

Mordechai LEVY

Yezreel Valley College

ORCID: 0009-0002-7223-6891

## The Demise of the Left Parties in Israel: From Party Identification to a Negative Partisanship

**Abstract:** The left parties are the oldest political institutions in Israel. They were founded before the establishment of the State and were the dominant political force in its first decades. However, since the 1990s, there has been a consistent decline in their power, to the point where, in the last Knesset elections held in 2022, the left parties barely passed the threshold. This article explains the decline of the left parties and attempts to answer where the voters went. A combination of several local and global events that occurred in recent years caused the left parties to distance themselves from the narrative of Zionist Socialism characterizing them and to adopt a new narrative, which less inspires identification of Jewish voters. The article's main argument is that the voters did not disappear but only changed their political behavior from a state of party identification and voting for the left parties to a state of political opposition and voting against the rightist parties. To illustrate the pattern of behavior, voting data for the Knesset in two communities with different demographic characteristics are presented: Kibbutz Mizra, a socialist commune identified with left voters, and Beit-Shean, a town that is a stronghold of rightist voters. The conclusion is that the way for the left parties to return to dominance is through reintegrating the Jewish identity with the values of justice and equality.

**Key words:** Israel, left parties, electoral volatility, political narrative, party identification, negative partisanship

---

### Introduction

In the last elections to the Knesset, held in November 2022, the Israeli political left suffered its greatest defeat since the establishment of the State and, in essence, since the establishment of the workers' parties in the Land of Israel. The historic Labor Party received only four of the one hundred and twenty seats, and the other left-wing party, *Meretz*, did not pass the threshold. Intellectuals, commentators, and even members of the Knesset who until recently were part of the left-wing parties eulogized the political left in Israel. Only three decades ago, the left-wing parties won an unprecedented achievement and constituted almost half of the members of the Knesset. If so, what could have changed? What is happening to the political left in Israel? Why did the leftist voters abandon their parties? Examining the change in the relationship between the left parties and their electorate is necessary to understand the phenomenon. Although the political system in Israel seems to be driven by ideology, in practice, more than by differences in ideological perceptions, the political struggles reflect a struggle between competing social identities (Arian, Shamir, 1983, p. 156; Rahat et al., 2016, p. 106; Levy, 2016a, p. 198). The social identities are reflected in the parties' values that evoke identification, their leaders who bear representative qualities, and their vision that projects the image of the desired society in the future. If a party loses its voters, this can indicate a gap that

has opened between the narrative offered by the party and the social identity perceived by the voters. This article suggests the erosion of the narrative of the left-wing parties as one of the leading causes of the distancing of left-wing voters and the change in their voting patterns. The article's main argument is that left-wing voters have changed their political practice, from voting for a left-wing party that presents their social identity to voting against right-wing parties that offer the opposite identity.

### The Zionist Socialism

The political left in Israel preceded the establishment of the State. The first workers' parties were founded as early as 1905 by Jewish immigrants imbued with ideals and a desire to repair the world and build a new Jewish society. The understanding among these young pioneers was that a national solution alone would not be sufficient for the redemption of the Jewish people and that a social correction within society was also required, with the transformation of the Jews into a nation of workers (Bein, 1976, p. 28). Lacking a political center that needed to be conquered, the workers' parties focused on improving the conditions of the Jewish workers and on creating diverse social services. In this way, the socialist parties could expand their influence in the Jewish community because many immigrants chose to exchange political support for social services (Horowitz, Lissak, 1977, p. 137). In 1930, the "Workers' Party of the Land of Israel" (*Mapai*) was founded, and it would become the dominant party in Israeli politics. *Mapai* was able to abandon the socialist values a little in favor of the national ideas, therefore creating a political doctrine that appealed to a broader section of the Jewish public (Arian, 1997, p. 109). This combination of Zionism and Socialism is the one that would be the core of the ideology of the Zionist left: on the one hand, an aspiration to establish an independent Jewish state, and on the other, the ambition to create an equal and just society. Beyond the party's capacity and control over capital and human resources, the secret of *Mapai's* success lay in its ability to spark enthusiasm around a political vision deeply rooted in Jewish culture. The narrative of a people returning to their homeland and renewing their sovereignty in the spirit of the Jewish Prophets had great power, and it served as a platform for the building of Jewish society in the Land of Israel.

Three motifs comprise the narrative of Zionist Socialism. The first motif is the socialist ideology. As its name suggests, *Mapai* is a workers' party that belongs to the association of social democratic parties, and until recently, it was even a member of the Socialist International.<sup>1</sup> In economic terms, *Mapai* advocated for a centralized economy controlled by the government, public ownership of the means of production, and a welfare State. This ideology is also reflected in the party's symbol, which combines the red color identified with the workers with the wheat ears logo representing the farmers. The second motif is Jewish nationalism. The founders of the workers' parties came to Israel as part of the Zionist movement that worked to establish a Jewish State. They believed that the national project required not only transforming the

---

<sup>1</sup> In the year 2018 the Labor Party withdrew its membership because of the organization's decision to support the BDS organization working against Israel.

