

JERUSALEM LETTER / VIEWPOINTS

Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs

No. 346 4 Kislev 5757 / 15 November 1996

THE DIRECT ELECTION OF THE PRIME MINISTER: A BALANCE SHEET

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A Continuing Controversy

The direct election of the Prime Minister in the May 1996 elections represented the culmination of more than a decade of public debate and controversy. From the mid-1980s until early 1992 when the revised Basic Law: The Government was passed, the idea of directly electing the Prime Minister as a remedy for the ills that afflicted the Israeli political system was the subject of a great deal of academic analysis, legal dissection, and ideological wrangling. Moreover, in the roughly four years that elapsed between the law's passage and its actual use, there were many attempts to subvert it or at least to postpone its implementation. Although it was massively supported by the public and received a substantial majority when voted upon in 1992, the idea of direct election was opposed by a majority of Israel's political scientists as well as by many leading political figures.

For those who hoped that the actual implementation of the law would set this often acrimonious debate to rest, the results are a disappointment. It was unlikely that this, the first direct election of the

Prime Minister, would be clearly decisive in assessing its qualities. On the contrary, those who supported the bill in the past continue to be convinced that it fulfilled its promise, just as those who opposed it are certain it failed. Nevertheless, the strident and speculative debate that preceded the election must now change character: claims need to be squared with empirical data and speculations checked against actual results. Even if interpretation turns out to be unavoidable, henceforth it will be disciplined by the constraints of evidence and proof.

Doubtless, as with all significant electoral-constitutional reforms, it will take a number of implementations to assess the full potential of direct election. After its first use, therefore, no more is possible than an initial appraisal that must await further implementation to be fleshed out and corroborated. Inevitable as well is the confounding of the specific, substantive results with the performance of direct election itself. Critics are far more likely to be found on the losing side. (And since the large parties were both hurt in the elections,

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this criticism is, not surprisingly, quite widespread.) The object of this essay is to make a preliminary analysis of direct election in its first trial, one that focuses on the dynamics of the law itself rather than on the very different question of who won and who lost.

Were the Law's Objectives Achieved?

First of all, the law's drafters wished for it to be clear, as soon as the election results were tabulated, who would be Prime Minister and form the government. They wanted to eliminate the confusing interregnum between the elections and the formation of the government. Direct election was meant to put an end to weeks of uncertainty — during which it was entirely unclear who would be forming the government and what its policies would be — and on this score at least, it accomplished its purposes fully. From the moment the electoral results were clear, Netanyahu's position as Prime Minister was unassailable — even though his majority was razor thin.

The law's formulators were determined to avoid the demoralizing spectacle of coalition-making parties abjectly prostrating themselves before their potential junior coalition partners, cutting deals that were as hateful to themselves as they were to the vast majority of the electorate. Such deals were unavoidable as long as the leaders of the large parties needed to operate within the logic of the old system, i.e., so long as they knew that the opposition party might well accede to just what they had rejected. In which case, they would *both* languish in opposition and see the measures they sought to avoid become the law of the land. With two competing parties seeking to form coalitions with the same smaller parties as necessary partners, a logic of capitulation is set into motion. Playing one large party off against the other, the small parties are in position to constantly up the ante by transforming the promises made by one side into baseline demands for negotiating with the other. In this way, the smaller parties — at times even individual members of Knesset — extracted staggering political prices from their larger counterparts. The byzantine intrigues and nasty machinations that accompanied these negotiations created, so the law's defenders warned, a dangerous threat to the democratic consensus, a growing loss of faith in the fundamental fairness of the system.

Direct election of the Prime Minister was to alter the basic context in which coalitional negotiations take place. Since it is immediately clear who will be forming the government, the entire logic of capitulation

would be avoided. Prime Ministers would negotiate with their potential coalition partners from a position of strength and exclusivity because there would be no other alternative open to the small parties. The dynamic of spiraling demands would be neutralized at the outset.

