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ON THE RECIPROCAL RELATION BETWEEN ISRAELI FOREIGN AND DOMESTIC POLICY IN REGARDS TO THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT, 2009-2019

MA thesis

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have written this Master's thesis independently. All viewpoints of other authors, literary sources and data from elsewhere used for writing this paper have been referenced.

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Merili Arjakas

Abstract

This thesis aims to explore the role and impact of Israel's domestic factor in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict dynamic in the period of 2009-2019, under the leadership of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. It uses the theoretical framework of domestic constraints in foreign policy, as Israel's actions in regards to the Palestinians can be considered a type of foreign policy. To simplify between various sources of domestic influence, the thesis focuses on the party factions within the coalition governments and their bargaining power relative to each other. Thus, the study is based on the formation of the coalitions as the primary arena of internal political contestation, and on the subsequent actions of the government as an agent with executive power in the state.

The research examines the causal connections between internal political contestation and foreign policy on the basis that leadership uses the international level to achieve objectives at the domestic level. The objective of the thesis is to enhance the theoretical framework by exploring the mutually reciprocal relations between domestic politics and foreign policy. It suggests that conflictual behavior is not contained to foreign policy, but has also had repercussions for the society as a whole. Accommodating to radical elements and avoiding resolving contentious issues might sustain the leadership's power, but this has put it into a more difficult position to solve long-term problems. Legitimizing the regime erodes the possibilities for peaceful conflict resolution, because alternative options are not explored. Initiatives for retroactive legalization and judicial overhaul weaken the position of rule of law. As these plans are proposed in the protracted conflict situation, they also have the effect of persisting the conflict despite the costs it

entails. As the findings are limited to one case, further research is needed to assess their applicability.

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INTRODUCTION

Research question and relevance

On April 9, 2019, Benjamin Netanyahu, the incumbent prime minister of Israel, won the parliamentary elections and is appointed to form the next coalition. It would be his fifth overall, and since 2009, his fourth consequent government. In the last decade, the center of gravity in the coalition has been gradually moving to the right, with the coalition formed after the 2015 elections the most right-wing government Israel has ever had.[1]

Since 1967, Israel has been occupying the Palestinian territories of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. In the 1990s, Israel and the Palestine Liberation organization (PLO) agreed to hold peace negotiations with each other. This resulted in the Oslo Accords, signed in 1993 and 1995, which created a limited self-governance for the Palestinians in the territories. The full terms of the accords were never implemented. Both parties have declared that the two-state solution, i.e. creating a Palestinian state besides Israel is their objective and obligation in solving the conflict.[2] Nevertheless, there has been limited progress in the conflict's resolution since the collapse of the Oslo process.

The ten years of Netanyahu's rule have thus far resulted in a degradation in the relations between the conflict's parties. The latest direct talks were held in 2013-2014 and the period has been marred with regular eruptions of violence. Under these circumstances it would be expected to see Israelis deeply concerned about their conflict with the Palestinians and demanding the government to look for ways to end the violence. Subverting expectations, the Palestinian question has been effectively marginalized in the political arena.[3] Netanyahu's premiership has downgraded the Israeli-Palestinian conflict

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[1] Compared with the center point in the parliament of Israel to take into account that the content of what is considered to be 'right' and 'left' can also move over time.

[2] Annapolis Conference: Joint Understanding and Statements, Joint Understanding on Negotiations, adopted on November 27, 2007.
https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/IsraelOPt_JointUnderstandingOnNegotiations2007.pdf (used May 16, 2019)

[3] Lazaroff, Tovah. (2019). Only 11% of Israeli voters to prioritize Palestinian conflict in the elections. The Jerusalem Post, February 21. https://www.jpost.com/Arab-Israeli-Conflict/Only-11-percent-of-Israeli-voters-care-about-the-Palestinian-conflict-581269 (used May 16, 2019)

from a central issue to a footnote. Instead, he is offering a perspective that Israel continues to fight for its very existence. This view sees enemies to the Zionist project both abroad and within the Israeli society, who try to undermine the established state from the inside.[4]

The problem is relevant because the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been termed as the most intractable conflict in the Middle East. Thus, analysis into the factors that have resulted in its protractedness, but also demotion from the central issue can refine our understanding about the implications of the domestic setting in the situation of an extended conflict. This understanding can then be applied for other relevant cases.

