

in the current moment, when both major parties agree on “applying sovereignty” to the Jordan Valley, with *ribonut* being a central theme of coalition negotiations.¹³¹

Conclusion: The Evolution of Sovereignty

The meaning of sovereignty is changing not only in Israel but worldwide. While the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st have been considered a period of “sovereignty in crisis,”¹³² our times raise the question of what comes next. With globalization, “sovereignty as domination” and the acceptance of paternalist power-structures in international politics may be one of two viable alternatives for the international arena, the other being a radical rethinking of sovereignty and a move to post-sovereignty and partnerships between peoples irrespective of their territorial possessions. But paternalist power structures are not only about international politics; they are about democracy itself. Israeli discourse reveals that when sovereignty comes to mean domination, sovereignty ceases to become a national right and an expression of national freedom, and becomes a tool for subjection. Those who care about the future of Israel/Palestine and about democracy should be attuned to sovereignty discourse in Israel and its implications.

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HOW MANY IS ONE TOO MANY? ISRAELI ELECTIONS 2018 - 2020

By Tamar Hermann

Between 2018-2020 Israel set a national – perhaps even international - record by holding (at least to the date of this writing) four election campaigns in 18 months:¹³³ one municipal (October 2018) and three national (April and

September 2019, March 2020). The municipal elections were conducted on time and showed no indication of the upcoming saga. Yet, the following three national elections were all inconclusive. For the first time in Israel's history, after both the April and the September rounds none of the largest parties' leaders (Benjamin Netanyahu of Likud and Benny Gantz of Blue and White) was able to assemble a majority-based coalition. Thus, new elections had to be called upon. As a result, Israelis have lived in a protracted elections campaign since late 2018. In addition to the elections, this period was dominated by the legal process focusing on Prime Minister Netanyahu—which resulted in three indictments against him. Netanyahu's case has so dominated the political arena that the common wisdom in Israel is that the three elections were all about the public sentiment “for or against Bibi” while all strategic issues have been neglected. At the same time, Israel has been experiencing for several years now a low level of public trust in the political institutions (Hermann et. al, 2019). Are the frequent elections the last straw that may break the camel's back, i.e., are Israeli citizens losing their political patience and interest in the democratic process?

This paper briefly discusses Israeli public opinion on three relevant topics:

1. Are the elections interesting?
2. Are the elections fair?
3. What are the elections all about?

The data presented below is taken from the Israeli Voice monthly public opinion polls project, conducted by the Guttman Center for Public Opinion and Policy Research in the Israel Democracy Institute.¹³⁴

Are the elections interesting?

Israelis are known for their high political awareness and engagement.¹³⁵ However, when the second round of elections was called for September 2019, many predicted that a large number of Israelis would stay at home because of electoral fatigue or as protest. This did not happen; in fact, the national turnout increased

between April and September from 68.5% to 69.4%. The increase was especially visible (from 49.2% to 59.2%) in the Israel Arab sector where voter turnout is historically lower than in the Jewish sector.

And yet, there were some warning signs of elections fatigue. For example, in the Israeli Voice survey of August 2019 and again in January 2020 the following question was presented: "In about another month and a half, elections will be held for the Knesset. Compared to the campaign for the previous elections in XXXX, are you following the current campaign to the same extent, less, or more?" The optional answers were: 1) Following the current campaign more; 2) Following the current campaign less; 3) Following it to the same extent; 4) Don't know. In January almost half of the respondents (48%) reported that they follow the current campaign less, compared to 41% in August. Only 12% reported in the later poll that they follow the elections more than in the past (compared to 17% in August). The number of those reporting that they follow it to the same extent was about the same in the two surveys.

Segmentation of the answers to this question by the three main political blocs (self-positioning, Jews¹³⁶) – Left, Center or Right¹³⁷ -- show significant differences: the majority in the Left (53%) reports that they are as interested as they were in April. On the Right, the majority reports that they are less interested than previously (52%). Like in many other issues, the Center is somewhere in between: here a plurality (47%) report that they are less interested than in the past. Age appears as a major factor in this regard: while 63% of the youngest age cohort (18-34 years old) is less interested in the current elections, amongst the oldest age cohort (55 years old and above) the majority (51%) says that their level of interest stays the same. Only 34% of the older groups report that they are less interested in the elections than before.

Are the elections fair?