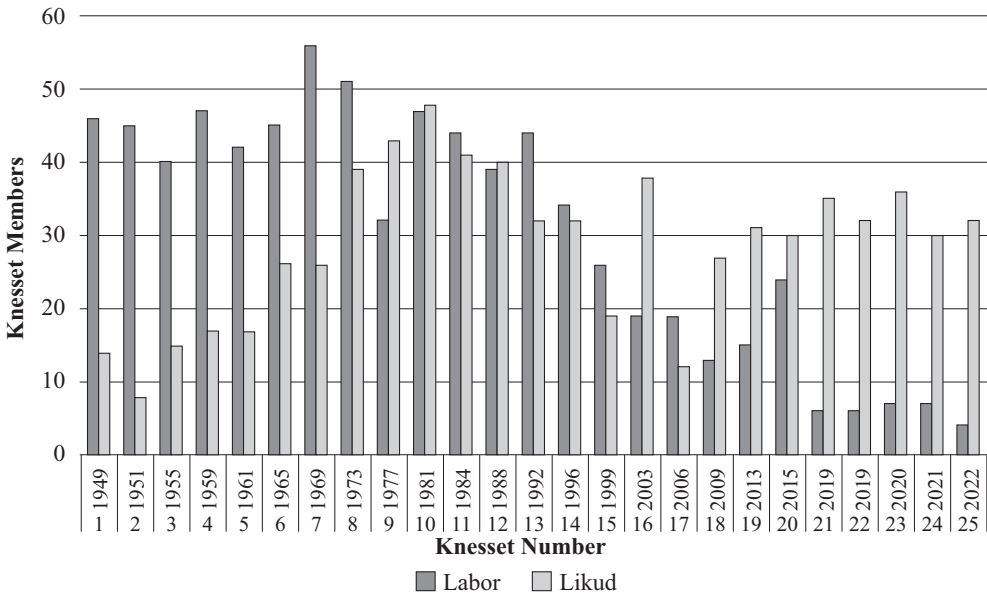
Jews into a nation of workers but also restoring the ancient Hebrews, which would tie them to the land and give them historical significance. Therefore, not just any worker but a Hebrew Jewish worker who speaks the language of the Bible and returns to the land of his ancestors is recruited to establish Jewish communities in the land of Israel. The last motif is a flexible and pragmatic political practice. This *realpolitik* approach placed *Mapai* in the center of the political array. It gave it flexibility in assembling the coalition and collaborations with almost all the other parties in the Jewish community. The party advocated for religious freedom but cooperated with the *Mafdal* (National Religious Party). In the economy, the party supported Socialism but was willing to sit in a coalition with bourgeois parties. On the issue of foreign affairs and security, the party worked to realize the vision of a Jewish state. Still, it demonstrated a willingness for territorial compromise and establishing an Arab state alongside Israel. Since different parties present different narratives regarding society and its nature, success or failure depends on how much the voter agrees with the given narrative (Sheafer et al., 2011, p. 318). Therefore, just as the dominance of Zionist Socialism in the first decades can indicate the support for the presented narrative, the erosion of its status suggests the loss of this support.

### The Demise of the Left Parties

It is possible to describe the political history of Israel as a process of the erosion of the hegemony of the Zionist left-wing party, *Mapai*, in parallel to the gradual strengthening of the power of the Zionist right-wing party, *Likud* (Arian, 1990, p. 131), as can be seen in Figure Number 1. The decline in the Zionist left occurred gradually over the years, influenced by the demographic and social changes that Israeli society experienced. In the first thirty years of the State, *Mapai* was the dominant party in the political system in Israel. In the Knesset elections, it won the majority of votes by a considerable margin compared to the other parties, and its position was never questioned. Since only *Mapai* could form a coalition and build a government, the other parties competed among themselves to partner with it. In addition, *Mapai* enjoyed great prestige because it led the Jewish people in its struggle for independence, and the achievement of establishing the State is credited to it. The overlap between the State and the party was so substantial that the public perceived any criticism against the party as criticism against the State (Goldberg, 1992, p. 34). The erosion of dominance began to appear during the Six-Day War in 1967. The national crisis that preceded the war led the ruling party, *Mapai*, to form an emergency government with the *Herut* Party. In this way, the right wing in Israel won the legitimacy of a ruling party for the first time. In addition, the consent of the left-wing government to allow Jewish settlement in territories conquered in the war strengthened the political right, which advocated the idea of a whole Land of Israel. The Yom Kippur War in 1973 and its results catalyzed the end of *Mapai's* dominance. The military failure and the heavy price that Israeli society paid in this war undermined the public's confidence and contributed to the understanding that political change is needed. In 1977, a political upheaval took place when, for the first time, the left parties lost power to the right. In the 1980s, the political system in Israel underwent realignment and stabilized

in a bipolar structure of two large parties, similar in size, the *Likud*<sup>2</sup> Party and the Labor<sup>3</sup> Party. The close struggle pushed the two main parties to differentiate themselves and introduced the distinctions of right and left into the political discourse. From this moment on, the *Likud* has worked to create a negative image for the political identity of the “left,” linking it to the old establishment, the security failures, and all the economic and social problems in the State (Arian, Shamir, 2018, p. 39).

**Figure 1. The Representation of the Labor and Likud Parties in the Knesset 1949–2022**



Source: Knesset Website – Elections Results.

The year 1992 can mark a watershed moment regarding the status of the Zionist left parties. After a decade of political deadlock with the *Likud* Party, the left had reacquired the trust of the Israeli public. The Labor Party, under the leadership of Yitzhak Rabin, won an overwhelming victory of 44 seats, and together with the *Meretz* Party, the Zionist Left was represented by 56 members in the Knesset. However, as shown in Figure 2, this year was the last time the left won a meaningful achievement. From this point onward, there was a consistent decline in the power of the left parties, and in the last elections in 2022, the Labor Party barely received four seats, while the *Meretz* Party did not pass the threshold. From a sociological point of view, the left-wing voters did not disappear; what changed was the left-wing parties, which seemed to have lost their way while adopting a new political narrative that inspired much less identification on the part of the Israeli voter. It is possible to identify several global and local events that undermined the narrative of Zionist Socialism since the 1990s.

