# La Bell(e) Epoque? A Comparison of Party Platform and Television Propaganda Ideology in the 1999 Israeli Elections

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TELEVISION PROPAGANDA, PARTY PLATFORMS, AND POLITICAL

In the contemporary world, the most fashionable term in social science and the humanities is 'post'1 – post-modern, post-historical, post-industrial, post-ideological, and (in Israel) post-Zionist.<sup>2</sup>

The collapse of political ideology as diagnosed decades ago by Bell<sup>3</sup> seems to be only one side of a process which Aron refers to as the total Fin de l'Age Ideologique (End of the Age of Ideology);<sup>4</sup> the other side is that ideology accommodates itself to the so-called 'consumer culture' and fulfils, on a deeper level of consciousness, its old function: exerting pressure towards conformity with existing conditions. This false consciousness no longer consists of an internally harmonized nexus of ideas, as did the political ideologies of the nineteenth century, but of a nexus of modes of behaviour.<sup>5</sup>

Ideally, the vote is only the concluding act of a continuous public debate between argument and counter-argument. In practice, however, political parties and auxiliary organizations see themselves as forced to

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influence voting decisions propagandistically, analogous to the way advertising influences buying decisions.<sup>7</sup>

Every day we are bombarded with one persuasive communication after another. These appeals 'persuade' not through the give-and-take of argument and debate, but through the manipulation of symbols and of our most basic human emotions. For better or worse, ours is an age of propaganda and political marketing. Party agitators and old-style propagandists have given way to politically neutral advertising experts, employed to sell politics in a non-political way. Evidently, it did not take long for the principles of commercial advertising and marketing developed in the 1930s (right after the end of La Belle Epoque in Europe and the Roaring Twenties in the US) to be applied to the 'sale' of political candidates. This tendency began to prevail after World War II, with the scientific development of empirical techniques of market and opinion research.

The famous Kennedy-Nixon televised debates in 1960 marked the coming of age of television in modern political communication. Since then, political communication has continued to fall under the growing influence of audio-visual media in general, and television in particular.

In most democratic countries, television has become the principal medium by which citizens get information before they go to the polls. 12 Consequently, television is the mass medium of greatest importance to the political process, as the dominant source of news and entertainment for the mass audience – not just those who have a particular interest in politics. Television news and election programmes are almost universally regarded as influencing the success of candidates and parties, 13 and although their actual impact cannot really be gauged, the narrow margin frequently separating political opponents makes their use a must for the candidates and parties involved. 14

When commentators in the 1950s spoke of the end of ideology, they did so in contrast to the 1930s, the most ideological period in American history, when for the first time socialism seemed a genuine political option, if mainly among intellectuals. By the 1950s, though, the 'end of ideology' school argued that traditional political labels had lost their intellectual significance, in large part due to the parties' attempts to become 'mass parties'. As a result, the old politico-economic radicalism lost its meaning, went the argument, while the stultifying aspects of contemporary culture (for example television) could not be redressed in political terms. 18

In Israel, as if to provide for the needs of such 'mass politics', a significant development in the political use of broadcast media has taken place over the last three decades. Television as a public service, modelled on the BBC, was introduced in Israel shortly after the 1967 war. Its monopolistic structure for more than a quarter of a century guaranteed

and amplified the centrality of election broadcasts in each successive election campaign.<sup>19</sup>

Television broadcasts by the parties were introduced in the 1969 elections, 20 when the politicians simply appeared full-face on camera, 'lecturing' their arguments before the curious viewers of the new medium. 21 The second televised election campaign took place in the shadow of the 1973 war and its aftermath, and the political parties curtailed their advertising expenditures drastically. 22 Only during the 1977 electoral campaign did the nature of electioneering change significantly, with substantial financial resources invested in the campaign. Almost every list used the mass media extensively. 23 This trend continued during subsequent elections and became a major trait of the electoral process in Israel. 24

From several standpoints one can identify the 1996 Knesset elections as a watershed in Israeli campaign propaganda. The change was best symbolized by the Likud's 'shattered glass' spot which harked back to the 'Daisies/Nuclear Mushroom' television ad of Lyndon Johnson against Barry Goldwater – signifying Israel's arrival at the no-holdsbarred campaigning which the US had begun over 30 years earlier.<sup>25</sup>

If the research literature is plentiful regarding political party propaganda and election campaigning, the same cannot be said for the subject of party platforms, either worldwide or in Israel. In one sense, this could well be an indication of the demise of substantive political ideology in election campaigning as noted above. For if conventional (scholarly) wisdom believes that platform ideology is meaningless either substantively or electorally - that might account for the dearth of research on the subject. Still, we were very surprised to find that an intensive search of journals, databases, etc, uncovered almost nothing which directly addresses the topic of party platforms.<sup>26</sup> In any case, in lieu of research on election platforms, we approach the subject obliquely through a survey of political party ideology, with particular emphasis on its role during election campaigns. The assumption here is that platforms are the formal means by which each party's ideology is expressed. Of course, platforms can also express specific policy proposals which are not ideologically based; rather, our claim is more modest - to the extent that ideological values are still a part of the party's soul, they will be most clearly expressed in the party's official platform.

What is ideology? Few writers on the subject have not been heard muttering about the frustrating elusiveness of the term. While dozens of definitions exist, there is no single accepted definition. The problem is not technical but rather a critical part of the ideological struggle itself.<sup>27</sup> Attempts at definition founder because ideology is not a single homogeneous phenomenon but includes multiple levels of discourse:

philosophical, operational, propagandistic, mobilizational. Each level of discourse has its own unique characteristics<sup>28</sup> in the long distance from party platform to its media campaign to election-day sloganeering and finally to the party's actual policy in (or out of) office.

