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# How to Coerce a Multi-Dimensional System into a Undimensional Frame: Israel's 1996 Electoral Change

Hani Zubida* Gideon Doron†

*Herzliya Interdisciplinary Center, Israel, hzubida@idc.ac.il

†Tel Aviv University, Israel, gideond@post.tau.ac.il

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# How to Coerce a Multi-Dimensional System into a Undimensional Frame: Israel's 1996 Electoral Change*

Hani Zubida and Gideon Doron

**Abstract**

Political instability affects Israel's ability to govern itself. Many equate this instability with the problematic nature of its electoral institutions. This study examines the effects of the 1992 electoral institutions change by analyzing 1996 pre-election data and the actual 1999 electoral results. It argues that while policy-balancing theory and a decrease in the number of parties might have been a valid solution in a different context, in the Israeli case, due to its multi-dimensional political system, such an institutional change could not yield this outcome. Some concrete recommendations as to future changes are made.

**KEYWORDS:** Israeli elections, split voting, ticket-splitting, issue dimensions, voter behavior

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*Hani Zubida is an Assistant professor at the Lauder School of Government, Diplomacy and Strategy at the Herzliya Interdisciplinary Center, Israel. Gideon Doron is Associate Professor at the Department of Political Science, Tel Aviv University, Israel. We would like to thank Yael Ohayon, Abigail Amit and Adam Wolfson for their research assistance and Youssef Cohen, Martin Schain, Fany Yuval and Aviva Zeltzer-Zubida for their helpful comments and suggestions on earlier drafts.

## Introduction

Israel is a multi-party parliamentary democracy evidencing protracted governability problems. Since the first election to the Constitutional Assembly in 1949, when the 120 elected members declared themselves as the first Parliament (Knesset), 32 governments have ruled. Israeli policymakers and academic experts have therefore been engaged in deliberate attempts to reform the electorate system so as to induce stability. One such successful attempt occurred in 1992, when a new law required voters to cast two votes, one for the prime minister and the other for their preferred party. That law, popularly known as the "direct election to the Prime Minister" law; formally, *Basic Law: The Government (1992),* was first implemented in the 1996 election. It remained in effect for the 1999 general election and in 2001, when a "special election" to elect the prime minister took place. By the 2003 general elections, the system had reverted to the former voting scheme, whereby voters cast only one vote, for a party.

This article analyzes the 1996 elections to the 16th Knesset, the first time that the Israeli public was exposed to the possibility of splitting its votes in national-level elections. Furthermore, as a result of the majority vote system implemented in direct election for the prime minister, many voters confronted a new dilemma: choosing between a large number of candidates for the post. As shall be seen, the uncertainty that prevailed regarding voter behavior led leaders of the two major parties (Likud and Labor) to "buy off" real and potential competitors for the purpose of restricting the field to only two rivals. By investing efforts to maximize the probability of their election, they paid the price of a narrowed parliamentary base and a weakened capacity for rule. In other words, due to split voting between a PM and the party of their sincere choice, the PM was elected with a much smaller political base in the Knesset than necessary for effective rule.

Several theoretical questions are addressed in this analysis, the major ones being: How significant is the impact of differences in socio-political outlook/ideology on voter behavior? And, what effect does a systematic reduction in the number of prime ministerial candidates have on an election?[1]

Ticket-splitting during two post reform elections produced largely unexpected outcomes and a change in the Israeli voter's political behavior and attitudes. The structural change did not, however, improve governability: Because votes were split across 11 parties, the winner had to rely on a coalition of parties

[1] See Duverger Law (Duverger, 1954).

presenting opposing demands.[2] Given such an outcome, the question becomes whether one can construct a voting scheme that improves governability.

A description of the rationale for the 1992 electoral reform together with its effects on the 1996 and 1999 election outcomes are presented in the first part of the article. The second part provides a through examination of the 1999 election results in light of split-voting theories. Against the theoretical background and empirical analysis, part three reassesses the 1996 pre-election polls and its primary findings. The conclusion provides insights into possible future electoral changes.

## Electoral Change Outcomes, the 1996 and 1999 Elections

The 1996 election featured Israel's first serious electoral reform since its establishment. The outcomes of this reform have significant ramifications for the future of institutional politics in Israel. The premise that motivated many to advocate reform was that institutional change could strengthen governability and the executive branch's powers (Arian and Amir, 1997). Numerous proponents of the reform relied on the idea of decreasing the number of both candidates and parties, as suggested by Duverger (Duverger, 1954)[3]. Few, however, took into consideration the effect of the change on the distribution of voters' preferences especially when an additional choice option was made available (Doron, 1996). Moreover, few foresaw the crumbling of the political party structure and the growth of sectarian blocs (Korn, 1998).

The 1996 election results showed that the two major political parties in Israel, Likud and Labor, had lost significant portions of their electorates. When compared to the 1992 elections, Labor lost 7.2% of its electorate while Likud lost "only" 4.3%. In effect, however, Likud, the party in power between 1977 and 1992, had lost even more. Ten out of the party's 32 seats had been allocated to two of its coalition partners: Gesher and Tzomet. Likud had committed these seats to the two parties' leaders so as to ensure that the latter would not compete against its leader for the PM post. More importantly, the reform was driven by a majority of Knesset members backed by a grassroots movement of concerned citizens who wish to decrease the electoral base enjoyed by small, "blackmail-prone" sectarian parties representing population sectors such as ethnic groups and new

[2] For example Shas, the ultra-Orthodox party representing Oriental (Sephardic) Jews, was constantly competing with the National Religious Party over budgets and the issue of who best represented religious Jews.

[3] Duverger claims that a simple majority election system, with only one ballot (like the simple plurality rule applied in the United States) tends to shift the system to a two-party system (Duverger, 1954: 217).


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immigrants[4]. These small parties had managed to enter each Knesset and significantly affect public policy, way beyond their electoral weight[5].

The 1999 election outcomes bolstered the 1996 election results. Likud and Labor suffered further, even greater blows. Labor, running under the title One Israel, reinforced by Gesher and Meimad, lost another 7.3% of its 1996 supporters, whereas Likud suffered an 11.7% drop. As a result, the Israeli political system faced a novel political reality in which the two largest parties had together won less than 45% of the vote.[6] The revised electoral system thus failed to provide Israel with an executive whose power was greater than that achieved by previous governments. Moreover, it seemed that the new system was on its way to completely abolishing the two-bloc political system's parliamentary structure (Ventura and Shamir, 1989) by replacing it with an extremely fragmented system, that contained bolstered sectarian parties.

