulanu	10	+10

³¹¹ Hazan and Diskin, “The 2015 Israeli Elections.”: 5

³¹² Ibid., 4

³¹³ Ibid.

³¹⁴ Ibid., 5

Thus, the 20th Knesset was elected and, once again, there was no majority party. While it may seem inherent that forming a coalition government for the 20th Knesset should have been easier, with a number of parties supporting generally the same position in regards to religious conflict and foreign affairs (as can be seen in Figure 6), the nuances in the party platforms made coalition forming a difficult task for Netanyahu. A promise made by Netanyahu to the leaders of Kulanu and United Torah Judaism for the Knesset Finance Committee chairmanship brought negotiations to a standstill.³¹⁵ At the end of the 28-day deadline, no agreements had been made, and a two-week extension was granted.³¹⁶ Ultimately, decisions were made on how to divide up the ministries to please both parties, giving UTJ the Health Ministry and Kulanu the Finance, Construction, and Environmental Protection Ministries.³¹⁷ At the five-week mark the first agreements were made between Likud, Kulanu, and the United Torah Judaism, bringing the coalition to 46 seats, 15 seats short of the necessary majority.³¹⁸

³¹⁵ Peters and Pinfeld, "Consolidating right-wing hegemony: the Israeli election of 2015.": 409

³¹⁶ Hazan and Diskin, "The 2015 Israeli Elections.": 7

³¹⁷ Hoffman, "Netanyahu signs coalition deals with Kulanu, UTJ; Kahlon promises reforms," 2015

³¹⁸ Hazan and Diskin, "The 2015 Israeli Elections.": 7

Figure 6: 2015 Election – Primary Party Platforms

Party	Top Three Platform Issues
Likud	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Need for a strong leader to protect Israel from security threats - Opposition to making territorial concessions to the Palestinians - Opposition to a two-state solution
Yesh Atid	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Call for a regional agreement between Israel and Palestine - Need for a two-state solution, with Jerusalem remaining in control of Israel - Israel needs to join a coalition of “moderate countries” in the Middle East to protect against and prevent security threats from radical Islamic organizations/nuclear threats - The best way to improve the Israeli economy is through a peace agreement with Palestine
Zionist Union	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Secure and finalize Israeli borders once and for all, keeping the West Bank and Jerusalem under Israeli possession - Demilitarize the Palestinian state - Opposition to Netanyahu – “It’s Us or It’s Him”
Jewish Home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Call to return Israel to the layout determined by the Oslo Accords, involving the annexation of the West Bank - Opposition to the creation of a Palestinian state - Israeli possession and full control of Jerusalem
Yisrael Beiteinu	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Two-state solution negotiated by land exchanges between Israel and Palestine - Provision of economic incentives to encourage Arab Israelis to move from Israel to Palestine - Peace agreement between Israel and the rest of the proximate Arab worlds
Yachad	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - End to negotiations with the Palestinians as long as Palestine would not concede territory - Continuation of Israeli settlements - Deportation of all Palestinians from Israeli territory and the occupied territories
Kulanu	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Palestine is an unviable partner in peace negotiations - Call for annexation of the land that belongs to Israel - Improving the economic well-being of Middle Class Israelis
UTJ	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Securing more financial aid for members of ultra-Orthodox communities - Opposition of separation of church and state

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Opposition of military conscription for ultra-Orthodox Israelis
Meretz	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Opposition to the continuation of settlements in the Occupied Territories - Call for a two-state solution - Opposition to the proposed changes to the Basic Law (making Israel a Jewish state) by the 19th Knesset
Shas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The creation of a longstanding interim agreement with the Palestinians to protect the Israeli economy - Protection of all people, particularly the “Arab public” - Eventual Israeli annexation of Palestine
The Joint Arab List	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - An end to racism in Israeli society and a call for equality for all Israeli citizens - Adherence to UN decisions made in 1967, particularly to create a Palestinian state - Opposition to a fourth Netanyahu leadership term

To bring the coalition to 53, Netanyahu promised Shas that the new government would roll back the legislation passed in the 19th Knesset, which criminalized evasion of military service for the ultra-orthodox.³¹⁹ This promise left Netanyahu with only two days to find support from an additional list that had at least eight Members to finalize the coalition. Believing that the support of Yisrael Beiteinu would be easy to acquire, Netanyahu was confident in his ability to form the coalition.³²⁰ However, with only two days left, Yisrael Beiteinu announced that the party would not be a part of the coalition, and instead would join the opposition.³²¹ Weak and exposed, Netanyahu was forced to make the concession of

³¹⁹ Peters and Pinfeld, “Consolidating right-wing hegemony: the Israeli election of 2015.”: 409

³²⁰ Ibid.