Moreover, because there would be no alternative to the elected Prime Minister, the small party's options would be reduced to just two: either they join the government or they do not. With only these stark alternatives available, there is an overwhelming logic that militates toward entering the coalition. Joining the coalition means influence, budgets, patronage, ministries, etc.; staying out means impotence, privation, and irrelevance. Small parties that, nevertheless, insisted on opposing the Prime Minister would now be forced to pay a formidable price.

The linchpin of the new system is the provision that if the Prime Minister does not receive a majority when he presents his government (or in any vote of confidence thereafter), elections follow for both the Prime Minister *and* the Knesset. For a party to vote for the Prime Minister's fall means relinquishing the parliamentary seats it has just won and, moreover, facing elections against the background of having defied a Prime Minister elected by more than 50 percent of the vote. Would newly elected Members of Knesset, having just survived a "primary" battle, be likely to support a vote of no-confidence if this meant a renewed struggle for a place on the party's parliamentary list? Not a likely prospect.

We might profitably compare the difference between the old and new system to the difference between a seller's and a buyer's market respectively. In the old system, the small parties aim to sell their coalitional services to larger parties when there are two buyers, each of which has no alternative but to purchase just these goods being sold by the smaller parties. Not surprisingly the price skyrockets. The new system, by leaving no alternative but the elected Prime Minister, alters the political market's dynamic fundamentally. The smaller parties are drawn into the coalition by the promise of power and payoffs; they are deterred from resisting the Prime Minister because that would involve jeopardizing the parliamentary seats they have just gained. Lacking political leverage, the coalitional price the smaller parties are able to exact drops dramatically. Indeed, their power is rendered proportional to their size.

One obvious way of checking this hypothesis is to compare what the smaller parties achieved in coalitional

negotiations in 1996 to what they attained in the past. This comparison should be especially instructive because the small parties grew substantially in numbers and we would expect a concomitant rise in payoffs rather than the decrease foretold by the law's supporters. In terms of payments related to the principled issues of policy and legislation, the results are striking. Only two concessions were made to the religious parties by Netanyahu and both of them were distinctly secondary — dramatically so if we judge them against previous coalitional payoffs. They are: first, only Orthodox conversions will be recognized, and second, non-Orthodox members are not to be included in local religious councils. When these coalitional payments are placed alongside the initial demands of the religious parties immediately after the election results were in, they appear paltry indeed. Neither did their ministerial representation in the new government grow in proportion to their numerical growth.

All told, the law's authors' intentions were largely realized: Netanyahu formed his government quickly and easily; there was no doubt from the start that his coalition would be successfully formed; he made few concessions of major significance to his coalition partners; the initiative remained clearly with him rather than with his partners throughout the negotiations.

Were the Critics' Predictions Borne Out?

Perhaps the most oft-heard reproach levelled at direct election was that the increased power of the Prime Minister would create a one-person government able to sweep aside all opposition and criticism. Israeli democracy, with its crisis-ridden character, it was said, could ill-afford a system that was focused on a single individual. While it is impossible only a few months after the election to make definitive assessments as to the future, the available evidence leads to the conclusion that this criticism is unfounded. Although the Prime Minister acted swiftly and with relative ease in establishing his government, he was shown to be deeply beholden to and constrained by a variety of political actors and groups. Despite his vigorous efforts, he could not resist pressure from within his own party to appoint Dan Meridor as Minister of Finance. Nor could he move the Budget Management Branch from the Finance Ministry into the Prime Minister's office, or separate the Israel Lands Administration from the Ministry of Housing. Most dramatically, Netanyahu was stymied in his effort to freeze Ariel Sharon out of his government. Support for Sharon proved to be more powerful than Netanyahu's intentions. All of which

sets to rest the fear that direct election would create a Prime Minister immune from the daily pressures of his own party, his coalition partners, the Knesset, and sundry interest groups.