The supposed reform was nullified by the Knesset after the 2001 special election. Many questions were raised by this episode; here we focus on just one: Why was the premise at the core of the reform – that the new system would strengthen Israel's central government institutions – prove to be so divorced from the political reality? Stated differently, why did the new voting system introduce even greater instability and place the political system on the verge of executive paralysis? The next section addresses this question.

## Split-voting Theories and the Israeli Case

The 1996 elections provided Israeli voters with the choice of splitting their votes in national-level elections. Whereas the literature suggests few explanations for this phenomenon, there is wide agreement over the fact that when voters face the option of splitting their votes, some will do just that. The relevant question is, then, not whether there will be a split vote but, rather, how many voters will actually split their vote? The more complex, underlying issue refers to the considerations supporting the split-voting decision.

Among the explanations offered in the literature, those of Burden and Kimball (1998, 2002), Fiorina (1992, 1996), Jacobson (1990, 1997), Petrocik

[4] The grassroots movement's principle enemy had been the small ultra-Orthodox parties that "blackmailed" the government for additional budgetary allocations for their sector by threatening to provide or withdraw their support for its policies and legislation. The data refers to new immigrants from the 1990s, not to new immigrants from the 1970s.

[5] It is easy to see that this reform's goal was not obtained. In 1992, there were four parties with four seats or less in the Knesset. By 1996, there were five parties with five seats or less.

[6] The entire election data set was obtained from the official Knesset web site, which can be entered at this address: http://www.knesset.gov.il/description/heb/heb_mimshal_res.htm

(1991), and Petrocik and Doherty (1996) dominate.[7] The problem with these explanations is that most of the models are suited to the American two-party plurality electoral system almost exclusively; attempts to adjust them to European – and thus the Israeli – proportional representation schemes are somewhat problematic. The associated explanatory models may be grouped into three categories: (1) American structurally oriented models, (2) declining party significance models, and (3) policy balancing models.

The first category, based on the American institutional and electoral system, has been applied to Australian balloting (Rusk, 1970), gerrymandering (Campbell, 1997) and mid-term election (Jacobson, 1997). The second category covers explanations such as control over "presidential issues" by Republicans (Petrocik, 1991), the shift from ideology-centered to candidate-centered politics (Jennings & Markus, 1984; Wattenberg, 1998), weakening political ties between voters and political parties (Beck et al., 1992; Garand & Lichtl, 2000; Sigelman et al., 1997), the incumbency effect (Alvarez & Schousen, 1993; Burden & Kimball, 1998), candidate quality (Kimball, 1997) and incumbent approval rate (Mebane, 2000). The third category is based on the premise that voters split their votes in an attempt to reach a balanced government policy (Alesina & Rosenthal, 1989, 1995; Fiorina, 1992, 1996). According to this argument, by dividing control over government agencies among the different parties, voters ensure balanced decision making, devoid of extreme ideological bents.

Studies of split-voting outside the United States that have appeared in the literature (Bawn, 1999; Darcy and Marsh, 1994; Karp et al., 2002; Schoen, 1999)[8] often employed comparative methods to gain further insights into this phenomenon (Johnston et al., 2002; Zubida, 2006). As we shall show, the current study belongs to the third theoretical category, specially to Fiorina's "balancing model". We argue that with some adjustments, this model can be used to explain multiple-party voting dynamics.

At the foundations of Fiorina's model is the notion that voters' electoral behavior is consistent with to the so-called a "balancing principle". In other words, voters wishing to balance competing ideological and public policies do so by distributing authority over selected institutions among different parties. The original model featured a spatial analysis that provided a one-issue analysis of two types of voters, moderates and extremists. Moderates were voters who had positioned themselves around the center (e.g., the median voter) of a salient issue dimension. Their views were influenced by both factions active in the political

[7] The proposed explanations refer mainly to the American research framework. There are numerous other explanations, for example, those of DeVries and Tarrance (1972) and Beck et al. (1992), but these deal with only one case. They therefore do not provide a comprehensive explanatory framework.

[8] See also a special issue of *Electoral Studies*, (28), 2009, dedicated to this subject.


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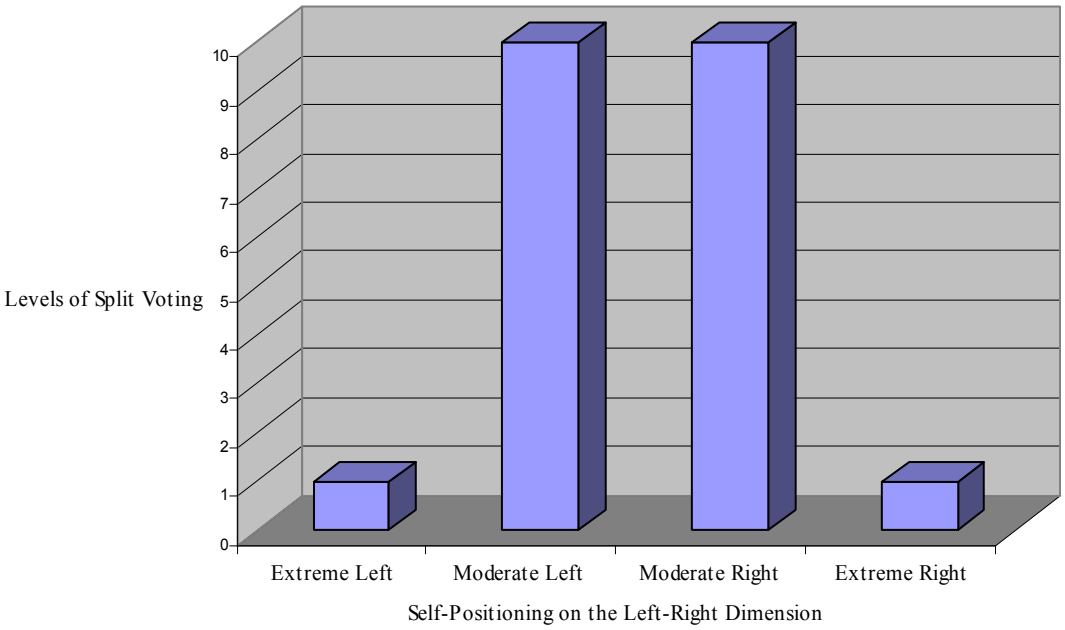
sphere, and their party identification was relatively low. Extremist voters were positioned at the edges of the same distribution; they were characterized by high levels of party identification and therefore unlikely to split their votes (Fiorina 1992, 1996). Figure 1 presents a graphic illustration of the model.