Mannheim, particularly in his major work *Ideology and Utopia*, <sup>29</sup> derived his premise from Marx: ideas do not generate spontaneously; they are invariably born out of the push and pull of real human needs: that is, our social thought and political outlooks arise in the context of our social existence. <sup>30</sup>

In a world clouded by uncertainty and hyper-variety, ideologies are useful to parties as well as to voters. Each party realizes that some citizens vote on the basis of deeply held values rather than policies; hence, it fashions an ideology which it believes will attract the greatest number of votes. This ideology must be both internally coherent as well as being consistent with the party's concrete policies; but these two conditions still leave a wide range of possible ideologies open to each party.<sup>31</sup>

In the case of the major parties, election platforms are largely determined by the party central committees and represent a compromise agreed upon by the main factions. These platforms are issued as discrete party documents, and do not normally circulate widely outside the party membership. Smaller parties, especially in the past, have not always issued formal platforms but simply make a statement through the press, either in the form of a specific document or a speech by a prominent leader.<sup>32</sup>

Each party tries to appeal to as many voters as possible. Hence no party makes its platform adhere too rigidly to any one philosophical outlook, but it also does not merely put forth an unorganized jumble of policies, as it wishes to appear ideologically competent so as to attract dogmatic voters. Platforms are coherent but not integrated, to use Downs' expression.<sup>33</sup>

Many a voter finds party platforms useful because they remove the necessity of relating every issue to a specific personal philosophy. Platforms help the voter focus attention on the differences between parties; therefore, they can be used as samples of all the different stands. With this shortcut a voter can avoid the cost of becoming informed on a wider range of issues.<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, a citizen may decide for whom to vote by means of platforms rather than past performance. Instead of comparing government action and behaviour with opposition proposals, voters compare different platforms and support the one closest to their personal values and beliefs.<sup>35</sup>

To be sure, voters can glean ideological information not only from platforms but – at least theoretically – from election campaign propaganda as well, television spots among them. The central research

question which we have set out to explore here is whether, and to what extent, these two modes of political communication tell a similar ideological story. In other words, do the parties use these different means of propaganda to convey the same (or at least a similar) message, or are they used for different purposes and/or separate substantive emphases? The second research question stems from the 'end of ideology' thesis as described above: are the platforms and/or the television spots expressed in such a way that one can say that they are truly devoid of ideology, or can one still discern (in Israel at the twilight of the twentieth century) significant elements of ideology in either or in both?

### MEASURING PARTY PLATFORMS AND TELEVISION ADS

In order comprehensively and representatively to study the degree of linkage between platforms and television propaganda we sought out the platforms of the two major parties (Likud and One Israel – formerly Labour); the new Centre party; the Russian immigrant Yisrael B'aliya party; a religious party (Shas); and two smaller parties from both ends of the Zionist spectrum (Meretz and the National Union party). Unfortunately, some of the party platforms did not exist (for instance Shas); some were published very late in the campaign and thus had little effect on the electorate (Centre, Shinui); others were distributed in very limited fashion (One Israel). Here we will compare four which cover most of the political spectrum from right to left: Likud, Centre, One Israel (the largest party) and Meretz (a smaller, more ideological party).

The variables which we investigated were: general format, range of issues, the order of their appearance, and their length – the latter two indicative of the importance which the party attached to each issue. The platforms did not all follow the same format: the issues were not categorized the same way and a few parties dealt with issues not touched upon at all by the others. We compared and analysed the seven major issue areas appearing in most of the platforms and in the party television propaganda. The television ads were those seen on Channel One (there were no content differences whatsoever between the two channels) over the full three-week period of election campaign broadcasting mandated by Israeli law.

The television spots were scored and analysed for the number of times each subject was mentioned, as the prime indicator of importance that each party attached to each topic. (In order to account for the great difference in broadcast time allotted to each party, this frequency was rated proportionately to the overall number of minutes given to each party's television spots.) To be sure, frequency is not merely a function of importance. A party may show a television ad in reaction to a rival's

attack. Examples of this include Labour's ads on Jerusalem and national unity as a response to Likud's accusations that 'Barak will divide Jerusalem'; Likud response ads to Tikki Dayan's crass designation of Likud supporters as rabble (asafsuf). In such a study where linguistic and pictorial nuances cannot always be picked up by statistical frequency alone, we also employed qualitative analysis to get at the finer points of the propaganda.

#### PLATFORMS AND ADS: OVERALL COMPARISONS

Two platforms were brochures and two were obtained through the Internet.<sup>36</sup> Each was between 50 and 100 pages, almost exclusively text, with minimal colour and pictures. Each platform had a table of contents, introduction, and final summary, with the body text divided into categories such as peace and security, society, economics, religion and state, etc.

Analysis of the party platforms is based for the most part on the italicized number which indicates the order of topic appearance which, in turn suggests the topic's degree of importance. This assumption is strengthened by the high positive correlation between order of appearance and number of pages devoted to each topic. The Centre party is the exception, with an order of topic appearance (the bold numbers) quite different from the other parties; however, the gap narrows once the italicized proportional number is figured in.

# Comparing the Party Platforms

Peace and security is the first (or second) subject dealt with by One Israel, the Likud and Meretz – and last by the Centre party. However,

TABLE 1
PARTY PLATFORM ISSUES BY IMPORTANCE (FREQUENCY)

Subject	One Israel	Likud	Meretz	Centre*	
Society and Economics	2 (0.44) 1	3 (0.39) 1	3 (0.27) 2	2 (0.22) 2	
Peace and Security	1 (0.26) 2	1 (0.19) 2	1 (0.09) 5	3 (0.31) 1	
Education	3 (0.13) 3	2 (0.12) 4	4 (0.11) 4	2 (0.16) 4	
Democracy, religion and state	4 (0.09) 4	6 (0.04) 6	2 (0.28) 1	1 (0.17) 3	
National unity	0 (0) —	0(0) —	0 (0) —	1 (0.09) 5	
Immigration	6 (0.03) 6	4 (0.07) 5	5 (0.06) 6	2 (0.02) 7	
Ecology	5 (0.06) 5	5 (0.18) 3	6 (0.19) 3	2 (0.03) 6	

Note: The number in bold represents the importance of the topic by rank order placement in the party's platform. The *italicized* number represents the number of pages devoted to each topic, proportional to the total number of pages in the platform overall (the number in parentheses).

regarding the extent of the topic coverage, the Centre party is first, whereas peace and security merited much less coverage (fifth place) in Meretz's platform.