The fear of a gridlocked "oppositional Knesset" also figured significantly in the critics' worries. It is, of course, impossible to infer from a single election in which an oppositional Knesset did not arise, that it will not occur in the future. Nevertheless, the prospect of an oppositional Knesset appears quite remote. Theoretically, of course, Netanyahu could have won the Prime Ministerial election while the Labor Party maintained a blocking majority, as in the previous Knesset. Were this to have occurred, it is likely that a "national unity government" would have been formed, which renders the system of direct election no worse than conventional parliamentary arrangements in which national unity governments (of which Israel has had more than its share) are the favored solution to insurmountable coalitional difficulties.

Those who feared an oppositional Knesset did so because they appear to have assumed that the Israeli Knesset is divided into sharply divided and hermetically sealed right and left camps. Indeed, were all of the smaller parties irrevocably committed to one or the other of the large parties, their fears of an oppositional Knesset would have been justified. In a close race between the two camps, the results of the elections for Prime Minister and for the Knesset could turn out to be incongruous.

But this is not and never has been the reality of Israeli politics. There have always been parties that could have gone either way. The right and left camps typically control 40-45 percent of Knesset representation each, while those parties that remain committed to neither side populate the ambidextrous center of the political map. As long as such a center exists, the prospect of an oppositional Knesset remains quite implausible. Whichever of the candidates for Prime Minister wins, these centrist parties are virtually his/her "prisoners," i.e., they have nowhere else to go but into the government. Barring the total polarization of Israeli politics and the complete disappearance of parties that are ideologically ambidextrous — an unlikely prospect — the probabilities of an oppositional Knesset are slim indeed.

Some complained that a strengthened Prime Minister would ride roughshod over the Knesset. While it is still too early to assess this critique fully, we should recall the novel powers that the law itself grants the Knesset to compensate for the enhanced power of the

Prime Minister. Among them are: 1) The responsibility for secondary legislation, heretofore located in the executive branch's staff, will be transferred to the Knesset. 2) The Knesset can now summon any Minister to appear before a Knesset committee — whereas in the past, the Minister had to agree to accept such an invitation. 3) An increase in the Knesset's role in regard to Declarations of a "State of Emergency." 4) The Knesset can now vote no confidence in a single Minister without bringing down the government.

In the end, the Prime Minister continued to act as any Prime Minister in a conventional parliamentary system would. He did not believe he could rule without the support of a variegated, broad-based parliamentary coalition. Despite his direct election, it was perfectly clear that he was no president in the American style.

Critics alleged that the new system would exacerbate rather than ameliorate the problem of undue small party influence because demands for political concessions would be made not only after the elections — as in the old system — but prior to the elections, between the first and second rounds of the Prime Ministerial contest, and after it was already clear who would be Prime Minister.

Yet during the post-election period, as we have noted, the small parties were subject to the undisputed dominance of the Prime Minister. During the pre-election period, a great deal of political "courting" undoubtedly took place. Apart from *de rigueur* appearances at ultra-Orthodox assemblies, both candidates canvassed the Arab sector, and made appearances at very many local and sectorial meetings of ex-Soviet immigrants, slums, development towns, etc. This is only natural and legitimate. Did they, however, make any hard promises, any definitive deals with other parties or groups? The answer here must be a simple "no."

No such deals were made because the new law mandates that all such agreements must be immediately publicized. (Informal understandings are problematic as well because they are entirely unenforceable.) The large parties were hesitant to make such deals because they feared losing voters to other parties were it known, for example, that they had made substantial concessions to the ultra-Orthodox parties. For their part, the smaller parties, being uncertain of which of the two candidates would emerge as Prime Minister, feared betting on the "wrong horse" and hence preferred to avoid premature entangling alliances.

The real test of inordinate small party pressure did not arise in these elections because it was a two-candi-

date race without a run-off second round. Some of the limitations on deal-making noted above would probably no longer be quite as decisive in second round voting. In a word, the ability of the smaller parties to extract exorbitant prices for their inter-election support must, at this point, remain a moot question.