³²¹ Ibid.

the Justice Ministry, a position he was saving for the Likud, to The Jewish Home.³²²

Two hours before the six-week deadline, a coalition government of 61 Members was formed.³²³

Figure 7: 20th Knesset

Party	Seats
Coalition Government	
Likud	30
Kulanu	10
Jewish Home	8
Shas	7
UTJ	6
Total	61
Opposition	
Zionist Union (Labor/Hatnuah)	24
Joint Arab List (Hadash, United Arab List, Balad)	13
Yesh Atid	11
Yisrael Beiteinu	6
Meretz	5
Total	59

However, even before it was sworn in, the coalition government of the 20th Knesset presented dysfunction amidst its ranks due to disagreements over the distribution of ministerial posts.³²⁴ To please members of Likud, Netanyahu agreed to repeal the law that limited the number of ministerial positions to 18.³²⁵ However,

³²² Peters and Pinfeld, “Consolidating right-wing hegemony: the Israeli election of 2015.”: 409

³²³ Hazan and Diskin, “The 2015 Israeli Elections.”: 7

³²⁴ Peters and Pinfeld, “Consolidating right-wing hegemony: the Israeli election of 2015.”: 410

³²⁵ Ibid.

this measure did little to please Likud, as the members were dissatisfied over the posts left for their party, and demanded more.³²⁶ Arguments amongst the parties over ministerial positions resulted in no changes to the ministerial allocations, and delay of the swearing in of the 20th Knesset by more than two hours.³²⁷

3.4 The 2015 Election: Analysis of the Campaign and Electoral Results

The electoral outcomes of the 2015 election show a clear shift in the priorities of the Israeli public, back towards security issues. Although a majority of parties lost seats in the Knesset, the overall outcome of the election shows a positive shift in the number of seats that went to those hawkish parties, and a clear shift in the public domain towards the right.³²⁸ Both Likud and the Zionist Union swept seats from other parties on the right, such as The Jewish Home, showing a shift in party preference on the right but ultimately an increase in support for those parties on the right.³²⁹

This shift in support towards the parties of the right also illustrates the clear reemergence of the left and right blocs in Israeli politics. During the 2013 election, the divisive lines between those parties of the left and those of the right all but

³²⁶ Ibid.

³²⁷ Peters and Pinfeld, "Consolidating right-wing hegemony: the Israeli election of 2015.": 410

³²⁸ Lindenstrauss, "What Has Been Is What Will Be: The 2015 Israeli Elections and the State of Turkish-Israeli Relations.": 20

³²⁹ Hazan and Diskin, "The 2015 Israeli Elections.": 5

disappeared, as parties focused on issues that moved them all towards the center. However, in the 2015 elections, these lines once again emerged, and emerged clearer than ever.³³⁰ Perhaps due to the intense focus of the parties on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the chasm between the blocs grew to a potentially dangerous point by the end of the election.

Furthermore, the 2015 elections show an increase in the amount of support for bringing an end to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict via negotiations, without making concessions to the Palestinians. Those parties who gained the majority of the seats in the 20th Knesset, namely Likud and the Zionist Union, campaigned primarily on the notion that, if elected, an end would be brought to the conflict but at the very least Jerusalem and the West Bank would remain under Israeli control. A shift in party platform for Likud, from preferring Israeli control of all of the land but considering the possibility that a two-state solution might be necessary to end the conflict to condemning a two-state solution, can be attributed to the significant and unexpected success of Likud. This can be considered a primary factor in the emergence of last minute support for Likud particularly because, within the week before the election, Netanyahu made repeated statements denouncing the two-state solution, drawing attention to it repeatedly.