<sup>2</sup> In 1973 *Herut* united with other national parties and established the *Likud* party.

<sup>3</sup> In 1969 *Mapai* united with another workers’ party and changed its name to the *Labor* party. In 1969 there was the technical unification of all the workers’ parties under the name *Maarach*.

*The collapse of the Soviet Union.* The end of 1991 saw the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the leading ideological alternative competing with the capitalism of the West. This event caused a shake-up in the left-wing parties. It damaged their self-confidence and belief in the rightness of their way since the public saw the political collapse as proof that the socialist order had failed in its ability to organize society, especially compared to the prosperity and standard of living created by capitalism. In addition, the collapse of the communist regimes allowed looking inside and gaining an impression of what happened inside those countries, a reality hidden for years. The picture of corruption, governmental violence, and oppression caused a shock and further eroded the image of the left-wing parties. The first moves to extract Israel's economy from the socialist perception began as early as 1977, after the governmental upheaval in which the *Likud* party came to power, except that this time, it was the left-wing parties that distanced themselves from the socialist model and embraced the ideas of the free market. A look at the Labor Party platform from 1997 demonstrates the change that the party experienced in its economic perception. The party platform states that: "The party supports a free economy based on private ownership, free competition, and minimal intervention" (Kenig, Rahat, 2022, p. 203). Another example of the withdrawal from the socialist model is the change in the attributes of the representatives of the left parties in the Knesset. In the first years, many members of the Knesset of the left came from cooperative agricultural communities, waving the flag of the Hebrew proletariat (Levy, 2016b, p. 237). In contrast, in recent years, the leadership of the left-wing parties represents the Tel Aviv bourgeoisie, most of whom are economically established, engage in liberal professions and live in the big city. The loss of the socialist characteristic in the narrative of the left parties distanced them from the struggle for the weaker groups in society and left them without an up-to-date vision for dealing with the problems of the economy and inequality in Israeli society.

*The assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin.* On November 4, 1995, three shots were fired into the back of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, ending his life and the path of the Labor Party. Only three years beforehand, Rabin had led the Labor Party to victory in the elections, when he enjoyed great popularity in the public. Rabin's determination to advance towards a historic peace process with the Palestinians awakened strong opposition among the right, which found it difficult to accept a Palestinian government in the territories of the Land of Israel, thus leading in the end to the assassination. The assassination of Rabin damaged the Labor Party twice over. First, it left the Labor Party in a leadership void, without a leading figure to enter his shoes and consolidate the leftist camp. The succession struggles for the leadership led to frequent changes and internal conflicts within the party, which weakened its cohesion. For example, between 1995 and 2022, there were no less than nine different heads of the Labor Party. Second, the assassination of Rabin also thwarted his political path to a territorial compromise with the Palestinians. A few months after the assassination, Binyamin Netanyahu succeeded in coming to power while using harsh propaganda against the left-wing parties and questioning their legitimacy (Greenfield, 2017, p. 76). The outcome was that the peace process with the Palestinians was stopped, Israel's political positions hardened, and the *Likud* replaced the left-wing government again.

*The Failure of the Camp David Conference.* In 1997, Ehud Barak was elected as head of the Labor Party. Barak, who had finished his term as Chief of Staff two years earlier,

succeeded in bypassing the Labor party veterans and positioning himself as the leader of the left camp. In the elections held in 1999, Ehud Barak defeated Binyamin Netanyahu and became the tenth Prime Minister of the State of Israel, raising many hopes of restoring the dominance of the leftist camp. With great courage, Ehud Barak worked to advance towards a comprehensive peace agreement in the Middle East. After his efforts to negotiate with Syria failed, Barak turned to the Palestinian arena. Thus, at the beginning of July 2000, the “Camp David” Conference was convened under the auspices of the President of the United States, Bill Clinton, when it awakened many expectations in the public. Aspiring to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Ehud Barak presented to Yasser Arafat, the chairman of the Palestinian Authority, a bold and far-reaching plan from the viewpoint of the State of Israel, including concessions on core issues considered taboo in Jewish society.

Nevertheless, the Palestinians rejected the proposal outright and were unwilling to move towards a historic compromise. Thus, after two weeks of talks, the Camp David Conference failed (Kenig, Rahat, 2022, p. 161). Upon his return from the United States, the disappointed Ehud Barak delivered a speech in which he announced to the Israeli public that in his many efforts to end the conflict, he had not found a partner for peace.<sup>4</sup> Barak’s declaration, along with the renewal of the wave of Palestinian terrorism, removed the Palestinian issue from the political agenda and moved the Israeli public to the right. In this way, the political path of the left in Israel came to an end.