Cases of interference with the votes counting were suspected and investigated more than once in

Israel. These cases were mostly uncovered in ultra-Orthodox largely populated neighborhoods and in Arab towns and villages. There used to be a consensus that these were "local initiatives" and that, by and large, Israeli elections were fair. However, after the 2015 elections, a group of concerned activists sensed that something had gone wrong. Based on a meticulous analysis of the formal outcomes compared to the timeline of the voting, the possible number of voters per a time unite, etc., they reached the conclusion, which they shared then with a number of academics, data analysts and media professionals, that the official reports were improbable: that Likud was allocated significantly more votes than it had actually received. This argument did not get much attention at the time, but with the growing grassroots distrust of the political establishment in the following years it seems to have better resonated with the public's ear: more than a few Israelis now doubt the fairness of the elections.

Thus, since early 2019 the following question was presented in five Israeli Voice surveys: To what extent do you have or not have trust in the integrity of the Knesset elections, meaning that the results to be announced will accurately reflect how the public voted?" In all measurements the finding were highly disturbing: on the average a bit over one third of the Israelis (34.3%) appear skeptical regarding the accuracy of the official reporting of the results or are even convinced that they were distorted (March 2019 - 27.5%, April 2019 – 32%, August 2019 – 43%, September 2019 – 32%, January 2020 – 37%). In all five surveys, skepticism and distrust regarding the fairness of the elections was significantly higher amongst the Israeli Arab respondents; in the January survey it amounted to 52%. Segmentation of the Jewish sample in the same survey by political blocs showed that the number of the doubters was the lowest in the Left (29%) and somewhat higher in both the Center and the Right (33%). Segmentation by level of religiosity (Jews) also produced some interesting results: amongst the ultra-Orthodox 47% doubted or totally rebutted the integrity of the elections, among the religious – 35%, the traditional religious – 41%, the traditional non-religious – 25% and the secular – 33%. In other words, the two sectors in

which manipulations of the votes counting have been more prevalent, i.e., the Arab and the ultra-Orthodox are also the more skeptical regarding the elections integrity.

What are the elections all about?

What is the main reason for voting for one party and not for another (usually of the same bloc as inter-bloc shifts are usually quite uncommon)? In February 2019 and in January 2020 the following question about priorities was presented to the Israeli Voice survey interviewees: "What, in your opinion, is the main issue that will affect how Israelis vote in the upcoming Knesset elections?" The options were: 1) The cost of living and of housing; 2) The security situation; 3) The Netanyahu investigations; 4) Religion and state issues; 5) Jewish-Arab relations in the country.¹³⁸ In early 2019 a plurality of the respondents (30%) pointed to the security situation as the main reason for voting for a specific party. Second came the cost of living and housing (22%) and third – the Netanyahu investigations (19%). However in January the order changed somewhat: the Netanyahu investigations jumped to the top (32%), cost of living and housing stayed second (21%) and the security situation dropped to the third place (17%). This may indicate that indeed the elections are all about "for or against Bibi".

The difference between Jews and Arabs in this regard reflects the disparity in their respective situation as Israeli citizens: while the Jews put on top Netanyahu investigations (34%) as they are more troubled by the corruption issue, the Arabs, who struggle with much lower living standards pointed to the cost of living and housing as the top priority for making the electoral decision (33%). The differences between the three political blocs voters (Jews) are also significant: in the Center 47% put Netanyahu investigations on top, as this is the principal issue addressed by the main party of this bloc – Blue and White. So did 45.5% of the Left who would like to see Netanyahu out for a wide variety for reasons, not only corruption. However, only 28% of voters on the Right put the Netanyahu investigations on top. This can be explained by their shared view that the court case against Netanyahu is a judicial plot

by his opponents who failed to topple him twice electorally - in April and September.

Despite the unprecedented repetition of the 2019-2020 election campaigns, Israelis still develop and hold solid views on the political processes related to the elections. Indeed many follow the campaigns less closely than before, particularly the younger citizens, but this may change when election-day is right around the corner. Indeed, a significant number doubt the fairness of the elections, but the majority does not. Much depends now on the development of the Netanyahu court case. If he stays in office for a few more years, it may well derail Israel democracy off track. However, if he departs office, there is a significant potential for recovery as the public is still highly politically engaged.

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the entire territory. It is comfortable with redemption, and among its activists are those who work towards the construction of the Third Temple in our times. One member of the steering committee of the movement, Geula Cohen, was herself a member of the Lehi from 1943 until the movement split up, and on the website of the Sovereignty journal she is listed as a Lehi fighter.

<http://ribonut.co.il/AboutSection.aspx?NewsHomeItemId=3&lang=2>

¹²⁹ <http://www.ribonut.co.il/?lang=1>
¹³⁰ Exponential rise in the use of the term in news (through google search, April 7,2020) in two-year blocks seen in a preliminary search for ribonut (in Hebrew) on Google under the “News” tab. 2008-2009: 43 mentions, not with the meaning of domination. 2010-2011: 149 articles mentioning ribonut with the meaning of domination; 2012-2013: 289 articles; 2014-2015: 646 articles 2016-2017; 1210 articles. 2018-2019: 5320 articles.