The two main parties were somewhat more consistent, in both cases devoting the second most amount of space to the subject. The main difference of substance was seen in the relationship between peace and security: One Israel and the Centre party continue Rabin's approach of 'no security without peace', while the Likud advocated Ariel Sharon's doctrine of 'security even without peace'.<sup>37</sup>

On the subject of society and economies no significant differences were found in the parties' placement (second or third place). Similarly, no great gap existed regarding extent of coverage: Meretz and Centre, second place; Israel One and Likud, first place. As to substance, the three central parties presented virtually indistinguishable policy platforms on such topics as national health insurance, education, etc. Any voter on the right who believed in privatization and transfer of social responsibility from society to the individual had to turn to Shinui (Change), while anyone seeking greater public social welfare and interventionism could turn to Hadash (the Democratic Front for Peace and Equality) or perhaps Meretz.<sup>38</sup> On economic issues, one could easily trade entire sections between the three platforms without anyone noticing. For example, none of the three discuss increasing taxation on the upper class, the wave of foreign workers, or shekel devaluation. On the other hand, the campaign's magic bullet - infrastructure development - was amply discussed by all three.39

The Likud and Centre party each gave education a relatively high priority (second place), compared to One Israel (third place) and Meretz (fourth). Regarding extent of coverage, the picture was more unified: One Israel in third place and all the others in fourth place. Although no comparative data are available for previous years, there is little doubt that education had greater salience in 1999 than ever before, so that its 'middle' position should be viewed as a major step up into the forefront of Israel's central issues.

The issues of democracy, religion and state stood at the head of the Centre party's platform and came in second place for Meretz. On the other hand, it was not very critical for One Israel (fourth place) or the Likud (sixth place), with the same results regarding extent of coverage. The religion and state sections are full of obfuscation and generality, the weapons of choice in dealing with every possible political landmine and contradiction. Expressions such as 'democratic education', 'Zionism', 'heritage', 'national values' and 'human rights' abound, although it is not clear how several of these contradictory values can be bridged or translated into an operative framework.<sup>40</sup> Such overall obfuscation offers a clue to the electoral success of Shinui, the only

<sup>\*</sup> The Centre party divided its subjects into only three categories; thus a 1-3 scale is used here.

non-religious party which took a clear stand on this important, controversial issue.

Although the Centre party placed the topic of national unity at the top of its platform agenda, the extent of coverage was so minimal as to put the issue in fifth position overall, much closer to where the other three parties stood and representing a general avoidance of the issue. Indeed, if anything, one could define this as the non-issue which the Centre party tried (unsuccessfully) to pawn off as the central campaign topic (perhaps partly to hide the fact that it had little different to say on the core issues).

Although the Centre party put immigration in second place in its platform, the amount of space devoted to this topic was much less (fourth place). Likud, Meretz and One Israel placed immigration in fourth, fifth and sixth place respectively, with their coverage roughly equal to the placement position. One senses here not much more than a token attempt to address the needs of a huge sector of voters.

The 1999 elections constituted Israel's first serious electoral involvement in the 'post-industrial' topic of ecology. Although the new Green party did not pass the voting threshold (1.5 per cent), the subject was an important one for a growing number of higher-educated citizens. Thus, the Centre party positioned ecology in second place in its platform (although in sixth place in extent of coverage). Surprisingly Meretz positioned ecology in only sixth place, but with more extensive coverage (third place). Both One Israel and the Likud placed ecology relatively low (fifth place), but the Likud's coverage was somewhat more extensive (third versus fifth place).

#### COMPARING PARTY TELEVISION PROPAGANDA

Overall, 690 minutes were allotted to 33 parties over a three-week period, based on Amendment 3 of the Election Law: 'Each party and list of candidates will be awarded ten minutes, and each party represented in the outgoing Knesset (Israel's parliament) will receive an additional three minutes per Knesset member.' As a result, One Israel received 106 minutes, the Likud 67, Meretz 31 and the Centre party 25.41

Table 2 presents a quantitative breakdown of the amount of time each party devoted to the various topics. In order to allow for the overall time allotment differential between the parties, we chose to compare them proportionately. The absolute number of times each subject was broadcast is highlighted in bold, and the subject's order of importance for each party is noted by the number in *italics*. Thus, for example, One Israel mentioned 'society and economics' 86 times and the proportional result was obtained by dividing 86 into 106 (total number of minutes allotted to the party) to reach the figure of 0.81. In

TABLE 2
TELEVISION PROPAGANDA ISSUES BY IMPORTANCE (FREQUENCY)

Subject	One Israel	Likud	Meretz	Centre _		
Society and economics	86 (0.81) 1	8 (0.12) 3	24 (0.77) 2	1 (0.04) 4		
Peace and security	61 (0.58) 2	73 (1.09) 1	9 (0.29) 3	6 (0.24) 3		
Education	<b>55</b> (0.52) 3	2 (0.03) 6	8 (0.26) 4	0		
Democracy, religion and state	21 (0.20) 4	8 (0.12) 3	25 (0.81) <i>1</i>	7 (0.28) 2		
National unity	13 (0.12) 5	10 (0.15) 2	4 (0.13) 6	11 (0.44) 1		
Immigration	12 (0.11) 6	7 (0.10) 5	0	0		
Ecology	0 ` ´	0 ` ′	7 (0.23) 5	0		

the television spots, frequently several subjects were interspersed in the same breath (thus, the total number of appearances for all the issues combined may exceed the total number of minutes allotted to each party).

Society and economics was far and away the most important topic for One Israel, which repeatedly attacked the high rate of unemployment as a personal failure of Prime Minister Netanyahu and his government's policy: 'So many people are unemployed; why should he keep his job?' The ads offered no specific policy proposals to alleviate the problem, but instead presented a telephone number through which viewers could order a detailed programme to be sent to them at home. The policy paper was not of the party but rather was called 'The Barak programme for economic security'.

The general subject was also of prime importance for Meretz (in second place after 'democracy'), but here too with little specificity. Other than supporting the 'public housing law', Meretz offered few economic policy proposals, nor any in the area of 'social welfare', although it stressed the importance of social issues on many occasions.