**Figure 1**
**Fiorina's Model "In Search of Moderation**




According to this model, moderate voters are more likely to split their vote than are extremist voters. In consequence, government's division in two branches ensures that most of the policies adopted will reflect a compromise between the two factions. Fiorina's model appears at first to explain the split-voting that occurred during Israel's 1996 and 1999 elections[9] due to the stress placed on the security dimension, which polarized the electorate into moderate and extremist voters. However, as shown below, an exclusive analytic stress on national security in the 1996 elections misses the roots of split-ticket voting among the Israeli electorate. Thus, unlike the American plurality-rule system, Israel's national prime ministerial electoral scheme allowed for a multiplicity of issue-dimensions to

[9] See Table 2 for additional data about Israeli 1996 split-ticket voting distributions.

surface in the vote for Knesset representation.[10] Disregarding this phenomenon implies missing one of the most important features of Israeli post institutional change politics.

The 1992 electoral reform therefore presented dual electoral choices to Israeli voters on the structural level: voting for the executive branch and voting for the legislative branch. Given these choices, the decision to run a prime ministerial candidate became especially significant for small sectarian parties. On the one hand, the new structure made the option of running their own prime ministerial candidate available to religious and ethnic parties. On the other hand, the electoral reform enhanced their bargaining leverage and improved their ability to promote their own policies in the pre-elections period and during coalition negotiations related to formation of the government. That is, the reform reinforced the prime minister's dependence on the multi-party Knesset's approval of executive decisions.

From a different perspective, the new institutional setting imposed some unfamiliar constraints on the number of viable prime ministerial candidates. The Two-Stage-Majority Rule, where only the two front-runners at end of the first round could face each other in the second round, ensured that voters would be given a choice between two candidates or, if they wished, to abstain from voting for the PM altogether. This situation raised the rate of split-voting among voters whose parties had either been unable to put forward a viable candidate or been able to showcase a candidate sufficiently strong to pass the first electoral round but not the second one.

In 1996, the electoral reform did not impact on the number of prime-ministerial candidates because the two major parties were the only ones to propose candidates.[11] A similar result was obtained during the 1999 election campaign, when the institutional changes promoted narrowing down the number of prime ministerial candidates to two, in a process that lasted up until the election's eve.[12] Once again, the two candidates were members of the two major

[10] Israel is one of two western democracies (the other is Slovakia) that holds national as opposed to regional party-list elections. That is, the entire country is treated as a single electoral zone, with 120 Knesset delegates elected.

[11] As a matter of fact, in the early stages of the campaign, there were two other candidates: the former chief of staff Rafael Eitan, leader of the right-wing party Tzumet, and David Levi, head of the recently established party Gesher. Netanyahu, the Likud's leader, persuaded them to leave the race by allocating seven seats to each party on the Likud's national list; see Doron (2006).

[12] Before the 1999 elections, several candidates announced their intention to run for prime minister. They included: Yitzhak Mordechai, Ze'ev Binyamin "Benny" Begin, Azmi Bishara of the Arab party Ba'lad, and the independent candidate Rabbi Ba-Gad, in addition to Binyamin "Bibi" Netanyahu, the incumbent, and Ehud Barak, the Labor party leader. All except the last two bowed out at different stages of the race.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parties, leaving the religious and ethnic parties with the choice of either voting for one candidate or not voting at all.

And so, the 1999 prime ministerial elections featured only two candidates – the leaders of the major parties – who then positioned themselves on the national security dimension. By doing so, the prime ministerial elections outcomes were influenced in two ways: First, it forced the electorate to vote solely on the basis of *one* main issue, whether the security dimension or any other; second, it demonstrated that split-voting was a reasonable voting strategy especially when the party closest to a given voter's position was unable to offer a candidate for the prime minister's post.

## The 1996 Election – An Empirical Analysis

When testing the compatibility of Fiorina's model's to those political identity dimensions affecting voting in Israel, we defined each dimension by the main corresponding vote-splitting that might have been observed in the 1996 and 1999 elections, that is: left-right, religious-secular and ethnicity (Sefaradi-Ashkenazi).[13]

While the range of split-voting choices is clear in two-party plurality systems such as the American one, the Israeli multi-party multi-dimensional system creates a different political environment that expands these choices and requires an alternative definition of split voting. Hence, in order to better map the field in Israel, we used three contextual definitions that reflected the political parties that represented the polity's different views: left-right (i.e., security policy) split voting, ethnic split voting and religious split-voting.[14] All the parties were grouped (1) into the appropriate category by dimension, and (2) according to the candidates for the prime ministerial post who were associated with that dimension. The encoding was thus conducted by trichotomies: political extreme right, moderate and extreme left; Sepharadi, no ethnic identity and Ashkenazi; highly observant, traditional and secular. Each candidate for prime minister was matched to one of the three identity groups in each category; split-voting level

[13] The respective data was gathered by the Modi'in Ezrachi Research Institute, through face-to-face interviews at the respondent's home in May 1996. The sample (N=1,168 respondents) was representative of Israel's adult Jewish population, excluding residents in kibbutzim and Jewish settlements in the territories under Israeli control since 1967. Asher Arian and Michal Shamir supervised the survey, which is available through the Israel Social Science Data Archive, the Hebrew University (Study No. 0643).