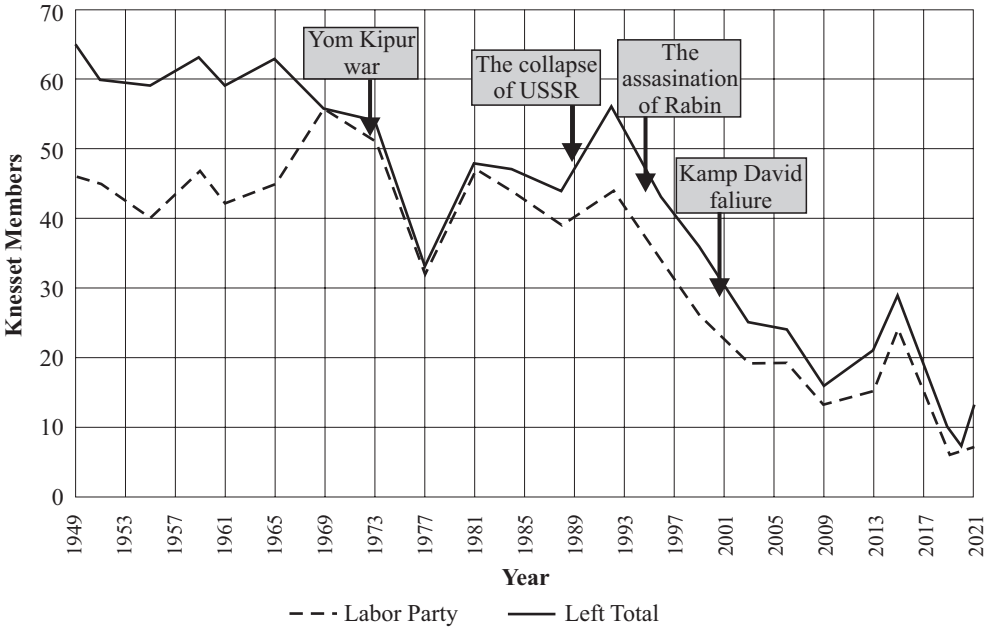
*Distance from the Jewish identity.* In 2017, during a meeting with students, Avi Gabai, the chair of the Labor Party, stated, “The people of the left have forgotten what it is to be Jews”.<sup>5</sup> This expression can illustrate the mindset that a part of the Jewish public feels concerning the leftist parties today. The move away from Socialism and the neglect of the struggle for economic equality pushed the left parties to seek equality in other arenas. In this way, the battle for class equality was converted into a fight for the civil equality of disadvantaged groups in society, such as gender equality, equality for the LGBT community, and rights for migrant workers (Greenfield, 2017, p. 23). The liberal agenda paved the way into the heart of the new narrative. Still, they positioned the left parties more than once in a situation in which they had to choose between universal values on the one hand and Jewish values on the other: the freedom of movement versus the observance of the Sabbath, the freedom of conscience versus the adherence of kosher food, a policy that facilitates the acceptance of refugees versus the aspiration to secure the Jewish majority. The result of these struggles was a gradual distancing from the Jewish identity and the traditional electorate that sees it as a central part of their lives.

In the end, the three motifs that comprised the narrative of Zionist Socialism were gradually eroded as a result of the events that happened to the leftist parties in the last thirty years: the loss of the socialist component, the distancing from the Jewish identity, and the abandonment of the peace process. Without an updated political vision inspiring identification and leadership, the left lost its position, sliding from a status of party dominance and broad public support to the role of a marginal political player looking for its way and focusing on secondary issues in society.

<sup>4</sup> <https://news.walla.co.il/item/14068>.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-5042427,00.html>.

**Figure 2. The Demise of the Left Parties in the Knesset 1949–2021**



Source: Knesset Website – Elections Results.

### Party Identification and Negative Partisanship: Two Sides of the Coin

Towards the end of the previous century, signs of the weakening of the political system began to appear in several Western democracies. The social divisions that shaped the party map in the 20<sup>th</sup> century began to fade, and the political system began to stabilize along new cleavages. This is reflected in the weakening of the old parties, increasing voting volatility, and the emergence of new parties that work to promote a new agenda (Drummond, 2006, p. 629). The main reason for the instability is the decline in party identification (Dalton et al., 2002, p. 39). Campbell and colleagues (1960) presented in their book *The American Voter* that party identification is a central variable in understanding the voter’s behavior. Party identification is a psychological component that derives from the individual’s strong identification with a social group. The party offers the voter a mental map with a distinction between enemies and friends and consolidated political preferences. Beyond the political program it offers, the party is, first of all, a type of members’ club with representative qualities, feelings of pride, and symbols of belonging, which contribute to a person’s self-image and help him place himself in the social space (Campbell et al., 1960, p. 146). The party identity is formed at a young age through political socialization processes, and in most cases, it reflects the social divisions in society. Since the voter sees the party as a part of him, it follows that voting for the party in the elections constitutes an act of ratifying his social identity, similar to the payment of membership fees in a social club. This relationship can explain the partisan loyalty of the voter towards a party, which not only does not change depending on the circumstances,

no matter how serious they may be, but also, in many cases, grows more robust over the years. At the same time, social identity can also appear negatively when it includes all the characteristics the person does not or does not wish to have. The negative identity alone can also serve as a strong enough social category to unite a group and motivate the person to act against other groups (Zhong et al., 2008, p. 794). In the political dimension, the negative identity is expressed in the voter's intense hostility towards another party, so he will never vote for it. In countries with a multi-party system, the negative party identity can be expressed in hostility to several parties or even hostility towards a particular political camp (Bankert, 2021, p. 467). A voter can, therefore, have two political identities at the same time, each of which has the power to push him to action: the party identification expressed in loyalty to a particular party and the negative party identity, which is hostility towards another party (Caruana et al., 2015, p. 776). The combination of the two identities creates two types of voters: closed partisans, voters who have party identification and loyalty towards one party, together with a negative party identity and hostility towards another, and negative partisans, who choose to have only a negative party identity (Rose, Mishler, 1998, p. 223). The decline in party identification, as indeed began to happen during the 20<sup>th</sup> century in many democracies, weakened the voters' degree of commitment towards the parties, leaving them with only one negative political identity. In this way, many voters became negative partisans, evident in political behavior mainly based on opposition to other parties.