Critics charged that direct election would aggravate political fragmentation by strengthening the smaller parties at the expense of the larger ones. Although the defenders of the law conceded that the vote-splitting possibilities of the law would strengthen smaller parties somewhat, they rejected the argument that this would lead to fragmentation and increased political uncertainty, contending that the Prime Ministerial election would naturally focus the vote on the two large parties.

Here the critics were clearly in the right — the new system clearly encouraged larger small parties and smaller large parties. A full 45 percent of the voters split their vote, i.e., voted for a party different from the party of their preferred Prime Ministerial candidate. The two large parties together lost roughly 20 percent of their seats, while new and smaller parties advanced by the same margin. Although Meretz fell by 3 seats and Moledet and Agudat Yisrael were unchanged in their parliamentary strength, Shas, Mafdal, Yisrael Be'aliya, the Third Way, and the two Arab parties all made impressive showings. Accounting for this dramatic shift in voting patterns requires a broadly encompassing political perspective.

Although the two large parties early understood that victory in the Prime Ministerial vote was considerably more important than the results of the party vote, they seem to have exaggerated this priority into a thoroughly lopsided division of energies. They acted on the assumption that the Knesset election's outcome would be of no great import so long as their candidate for Prime Minister prevailed. All the party's resources were focused on victory in the Prime Ministerial contest, while virtually nothing was invested in convincing voters that a good party showing was an integral part of electoral success. Both parties had large staffs working for the individual candidates and virtually no staff working on the party vote. Neither of the large parties used any of their TV time to counter the argument for a split vote made so effectively by the smaller parties. Instead, both large parties, with their eyes exclusively on the Prime Ministerial race, set up joint electioneering organizations with their likely coalition partners, culminating, on election day, with the actual merging of their staffs in a common effort to get out the vote.

This mistake will not be repeated in the next elections. The large parties will surely do all they can to emphasize the importance of the party vote, to differentiate themselves from their ideological neighbors, and to separate their electoral organizations from each other. Besides, the voters themselves, having realized the effect of ticket-splitting on the larger parties, may well moderate their own tendencies to abandon Labor and the Likud for the allegedly greener pastures of the smaller parties. It remains unclear whether the very high levels of ticket-splitting in this election will be a permanent feature of direct election.

There are also a number of specific explanations not related to direct election that account for the growth of the smaller parties. In regard to the two Arab parties, there can be no question that the impact of the ill-considered and damaging military action in Lebanon (Operation Grapes of Wrath) a few months before the election was keenly felt. The result is clear: although about 95 percent of Arab voters cast their ballot for Peres, there was a substantial migration from the dovish Zionist to Arab parties in the party vote.

The rise of an immigrant party, Yisrael Be'aliya, represents quite a novelty in Israeli politics. Sensing that their interests were not a high priority for either of the large parties, ex-Soviet immigrants organized politically and, in a remarkable *tour de force*, broke onto the political stage with 7 Knesset seats. In a profound sense, the ability of a recently arrived, disempowered group, that felt itself marginalized by establishment politics, to take matters into its own hands and enter the political stage with such force is a badge of honor for Israeli public life. Doubtless, a substantial part of this vote would have gone to the immigrant party regardless of the voting procedures employed. Their central concerns were not so much with Peres or Netanyahu (although they preferred the latter by a substantial margin after having supported Labor in the 1992 elections), but with their own travails in a new and perplexing reality.

The large parties, for their part, invested little in "on the ground" work in the immigrant communities. They appear to have operated on the assumption that sporadic budget largesse, the coopting of a leader or two, and the valedictory rhetoric of "ingathering the exiles" would be sufficient to secure the loyalty of these voters. We may conclude then that the very extensive vote-splitting among the immigrants was perhaps facilitated by a two-vote arrangement, but it was surely not generated or driven by the logic of the new system.