Domestic political factors have been used to analyze the emergence and the outcome of the Oslo process.[5] The literature regarding Israel's conflict management after the Second Intifada makes references to internal political inputs,[6] but no study explicitly looking into the internal political working of the state and the degradation in the peace process under the leadership of Netanyahu has been to the author's knowledge conducted. This research can only offer preliminary insights into the matter due to the limited scope of the thesis and dependence on secondary sources. Thus it is conducted as exploratory case study, designing a study based on the formation of the coalitions as the primary arena where internal political contestation occurs, and on the subsequent actions of the government as the agents with executive power in the state.

The objective of the thesis is to examine the impact of Israeli internal political contestation on the peace process. As the conflict is intrinsically linked with the Israeli society, the domestic factors have had an influence on the negotiations, and the actions conducted by the domestic actors regarding the peace process has had an influence on the society. It is a case of agents and their decisions, and of structures reciprocally influencing each other. Furthermore, it links together the first level, that being international relations,

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[4] Scheindlin, Dahlia. (2017) Ten Years with Netanyahu: Maintaining Israel, the Conflict – and Himself. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, International Policy Analysis. http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/iez/13126.pdf (used May 13, 2019). P 3.
[5] Barawi, Hassan A. (2004). Israeli Politics and the Middle East Peace Process, 1988-2004. Routledge.
[6] Such as Maoz, Zeev. (2008). Defending the Holy Land: A Critical Analysis of Israel's Security and Foreign Policy,-University of Michigan Press.; Gorenberg, Gershom. (2011). The Unmaking of Israel. HarperCollins Publishers; and Shafir, Gershon. (2017). A Half Century of Occupation: Israel, Palestine, and the World's Most Intractable Conflict. University of California Press.

and the second level of domestic affairs. Thus the government's actions regarding the peace process are not contained to their relations with the Palestinians, but have wider repercussions in the Israeli society.

The premise of the research is that domestic political factors have had a relative significance in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict dynamic. Thus it does not take the conflict parties as unitary actors, but claims that the relations between the sides are causally connected with the internal political contestation, in which parties seek to gain and retain power. Parties operate in the domestic political setting and their power is based on that setting. These relations can be conceptualized as a type of foreign policy, because while Palestine is not a state, the conflict is held between two nations and the Palestinian Authority is internationally recognized as the representative of the Palestinian people. Due to limited scope, the research focuses on only Israel's domestic factors. Because only the Israelis are backed by the power of the full-fledged state, giving them much more leverage in negotiations or choosing not to have them, this restriction is justified.

Structure of the thesis and overview of the sources

The thesis is made up of three chapters and a conclusion.

The first chapter introduces the theoretical framework of domestic actors conducting foreign policy in a protracted conflict setting. Putnam's concept of two-level games is used to establish the link between international and domestic level, in which the leadership is conducting actions in the international level to achieve their objectives in the domestic level. Thus the foreign policy carried out by the state is fundamentally political and dependent on the interests of the agents who have power in the decision-making.

A wide array of domestic factors can have an influence on the decisions taken by the government. Thus the thesis uses the conceptualization of the actors within the coalition government, made up of party factions, and their bargaining power to conduct policy in their interests. The aim of this chapter is to delve into the factors that influence the behaviour of coalition parties in their relations with the domestic society, how these factors are represented in the decision-making process, and what are the expected

outcomes of the strategies actors use depending on these factors. The chapter concludes with an assessment of the limitations of the theoretical framework and the implications that the empirical case can provide for.

The second chapter provides an overview of the research design and the methodology used to carry out the empirical study. The chapter presents the reasoning for using specific concepts and their operationalization within the context of a case study. The aim of methodology is to link together the theoretical framework and the empirical research.

