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EXERCISING SOVEREIGNTY: THE ISRAELI ELECTIONS OF 1988

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Israel at the Polls: Civic Pride and Total Participation / What Happened? / How Did the Ultra-Orthodox Do It? / What of the Future?

Israel at the Polls: Civic Pride and Total Participation

To this observer, the routine of voting never fails to arouse the deepest emotions of civic pride. Tuesday's election in Israel was no exception. In Israel, still forty years young as a state, the act of voting still has that special quality of civic ritual which has powerful consequences. The assembly of the entire people in the course of one day, each in his or her neighborhood, to cast their votes that will determine who governs for some extended period in Israel (approximately four years under normal circumstances), is today's equivalent of the general assembly of the entire community, under conditions of modern democracy where all but the smallest micro-states

are too large to maintain government in the Athenian agora or at the gates of the biblical city.

The exercise of popular sovereignty is a powerful, exciting, yet sobering act. In Israel where neighbors are not anonymous and it is expected that one will invite the co-owners in one's condominium to one's weddings and bar mitzvahs, gathering at the polls is an extension of that social relationship to the neighborhood as a whole. One sees and greets those familiar faces who stand next to you in the neighborhood grocery, whom you pass on the street in the course of the day, but whose names you might not know.

At the same time the act is a real one; it is no empty ritual. In the quiet of the polling booth each and every

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