The dramatic growth of Shas (from 6 to 10 Knesset

seats) was also facilitated but not caused by the two-vote system. Shas supporters, feeling short-changed in the marketplace of Israeli life, responded by combining political organization with groundwork in education, social services, welfare, and religious counselling. Indeed, they have been so successful in their efforts that they are displacing the Likud as the voice of the "second" Israel. Having long ago ceased to be a palpable presence on the ground, it is no wonder that the Likud is progressively losing its dominance to Shas. The Likud has centered its concerns on the needs of its central party organization and, much like Mapai in its heyday, has attempted to secure the periphery via patronage, budgetary largesse, co-optation, and warmed-over rhetoric. It has become what might be called a "superstructure" as opposed to an "infrastructure" party. Like Labor's loss of the Histadrut, the Likud's partial displacement by Shas both reflects and perpetuates their estrangement from the street and the work place.

The gradual decline of the Likud and the rise of Shas did not begin with, nor is it wholly attributable to, direct election. Some, if not most, of the shift from the Likud to Shas would have taken place under the old system as well. Our conclusion should be, therefore, that the success of "communitarian" parties like Yisrael Be'aliya and Shas reflects both their superior groundwork and the failing "remote control" strategies of the large parties — at least as much as the dynamics of two-ballot voting. Far from representing a disintegration of Israeli public life into clannish fiefdoms as has been charged, the strong showing of these "communitarian" parties portends a growing "stake in society" for otherwise marginalized and potentially disruptive groups.

One last autonomous factor accounting for the weakness of the larger parties relates to the growing impasse that divides them from Israel's religious community. In the past, the Labor Party displayed considerably more pluralist latitude than it does today. Apart from satellite Arab parties, it had a not-insignificant religious cohort organized as the Oved Hadati (religious worker). In the 1992-96 term especially, this catch-all pluralism gave way to an image of monochromatic Ashkenazi secularism and cosmopolitanism. Labor became associated — especially in the religious community — with a well-heeled, Western, professional class living in very specific genteel, up-market neighborhoods, whose objective it was to create a consumerist, permissive, high-tech, non-traditional Israel in a "new Middle East." Labor's frequent clashes with

religious settlers and their supporters during their term in office, as well as the cozy partnership with the combatively secular Meretz, only sharpened this image. Meretz's election campaign, which included TV images of great masses of Haredim above which the logo "stop them" appeared, made a Labor vote unthinkable for the bulk of religious Jews. Add to this the growing consolidation of the overwhelming majority of the religious community around religio-right wing precepts, and the impasse becomes quite unbridgeable.

The Likud too made a clear step in the secular direction when it included Tzomet (which in many ways constitutes a right-wing analogue to Meretz) into its ranks. The idea of voting for a party that called itself Likud/Tzomet/Gesher must have given religious Likud voters a great deal of pause and, in the end, driven many of them into more congenial expressions of their position via the National Religious Party or Shas. In a word, religious voters who might otherwise have supported one of the large parties were effectively deterred from doing so by the secularizing tendencies that had, ostensibly, overtaken both parties. The result was a drop in support for the large parties and a swelling of support for the religious parties — even before considering the effect of the newly adopted two-ballot system.

Did the New System Succeed?

In assessing the overall success of an electoral arrangement, two general criteria are regularly applied. The first is: does the system in question provide an equitable, expressive, and democratic framework within which the voters can satisfactorily signify their choice? To this the answer must be a definite "yes." The two-ballot arrangement is a major improvement in that it affords voters considerably more control over the expression of their preferences than was available in the simple choice between parties. Voters operating within the two-ballot system can fine-tune their choices, balance their votes against each other and, in general, make far more sophisticated calculations than were ever possible before. It is, in fact, just this finer control over the implications of one's vote that accurately revealed (rather than created) the cleavages marking the terrain of Israel's electoral topography, cleavages that had been occluded by the old system's indiscriminately simple choice of a party.