The third chapter considers the empirical case of Israel's internal political contestation in determining the output of the foreign policy decision-making. The objective of this chapter is to describe and analyze the implications of this contestation to evaluate the theory in light of the empirical explanation. The segment is divided into two subchapters. The first subchapter examines the internal political dynamics of Israel that create a background under which circumstances the foreign policy is carried out and the reasons why the paralysis in conflict resolution is dangerous for the Israeli society. Next, the chapter explores the peace negotiation strategy under the leadership of Netanyahu, and accommodating and discrediting strategies that the government has used to consolidate their power. In the second part the parliamentary elections of 2009, 2013, 2015, and 2019, and the events during the election cycles are analyzed to assess the changes in the government formation that have brought about the strategies presented before.

Data for the research will be gathered from primary sources, e.g. election results and coalition documents, secondary sources, e.g. scholarly articles and NGO reports, and articles from the Israeli and international media. The design of the research takes into consideration that the information about all the variables that could be influential in the decision-making cannot be provided and the outcome of the decisions might not always accurately reflect the intentions of the decision-makers due to the factors not in their control. Thus, simplifications are necessary. As the purpose of the research is to conduct an explorative study, the research can be conducted without getting insights from the decision-makers in the government. The limitations set by the availability of data is

mitigated by incorporating a wide array of sources and references, thereby reducing bias and laying a foundation for further analysis.

Public opinion polls are used to gauge the sentiments among the population, because the government is presumed to be sensitive to shifts in the electorate's views. Mainly, these address the views among the Jewish population in Israel. Specific notions to Jews, Arab citizens of Israel, and Israelis as amounting to both groups are made to distinguish between the segments. While focusing on the solely Jewish segment omits nearly 20% of the Israeli population, it takes into account that this is the ethnic group that holds power in the society and the Jewish parties are competing for that power. Three quarters of the Jewish population believes that crucial decisions on peace and security, that is in the conflict resolution with the Palestinians, should only be taken by a Jewish majority.[7] Thus, the Jewish parties that make up the government are more incentivized to take into account the Jewish majority of the population and the focus on them is justified. When relevant, the opinions reported are distinguished between the political leaning of the electorate to account for the audience prioritization of the parties.

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[7] Hermann, Tamar; Anabi, Or; Heller, Ella; Omar, Fadi. (2018). The Israeli Democracy Index 2018. The Israel Democracy Institute. P 87.

1 DOMESTIC FACTORS IN FOREIGN POLICY ANALYSIS

International relations are fundamentally embedded in domestic politics.[8] Bueno de Mesquita (2002) summarizes the premise of this approach, saying that "[l]eaders, not states, choose actions."[9] In the words of Fearon (1998), this theory takes into account that "differences in states' political institutions, cultures, economic structures, or leadership goals unrelated to [the state's] relative power are causally relevant to explaining different foreign policy choices."[10] The theoretical framework used in the thesis considers the role of domestic factors in explaining outputs in foreign policy decision-making. Domestic factors constrain the leadership's actions as the domestic setting is the main level the leadership is focusing on to secure their power.

Foreign policy analysis emerged from a framework developed by Snyder, Bruck and Sapin (1954) who sought to generalize states' behavior based on how they made policy decisions.[11] This focus point differed from traditional schools of thought regarding international relations, such as realist approaches. In contrast to a domestic constraints' approach, theories that hold the state to be a rational and unitary actor use the nature of the international political system to explain the behavior of states.[12] Realism perceives states to be the predominant, if not the only actors in the international arena. The foreign policy of states is made by their national government and its primary aims are to keep the state's sovereignty and independence.[13]

Realism draws a separation between a state's foreign and domestic policies. The driving question for neorealism is what is the basis of the international structure and how it

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[8] Bueno de Mesquita, Bruce. (2002). Domestic Politics and International Relations. International Studies Quarterly, 46(1), pp. 1-9. P 2.

[9] Bueno de Mesquita 2002: 4.

[10] Fearon, James D. (1998). Domestic Politics, Foreign Policy, and Theories of International Relations. Annual Review of Political Science, 1(1), pp. 289-313. Pp 302.