¹³¹ <https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/west-bank-annexation-could-move-forward-as-early-as-july-623802>.

¹³² Brown, Wendy. *Walled states, waning sovereignty*. MIT Press, 2017.

Hermann Notes

¹³³ Hermann, T. et. al., 2019. *The Israeli Democracy Index 2019*. Jerusalem: The Israel Democracy Institute

¹³⁴ For the Israeli Voice surveys entire data set see (idi.org.il).

¹³⁵ By the Economist Intelligence Unit political participation index Israel scores

¹³⁶ This trichotomy is hardly relevant for the Israeli Arab citizens as they put themselves almost totally on the Left.

¹³⁷ The three blocs are very different in size: about 55-60% identify with the Right, about 15% with the Left and 25-30% with the Center.

¹³⁸ When the two surveys were conducted the Deal of the Century was not yet on the table and relations with the Palestinians were hardly on the agenda of any party as the matter seemed dead ended.

Marc Lynch Notes

¹³⁹ Marc Lynch, “Is There An Islamist Advantage At War?” APSA MENA Politics Newsletter 2(1), available at <https://apsamena.org/2019/04/16/is-there-an-islamist-advantage-at-war/>

¹⁴⁰ Steven Brooke, *Winning Hearts and Votes: Social Services and the Islamist Political Advantage*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018.

¹⁴¹ Elizabeth R. Nugent, *After Repression: How Polarization Derails Democratic Transitions*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020.

Khalil Al-Anani Notes

¹⁴² Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckman, *The Social Construction of Reality*, (London: Penguin Books, 1966).

¹⁴³ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995)

¹⁴⁴ Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (New York: International Publishers Co, 1971)

¹⁴⁵ Roger Petersen, “Emotions as the Residue of Lived Experience.”, *PS: Political Science & Politics*, Volume 50, Issue 4, October 2017, pp. 932-935.

¹⁴⁶ See for example, Jeff Goodwin, James M. Jasper, Francesca Polletta, *Passionate Politics: Emotions and Social Movements* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001); G.E. Marcus, “Emotions in Politics.”, *American Political Science Review*, 2000 3:1, 221-250, and Roger Petersen, “Emotions as the Residue of Lived Experience.”, *PS: Political Science & Politics*, Volume 50, Issue 4, October 2017, pp. 932-935.

¹⁴⁷ Interview, August 24, 2017

¹⁴⁸ Interview, August 24, 2017

¹⁴⁹ Interview, August 24, 2017

¹⁵⁰ Mustafa Menshawy, *Leaving the Brotherhood: Self, Society, and the State*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019)

¹⁵¹ Interview, November 12, 2017

¹⁵² Mada Masr, 9/9/2019 at <https://madamasr.com/en/2019/09/09/feature/politics/in-a-letter-from-prison-jailed-muslim-brotherhood-youth-call-on-prominent-public-figures-to-mediate-with-authorities-to-secure-their-release/>

Steven Brooke Notes

¹⁵³ Steven Brooke, *Winning Hearts and Votes: Social Services and the Islamist Political Advantage*, (Cornell University Press, 2019); Melani Cammett and Pauline Jones Luong, “Is There an Islamist Political Advantage?” *Annual Review of Political Science*, 17 (2014), pgs. 187-206; Tarek Masoud, *Counting Islam: Religion, Class, and Elections in Egypt* (Cambridge University Press, 2014). Thomas Pepinsky, R. William Liddle, and Saiful Mujani, “Testing Islam’s Political Advantage: Evidence from Indonesia,” *American Journal of Political Science*, 56:3 (2014), pgs. 584-600.

¹⁵⁴ Ana Arjona, *Rebelocracy: Social Order in the Columbian Civil War*, (Cambridge University Press, 2017); Ana Arjona, Nelson Kasfir, and Zachariah Mampilly, *Rebel Governance in Civil War*, (Cambridge University Press, 2015); Zachariah Mampilly, *Rebel Rulers: Insurgent Governance and Civilian Life During War*, (Cornell University Press, 2011).

¹⁵⁵ Steven Brooke, “From Medicine to Mobilization: Social Service Provision and the Islamist Political Advantage,” *Perspectives on Politics*, 15:1 (2017), pgs. 42-61.

¹⁵⁶ Melani Cammett and Aytüğ Şaşmaz, “Political Context, Organizational Mission, and the Quality of Social Services: Insights from the Health Sector in Lebanon,” *World Development*, 98 (2017), pgs. 120-132.

Nicholas J. Lotito Notes

¹⁵⁷ The combined data include 352 groups, of which 38 (11%).