³³⁰ Meir, "Insight No. 678 Israel: The 2015 Elections.": 2

Additionally, although not a significant determining factor in the election, the construct of the 20th Knesset is worth noting. The 20th Knesset featured the most women Members of the Knesset, as well as the most Arab Members of the Knesset, ever in Israeli history. With 29 females and 16 Arabs, the 20th Knesset is the most demographically diverse Knesset that Israel has ever seen.³³¹

Although the coalition government of the 20th Knesset was formed with parties with generally harmonious positions in regards to foreign affairs, the call by the ultra-religious parties to repeal many of the laws passed in the 19th Knesset in attempt to equalize Israeli society is certain to cause unrest amidst both the government and the Israeli people.³³² This unrest could potentially serve as an obstacle in the lifespan of the coalition.

Finally, in regards to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, and religious conflict in general, the agreement to form the coalition makes no mention of a specific or preferred path forward.³³³ Given Netanyahu's recent condemnation of the two-state solution, as well as the hawkish positions of all parties in the coalition, it is unlikely that much progress will be made in ending the conflict. In this regard, one could expect the coalition to last longer than the 19th Knesset, and the election to the 21st Knesset to focus on many of the same issues.

³³¹ Hazan and Diskin, "The 2015 Israeli Elections.": 5

³³² Peters and Pinfeld, "Consolidating right-wing hegemony: the Israeli election of 2015.": 411

³³³ Ibid.

Chapter 4: Analysis – Determining Factors in the 2013 and 2015 Israeli Elections

When analyzing the 2013 and 2015 elections to the Israeli Knesset considering international factors, economic and social movements, and religious conflict both within and in the region surrounding Israel, it becomes clear that in crucial respects the elections are different both from each other, and from any elections in Israeli history. In analyzing the elections, this study has considered the number of parties running, the party platforms, social movements, economic factors, the rise of Islamic extremism, and religious conflict between Israel and Palestine as well as changes in the electoral threshold and campaign styles between the two elections. First and foremost, it is essential to recognize that the change in the threshold between the two elections did play a role in determining the outcomes of the elections. In March of 2014, the Knesset passed the Governability Law, a law which amended the Basic Law: the Government and the Knesset Elections Law by raising the minimal threshold in Knesset elections from two percent to three-and-a-quarter percent in an attempt to keep Arab parties out of the Knesset in the future.^{334,335} As was addressed, this increase caused the Arab parties to join together in the Joint List, and actually become the third largest party in the 20th Knesset. The new threshold also kept Yachad out of the 20th Knesset, with nearly three percent of

³³⁴ Hazan and Diskin, "The 2015 Israeli Elections.": 2

³³⁵ Lindenstrauss, "What Has Been Is What Will Be: The 2015 Israeli Elections and the State of Turkish-Israeli Relations.": 20

the vote.³³⁶ While it is impossible to determine whether or not the Arab parties would have received the same amount of support had they not joined in one list to overcome the threshold, it is certain that had the threshold not been raised, Yachad would have been a part of the 20th Knesset and it is possible that the coalition government and dynamic would have changed. Additionally, the increase in the threshold caused fewer parties to run for election in the 2015 elections, potentially affecting the vote split between the parties which won seats. However, it is important to understand that while the change in threshold did have some impact on the results of the elections, the impact is not significant enough to be the sole determining factor, or even a primary determining factor in the outcome.

Second, it is essential to note the dramatic change in the 2013 and 2015 elections from party-centered elections to candidate-centered elections. Beginning with the 2013 elections, a shift in campaign strategy leading to an increase in the use of new media led to a substantial increase on the focus of the particular candidates leading the political parties, and not the parties themselves.³³⁷ Spurred by the unrest in Israeli society due to the economic situation, and call for a new government and new way of governing, the parties began to shift their campaign strategies.³³⁸ A new way of governing could only begin with a new way of campaigning. As such, for the first time in Israeli politics, during the 2013 campaign

³³⁶ Central Elections Committee. *Final Results of the Election for the 20th Knesset*.