[11] Snyder, Richard C., Bruck, H. W., & Sapin, Burton. (1954). Decision-making as an approach to the study of international politics. (Foreign Policy Analysis Series No. 3.). Oxford, England: Princeton University Organizational.

[12] Smith, Steve. (1986) Theories of Foreign Policy: An Historical Overview. Review of International Studies, 12(1), pp. 13-29. P 14.

[13] Webber, Mark; Smith Michael. (2014). Foreign Policy in a Transformed World. Routledge. P 12.

forms actors' behaviors.[14] The internal aspects of a state are through this prism by and large irrelevant to how a state conducts its foreign policy.[15] Realist approach assumes the state to be a "black box", meaning that it is not necessary to look into domestic political processes to explain a state's behavior in international sphere.[16] To justify the differences in foreign policy, the concept of power is used as a central explaining factor for both the key characteristics of a foreign policy and its success rate.[17]

The domestic constraints' approach does not claim that the international structure has no influence on the leaders' options. The first level can be used to explain some general trends in a country's foreign policy that are related to its discordant objectives. However, it does not look into decision-making within a state.[18] The deficiency in the theories that primarily emphasize the international structure is their underestimation of the role that public support has for both a government's ability to implement its decisions and the overall direction of its foreign policy. This is especially important in enduring rivalries, where the government must be able to mobilize public support repeatedly for a costly or protracted conflict.[19] Structural realist accounts are also insufficient for explaining the similarities in a state's behavior under different structural conditions, or variants in the sameness.[20]

Instead, domestic factors are seen as holding significant explanatory power in determining the foreign policy of a state. Domestic influences are public opinion, electoral politics, interest groups, ideological preferences and bureaucratic politics.[21] These factors form the backdrop that the decision-makers must take into account when they want to effectively implement their decisions and stay in power. Above all, it is the domestic

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[14] Hudson, Valerie M. (2013). Foreign Policy Analysis: Classic and Contemporary Theory. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers. Pp 12.
[15] Barari 2004: 5-6.
[16] Hosti, Ole R. (2006). Making American Foreign Policy. New York, Abingdon: Routledge. P 327.
[17] Webber & Smith 2014: 13-14.
[18] Smith 1986: 17.
[19] Mor, Ben D. (1997). Peace Initiatives and Public Opinion: The Domestic Context of Conflict Resolution, Journal of Peace Research, 34(2), pp. 197–215. P 199.
[20] Stein, Janice Gross. (1999). The Political Economy of Security Agreements: The Linked Costs of Failure at Camp David. In Double-Edged Diplomacy: International Bargaining and Domestic Politics, Evans, Peter B.; Jacobson, Harold K.; Putnam, Robert D. (eds). Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, pp 77-103. P 78.
[21] Holsti 2006: 327.

political system that determines the type of leader that can gain authority in that certain state. When a leader has emerged, they will likely wish to remain in power. For that, the domestic audience forms the primary focus point for a leader because it is the base for his power. Furthermore, leaders are more likely to lose power in internal overthrowal, either due to a coup or in an election, than in a foreign invasion.[22]

International politics are thus not seen as a given set of systems that work independently of choices made by societies and individuals.[23] Rather, these choices lead to a political process that produces foreign policy actions.[24] The general direction of a state in international affairs is rooted in the domestic setting and the dominant views in that society.[25] These are the discordant objectives of the state and and perceptions of its nation, as conceptualized by Brecher and which will be elaborated on later. Therefore, the public imposes constraints on the range of policies which the leadership can pursue.

The result is that instead of determining how states conduct their affairs on the international stage, politicians use the global arena as a venue where they try to maximize their domestic political advantage.[26] Leaders are keen to guard their own and their state's reputation in the foreign arena because the cost that harming this reputation might have detrimental effects in domestic politics.[27] The dual setting of international and domestic level produces two-level games, where the leadership can make use of conditions on either level to gain support for their own preferences.[28]

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[22] Fearon, James D. (1994). Domestic Political Audiences and the Escalation of International Disputes. The American Political Science Review, 88(3), pp. 577-592. P 581.

[23] Bueno de Mesquita 2002: 7.