### **From Party Identification of the Left to a Negative Partisanship against the Right**

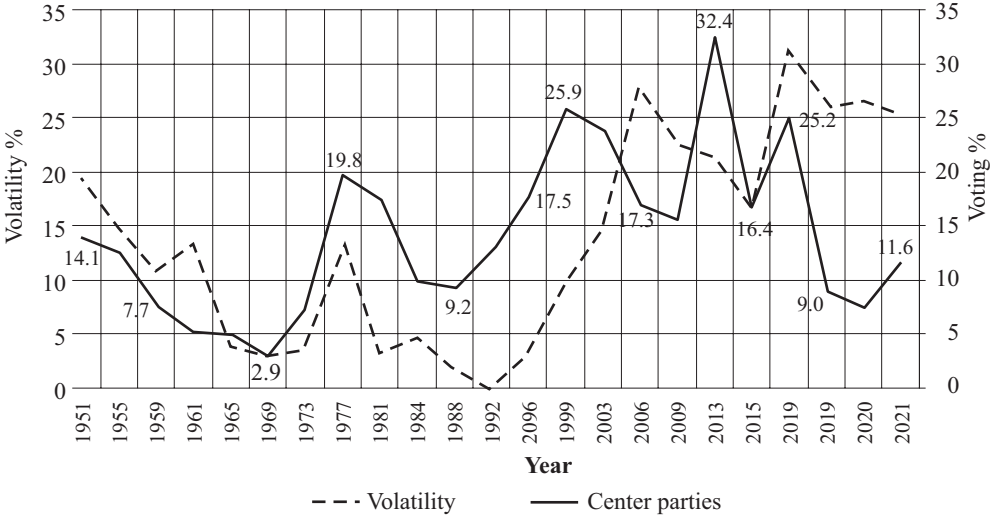
Since the 1990s, the State of Israel has experienced disorder in the political system. The weakening is reflected in repeated elections, the decrease in the turnout, and the polarization of the party system. The two major parties, *Likud* and Labor, which served as anchors in stabilizing the party system, weakened while the influence of the sectoral parties steadily increased. The cause of the instability is the unstable behavior of the voters, who changed their vote between one election and another, thus not only harming the representation of the old parties but also allowing the entry of new parties (Kenig, Rahat, 2022, p. 18). The instability of a parliamentary system is calculated by electoral volatility (Pedersen, 1979, p. 4). This index shows the percentage of voters who changed their vote between two consecutive elections. Figure 3 shows the volatility of Israeli voters over the years. During the dominance period of *Mapai*, the voting patterns were stable, and the percentage of electoral volatility was meager. The increase in volatility in 1977 reflects the change in government and the shift of some voters from the Labor Party to the *Likud* Party. In the 1980s, the political system again stabilized in a stable bipolar structure, and therefore, the volatility decreased accordingly. However, starting from the 1990s, there is a trend of an increase and sharp changes in voting patterns, which reached a peak of 32% in 2013.

A phenomenon that complements the electoral volatility is the increase in voting for the center parties, as seen in Figure 3. The center parties are new parties that enter the parliamentary system while the status of the old parties is eroding. The secret of their power is their fresh image and the promise of a new politics without party corruption. Without a clear ideology and a party mechanism, the center parties offer an institute



around a leader, usually a well-known public figure, and a sharp criticism of the old parties. Their inability to present a coherent narrative and a clear political identity makes it difficult to produce stability and party loyalty over time. Therefore, shortly after being elected to the Knesset, they lose support, break up, and give way to new centrist parties. These parties function as a tool for political mobility, like a “train station,” where passengers get off or get on but do not stay (Arian, Shamir, 2018, p. 44).

**Figure 3. Electoral Volatility and Voting for the Center Parties 1951–2021**



Source: Kenig, Rahat, 2022, p. 13.  
 Knesset Website – Elections Results

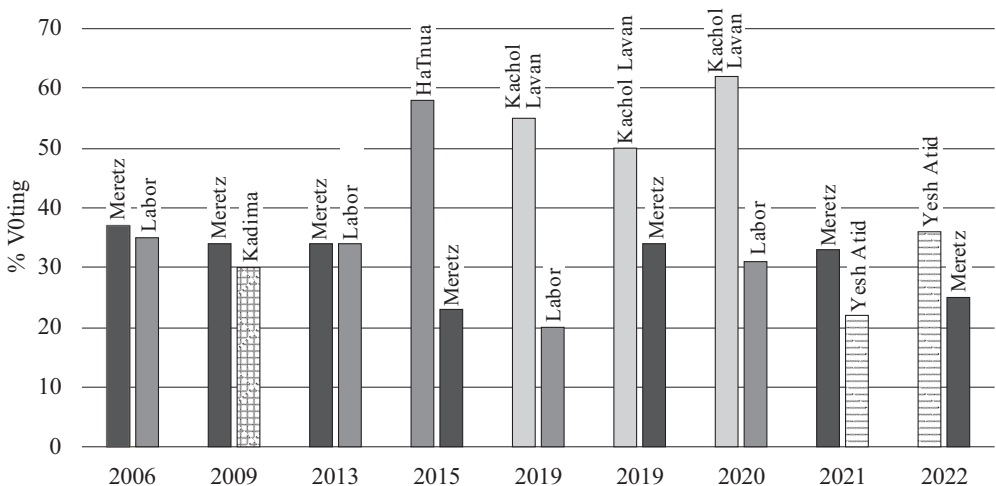
A comprehensive look at the process of weakening the Israel party system since the 1990s – the decline in the power of the left parties, an increase in the electoral volatility, and a rise in the power of the centrist parties – makes it possible to decipher the change that the voters of the left parties in Israel experienced. Until the 1990s, these voters were considered closed partisans, that is, party identification with a left-wing party together with a negative party identity towards the right-wing parties. This political behavior was made possible because of the adoption of the narrative of Zionist Socialism, and it guaranteed broad and consistent political support over time. The erosion of the left’s narrative since the 1990s stripped away the voters’ party identification, leaving them with only a negative identity that can be called “just not the right.” In the absence of a party with which to identify, voting became a strategic move when the primary concern directing it was to prevent the right’s success. In this sense, the center parties have become an address for the voters of the left and a means of electoral opposition to the right. The short lifespan of the centrist parties and the emergence of new parties explain the steadily increasing electoral volatility.