The Likud placed society and economics in a third place tie with Democracy, far behind 'peace and security' (first) and 'national unity' (second). The Likud offered several statistical indicators to prove its socio-economic successes, but again without any specific future policy proposals. The Centre party deigned to mention society and economics only once in its television spots without offering any details.

For the Likud, peace and security dominated almost the entire televised campaign, emphasizing success in limiting terrorist attacks, increasing the feeling of personal security, and strengthening the centrality of Jerusalem. Its television spots also attacked the 'left' (especially One Israel) as willing to endanger Israel's security through 'dovish' concessions. Moreover, as a counter to One Israel's spotlighting of candidate Barak as Israel's most decorated soldier, the Likud lauded the military past of Prime Minister Netanyahu and Foreign Minister Sharon. However, despite the great amount of broadcast time devoted

to the general subject, the Likud offered few specific policies – or even its general stance and principles – which could indicate to the citizenry what the party intended to do in the future.

One Israel placed the peace and security issue in second place (albeit well behind society and economics, the first issue), extensively repeating the 'Barak: Israel's Number One Soldier' spot, which surveyed his impressive army career and military heroics. However, it shed no light on what his future security policy might be. Another recurring theme was the introduction of Barak's future 'military cabinet', many of whom lauded Barak's abilities rather than spelling out specific policy on this critical subject. Only the issue of Jerusalem received any detail, with emphasis on promises not to divide the city, etc. But here, too (in mirror image of the Likud), this was more a result of defending against the Likud's attacks rather than the relative importance of the issue in the broad scheme of peace and security problems which Israel faced, including Lebanon, Syria, the Oslo process and the Wye Agreement.

Both Meretz and the Centre party placed peace and security third, although with different emphases. Meretz accentuated the importance of peace and the legacy of the late prime minister, Rabin, with some added general comments on security policy (withdrawal from southern Lebanon). The Centre party, as with One Israel, stressed the military background of its leader, the former general and defence minister, Mordechai. In addition, the party positioned itself as the compromise moderate centre, here, too, without specifics.

As noted earlier, the 1999 elections marked the first time that education became a highly salient election topic. One Israel gave it almost as much air time (third place) as peace and security (second). Meretz gave it some emphasis (fourth place), whereas the Likud placed it at the bottom and the Centre ignored it completely.

What lay at the core of One Israel's education propaganda? Close analysis shows that no specific educational philosophy or even specific policies were offered, but rather the issue was exploited as a cudgel against Prime Minister Netanyahu's empty promises regarding his 'long school day' and 'a computer for every child' projects, in addition to his mishandling of the university students' long strike (including empty promises he gave in order to end it). In short, education was definitely placed on the election agenda, but without any ideological underpinning.

Meretz devoted more air time to democracy, religion and state (first place) than the other parties, with its message 'Being free in our country' directed against religious coercion. Indeed, the party viewed this as a strategic issue which might enable it to become the third largest party in the country. Its television propaganda asked again and again, 'Who will become the third largest party – Meretz or Shas?' In this case,

the issue was definitely ideological and not merely instrumental, as one of the component factions of Meretz (the Citizens' Rights Movement founded in 1973) had always viewed the issue as its raison d'être. 43

The Centre party also devoted a large amount of time to the subject (second place). This can be explained by the topic's closeness to the 'national unity' issue which led the party's televised campaign, as well as the relative ease with which the Centre's disparate political personalities could agree on the topic of 'democracy'. As for religion and state, amorphous generalities were the order of the day.

Both the Likud and One Israel placed the subject in the middle of their propaganda agenda, albeit with significant differences. Whereas the Likud chose to concentrate on the general importance of Judaism to the nation's character along with photos of Prime Minister Netanyahu in relevant poses and scenes, One Israel (in addition to similar platitudes) came out forthrightly against 'religious blackmail' and promised to ensure that all public monies would be disbursed in just and equal fashion, in other words, university students would not receive less than Yeshiya students.

As noted above, national unity was the Centre party's main issue. However, for various reasons it offered very few specifics in its television spots as to the operational meaning of the topic. This may have been due to the short amount of time at its disposal to produce the television ads, as well as a dearth of funds for more sophisticated and variegated advertising. It may also be that as the party leadership was the living embodiment of 'national unity' (coming from several different ideological and party directions), it felt little need to expand on the obvious.

The Likud also gave national unity relative primacy in its televsion spots (second place, albeit far away from first), but its approach was decidedly negative – attacking One Israel for its elitism, especially as expressed by Tikki Dayan in her egregious 'rabble speech' and Barak's (lack of appropriate) response. The Likud mentioned almost nothing positive regarding 'national unity'.

One Israel placed national unity in only fifth position in the televised campaign. It broadcast mainly self-defence explanations against the Likud's 'rabble speech' attack. Towards the end of the campaign, One Israel used the idea of 'national unity' to ask Likud supporters to abandon Netanyahu and cross the party divide by supporting Barak in the prime ministerial race.

Finally, as befitting a more ideologically focused party, Meretz hardly paid any attention to this consensual issue in its ad spots.

Meretz and the Centre party ignored immigration completely, while the Likud (fifth place) and One Israel (sixth) hardly did it justice either. One explanation is that by including running Russian subtitles in its ads (along with the occasional jingle), the parties felt they had done their duty, although this meant that they were not dealing with the issue itself directly and certainly were not addressing those issues close to the hearts of immigrants from the former Soviet Union (except perhaps for religion and state). Another explanation is that the televised ads are costly and it was not clear that the outlay would bear electoral fruit, especially with a population having a strong print and oral culture. Finally, too great a pandering to the immigrants might have turned off many other Israeli voters with their own demands. The real battle between the Likud and One Israel for the votes of these immigrants took place far from the general public's eye, in the Russian-language newspapers and at election meetings.

Other than Meretz, 'green' was not a colour seen on the parties' ad spots. Although ecology had been placed on the public election agenda, the subject was obviously too narrow to warrant serious expenditure of broadcast time and production money.

#### COMPARING PARTY PLATFORMS AND TELEVISION ADS

Table 3 displays the rank order of both the television ads and the platform by subject and by party.