[24] Soetendorp, Ben. (2007). The Dynamics of Israeli-Palestinian Relations: Theory, History, Cases. New York: Palgrave Macmillan US. P 55.

[25] Hagan, Joe. (1994). Domestic Political Systems and War Proneness. Mershon International Studies Review, 38(2), 183-207. DOI: 10.2307/222714. P 183.

[26] Bueno de Mesquita 2002: 8.

[27] Fearon 1994: 581.

[28] Putnam, Robert D. (1988). Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games. International Organization, 42(3), pp. 427-460. P 434.

1.1 Core concepts

The links between international and national level politics provide the government an opportunity to use the first level to achieve their goals in the second. Tsebelis uses the concept of nested games to explain why an actor might choose an option that, from the viewpoint of an observer, is either against his interests or subpar suboptimal under existing circumstances. He claims that in these situations, the decisions made appear to be suboptimal, because the observer does not take into account that the leader is playing games in multiple arenas.[29] Both arenas produce constraints and opportunities for leaders to advance their agenda.[30]

For maximizing their freedom of action, a government needs to achieve success in both games. Over domestic negotiations, the government seeks power by responding to the interests of domestic groups and building coalitions with them. At the international level, governments are seeking a solution that gives them maximum leverage for satisfying domestic pressures, while avoiding the outcome that their domestic coalition would not support. An executive who ignores either of these games does not stay in power for long. While consistency between both game boards is a favorable position for the player, sometimes rational acts for a domestic game produce suboptimal outcomes in the international level, and vice versa. The two levels become linked when any agreement reached in the international negotiations needs to gain the ratification of the domestic constituency. This ratification does not have to be a formal procedure, but is necessary for the emergence of two-level negotiations.[31]

Foreign policy analysis is multifactorial and multilevel at the same time: it considers a wide range of variables and covers several levels of analysis. The complexity of analysis is further increased because not all decisions result in a wanted outcome.[32] This

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[29] Tsebelis, George. (1990). Nested Games: Rational Choice in Comparative Politics. California Series On Social Choice and Political Economy. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press. Pp 1, 7.
[30] Hagan 1995: 117; Putnam 1988: 427-428.
[31] Putnam 1988: 434-436.
[32] Hudson 2013: 6-7.

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is a fundamental shortage of analyzing decision-making and decision implementing. Therefore it is impossible with our current information-collecting and weighing capacity to trace all influences of any given decision. Additionally, when we look at humans as the agents conducting acts of policy-making, the specific people who are making the decisions become important. They are not some generic rational utility maximizers, equally weighing the information at hand and calculating the most optimal decision.[33] Rather, the leaders are bound by their personal views and the surrounding elements in both the domestic and international settings.

In the case of a protracted conflict, the conflict influences both the agents who decide and the structure in which they make the decisions. Protracted conflicts persist over time due to various reasons. These can be divided into three categories. The first are intangible aims such as national interest, a perceived place in the power balance vis-a-vis the adversary, and existential fear. These are objectives connected to power, territory, and ideology. The second are tangible goals, such as competition for material or territorial benefits. Both the tangible and intangible aims of the state are rooted in the perceptions of the nation in said state, meaning these perceptions identify how the nation sees itself and the position of their state.[34]

The third are decisions by the leadership. While the decisions are made based on perceptions, they are more actor-specific, because an individual or a group of decision-makers chooses a specific course of action between different options. These decisions can take the form of conflict-sustaining acts, that is when the outcome of their implementation is to protract the conflict. Brecher (2016) categorizes conflict-sustaining acts into four groups based on their nature. These are political hostility, violence, economic discrimination, and verbal hostility or propaganda.[35]

Drawing from these notions, Brecher's model on persistence for protracted conflicts forms a causal chain. For this thesis, the chain is simplified, because the theoretical analysis does not need distinguishing between several categories of concepts within a

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[33] Hudson 2013: 7.
[34] Brecher, Michael. (2016). The World of Protracted Conflicts. Lanham: Lexington Books. Pp 144-153.
[35] Brecher 2016: 153.