[14] Faction selection derived from an analysis of the most salient cleavages in Israeli society (Smooha, 1993) and from their significance in the 1996 elections. The term *Sepharadi* refers to Jews from Arab and Mediterranean countries. Because this term was used in the survey, it is employed here as well.

was measured thereafter. Voter who cast a vote for a candidate but not for the candidate's party were considered to be split-voters.[15]

The fact that the identity dimensions (e.g., religious affinity, country of birth, parent's country of birth and voting preferences) were not determined "objectively" is of major importance for interpretation of the results. Participants in the survey were asked to self-identify themselves on the various identity continuums (for the questions' precise wording and the response frequencies see Appendix 1). Consequently, these definitions did not reflect the voters' external behavior but, rather, their subjective identities as perceived by them. We nonetheless assumed that this web of identities does determine a person's positions and constitutes a main factor in voting behavior. This assumption was therefore tested. The results of the analysis are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1**
**Self-Positioning Variables**

| Self-Positioning Dimension | Type of Vote | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Self-Positioning along the Left-Right Dimension | *Extreme Right* | 22.5% |
| | *Moderate* | 51.9% |
| | *Extreme Left* | 26.6% |
| | ***N*** | 1159 |
| Self-Positioning along the Ethnic Dimension | *Sephardic* | 41.0% |
| | *Neither* | 27.7% |
| | *Ashkenazi* | 31.3% |
| | ***N*** | 1155 |
| Self-Positioning along the Religious Dimension | *Religious* | 27.1% |
| | *Moderate* | 51.9% |
| | *Secular* | 21.0% |
| | ***N*** | 1164 |

The distribution of self-positioning responses on the security dimension, as shown in Table 1 reveals, that the two extremes, left and right, are about the same in size (22.5% and 26.6% accordingly), with the moderate middle category shown to be the largest (51.9%). Self-positioning on the ethnic and religious dimensions was used as a proxy for the interviewee's ethnic and religious identities. The frequencies shown in Table 1 suggest that most people do define themselves according to their ethnic identity (71.3%), with only a minority of Israelis not referring to themselves in those terms. As for religious identity, the

[15] For a formal definition of split voting as used in this study, see Appendix; for other useful definitions see: Burden and Helmke, 2009.


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majority are self-proclaimed moderates, with about a third (27.1%) identifying themselves as highly observant, while only 21% as secular.

Based on these findings, it can readily be seen that the moderates are in fact the largest contingents among the three religious and three political identities. In contrast, the distribution of respondents along the ethnic dimension shows clear polarization. Therefore, ethnic identity appears to be a vital part of a voter's self-definition given that over 70% of the voters chose to identify themselves by one of the two specified groups, with no quantitative preference shown for the center (i.e., no ethnic identity). The 1996 elections can be interpreted as reflecting the salience of those identities because ethnic and religious motifs were stressed in attempts to draw the general public to vote for the prime ministerial candidates and for specific parties. Table 2 presents the data on split-ticket voting during that campaign.

**Table 2**
**Split-voting by Dimension**

| Dimension | Type of Vote | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| | *No Split* | 96.6 |
| Left-Right | *Split-Vote* | 3.4 |
| | ***N*** | 962 |
| | *No Split* | 52.2 |
| Ethnic | *Split-Vote* | 47.8 |
| | ***N*** | 962 |
| | *No Split* | 95.2 |
| Religious | *Split-Vote* | 4.8 |
| | ***N*** | 962 |

According to Table 2, the most substantial split-voting was observed among among those identifying themselves with the ethnic dimension: Almost half the voters (47.8%) reported their intention to split their vote in the upcoming election. These findings seem to contradict Fiorina's claims that the moderate group will be the largest group expected to split-vote: As indicated previously, 71.3% of the respondents placed themselves on the polar ends of the ethnic dimension, leaving only 28.7% as "moderates." We should also recall that Fiorina's theory is based on the American political reality, where no specific party represents narrow minority, sectarian interests. Although the Democrat Party has traditionally represented minorities (whether ethnic or religious) to a greater degree than the Republicans did, the respective categories were much broader. The practice of the politics of identity, requiring the involvement of distinctive political parties or camps, is more highly developed in Israel than it is in the

United States. There, group identity is associated with the national parties by means of mediators.[16]

Moreover, while Fiorina claims that split voting derives from groups affiliated with the central axis, the identity findings in the Israeli case tell a different story. Split voting along the ethnic dimension was a primarily "extremist" (in spatial terms) phenomenon. With respect to the other two dimensions, the reported levels of split voting were 3.4% on the left-right dimension and 4.8% on the religious dimension.

Furthermore, the religious self-positioning dimension highlights an issue especially important in the Israeli context. In general, religiosity tends to be underestimated in Israel due to the reluctance of ultra-Orthodox Jews to participate in surveys. Nevertheless, about 27% of the survey participants identified themselves as highly religious (observant or ultra-Orthodox). The majority of the participants were traditional (moderately observant; 51.9%), and only a minority considered themselves secular (21%). Has Israel become more religious? A longitudinal analysis could help answer this question.

Looking at the results of the split-ticket spatial analysis (see Figures 2, 3 and 4),[17] the findings suggest, as hypothesized, that Fiorina's balancing model emerges only in the left-right (security) dimension that also characterized the policies of the two prime ministerial candidates during the 1996 election campaign (see Figure 2). However, looking at the analysis of the ethnic and religious dimensions (Figures 3 and 4) clearly indicates that the ticket-splitting pattern is mixed, that is, it does not correspond with the predictions made by the balancing theory.

[16] See Shamir and Arian, 1999.

[17] A statistical analysis of the figures' data is shown in Table A5 of the Appendix.