³³⁷ Orkibi, "New Politics, New Media - New Political Language? A rhetorical perspective on candidates' self presentation in the 2013 Elections": 277

³³⁸ *Ibid.*, 278

party leaders saw themselves more so than their parties as candidates.³³⁹ Using social media, candidates reverted away from the typical “monologue style” of talking at the people and moved towards a dialogue with the people.³⁴⁰ Candidates made personal Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube pages to align with and personalize those of the party.³⁴¹ In fact, a majority of the traffic that the campaigns received online was directed towards the individual pages of the candidates.³⁴² Through the use of social media, candidates were able to personalize themselves to the public, and provide the public with the feeling that the candidates wanted them to be informed.³⁴³ Additionally, candidates began to record their campaign activities through the use of blogs, essentially serving as personal diaries for supporters to read, feel involved, and stay informed.³⁴⁴ This new media created a sense of community amongst candidates and the public, certainly helping to drive attention to the campaigns. For the first time, the Israeli political parties were personalized and the party members were valued not just as politicians but as people and members of society.

This factor, while certainly drawing attention to the campaign, did not result in the significant shift in party support. Instead, the shift to a new style of

³³⁹ Rahat and Hazan, “Increased Personalization in an Unstable Party System: The 2013 Elections in Israel.”: 377

³⁴⁰ Ibid.

³⁴¹ Ibid.

³⁴² Orkibi, “New Politics, New Media - New Political Language? A rhetorical perspective on candidates’ self presentation in the 2013 Elections”: 278

³⁴³ Ibid., 282

³⁴⁴ Ibid.

campaigning is important because, by drawing attention to the campaign and making citizens feel personally involved, they were therefore more likely to turn out to the polls. The significant increase in voter turnout after both the 2013 and 2015 elections illustrates this momentum.

The 2015 campaign took this new trend to even greater lengths, with the parties themselves making their leaders the center of the campaigns. Advertisements for the parties featured candidates and the name of the candidates, followed by the name of the party.³⁴⁵ Even more prominently, the attacks on the opposition were not made against the parties, but against the candidates themselves. A central theme of the campaign for most of the candidates became a comparison of the candidates to Netanyahu.³⁴⁶ Additionally, personal lives of candidates, as well as the lives of their friends and family, came into play in a significant way for the first time in Israeli politics.³⁴⁷ While the 2013 election started the trend towards candidate-centered campaigns, the 2015 election solidified this trend and focused almost exclusively on the platform of the candidates, rather than the party list the candidates were a part of.

A third difference between the 2013 and 2015 elections that is essential to note is the difference in the focus issues of the campaigns. As has been previously

³⁴⁵ Peters and Pinfeld, "Consolidating right-wing hegemony: the Israeli election of 2015.": 407

³⁴⁶ Ibid.

³⁴⁷ Ibid.

stated, the 2013 election was the first election in which parties were not focused on the issue of religious conflict. Instead, the parties presented platforms based on socioeconomic reforms (see Figure 3). In 2015, the party platforms once again focused on religious conflict and security concerns regarding Israel and the rest of the world (see Figure 6). The results of each election were significantly different. The 2013 election essentially erased dividing lines between the blocs in Israeli politics, as well as saw unexpected outcomes regarding the disappointing returns for Likud-Beiteinu and impressive returns for Yesh Atid. The 2015 election recreated and increasingly solidified the divides between the blocs in Israeli politics, as well as saw an incredible victory for Likud. This shift in party dynamics highlights the fact that, to garner support and remain in the Knesset, parties shifted their platforms and changed which issues were deemed to be most important. Thus, by changing their focus to different issues and therefore different stances, different parties were able to join together.

As has been shown, the primary differences between the 2013 and 2015 elections can be traced to the party platforms. By changing their party platforms, the political parties ultimately changed the outcomes of the elections to great lengths. Traditionally throughout Israeli history, Likud and Labor battled to be the largest party in the Knesset based on their foreign policy and security views. Prior to 2013, Netanyahu secured two terms as Israeli Prime Minister rather easily and seamlessly based on these portions of the party platform. However, beginning in 2011, there was something else on the minds of Israelis just as prevalently as the ongoing

religious conflict and security concerns – the economy. Israeli political parties, for so long focused on one primary issue and minor supplemental issues, shifted their focus entirely. Parties changed their one-issue focus from security to the economy. Instead of morphing party platforms to include the new socioeconomic positions taken by the parties and highlighting those positions throughout the campaign, parties released entirely new platforms that made little or no mention of anything but positions on socioeconomic issues. Israeli people were forced to reevaluate their political alignment, now that religious conflict was no longer an issue. The results of the election took not only Israel, but also the rest of the world, by surprise.