single step of the chain. The chain begins with discordant objectives. These are the intangible aims that together with the balance of capability between conflict parties form the independent variables. The second step in the chain are perceptions, which are embedded in the operational environment that is made up of the content of the independent variables. The last step is decisions. Some of these decisions are likely to be conflict-sustaining acts due to hostile relations between the conflict parties. These acts will cause the conflict to persist. Thus, the decisions made by the conflict parties can result in protracting the animosity by sustaining the hostile behavior between said parties. If these decisions, however, have conflict-reducing outcomes, the causal chain would turn into a conflict termination model.[36]

Each step of this model has a possibility of intervention, where change in the state's behavior becomes possible. Usually, the direction is linear. Shifts in the state's political standing or values gives way to changes in perceptions, which thus bring about alternative decisions. The decision-makers, however, might not all have same views about most rational behavior. Furthermore, the decision-making takes place in a context where various domestic system pressures, external system pressures and self-interests of the leadership compete to achieve their objectives.[37] This means that the objectives and the perceptions constrain the possible decisions that the leadership can make, but do not determine each single action.

1.2 Influence on the leadership

While Putnam focuses on domestic-level setting as as whole, Joe D. Hagan divides it into two critical games that influence the leader's prospects towards foreign policy. The first one concerns building coalitions that support their policies. The second one is driven by the logic of political survival, thus making retaining power the long term strategic goal

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[36] Brecher 2016: 154.
[37] Brecher 2016: 294-295.

for all leaders.[38] It is usually a domestic setting, rather than an international one, that makes the leader vulnerable to overthrowal.

Coalition-building is necessary because, particularly in democracies, but also in autocratic states, the leader is not the sole executive decision-maker. Firstly, the constituency must support the proposed policies by either electing the government or not protesting against its decisions, if it moves away from campaign promises. Secondly, domestic politics are entwined with internal contestation over authority, as lots of formal and informal factions demand their slice of the cake. In cases where a decision is not made rapidly by a small group on the top of the state, the issue might become politicized. This is especially likely when the power to influence decision-making is divided among autonomous and strong actors, and when these actors differ in their stances towards the policy. When the cabinet itself is divided over policy matters, it gives further points of access for interest groups to weigh on their representatives, who are in turn incentivized to look for allies outside.[39]

Retaining power is the ruling groups long-term strategic goal. For that reason they have to maintain the support of their domestic base, even though there might be changes within that base.[40] If the leadership is sufficiently challenged on their foreign policy decisions, this policy needs adjustment to reduce domestic costs. This, though, does not mean that all policy questions are politicized in the eyes of the domestic audience. However, two dynamics between policy-making groups and the general public make the leadership sensitive to the concerns of their constituency. Firstly, the domestic political arena is usually characterized by the occurrence of competing groups who are looking for ways to maximize their influence. That leads to the politicizing of even those issues that would otherwise be left aside. Secondly, the public easily perceives foreign policy questions as a reflection of the general credibility of the government and its stance in the world affairs. A leader who is seen to be cowering before the enemy will face significant

[38] Hagan, Joe D. (1995). Domestic Political Explanations in the Analysis of Foreign Policy. In Foreign Policy Analysis: Continuity and change in its second generation. Neack, Laura; Hey, Jeanne A. K.; Haney, Patrick Jude (eds), Cambridge: Prentice Hall, pp. 117-143. P 122.

[39] Hagan 1995: 122, 140-141.

[40] Gagnon, V. P. (1994). Ethnic Nationalism and International Conflict: The Case of Serbia. International Security, 19(3), pp. 130-166. DOI: 10.2307/2539081. Pp 134-135.

opposition to his power at home, putting him under pressure to satisfy the electorate's demands.[41]

The more vulnerable the leadership perceives itself to be for overthrowal, the more sensitive they are to their power base's opinion. This vulnerability can emerge both from the wider political environment and within the ruling coalition. This happens under several conditions, of which the following list is non-exhaustive, as there can also be additional circumstances, applicable to a small number of cases.