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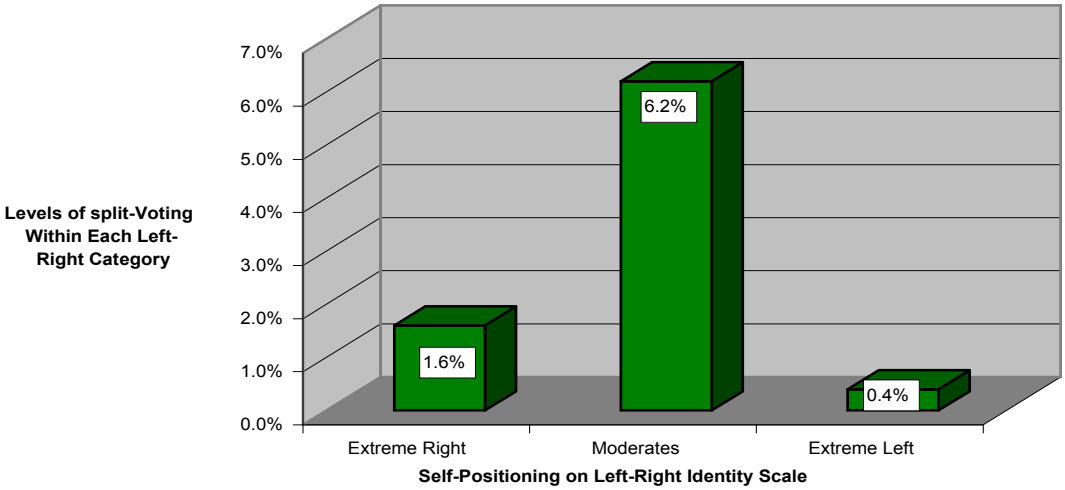
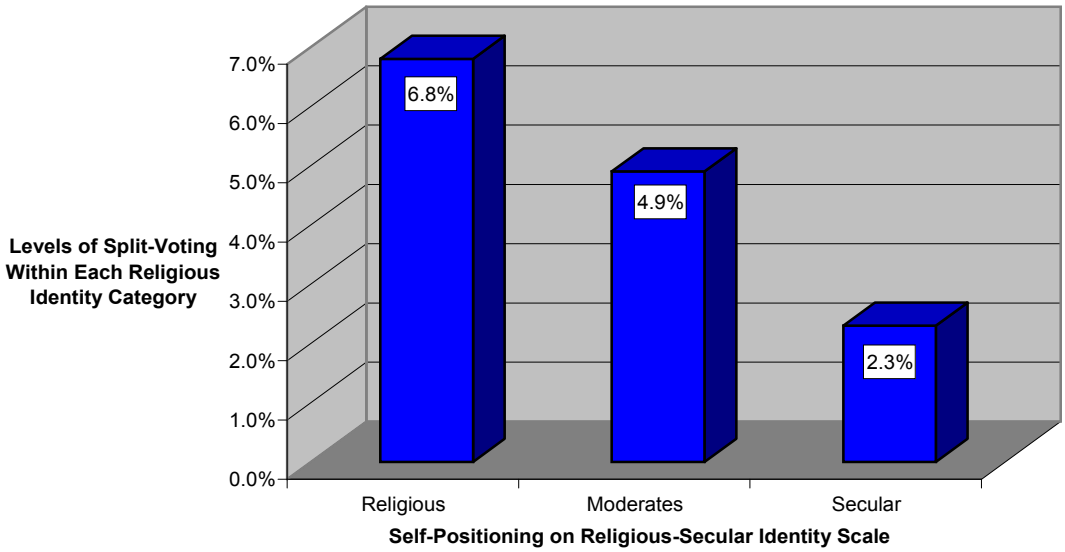
**Figure 2**
**Split-voting within Each Left-Right Category**



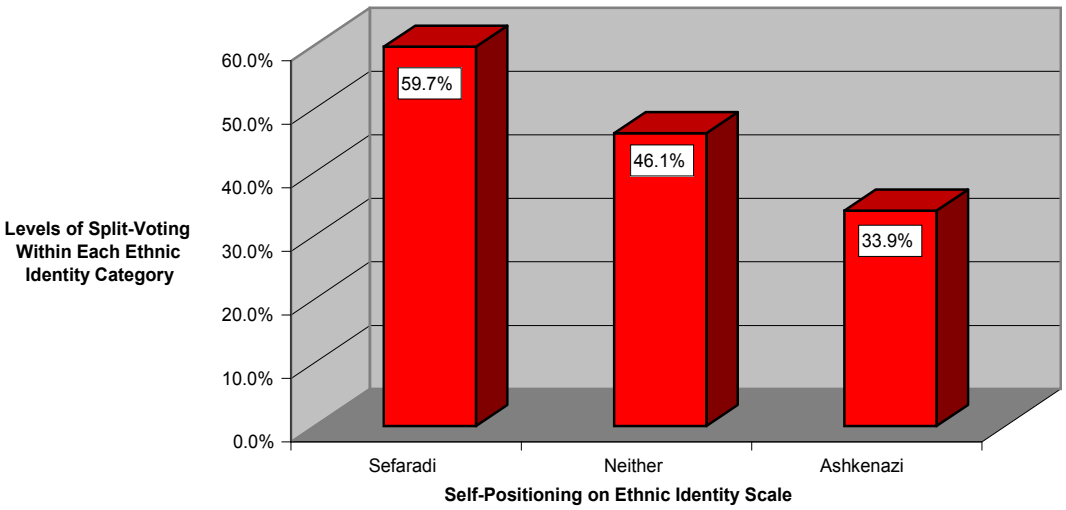

Chi-Square significant at p<.001

**Figure 3**
**Split-voting within Each Religious Category**




Chi-Square Significant at p<.100

**Figure 4**
**Split-voting within Each Ethnicity Category**




Chi-Square Significant at p<.001

As argued here, despite the fact that Israel's political system can be characterized by three main issue-dimensions, as supported by institutional restraints, only one of the three – the left-right dimension – is sufficiently dominant to produce "natural" prime ministerial candidates. According to the Israeli data, voters indentifying with the extremes of the religious and the ethnic dimension split their votes in proportions greater than those on the left-right dimension, specifically, highly religious (see Figure 3) as well as Sephardic (see Figure 4) voters. In general, we witnessed high levels of split voting among other extremist groups as well – all of which seem to contradict Fiorina's model.

Furthermore, the two self-proclaimed extremist groups that shared the highest incidence of split voting – the Sephardim and the highly religious – did not submit their own prime ministerial candidates. Therefore, these groups could not vote for their sincere preferences. As a result, they split their ticket as an act of strategic voting,[18] that is, in order to maximize benefits, they voted for the prime ministerial candidate that advocated policies favoring their group, unlike extremists on the left-right dimension who could vote their sincere preference for

[18] For a more extensive analysis of the rationality of politics in Israel, see Doron, 1988.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this office (see Figure 2). Hence, when candidates proposed dimension-related platforms, ethnic and religious extremists split their vote.

In this context, the interesting question becomes why these groups did not follow the pattern set by left-right voters? The answer is twofold: First, these voters are less inclined to adjust their voting behavior to the demands of the left-right national security dimension dominating Israeli politics because of sectoral priorities. Second, because security is the most salient dimension in Israeli politics, constantly intensified by the protracted violence with the Arabs, the structural constraints of the new system made it almost impossible for a candidate who represented a dimension other than security to compete for the prime minister's office.[19] The "natural" reduction in the number political candidates predicted by Duverger Law – the law at the foundation of the legislation's intent – did not materialize at the party level yet it did transform the prime ministerial race into a contest between only two candidates.