An analysis of the voting behavior of Kibbutz Mizra’s members in recent years can reveal the transition to a negative party identity. Kibbutz Mizra is an agricultural community located in northern Israel. Like the other Kibbutzim, it was established as a commune to realize in practice the socialist ideas. As required from an ideological commune,

the members of the Kibbutz had a clear political identity and loyalty to the workers' parties that began even before the establishment of the State and lasted for decades. It is unsurprising that until the end of the 1990s, 100% of the votes of the Kibbutz members in the Knesset elections were awarded to the socialist parties. However, the decline in the prestige of the left-wing parties did not escape even the members of the Kibbutzim. Figure 4 presents the voting patterns of Kibbutz Mizra in the last nine elections, where the two parties that won the most votes in the Kibbutz are shown each year. In this way, it is possible to obtain an impression of the political preferences of the Kibbutz members. As can be seen, the voting pattern changes in almost every election, and there is no loyalty to a particular party or electoral consistency. This behavior can be understood as strategic voting, meaning a vote for the alternative with the highest chance of winning over Binyamin Netanyahu and the right-wing coalition that supports him; in other words, it is not a vote for the left but mainly against the right. The weakening political loyalty to the left-wing parties and the desire to influence the future coalition led the Kibbutz members to vote for the centrist parties. Over the past fourteen years, the members of the Kibbutz have voted for three different center parties: *Kadima*, *Kachol Lavan*, and *Yesh Atid*, and to this, we can also add *HaTnua* Party that united with the Labor Party in a single list called the Zionist Camp for the 2015 elections. When a certain party is perceived as potentially cooperating with the right-wing bloc, support for it weakens in favor of a party that presents more negative messages against the right-wing coalition.

This was the case in 2020 when the political tie brought Benny Gantz and the *Kachol Lavan* list to form a joint coalition with the right-wing bloc while breaking his party into two factions. Many left-wing voters felt betrayed by his alliance with Binyamin Netanyahu, and in the elections that followed, the support for the *Kachol Lavan* list and Benny Gantz, who until recently was considered the hope of left-wing voters, plummeted in favor of Yair Lapid and his *Yesh Atid* party, who presented a more militant line towards cooperation with the right.

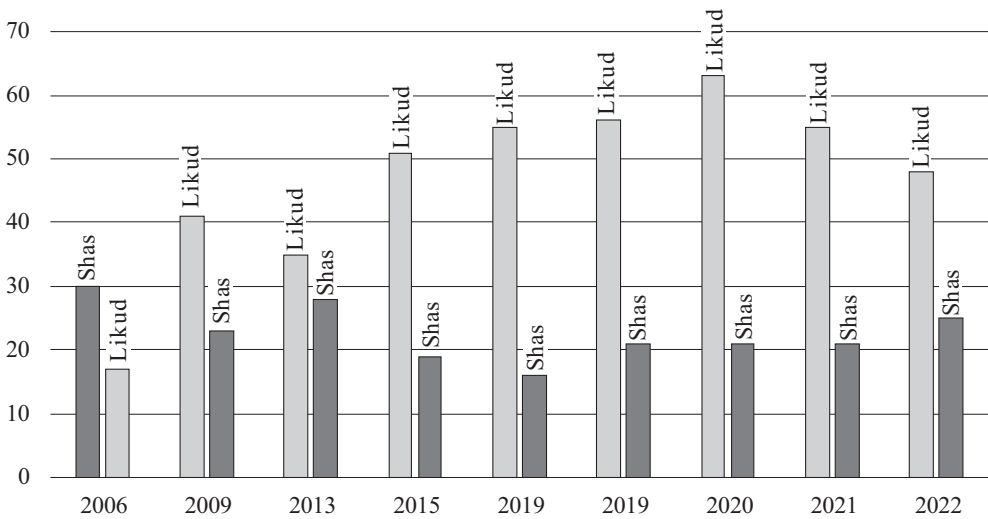
**Figure 4. The Two Main Parties in Kibbutz Mizra Knesset Voting 2006–2022**



Source: Central Elections Committee Website, 2006–2022.