Firstly, the coalition can divided over certain issues. This challenge is amplified when these issues form the core views for their supporting constituency. Secondly, the relative strength of the coalition's and opposition's power groups has an impact on the leadership's cohesion and stability of its power. These factors are best explained with the differences in outcomes if only one condition applies. Even if the coalition is highly divided, if the leader is able to execute his dominance over supporting groups, they would lack strength to defy his will. If the opposition is strong, but leadership is internally cohesive, the coalition would feel more secure in their power and be less concerned over finding compromises.

Thirdly, there might be formal or non-formal, but highly influential rules of politics. These include the separation of powers and their capacities vis-a-vis each other, electoral considerations, such as the start of the new campaign,[42] and social discord in the society and its impact for rule.[43]

Fourthly, there are differences in the amount and distribution of benefits a leadership can offer to their supporters. This can result in a curse of resources, where a naturally resource-rich economy grows less rapidly than other economies that lack these

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[41] Hagan 1995: 124.

[42] According to King (1997), American presidents start their reelection campaign immediately after assuming office and this continues even in their second term, when they are not up to reelection. King, Anthony. (1997). Running Scared: Why America's Politicians Campaign Too Much and Govern Too Little. New York: The Free Press.

[43] For example in the case of different ethnicities, if a leadership identifies strongly with their own ethnic group and focuses solely on their needs, they would have different considerations than a leadership in homogeneous countries. Further differentiated between the cases when a leadership is from the same group as the majority, from a different group, or divided between groups.

assets.[44] In a political context, however, it is the change of resources or perception of it that gives the opposition a chance to promise bigger returns, thus increasing the leadership's vulnerability.

This also matters in the context of the type of the regime. In democracies, governments are relying on wide domestic power. Transparency and avoidance of corruption that the electorate demands mean that the benefits are more equally distributed and the divergence between regime-supporters and regime-opponents is not great. This means that the supporters' political loyalty is weak, which makes democratic rulers more sensitive to general public opinion, as even small policy failures could mean a loss in next elections. In autocracies, however, the leader has more benefits that he offers only to his supporters and thus the size of their winning coalition is smaller. Hence, the leader can ignore public dissatisfaction to a far greater extent.[45]

Fiftly, the character of politics within that society has an effect on leadership vulnerability. This is a wide notion, as it can describe a range of factors, including politicization to party politics to personalization of politics. Putnam summarizes that an accurate representation of domestic determinants on international relations "must stress *politics*: parties, social classes, interest groups (both economic and noneconomic), legislators, and even public opinion and elections, not simply executive officials and institutional arrangements."[46] Taken altogether, these are the elements that a ruling elite takes into account in policy-making in order to carry out its will, especially in democracies. Even in the cases when a ruler is less concerned by overthrowal, for example if they know that their age or health would not allow them to stay in office for long, they can not implement decisions that the vocal majority of the society rejects. Thus they have to keep in mind the politics within the nation.

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[44] Sachs, Jeffrey D.; Warner, Andrew M. (2001). The curse of natural resources. European Economic Review, 45(4–6), pp. 827-838. Pp 827-828.
[45] Bueno de Mesquita, Bruce; Morrow, James D.; Siverson, Randolph M.; Smith, Alastair. (2002). Political Institutions, Policy Choice and the Survival of Leaders. British Journal of Political Science, 32(4), pp. 559-590. Pp 559-563. Bueno de Mesquita, Bruce; Smith, Alastair. (2011). The Dictator's Handbook: Why Bad Behavior is Almost Always Good Politics. New York: Public Affairs. Chp 1: The Rules of Politics.
[46] Putnam 1988: 432.

In short, we have political fragmentation and power-sharing in both the coalition and opposition, rules of governing, economic benefits, and the politics in the society as major elements that influence the dynamics between the society and leadership.