This type of electoral behavior was also evident in the religious and ethnic parties' strategic preferences and parliamentary coalition decisions as of 1992. After the 1992 election, these parties joined a left-oriented coalition. In 1996, the same parties shifted to a right-oriented coalition, only to return to the left-oriented coalition in 1999.[20] It appears, then, that the inability to offer a worthy and nationally appealing prime ministerial candidate, together with their relative disinterest in national security issues, transformed the sectoral parties into "free agents," players who at liberty to maneuver in an unconstrained fashion within the political system.[21]

## What Should be Learned, if Anything, by Future Reformers?

The design of an electoral system – that is, engagement in electoral engineering (Norris, 2004; Sartori, 1968, 1997) – means changing voting behavior. In consideration of this objective, one may ask: How will the proposed changes affect the balance between political institutions and political culture as observed in voting patterns? In other words, how will relations between institutional settings and political culture shift the equilibrium maintained prior to the change? Put simply, what are the implications of these changes for voter behavior?

These questions place two challenges before us. The first relates to overcoming the intricacy of making predictions together with the accuracy of those predictions and their consequences. Indeed, comparative research has been effective in providing explanations for complex social situations but not necessarily forecasting new exigencies in the post-change period. The second

[19] These findings also appear in the Logit analysis results, attached to Table A5 in the Appendix.
[20] See Peretz and Doron, 1997.
[21] See Doron, 1988.

challenge derives from the factors influencing voter behavior. Can these factors be identified and accurately measured? And, assuming success in responding to the challenge, is it possible to achieve a politically feasible policy agenda in the new circumstances? The literature disagrees on this issue (Cox, 1997; Lijphart; 1993, 1994; Lipset & Rokkan, 1967).[22]

The Israeli case provides an opportunity to empirically examine institutional change and the failure of that change to achieve its political and procedural objectives. Due to the disappointing results, the new reform was nullified in 2001, when voting was returned to the old one-ballot electoral scheme. One of the questions provoked by the decade-long experience with the reform is, then, can any practical lessons be derived from its failure?[23] A review of the 1996 election data clearly indicates that Israel's socio-political culture is layered and multi-dimensional (Shamir & Arian, 1999). Whereas Israeli politics have been preoccupied with national security since the State's establishment, it appears that some population segments have developed a non-security-based sectarian consciousness. If these other dimensions are overlooked, prediction of electoral behavior becomes problematic. This means that for a new democratic institution to succeed in such a setting, the impacts of numerous politically relevant though sometimes implicit dimensions on the change should be weighed.[24]

Another factor to be considered is the voter's ability to vote strategically. The Israeli voter's strategic behavior may be motivated by the success of right- or left-wing candidates whom some believe should be defeated.[25] Unlike sincere voting, which reflects straightforward voting "with one's heart," strategic voting is a more sophisticated, complex process and hence more difficult to anticipate.

The 1996 and 1999 election campaigns provide cases where voters chose to vote strategically – or split their votes – a pattern unanticipated by the reform's advocates. This type of voting went on to achieve results opposite from those

[22] Scholars have argued over the foundations and scope of the structural arrangements conducive to transforming voting behavior. Whereas Cox defines electoral institutions and electoral behavior from a narrow perspective, Lijphart broadens the definition to include other factors such as political, for example: regional divisions and others which he claims that have significant weight on proportional multiple election system.

[23] A 75-person commission – the "The National Commission for Examination of Structure of the Government in Israel" – was established in late 2005; it submitted its recommendations in 2007. None of the commission's recommendations have been adopted by the Knesset. See http://www.ceci.org.il/eng/action_item.asp?id=17

[24] One such major reform would be transformation of the current parliamentary system into a presidential system (see Doron, 2006).

[25] During the February 2009 general elections, supporters of left-wing parties strategically voted for the centrist party Kadima in order to block the center-right Likud from coming in first.


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expected by either the public or the reform's authors.[26] Due to legal, structural and political constraints, the prime ministerial race took place between only two candidates, which provoked high levels of split voting among some population segments.[27] Furthermore, it appears that voters frequently calculated approximately how close the prime ministerial candidate was to their primary political self-identity that, because it was not necessarily security-related, made split voting a reasonable choice from their points of view.[28]

The Israeli split-voting phenomenon also raises questions as to the importance of various socio-economic dimensions in the analysis of voter behavior. Socio-economic dimensions tend to be under-valued in the analysis of societies of nations under persistent threat. Such an approach tends to ignore internal transformation while unintentionally supporting a hegemonic interpretation of political behavior (Horowitz and Lissak, 1996).

Our study has also indicated that considerable time should be devoted to the institutional design of electoral reforms. The Israeli attempt to use democratic institutions such as direct election of the prime minister to create a prime ministerial regime "over night," one affecting the structural distinction between two branches of its government, altered the Israeli voter's habitual thinking about elections. Hence, although the formal institutional change limited the number of candidates actually running for the office of prime minister in each of the three elections (i.e., 1996, 1999. 2001),[29] the absence of candidates promoting dimensions other than national security promoted the split-voting strategy that, in turn, deepened the parliamentary crisis and hurried the political system's destabilization. The system's designers had expected unified voting for the prime minister and the Knesset, a strategy meant to decrease the number of Knesset parties and increase the executive branch's ability to govern. Instead, the reform produced the opposite effect by allowing voters to cast their ballots for small parties reflecting other features of their political self-identity, which resulted in divided government.

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[26] As mentioned previously, the electoral reform was expected to empower the executive branch. In truth, the 1996, 1999 and even the 2001 election outcomes did just the opposite, thus forcing the legislators to reinstate the old system.

[27] According to Basic Law: Government (1992), Paragraph 9. A(1) only a faction of 10 members from the outgoing Knesset may recommend a PM candidate; alternatively, according to Paragraph A(2), 50,000 franchised persons can also do so. Because of the two rounds to be held, election winners and losers were identified long before Election Day. Hence, potential winners turned to potential losers and "bought" them off by promising them post election pay-offs.

[28] That is, primary identities are either ethnic and/or religious. Since cancellation of the reform, two "natural candidates"' identified with the security dimension, have run for this office.

[29] Success with respect to this goal derives from the legislature's desire to increase governability by decreasing the number of participants in the political game.