The second criteria asks whether the system provides for effectiveness, stability, and governability. Balancing the expressive capacities of a system with its contribution to effective government is mandatory,

lest overly expressive electoral arrangements create turmoil and confusion. Does the new system provide such effectiveness? Earlier, we examined the initial coalition-making period and noted that Netanyahu created his government swiftly, easily, and with few substantive concessions to his smaller partners. The recognition on the part of the smaller parties that there was no choice but to accept the Prime Minister's offer or to face reelection, transformed them into reasonably docile negotiators. The augmented numerical strength of the smaller parties was more than balanced by the authority and decisiveness that direct election affords the Prime Minister.

Although the new system allows previously un- or under-represented groups to enter the political mainstream, it effectively limits their ability to extort hateful concessions from a needy government. In the past, small parties were able to make extravagant demands and have these demands met because the threat of leaving the coalition and forming a new government with the opposition parties was a "doomsday" scenario for the large party in power. Weighty concessions were granted *although* the large parties were larger and the small parties were smaller than they are at present.

This "logic of capitulation" is effectively nullified by direct election. First, the most smaller parties can do, and this only in the event that they are willing to vote themselves out of office, is to have the contentious issue decided in new elections for both Knesset and Prime Minister. It hardly needs to be explained why under these rules, sectarian demands lose much of their sting. Second, given a multi-party system operating within the logic of a "buyer's market," the departure of one party from the coalition may well be offset by the eager entrance of another. Only when there are no alternatives to the departing party, and when this party is willing to put its future on the line by voting "no confidence" and facing general elections, can a sitting government be changed — and then only by popular mandate. The stability-enhancing qualities of this design are manifest.

There is another ironic stabilizing quality to direct election. To the degree that parties joining the coalition have been successful in the popular elections, to that very degree will they be unwilling to challenge the coalition-maker — for fear that their successes will not be repeated in new elections. In the recent elections, for example, at least Shas, the National Religious Party, and Yisrael Be'aliya find themselves in this curious position. Having made what are very possibly one-time gains, they are effectively locked into Netanyahu's

government. Ironically, their impressive showing limits their room for manoeuvre. If we add to this that the lion's share of their constituents voted for Netanyahu, we begin to understand why disruptive behavior on their part would be quite counterproductive in terms of their own welfare.

Direct election also works against the alarming rise of political extremism in Israel. Responding to the inherent logic of direct election, both candidates did all they could to direct their arguments to the political center, so much so that complaints arose on all sides that the campaign messages of Netanyahu and Peres were basically indistinguishable — either security with peace or peace with security. Because ideological purism is punished by majoritarian systems, the campaign, despite the momentous issues at stake, was reasonably tame and civil. In a word, direct election fosters the rise of moderate, centrist political leaders.

We conclude then that the direct election of the Prime Minister is first, highly equitable in that it facilitates the rise of otherwise neglected sectors of the population and, second, stability-enhancing in that it limits the ability of coalition partners to pressure the government unfairly. Direct election brings together two normally antagonistic qualities: greater expressiveness *as well as* greater governability. The key to this unusual balance lies in the position of the Prime Minister who, owing his position to popular election rather than to a parliamentary majority, can effectively rebuff the immoderate demands of coalition partners. There is then a piquant paradox to our conclusions: in the old system, when numerically large coalition-forming parties faced numerically small coalition partners, this did not translate automatically into stable, effective government; in the new system, when smaller coalition-makers face larger coalition-partners, stability and effectiveness are nevertheless achieved through the agency of a directly elected Prime Minister.

What Might Have Happened Without Direct Election?