Several things are immediately obvious from the table. First, there is no correlation regarding the rank order of the issues between parties. The only two issues where the parallelism is somewhat apparent are (unsurprisingly) 'peace and security' and 'society and economics', which in most countries – and certainly one beset by security and socioeconomic problems as severe as Israel's – would head the list during most election campaigns. After that, however, each party goes its own way, so in terms of agenda priorities, the voter definitely had a choice among several different possibilities.

 $\begin{tabular}{ll} TABLE 3 \\ \hline RANK ORDER BY PARTY OF ISSUES IN PLATFORMS AND TELEVISION ADS \\ \hline \end{tabular}$ 

Carleina	One Israel TV	Р	Likud TV	Р	Meretz TV	Р	Centre TV	, P
Subject		1		1			1,	
Society and economics	1	2	3.5	3	2	3	4	*2
Peace and security	2	1	1	1	3	* 1	3	3
Education	3	3	6	*2	4	4	0	2
Democracy, religion and state	4	4	3.5	*6	1	2	2	1
National unity	5	*0	2	*0	6	0	1	1
Immigration	6	6	5	4	0	*5	0	*2
Ecology	Ō	*5	0	*5	5	6	0	*2

<sup>\*=</sup> a gap of at least two rank orders between television and Platform (0 is equivalent to seventh place, except for the Centre party where it equals fifth place in the television ads).

A closer look at Table 3, however, reveals a more complex picture. A much higher correlation does exist between the parties on issue rank order with regard to the party platforms than seen in the televised propaganda. In fact, in their platforms, the Likud, One Israel and Meretz show almost no perceptible differences in agenda priorities. On the other hand, the television ads exhibit far greater differences between the parties' rank ordering of the issues.

In approximately 40 per cent of the rankings in the table, there is a gap of at least two rank orders between the party's television propaganda and printed platform on specific issues. Given that the platforms were written very close to the time of televised campaign ad production (at most, a couple of months apart), one can hardly ascribe the gap to changing conditions in the state of the country or its problems.

What accounts for the platform/television ad gaps? For the exposition of the sundry factors, we turn now to a more general discussion which will also be devoted to the (lack of) ideological propagandizing in these elections.

#### W(H)ITHER IDEOLOGY

This study has a dual focus: to look at the place of ideology in the election campaign of 1999 in general, and to review the similarities and differences between the issues raised within the party platforms and television advertisements. These two seemingly separate questions really constitute two sides of the same coin.

The almost universal process of modernization, proceeding at different rates in different countries (including Israel), leads to profound change in the political system in general and the democratic election campaign specifically.<sup>44</sup> These changes seem to go hand in hand with the general inclination towards growing detachment between the parties' platforms and their electoral propaganda.

# Personalization and Personification of the Ideological Conflict

The personalization of political disputes has become a predominant factor in the contemporary world.<sup>45</sup> Over the course of time, the personal attributes of the candidates progressively eclipse the content of electoral propaganda.<sup>46</sup> In thoroughly modernized campaigns, the voters' choice depends increasingly upon their perception of the individual candidate. This new type of political 'relationship' replaces traditional ideological and fiduciary bonds between voters and the party apparatus.<sup>47</sup>

Thus, actual ideological divergence between parties, no matter how stark, is gradually reduced as a result of the greater importance accorded to personal traits and rhetoric skills.<sup>48</sup>

The medium which most underlies and strengthens this trend is television, with political advertisements creating and disseminating images of individual candidates, thereby increasing the personalization of politics which occurs for formal and structural reasons. Formally, the medium favours representation of human figures over complex institutions such as political parties. 49 Structurally, the natural short-term pragmatism of political marketing works to the detriment of long-term political concepts - overemphasizing the role of personalized modern political communication through the mass media, rather than political issues which are the very substance of politics. 50 Personification is the continuation and twin of personalization. Ideological and substantive conflicts between movements and parties are reduced to individual, personal conflicts between party heads and leaders. This reductionist presentation of conflicts simplifies reality and helps propagandists to clarify differences between the various political alternatives for the general public.51

A general criticism heard throughout the 1999 Israeli campaign was that both Barak and Netanyahu focused on each other's personality to the detriment of other campaign issues. In the case of the two major parties' television spots, this was certainly true.

Even when attacking its rival's (lack of) ideology, it was done in a personalized fashion: 'Ehud Barak. Too much ambition, too few principles'. What the Likud feared most of all was extensive use by One Israel of past quotes by Likud luminaries criticizing Netanyahu's personal shortcomings. Its preventive strategy was none other than using extensive past quotes of Labour party leaders criticizing Barak's personality.<sup>52</sup>

One Israel repeated the same tendency in two different ways. First, its central messages were: (1) Barak's ability to serve as prime minister, based on archival military footage; (2) details regarding Netanyahu's failures. As noted above, even on substantive issues such as unemployment, One Israel personalized its criticism with the sign-off line repeated over and over ('Why should Netanyahu keep his job?').

The Centre party also focused its election propaganda on the personality of Mordechai as capable of being prime minister. Here, however, the tactical message was somewhat different: Mordechai was described as the only one capable of defeating Netanyahu.

Meretz was the only party under discussion here which did not run a prime ministerial candidate, and so it is not surprising to find that it had a much lower level of personalization in its television ads. This suggests – as we shall elaborate further on – that one of the factors behind the personalization trend is 'systemic': namely, the nature of the election system.

However, one should not underestimate the fact that Meretz continues to be an ideological party - its prime means of differentiating

itself from One Israel on the Zionist left of the spectrum. In other words, where ideology is strongest, personalization is weakest.

If overall we find a high level of personalization in the television propaganda, why is the situation different in the party platforms? Here, too, the answer is 'ideology'. Whether meant seriously or not, the platform is the one place where each party finds room to offer (the vestiges of?) its ideological creed. Moreover, a platform is not ideal for 'negative advertising'; the focus is on one's own party and not the rival. This, too, lessens the temptation for personalization.