In contrast to the left-wing parties that have lost their identity, the right-wing parties in Israel present an ethnocentric narrative anchored in Jewish tradition and appeal to the cultural logic of the conservative voters. The centrality of the Jewish tradition, the belief in the exclusive possession of the Land of Israel, and the perception that the whole world is hostile to the Jews are central characteristics in the narrative of the right. The solidarity of many people with the ethnocentric narrative explains the political loyalty of right-wing voters to these parties. Not far from Kibbutz Mizra is the city of Beit-Shean, a small town where most of the residents are Jews, mainly from Arab countries, who were settled there in the 1950s. The *Mizrachi*<sup>6</sup> sectarian and traditional Jewish identities are also reflected in voting for the Knesset. Figure 5 shows the voting preference of the residents of Beit-Shean in the last nine elections, where also, in this case, the two parties that won the most votes in the Knesset voting are shown. As can be seen, the voting patterns of the residents of Beit-Shean are stable, consistent, and hardly change over the years, unlike the behavior of left-wing voters. The two parties receiving support are good at representing the social identities of the residents of Beit-Shean: the *Shas* party, which denotes the *Mizrachi* sectarian identity, and the *Likud* party, which reflects the Jewish identity. This voting behavior includes positive and negative political identities: both support the traditional Jewish narrative and oppose the bloc of left-wing parties perceived as not Jewish enough.

Figure 5. The Two Main Parties in Beit-Shean Knesset Voting 2006–2022



Source: Central Elections Committee Website, 2006–2002.

### Back to the Basics

The decline in the status of the parties is not unique only to Israel. Still, the findings of a comparative study show that in Israel, the weakening of the parties occurs more

<sup>6</sup> Mizrachi, from the Hebrew word for east, refers to Jews whose origin is in the east, the countries of the Middle East and North Africa.

acutely than in other democracies (Shamir, Rahat, 2022, p. 12). It is possible to point to the personalization process of politics in Israel as another factor that accelerated the erosion of the parties. Personalization makes politics more personal; it increases the leader's importance at the group's expense and makes the party redundant (Rahat, 2019, p. 14). In the past, the parties were organizations headed by leaders, and the political affiliation was towards the party; however, today, some leaders have parties at their disposal, and party identification translates into personal loyalty towards the leader. The absence of a dominant leadership since the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin has impaired the ability of the left-wing parties to produce the same personal political commitment, as indeed developed in the *Likud* party around the leadership of Binyamin Netanyahu. Without party identification, the left voters had an opposing political identity. It also took on a personal dimension of hostility towards the head of the right-wing camp, as often shown in the slogan: "Just not Bibi."

However, beyond the lack of a leading leader, the main problem of the left-wing parties was that it was unclear to them what to represent. The success of the left-wing parties in the past lay in their ability to present an understandable narrative with which to identify; not only an action plan of what needs to be done but mainly an identity component of who we are and why of all places in the world should we live here. The identity of the Hebrew worker created meaning; it gave a sense of home and was the driving force behind Zionist Socialism. The political changes that have occurred in recent decades have caused the leftist parties to lose their identity and abandon the narrative that characterized them until then. The loss of the economic vision, the abandonment of the political path, and especially the distancing from the Jewish identity – all these together caused the old left voters to look for a new political home. Moreover, the relinquishment of the Jewish element in the new left vision allowed the right-wing parties to attribute it to themselves and update the Zionist identity to a more religious and traditional version. The one who took advantage of this trend and made a political fortune out of it is Binyamin Netanyahu, who, in his populist style, incited against the leftist camp and denied its legitimacy because it was not Jewish enough in the face of the right-wing parties who were presented as the exclusive messengers of the Jewish people (Filc, 2006, p. 187).

Hundreds of thousands of Israelis waving Israeli flags gathered on January 7, 2023, in Tel Aviv in protest against the planned reform of the judicial system. The demonstrations against Netanyahu and the right-wing governments are nothing new, but after a long time, in addition to the use of the opposing political identity, which was expressed in chants of "Just not Bibi," a positive social identity presented and voices in favor of a "Jewish and democratic state." The use of national symbols and Jewish identity in demonstrations against the right proves how much this characteristic is a central element in the political preference of the Jewish voter.

The liberal values that have become the issue most identified with the leftist parties in recent years cannot create a narrative that evokes identification from the public unless they are intertwined with the elements of a cultural logic known and understood by the voter. After all, if a rocket falls on a person's house, he has to understand why he should live in this piece of land, which is what the Jewish story can explain. If the left-wing parties wish to win back the support of the general public, then they will have to return to the Jewish story and integrate it into themselves. As with Zionist Socialism in the past, so

too today it is necessary to maintain the civil struggles of the left within the framework of justice and morality drawn from the sources of Israel.