What might have happened in the 1996 elections had roughly similar results been obtained under the old system. Without entering into grisly detail, the rising *deja vu* images of patently corrupt deals, of political "clearance sales," of extravagant prices paid for coalitional services rendered, of the few dominating the many, are enough to induce shudders. Given his party's greater support among the Knesset fractions, Netanyahu, in all likelihood, would have been called upon to form the government, and it probably would

have been one very similar to the one that today rules the State of Israel. The differences would have been 1) in the time it took to create, 2) in the spectacular price the smaller parties exacted, 3) in the popular revulsion at the spectacle, and 4) in the vulnerability of the government to political extortion even after it had been sworn in.

For it must be understood that past spectacles would have returned — with a vengeance. Israeli politics has become increasingly divided and ideologically fraught, to the point of tragic political assassination. Both sides perceive the issues in contention as life and death matters, as determining the very character of the Jewish state. In such a charged and pivotal moment, each of the large parties would be willing to pay virtually any price to have *its* vision of a future Israel triumph over that of its rival. Given the momentous stakes involved, religious gurus, sectarian politicians and unscrupulous adventurers, by brokering their critical coalitional leverage, would determine the outcome of this most basic of struggles, while feathering their own nest in the process. The "logic of capitulation" would be irresistible.

From Cross-Cutting to Overlapping Cleavages

Over the course of the roughly three decades since the Six-Day War, Israel has moved from being a country marked by (what political scientists call) "cross-cutting cleavages" to one that is increasingly characterized by "overlapping cleavages." In the mid-1960s, the degree of correlation between the major Israeli socio-demographic categories such as religiosity, ethnic origin, income and education, on the one hand, and one's political views, on the other, were relatively weak. Religiosity, for example, was entirely compatible with dovish views. The Haredi world, to take one concrete illustration, was not notably aligned with either dovish or hawkish positions. In varying degrees, much the same holds for the other enumerated categories.

This is the world of "cross-cutting cleavages" in which knowledge of one's socio-demographic profile is an unreliable predictor of one's political views. "Complex identities," in which assorted attributes correlate with diverse political views, are abundantly present. Because cleavages do not "aggregate," i.e., because specific political views are not held by groups with recurrent and predictable sets of characteristics, political contention tends to be moderate, more in the consensual than the conflictual style.

Overlapping cleavages, by contrast, tend to generate contentious, conflict-ridden societies. Here, cleavages

aggregate: resentments are piled one upon another, disaffection in one area tends to inflame and amplify bitterness in others. Predictable sets of characteristics go together with predictable political positions so that the perception of an "us" ranged against a "them" comes to predominate.

It is toward this unenviable position that Israel has been moving. The correlation between political views and "attribute packages" has reached high levels of statistical significance. Religiosity, Sephardic ethnic origin, lower income, and moderate to low educational attainments each correlate with hawkish, right-wing views. When they are aggregated, the degree of predictive power becomes quite formidable. By contrast, liberal/secular views, Ashkenazic ethnic origin, middle and higher income, and higher educational attainments correlate with dovish, left-wing views. Similarly, when they are aggregated, prediction enjoys a high degree of accuracy.

Pitted against each other and roughly equal in numbers, the acrimonious and ideologically overheated political style necessarily intensifies. Because the Knesset is elected proportionately, it mirrors this rancorous divide with great faithfulness, threatening to undermine the common basis of Israeli politics. As such, its ability to provide focused and steady leadership is seriously impaired. It becomes the arena of struggle and division, not the focus of resolute direction and stability. A political system resting on slim,

inconstant, and often volatile majorities in the Knesset is, therefore, in danger of losing both its balance and its legitimacy.

Since so many will owe so much to so few in the formation of coalitions, the threat of political extortion, recurrent crises, and popular demoralization looms large. As parliamentary divisions deepen, the more necessary it becomes to provide for a decisive, extra-parliamentary voice of authority. A directly elected Prime Minister, resting on a popular vote of confidence, goes far toward providing such a voice of leadership. Secure in office, reasonably immune from sectarian pressures, although unable to dismiss parliamentary and party interests out of hand, a directly elected Prime Minister promises the steadying hand that is mandatory in an increasingly stormy political sea.

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