# The Medium Is the Message

The nature of television as a medium differs greatly from the textuality of a party platform in print form. The successful use of television requires the translation of abstract conceptual ideology into more simplistic pictures and sounds. This need ties in with the previous section, for many times the easiest way to accomplish such 'translation' is to personify the ideological message. As a result, commercial television often has been identified as an important contributor to the crisis of political parties,<sup>53</sup> since modern electronic mass media do not convey complex messages well: the simpler the message, the easier and more effective its presentation.<sup>54</sup>

In any case, the gap between platform and televised ad is understandable in media terms alone, as the ad turns the (theoretical) detailed exposition of the platform into actual realized pictures.

For example, One Israel's detailed platform proposals for restructuring the economy and reforming foreign currency laws quickly turned into television pictures of irate workers protesting their unemployment. The Likud similarly transformed its detailed platform on the final peace accords and Lebanon into stark pictures of past terror (under Labour governments). Meretz likewise took its prime 'Israeli democracy' platform issue and turned it into a picture of a hand banging on the Knesset's door asking 'Is anyone home?' and then showing the members of Knesset (MKs) sound asleep.

A second media-related element is the amount of time and space. In the platforms, space is virtually unlimited – each party can write at length on as many issues as it feels is warranted. However, television ads are very limited in time allotted and also cost a great sum of money for each separate election commercial produced. Here, the parties will be highly selective in what they film and how many separate ads they produce – essentially meaning that some issues will of necessity be given short shrift while others will be rerun several times over.

One further 'media' aspect should be noted here: time frame. Only one platform is issued (if that!), and so its time frame is at least the length of the entire campaign, if not the whole tenure of the next government. As such, it tends to be all-inclusive and more coherent – perhaps also more serious – coming as it does after significant discussion between leaders within the party. The television spots, by comparison, although in theory following a basic strategic campaign line, are more adept at immediate tactical response to the vagaries of the actual campaign on a day-to-day level. Thus, if, for example, Tikki Dayan causes an unexpected furore, television ads are the best way to exploit this, regardless of whether it fits into the Likud's original grand strategy of emphasizing 'peace and security'.

# The Scientification of Politics

In order successfully to traverse the media divide between platform and television, Israeli parties have increasingly turned to foreign media consultants who supply the expertise and render decisions formerly made by the party apparatus and leadership. This ever more frequent use of media experts, technicians and social scientists can best be described as the 'scientification' of politics.<sup>55</sup>

Unfortunately, these specialists seem at times to have transferred their methods into the political sphere without really giving sufficient thought to the ultimate consequences. They manage to convince many of their clients that the best and most professional method to attract voters (especially the undecided) is to avoid traditional political argumentation, instead simplifying and ideologically 'neutering' their message. To be sure, a certain degree of simplification of the political message can increase its impact,<sup>56</sup> but we now are close to the point where all voters find it difficult to differentiate between the ideological positions of the non-sectoral parties.

Certainly these outside experts (Finkelstein for the Likud; Carville, Schrum and Greenberg for One Israel) are not all that familiar (if at all; some are notorious for their 'parachute consultancy') with the ideological basis of the party they are called in to help. But that is a secondary consideration; of primary importance is that they are hired as 'technicians' in order to manipulate television images for maximum electoral advantage, mostly using American techniques which do not always fit the more serious Israeli approach to political matters.

Moreover, the strategic decision-making process of the television spots is worth noting. The take-over of the television campaign by 'marketing consultants' and the like is a result of the centralization of campaign strategy in the hands of the prime ministerial candidate party leader. Both Barak and Netanyahu set up a highly centralized system whereby virtually all campaign decisions were vetted by them. Indeed, in the 1999 elections, reports had it that Limor Livnat, the communications minister, who was formally in charge of the Likud's media campaign, was pushed out of the decision-making loop. This

would explain our finding that of the four parties under scrutiny here, it is the Likud which exhibits the greatest number of significant gaps (four) between platform and television spot rank order, given Netanyahu's renowned understanding of the medium and proven ability to manipulate television to his own personal advantage.

The bottom-line result for both major parties is that instead of a campaign which reflected their broad interests and ideological tenets as a whole, the television spots became highly personalized (reflecting each prime ministerial candidate's interest) and narrower in their policy and ideological scope.

On the other hand, no outsider was called in to doctor the party's platform, which is completely an 'in-house' job. The party platform remains just that – a means of political communication controlled by, and representing the interests and beliefs of, the party as a whole. Thus, whereas the platform is a purely political document, virtually untainted by 'scientific' considerations, the television campaign has become an almost exclusively 'technical' domain untainted by ideological—political criteria.

### The Election System

Majority systems allow voters to cast ballots for individual candidates and thus foster personalization. In turn, candidates seek support from ideologically heterogeneous groups of voters by stressing their personal appeal, rather than party affiliation and political programme. Proportional voting, in contrast, focuses attention more on the party with its ideological and political commitments than on individual candidates.<sup>57</sup>

The situation in Israel is somewhat more complicated due to its unusual dual election system with a proportional party vote and a majoritarian prime ministerial ballot. One might have expected that the television campaign would emphasize both the parties' ideology and policy and the prime ministerial candidates' personality. Overall (especially regarding the parties who ran a candidate for prime minister), this did not occur – personality overwhelmed party (as occurred in the 1996 elections as well). The reason is systemic: it is the victor of the prime ministerial race who determines the future government and not the ultimate inter-party constellation.

The subsidiary role of party (re)presentation has thus remained in the hands of the platform while the central role of advancing the prime ministerial candidate has moved to the television campaign. In short, whereas the platform has a collective client, television has an individual patron to serve.

### Party Characteristics

In Israel, as with the rest of the world, the traditional ideological party – no longer able to rely on a secure base of party loyalists – is being

replaced by 'catch-all' confederations which exist more to win elections by appealing to a broad range of voters' opinions than to implement defined programmes. Consequently, their electoral fortunes wax and wane with the voters' pragmatic assessments of their leaders and the performance of the current government<sup>58</sup> – often relegating specific ideological commitments to the background of campaigns and blurring programmatic differences between parties, except on a few issues where a party believes it holds the more popular view.<sup>59</sup>

How does this account for the gap between platform and television spots? It does not; rather, it explains the other side of the coin. If we noted above that approximately 40 per cent of the issues by party showed a significant gap, in the remaining 60 per cent a small (or no) gap existed. This has more to do with the de-ideologization of party platforms than with television ads. As 'catch-all' parties, the Likud, One Israel and the Centre party all couched their platform subjects in quite general and vague terms, as described at length earlier. Thus, substantively it seems that the platforms are moving closer to television propaganda rather than vice versa, in large part due to the changing nature of the parties, which as we saw a moment ago are the true authors of the platform.