### Author Contributions

Conceptualization: Mordechai Levy

Data curation: Mordechai Levy

Formal analysis: Mordechai Levy

Funding acquisition: Mordechai Levy

Software: Mordechai Levy

Writing – original draft: Mordechai Levy

Writing – review & editing: Mordechai Levy

**Competing interests:** The author have declared that no competing interests exist

### Bibliography

- Arian A. (1990), *Politics and government in Israel*, Zmora-Bitan Publishers, Tel-Aviv [Hebrew].
- Arian A. (1997), *The Second Republic: Politics in Israel*, Haifa University Press, Zmora-Bitan Publishers, Tel-Aviv [Hebrew].
- Arian A., Shamir M. (1983), *The primarily political functions of the Left-Right continuum*, “Comparative Politics”, vol. 15, no. 2, pp. 139–158.
- Arian A., Shamir M. (2018), *On mistaking a dominant party in a dealigning system*, in: *The Elections in Israel 2003*, eds. A. Arian, M. Shamir, pp. 27–52, Routledge.
- Bankert A. (2021), *Reflections on the past and present of research on partisan identity*, “Forum”, vol. 19, no. 3, pp. 459–480, <https://doi.org/10.1515/for-2021-2024>.
- Bein A. (1976), *History of the Jewish settlement in Israel*, Masada [Hebrew].
- Campbell A., Converse P. E., Miller W. E., Stokes D. E. (1960), *The American voter*, The University of Michigan Press.
- Caruana N. J., McGregor R. M., Stephenson L. B. (2015), *The power of the dark side: negative partisanship and political behaviour in Canada*, “Canadian Journal of Political Science/Revue canadienne de science politique”, vol. 48, no. 4, pp. 771–789, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0008423914000882>.
- Dalton R. J., McAllister I., Wattenberg M. P. (2002), *The Decline of Party Identifications*, in: *Parties without partisan: political change in advanced industrial democracies*, eds. R. J. Dalton, I. McAllister, M. P. Wattenberg, pp. 37–63, Oxford University Press.
- Drummond A. J. (2006), *Electoral volatility and party decline in Western democracies: 1970–1995*, “Political Studies”, vol. 54, no. 3, pp. 628–647, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9248.2006.00617.x>.
- Filc D. (2006), *Populism and Hegemony in Israel*, Resling, Tel-Aviv.
- Goldberg G. (1992), *Political parties in Israel – from mass parties to electoral parties*, Ramot – Tel-Aviv University [Hebrew].
- Greenfield T. (2017), *Collapse – The disintegration of the political left in Israel*, Miskal – Yedioth Aharonoth, Tel-Aviv [Hebrew].
- Horowitz D., Lissak M. (1977), *From Yishuv to statehood*, Am Oved, Tel-Aviv [Hebrew].
- Kenig O., Rahat G. (2022), *The parties in Israel 1992–2021*, The Israel Democracy Institute.

- Levy M. (2016a), *Changes in Israeli collective identity as a source of tension in the political arena*, "Przeład Politologiczny", vol. 1, pp. 193–204.
- Levy M. (2016b), *The Kibbutzim as collective political identity under a change*, Doctoral dissertation, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznan.
- Pedersen M. N. (1979), *The dynamics of European party systems: changing patterns of electoral volatility*, "European Journal of Political Research", vol. 7, no. 1, pp. 1–26.
- Rahat G. (2019), *The decline of the group and the rise of the star(s): from party politics to personal politics*, The Israel Democracy Institute.
- Rahat G., Hazan R. Y., Ben-Nun Bloom P. (2016), *Stable blocs and multiple identities: The 2015 Elections in Israel*, "Representation", vol. 52, no. 1, pp. 99–117, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00344893.2016.1190592>.
- Rose R., Mishler W. (1998), *Negative and positive party identification in post-communist countries*, "Electoral Studies", vol. 17, no. 2, pp. 217–234, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0261-3794\(98\)00016-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0261-3794(98)00016-X).
- Shamir M., Rahat G. (2022), *Four elections in two years*, in: *The elections in Israel 2019–2021*, eds. M. Shamir, G. Rahat, pp. 1–24, Routledge.
- Sheafer T., Shenhav S. R., Goldstein K. (2011), *Voting for our story: A narrative model of electoral choice in multi-party systems*, "Comparative Political Studies", vol. 44, no. 3, pp. 313–338, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414010384372>.
- Zhong C. B., Phillips K. W., Leonardelli G. J., Galinsky A. D. (2008), *Negational categorization and intergroup behavior*, "Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin", vol. 34, no. 6, pp. 793–806, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167208315457>.

---

## Upadek partii lewicowych w Izraelu: od identyfikacji partii do negatywnej stronniczości

### Streszczenie

Partie lewicowe są najstarszymi instytucjami politycznymi w Izraelu. Powstały przed utworzeniem państwa i były dominującą siłą polityczną w pierwszych dziesięcioleciach jego istnienia. Jednak od lat 90. XX w. następuje systematyczny spadek ich władzy do tego stopnia, że w ostatnich wyborach do Knesetu, które odbyły się w 2022 r., partie lewicowe ledwo przekroczyły próg. Artykuł wyjaśnia upadek partii lewicowych i próbuje odpowiedzieć, dokąd poszli wyborcy. Splot kilku wydarzeń o charakterze lokalnym i globalnym, jakie miały miejsce w ostatnich latach, spowodował, że partie lewicowe zdystansowały się od charakteryzującej je narracji o syjonistycznym socjalizmie i przyjęły nową narrację, w mniejszym stopniu inspirującą do identyfikacji żydowskich wyborców. Głównym argumentem artykułu jest to, że wyborcy nie zniknęli, a jedynie zmienili swoje zachowania polityczne ze stanu identyfikacji partyjnej i głosowania na partie lewicowe do stanu opozycji politycznej i głosowania przeciwko partiom prawicowym. Aby zilustrować schemat zachowań, zaprezentowano dane dotyczące głosowania w Knesecie w dwóch społecznościach o różnej charakterystyce demograficznej: kibucu Mizra – gminie socjalistycznej utożsamianej z wyborcami lewicy oraz Beit-Shean – mieście będącym bastionem wyborców prawicy. Wniosek jest taki, że sposobem na powrót partii lewicowych do dominacji jest reintegracja tożsamości żydowskiej z wartościami sprawiedliwości i równości.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Izrael, partie lewicowe, zmienność wyborcza, narracja polityczna, identyfikacja partyjna, negatywna stronniczość