The 1996 election data likewise show that the Israeli voter is not very different from voters in other democracies. A portion of the electorate, when given the choice, will split its vote. By ignoring the difference between sincere and strategic voting, few expected Likud voters, for example, to split their votes between their party's leader (i.e., Netanyahu) and their party of identity (e.g., Shas), a division that necessarily narrowed the party base upon which Netanyahu, once directly elected, could rely on for policy support (Doron, 2006).

If the Israeli voter indeed resembles other voters, several conclusions can be made. First, political campaigns in general (and particularly in Israel), are enacted in multidimensional rather than unidimensional spaces. Hence, Fiorina's analysis, although pertinent to American politics, may be less relevant to the politics of parliamentary democracies. Second, we can generalize that when choice options are made available to voters, they will no doubt take advantage of those options. Third, the craft of "electoral engineering" is not foolproof, with unexpected outcomes often produced. Such an observation could be predicted theoretically thanks to the operation of Arrow's Impossibility Theorem. This study arrived at similar conclusions but from an empirical perspective.

## APPENDIX

**Table A1**
**National Elections Voting Intention 1996**

| **Intended Vote for Knesset Party** | ***Percentage*** |
|---|---|
| Likud-Tsomet-Gesher | 39.9 |
| Labor | 41.6 |
| Meretz | 5.5 |
| Mafdal | 5.0 |
| Biblical Jewry | 1.6 |
| Moledet | 1.8 |
| The Third Way | 2.1 |
| Sash | 1.7 |
| Russian Immigrants Party | 0.6 |
| National Democratic Alliance and Hadash | 0.2 |
| Any Party form the Right | 0.2 |
| **Total** | 100.0 |
| **N** | 1,006 |


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**Table A2**
**Prime Minister Voting Intentions 1996**

| **Intended Vote Prime Ministerial Candidate** | ***Percentage*** |
|---|---|
| Benjamin Netanyahu | 48.5% |
| Shimon Peres | 51.5% |
| **Total** | 100.0% |
| **N** | 1,006 |

The two variables from Tables A1 and A2 were used to construct the three split-voting variables. In each case we coded voting intentions for the parliamentary and the prime ministerial election along the three main dimensions (left-right (national security), ethnic identity and religiosity). The coding used for the construction of Figures 1 to 3 is presented below. Simulation of other coding led to similar results.

An important issue to be addressed is how the parties and the prime ministerial candidates were coded along the various dimensions. Due to the nature of the analysis, the parties and the prime ministerial candidates had to be coded according to three different dependent variables, each representing one of the three chosen dimensions. The first stage required coding the various parties along each dimension. At this stage, we relied mainly on the parties' platforms and positions on various issues related to each dimension. We subsequently strove to position the parties on each dimension using the findings from the previous categorization. In some cases we foresaw a deviation from our coding of the dependent variables. In order to confront this problem, we tried many other coding combinations, none of which contradicted the findings presented in this article.

As to positioning the prime ministerial candidates along the three dimensions, the considerations applied were different. These candidates did not present a separate platform; hence, they could be coded only in terms of the positions taken by their parties, together with their actions and statements. During the 1996 election, the two prime-ministerial campaigns concentrated on national security, the left-right dimension. Furthermore, unlike Israel's political party space, which includes religious and ethnic parties, the prime ministerial space did not include candidates directly identified with the other two dimensions. Each candidate was nonetheless forced to relate to ethnicity and religion, although not with the same intensity as the left-right dimension. After locating the two candidates on each dimension, we assigned the various parties to one pole of the dimensions.

Non-split voters were comprised of two different groups, first, those who voted for the same party and prime ministerial candidate on each dimension; second, those who cast only one of the two required ballots. According to our definition, vote splitting requires completion of the act of voting; not casting a ballot was therefore not counted as a split vote. An example would be voters who stated the party of their choice but could not decide for which prime ministerial candidate to vote.

As for split voters, the definitions were much clearer. Split voters were defined as voters who reported a "mixed" vote, that is, one ballot cast for a party or candidate found at one end of a continuum and another ballot cast for a party or candidate found at the polar end of the continuum. An example would be voting for a prime ministerial candidate positioned on the right of the national security dimension and a party positioned at the left of the same dimension.

**Split-voting along the Left-Right Dimension**

In order to categorize the voters, the parties indicated as receiving their votes were coded in the following manner:

**Left Bloc**: Labor, Meretz, National Democratic Alliance and Hadash, The United Arab List, The Arab Movement, The Progressive Unity, Party from the Left/any party advocating a leftist agenda.

**Right Bloc**: Likud-Tsomet-Gesher, Mafdal, Biblical Jewry, Moledet, The Third Way, Shas, Russian Immigrants Party, any religious party, Party from the Right/any party advocating a rightist agenda.

**Neither**: Another party (not on the list), I will not vote, I have not decided yet, whatever the Rabbi decides, Refuses to answer.

As for the prime ministerial candidate, the right-wing bloc's candidate was Benjamin Netanyahu; the left-wing bloc's candidate was Shimon Peres. This is the most common and "natural" way to associate a candidate with a security-related issue, based on the centrality of national security in Israel's socio-political sphere.

**Split-voting along the Ethnic Dimension**

In order to categorize voters, the parties were coded in the following manner:

Ethnic Bloc: Shas, Russian Immigrants Party, National Democratic Alliance and Hadash, The United Arab List, The Arab Movement, The Progressive Unity

**Non-Ethnic Bloc**: Likud-Tsomet-Gesher, Labor, Meretz, Mafdal, Biblical Jewry, Moledet, The Third Way, any party from the Left, any party from the Right, a religious party

**Neither**: Other Party, I will not vote, I have not decided yet, Whatever the Rabbi decides, Refuses to answer.

The prime ministerial candidate Benjamin Netanyahu was associated with the ethnic bloc whereas Shimon Peres was associated with the non-ethnic bloc.


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This categorization was based mainly on party platforms, campaign statements and actions taken by the two candidates during their previous terms of office.

**Split-voting along the Religious Dimension**

The voters' parties were coded as follows:

**Religious Bloc:** Likud-Tsomet-Gesher, Mafdal, Biblical Jewry, Shas, any party from the Right, any religious party, whatever the Rabbi decides.

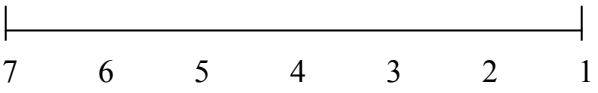
**Secular Bloc**: Labor, Meretz, Moledet, The Third Way, Russian Immigrants Party, National Democratic Alliance and Hadash, The United Arab List, The Arab Movement, The Progressive Unity, any party from the Left.