# The Structure of Party Competition

If until now we have offered several factors underlying the gap between each party's platform and its television campaign, the present factor is related to the other finding we mentioned earlier: a relatively high level of similarity between the rank ordering of the issues between the parties.

Bipartisan competition (systems dominated by just two or three viable, competitive parties) between catch-all parties favours an election model of sophisticated campaign strategies to create volatile and temporary aggregations of interests within a fragmented society. On the other hand, multiparty systems require parties to differentiate themselves by establishing better-defined relationships with particular social, economic and interest groups.<sup>60</sup>

An important question is the extent to which parties could be said to be coming closer together (convergence) or moving further apart (divergence).<sup>61</sup> Convergence owes its popularity to Downs' prediction that in a two-party system, with the majority of electors clustered in the centre, the parties will move to the median position (in terms of policy) in order to pick up as many votes as possible.<sup>62</sup>

To be sure, in Israel one does not find an economic left-right dimension emerging clearly. The dominance of ethno-national and nation-building concerns leaves little room for the traditional left-right cleavage.

As Israel is a relatively young state faced by external threats and the assimilation of foreign cultures, it would be odd if such concerns did not

predominate.<sup>63</sup> However, even though Israel is defined as having multiparty system, there seems to be a visible movement towards bipartisan competition, mostly as a result of the change in the election system instituted in 1996 (the direct election of the prime minister). As a result, in Israel a large area of overlapping policies exists near the centre of the spectrum, leading to a situation in which the larger parties closely resemble each other.<sup>64</sup> This tendency towards similarity, which Rappe found in Finland as well – also based on a study of party platforms and print campaign advertising<sup>65</sup> – is reinforced by deliberate equivocation about each particular issue. Party policies may become so vague, and parties so alike, that voters find it difficult to make rational decisions. Nevertheless, in Downsian terms, fostering ambiguity is the rational course of each party.<sup>66</sup>

In the 1999 campaign, the Likud, One Israel and the Centre party all consciously concentrated on the political centre. The fact that in the end the Centre party garnered nowhere near the numbers it had hoped underscores the other two parties' success in capturing 'the centre' (although see the concluding section's caveat regarding their 'success'). In propaganda terms, however, that meant marked similarity between these parties' issues as expressed in their respective platforms, and the same tegarding their respective overall television campaign.

Regarding Meretz, a party which did not seek the centre and had no prime ministerial candidate, one might have expected to find a completely different situation. In the event, however, we find that, on the one hand, the rank ordering of issues did not differ markedly from the others, but, on the other hand, the substantive content and the lack of ideological obfuscation set it quite apart. In other words, these four parties agreed on the most salient issues, but there were significant differences between the three double ballot parties and between the single ballot Meretz tegarding ideological clarity and substance.

# From Citizens to Spectators/Consumers

In general, the essential form of citizen participation in election campaigns has changed from direct personal involvement to spectatorship. Campaigns are conducted primarily through the mass media, and citizens participate in them as members of the media audience. Murdock has proposed a different distinction: between the identities of consumers and that of citizens. On one side stands the emotional crowd, seduced by dramatic images, acting in concert; on the other, we have the rational citizen, open to sequential argument, making considered personal choices and registering preferences soberly in the solitude of the voting booth. 88

While we were unable to elicit any data from the parties regarding the number of platform brochures issued, it is obvious from our own

# CONCLUSION

tortuous attempts to receive them that their readership could not have been very large. In addition to those close to the party, only citizens with special knowledge or communications resources would manage to get hold of the platforms. On the other hand, the 'people metre' ratings of the televised spots reached 30 per cent on most nights (almost exactly the same ratings as for the 1996 campaign),69 from all sociodemographic backgrounds.70 We can thus very roughly define the platform reader as being the politically cognitive, rational type, as compared to the more 'spectator/consumer'-orientated television ad viewer - still another explanation (audience) for the differences found between these two types of election propaganda.

# The Dominance of Policy over Ideology

What does not emerge from our statistical tables but is of critical importance to our understanding of the question of election ideology and platform/television differences is the relationship between practical policy pronouncements and principled ideological statements. If in the past, people were moved by a specific world perspective and/or attachment to a class, today Western voters are interested in each party's statements only in so far as they serve as guides to the policies the party will carry out when in office. When the party is already in office, its current actions provide a better guide to what it will do than do its current statements. Therefore, the incumbent party need not be reliable as it is responsible,71 for voters are ultimately interested in actions, not ideologies.72

Proof of this can be found in all the parties' television ads, which spent a very disproportionate amount of time on policies as opposed to ideological positions. This is in contradistinction to the platforms which laid greater (albeit not over) emphasis on ideological exposition. Thus, for example, in the television campaign the Likud concentrated on the outgoing government's accomplishments and the previous (Labour) government's failures. One Israel did the reverse; indeed, it mentioned ideology only regarding the large gap between the Likud's ideology and that party's policy in practice. Meretz focused on the lack of parliamentary legislation and its own legislative successes. Even the Centre party, which one would have expected to emphasize ideology (obviously not having any previous party record), did not do so, preferring to concentrate on the policy accomplishments of its frontrank leaders.

In short, the parties seem to be offering - at least in the media campaign - what they think the public wants: policy and personality. The party platforms still provide some general ideological road map for the voter but if present trends continue one can expect in the future to find this too going out of style, assuming the platform survives at all.

Judging from the 1999 Israeli election campaign, one might be tempted to conclude that our current age marks a new end of ideology. If the 'end of ideology' was first proclaimed in the United States in the 1950s, has Israel over 40 years later finally arrived at the same junction? Our surprising answer is yes - and no.