The 2015 campaign, having not been faced with a number of protests and uprisings throughout the state, reverted back to what had historically been the original one-issue focus of Israeli campaigns: religious conflict. The prevalence of focus on religious conflict throughout the campaign shifted the political alignment of Israelis once again, as the parties were once again redefined. However, the outcome of the election followed the pattern of previous Israeli elections that focused on religious conflict, with an easy victory for Netanyahu and Likud. The presence of religious conflict in the party platforms ultimately determined the outcome of the election. Thus, the shift in party platforms was the main determining factor in the outcomes of the 2013 and 2015 elections.

Previous analyses conducted of the unanticipated results of the 2013 and 2015 elections focus primarily on the effect of a shift in campaign tactics, whether a

shift in the personalization of media, the creation of “new politics,” or a shift towards negative campaigns. However, this study has found that this is not a complete analysis of the shift in platforms. These studies largely ignored the roles that the individual issues played in the elections. When analyzing the 2013 and 2015 platforms, it became clear that there is, in fact, no direct impact of religious conflict on the outcomes of Israeli elections. However, it was discovered instead that the presence or absence of issues regarding religious conflict in the party platforms is a direct determining factor of the outcome of Israeli elections.

Therefore, the answer to the proposed research question “What was the impact of religious conflict in the Middle East on the 2013 and 2015 Legislative Elections in Israel?” is none. However, the impact of the presence or absence of issues regarding religious conflict in the party platforms is extensive, and a primary factor to be considered when evaluating what the outcome of an Israeli election will be.

One may think that the differences in the party platforms and therefore the outcome of the elections is due to different internal and external circumstances in 2013 and 2015. However, while the 18th Knesset was faced with social upset and economic downturn more so than the 19th Knesset, both the 18th and 19th Knessets were faced with internal and external religious conflict. The rise of ISIL, an Islamic extremist and militant movement throughout the Middle East, began in 2011.³⁴⁸

³⁴⁸ Laub and Masters, “What is the Islamic State?”

This movement, combined with calls throughout the greater Arab world, particularly from states such as Iran calling for “full annihilation and destruction of Israel” to rid the Middle East of a Jewish state, externally threatened Israel continually throughout the 18th and 19th Knessets.³⁴⁹

Internally, Israel was faced with escalating military action in regards to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Throughout the latter half of 2012, Hamas in Palestine continued to shell southern Israel, as well as launch rockets into the state.³⁵⁰ In November of 2012, Israel retaliated by launching Operation Pillar of Strength, which launched rockets and attacks into Palestine.³⁵¹ As previously mentioned, in 2014 the situation was nearly the same, when Israel and Palestine continued to share firefight until an Egyptian-brokered ceasefire was established. Both the external and internal threats from religious conflicts were very much present before and during the 2013 and 2015 campaigns. However, the shift in focus of the Israeli electorate away from security issues and toward economic issues in 2013, and the reversion of this shift in 2015, accounted for the shifts in party platforms and hence the presence or absence of issues regarding religious conflict in the platforms.

Ultimately, it can be determined that the presence of religious conflict both throughout the greater Middle East and within Israel itself does not have a direct

³⁴⁹ Schachtel, Jordan. "Iran General: Military Buildup Won't Stop Until 'Full Annihilation and Destruction' of Israel." *Breitbart News*. Washington, 2 September 2015.

³⁵⁰ Hazan and Diskin, "The 2015 Israeli Elections.": 379

³⁵¹ *Ibid.*

affect on the outcome of Israeli elections. If there were a direct impact, the elections results would not have been substantially different between the 2013 and 2015 elections, as the situations involving religious conflict were extremely similar. Instead, what did directly affect the outcome of the election was the extent to which religious conflict was deemed an important and integral issue by the parties throughout the elections. When religious conflict is an integral issue of the platforms of the parties, the right-wing and hawkish parties do well, and consequently Netanyahu easily keeps his seat as Prime Minister. When religious conflict is not a predominant issue during an election, Netanyahu's safety is not guaranteed, and in fact both he and his party are in danger of losing their place as leaders of the Knesset. Therefore, while religious conflict itself does not have a direct impact on Israeli elections, religious conflict is largely responsible for the outcome of the elections, and a determining factor in electoral results.

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