**Neither**: Another party, I will not vote, I have not decided yet, Refuses to Answer.

The candidate supported by the religious bloc was Benjamin Netanyahu; the candidate supported by the secular bloc was Shimon Peres. This categorization was based mainly on the platforms of the candidates' parties, campaign statements and actions taken by the two candidates during their previous terms of office.

**Self-Positioning on Left-Right Scale**

The respondents were asked the following question: *"There is a lot of talk about the "Left" and "Right" in politics. Where would you position yourself on a "left-right" continuum, with 1 representing the extreme right and 7 the extreme left."*




The frequency distribution originally obtained for this variable is shown in Table A3.

**Table A3**
**Self-Positioning along *Left-Right* Dimension**

| Self-Positioning along the Left-Right Dimension | *Percentage* |
|---|---|
| 1 Extreme Right | 11.5 |
| 2 | 11.0 |
| 3 | 16.9 |
| 4 | 20.7 |
| 5 | 14.2 |
| 6 | 17.9 |
| 7 Extreme Left | 7.7 |
| **Total** | 100.0 |
| **N** | 1,159 |

After all the answers were received, the variable was recoded into three-point scale in the following way: 1- Extreme Right, 2- Moderate, 3- Extreme Left. The recoding was performed as follows: Original positions 1 and 2 were recoded as Extreme Right (1), positions 3, 4 and 5 were recoded as Moderate (i.e., 2) while positions 6 and 7 were recoded as Extreme Left (3). (See Table 1 for the recoded variable frequencies.)

**Self-Positioning on the Ethnic Dimension**

The respondents were asked: *"How would you define yourself?*
1. Ashkenazi; 2. Sephardi; 3. Neither. (See Table 1 for variable frequencies.)

**Self-Positioning on the Religious Scale**

The respondents were asked: "*To what extent do you observe religious traditions?*
1. Observe all rituals; 2. Observe most rituals; 3. Observe some rituals; 4. Observe no rituals.

The original responses were recoded as followings: responses 1 and 2 into the Highly Observant category, response 3 in the Moderate category, and response 4 into the Secular category. (See table 1 for the variable frequencies.)

**Split-voting Within Each Self-Positioning Group**

A correlation analysis was performed for the three split-voting variables with the corresponding self-positioning variables (see Figures 1-4). In each case, we examined the level of split-voting within each self-positioning category. The obtained distributions responses are presented below.


DOI: 10.2202/1935-6226.1064

**Table A4**
**Split Voting within Each Self-Positioning Dimension**

| **Self-Positioning along the Left-Right Dimension** | **Voting Strategy** | **Split Vote along the Left-Right Dimension** | **Split Votes along the Religious Dimension** | *Split Votes along the Ethnic Dimension* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Extreme Right/ Religious/ Sephardic | No Split | 98.4 | 93.2% | 40.3% |
| | Split-Ticket | 1.6% | 6.8% | 59.7% |
| | **Total** | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% |
| Moderates/Moderates/ Neither | No Split | 93.8% | 95.1% | 53.9% |
| | Split-Ticket | 6.2% | 4.9% | 46.1% |
| | **Total** | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% |
| Extreme Left/ Secular/ Ashkenazi | No Split | 99.6% | 97.7% | 66.1% |
| | Split-Ticket | 0.4% | 2.3% | 33.9% |
| | **Total** | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% |
| **Total** | No Split | 96.7% | 95.2% | 52.2% |
| | Split-Ticket | 3.3% | 4.8 | 47.8 |
| | **Total** | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% |
| Total N | | 959 | 958 | 952 |

Chi-Square is significant at p<.001

**Table A5**
**Logit Analysis of the Three Identity Models**

| | *Split-voting Left-Right Based Model* | | | *Split-voting Religious Based Model 1* | | | *Split-voting Religious Based Model 2*[30] | | | *Split-voting Ethnic Based Model* | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | B | S.E. | Exp(B) | B | S.E. | Exp(B) | B | S.E. | Exp(B) | B | S.E. | Exp(B) |
| Age | -0.02 | 0.01 | 0.98 | -0.01 | 0.01 | 0.99 | -0.01 | 0.01 | 0.99 | -0.01*** | 0.00 | 0.99 |
| Education | -0.05 | 0.06 | 0.95 | -0.06 | 0.05 | 0.94 | -0.05 | 0.05 | 0.95 | -0.08*** | 0.02 | 0.92 |
| Gender (Female Dummy Var.) | 0.04 | 0.36 | 1.04 | -0.81** | 0.32 | 0.44 | -0.69** | 0.33 | 0.50 | -0.25** | 0.13 | 0.78 |
| Extreme Right (Dummy Var.) | -1.48** | 0.54 | 0.23 | | | | -0.21 | 0.34 | 0.81 | | | |
| Extreme Left (Dummy Var.) | -2.96*** | 1.02 | 0.05 | | | | -2.83*** | 1.03 | 0.06 | | | |
| Religious (Dummy Var.) | | | | 0.35 | 0.33 | 1.41 | 0.22 | 0.34 | 1.24 | | | |
| Secular (Dummy Var.) | | | | -0.78 | 0.50 | 0.46 | -0.35 | 0.51 | 0.70 | | | |
| Sephardic (Dummy Var.) | | | | | | | | | | 0.45*** | 0.17 | 1.57 |
| Ashkenazi (Dummy Var.) | | | | | | | | | | -0.37*** | 0.18 | 0.69 |
| Constant | -1.44 | 1.02 | 0.24 | -1.55** | 0.85 | 0.21 | -1.43 | 0.86 | 0.24 | 1.50*** | 0.40 | 4.50 |
| N | | 948 | | | 949 | | | 949 | | | 948 | |
| Chi-Square | | 27.7*** | | | 13.74* | | | 32*** | | | 64.3*** | |
| Nagelkerke R square | | 0.11 | | | 0.05 | | | 0.10 | | | 0.09 | |

[30] In the case of the religious model, since the religious variables were insignificant (see Religious Model 1), we added the left and right variables to the model (see Religious Model 2) to test if they had any impact on the results, primarily because the left in Israeli is considered to be secular and the right religious.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