It must be remembered that this study is based on only four parties, for the main methodological reason that each issued a party platform. Our findings clearly show that while their platforms had a modicum of ideology, the brochures reached but a small segment of the population. The television campaign, on the other hand, reached a wide audience but was almost devoid of ideology, except for Meretz to a limited extent.

However, the election results tell a different story. These three 'nonideological' parties suffered disastrously at the polls relative to their 1996 strength: the Likud lost 14 Knesset seats, One Israel lost 8 (formally; even more if one discounts Gesher and Meimad seats), and the Centre party dropped precipitously from about 15 seats in public opinion surveys at the start of the race (in February) to 6 actual seats in the election itself (in May). On the other hand, those who did well in the elections were almost all ideological in nature: Shinui (6 seats, up from 1), Shas (17 seats - an impressive increase of 7), and Amir Peretz's One Nation party which garnered 2 seats despite most experts predicting that the party would not cross the minimum vote threshold.

We must therefore offer two separate conclusions. First, ideology was not a central part of these elections. The party platforms had some ideology but were narrowly disseminated; the television campaign had a wide audience but was almost devoid of ideology. However, our second conclusion is a mirror image of the first: the public was obviously not at all pleased with this state of affairs, punishing those parties which offered innocuous pap and rewarding those which offered some substance.

Indeed, everyone concerned would do well to remember what happened to the first 'end of ideology' thesis. Its proponents discerned a pattern of transformation in European politics marked by a sharp decline in extremist politics and radical ideologies. Post-war Western democracies were moving towards a pragmatic bargaining style. Grand ideological programmes were disgraced and disowned. Political maturity had triumphed; ideology, like other unfounded prejudices, was on its way to extinction.73 But the mistake soon became apparent: the 'end of ideology' did not survive the 1960s. The Vietnam War, the civil rights movement, student rebellions, and the events of May 1968 in Paris constituted precisely the revival of ideology that these theorists had discounted.74

Asher Arian (ed.), The Elections in Israel - 1969, Jerusalem: Jerusalem Academic Pressl 1972, pp.220-37.

22. Yoram Peri, 'Television in the 1973 Election Campaign', in Asher Arian (ed.), The Election in Israel - 1973, Jerusalem: Jerusalem Academic Press, 1975, pp.95-117.

23. Judith Elizur and Elihu Katz, 'The Media in the Israeli Election of 1977', in H. R. Penniman (ed.), Israel at the Polls: The Knesset Flections of 1977, Jerusalem: Jerusalem Academic Press, 1975, pp.227-54.

24. Dan Caspi, 'Following the Race: Propaganda and Electoral Decision', in Dan Caspilet al (eds), The Roots of Begin's Success: The 1981 Israeli Elections, London: Croom Helm

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25. Amir Ben-David, 'Who will Shatter the Glass? - The Propaganda War: A Special Report Maariv (Sabbath Supplement), 2 April 1999, pp.6-9 (Hebrew).

26. Among the databases which we searched were: ABI/INFORM (including the Social Science Module); FirstSearch; MCB - University Press e-journals; IDFAL; Periodical Content Index; Web of Science; WinSPIRS - Sociological. In addition, we carried out search engine investigations through the Internet, using keywords such as ['party (or) political (or) election' (and) 'platform'] (and) ['television (or) election' (and) 'propaganda (or) ads (or) commercials']. Many of the potentially relevant regular academic journals were surveyed as well, in the field of political science as well as mass communications.

27. Bernard Susser, Political Ideology in the Modern World, Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 1995, p.9.

28. [bid., p.14.

29. Karl Mannheim, Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge, \$5 Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1985.

30. Ibid., p.19.

- 31. Anthony Downs, An Economic Theory of Democracy, New York: Harper and Row, 1951
- 32. Bara, 'Israel 1949-1981', p.117.
- 33. Downs, An Economic Theory of Democracy, p.110.

34. Ibid., p.98.

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36. One Israel: http://www.elections-yedioth.co.il/Articles/795.htm; Center part http://www.knesset.gov.il/elections/knesset15/mercaz\_m.htm.

37. Ron Ben-Yishai, 'Peace and Security: Despite the Terror or Because of It?', Yediot Almond (Sabbath Supplement), 7 May 1999 (Hebrew).

38. Gideon Eshet, 'Society: Not Right and Not Left', Yediot Ahronot, 7 September 199 (Hebrew).

39. Sever Plotzker, 'Economics: The Numbers Don't Add Up', Yediot Ahronot, 7 May

40. Yaron London, 'Religion and State: Illusions Instead of Principles,' Yediot Abronot, 7 M. 1999 (Hebrew).

41. 'The Televised Ad Spots are Coming', Yediot Abronot ('24 Hours' Supplement) (Hebrew

From: http://www.elections~yedioth.co.il.

42. In Hebrew, it works as an associative pun on the famous words of the national anti-el The national anthem was repeatedly used and manipulated by other parties as well; t National Religious Party (Matdal) in response to Merctz; Allei Yarok (pro-marijual legalization) which played the anthem to a trance music beat; and others.

43. This is not to deny that for Meretz, the subject did not have great tactical importance, if it not only was fighting Shas but also had to guard its other ideological flank from the electoral inroads being made by Shinui which had become an almost one-issue par against religious coercion, thus threatening to attract many voters away from Meretz

44. David L. Swanson and Paolo Mancini, 'Politics, Media, and Democracy - Introduction Swanson and Mancini, Politics, Media, and Democracy, p.14.

45. Dan Caspi, Electoral Rhetoric and Political Polarization: The Begin-Peres Debate European Journal of Communication, Vol. 1 (1986), pp.447-62.

46. Dan Caspi, American Style Electioneering in Israel: Americanization vers Modernization', in Swanson and Mancini, Politics, Media, and Democracy, p.181

47. Swanson and Mancini, 'Politics, Media, and Democracy - Introduction', p. 14.

Israel's parties, therefore, would do well (from their own selfinterested perspective) to restore the party platform to its earlier central position in the campaign and to begin addressing the public not only in the media language of commercial consumerism,75 but in the traditional political language of values and an overarching ideological programme. Perhaps the nation's leaders and their hired media consultants believe that ideology no longer has a place in Israeli national elections, but the electorate obviously shares a different opinion.

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