1.3 Influence on foreign policy

To simplify between different decision units who can all have influence, Hermann, Hermann and Hagan (1987) conceptualized on the ultimate decision unit. This is a nebulous set of authorities that channel numerous domestic and international factors to finally make a foreign policy decision. This does not necessarily mean that the unit is formed of one separate entity. It may consist of several bodies, but by definition it is the unit that has the power to commit the resources of the government to back a certain decision to a point where the implementation of that policy is not easily reversed. Furthermore, the composition of this ultimate decision-making unit depends on the decisions to be made. Therefore this conceptualization takes into account that not all decisions are made by the same set of people.[47]

Unless the ultimate decision unit consists of a single leader, group behavior dynamics and a variety of conflicting preferences come into play in reaching the decision. This results in inter-group compromises or bargaining.[48] In coalitions, no single actor or group has the capacity to allocate the state's resources behind their own decisions. Rather, all involved members must reach an agreement, as by going rogue, they have the power to block initiatives. Hagan *et al* (2001) lay out these means as "(1) executing a veto, (2) threatening to terminate the ruling coalition, and/or (3) withholding the resources necessary for action or the approval needed for their use." These actors are also constrained by their constituencies, as they are held accountable for their views by their voters. Individual

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[47] Hermann, Margaret G.; Hermann, Charles F.; Hagan, Joe D. (1987). How Decision Units Shape Foreign Policy Behavior. In New Directions in the Study of Foreign Policy, Hermann, Charles F.; Kegley, Charles W. Jr., Rosenau, James N. (eds), Boston: Allen and Unwin, pp. 309-338. Pp 309-312.

[48] Mintz, Alex; DeRouen, Karl Jr. (2010). Understanding Foreign Policy Decision Making. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. P 16.

members in a coalition play another two-level game of bargaining with both opposing members in the coalition and with factional leaders of their constituency.[49]

Coalition theory literature points at two underlying principles for the forming of a coalition. According to the size principle, parties seek to form a minimum winning coalition in which they have just enough support in the parliament. A similar logic applies to decision-making within the coalition, where gaining a wider support than necessary to pass a policy initiative is avoided, because it would require making further compromises, dispersing resources, and/or sharing credit. Policy distance principles address the question of ideological preferences, with the premise that actors would be more willing to form a coalition with players who have similar views to themselves.[50]

In addition to these main principles, coalition forming is affected by the existence and strength of secondary factors. A pivotal actor is defined as the median player between right- and left-wing, without whose support an agreement is not concluded, thus giving disproportionate strength to his own views or giving him a possibility to extract concessions for supporting either side. Political logrolling can occur when there are single-issue parties within the coalition. These parties have strong views on a specific issue, but are willing to bargain over other topics. While opposing partners can run into deadlock if they have incompatible goals, exchanging favors can also have the outcome of overcommitting state's resources. The degree of coalition members' willingness to bargain has an impact on coalition facilitation. Even if parties have great policy differences, political maturity, norms of cooperation and a reliable party discipline can streamline the making of compromises and make the coalition function more as a single group.[51]

Mor (1997) identifies three parameters that determine the policy choice on the leadership level. „(1) the structure of public opinion (i.e., the size of the gap between supporters and opponents of accommodation); (2) the leadership's conflict-related beliefs

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[49] Hagan, Joe D; Everts, Philip P.; Fukui, Haruhiro; Stempel, John D. (2001). Foreign Policy by Coalition: Deadlock, Compromise, and Anarchy. International Studies Review, 3(2), Leaders, Groups, and Coalitions: Understanding the People and Processes in Foreign Policymaking, pp. 169-216. Pp 170-171.
[50] Hagan *et al* 2001: 174-175.
[51] Hagan *et al* 2001: 176-177.

(i.e., the leaders' own preference for a negotiated settlement, independently of the public opinion) and (3) the leadership's sensitivity to public opinion."

The different combinations of these parameters demonstrate that the interaction between public opinion and two leadership-related parameters yields different outcomes in policy-making.[52] While it is difficult to assign concrete weighs on these parameters in the decision-making in a case study, especially over a time period, some basic assumptions can be made due to the democratic structure of politics. Firstly, in the leadership of the winning party of the election has the strongest relative power; and the most popular parties or candidates tend to be moderate in their views. Secondly, the leadership can be considered to be highly sensitive to public opinion. From these premises it can be derived that the structure of public opinion has relatively more weight on influencing the government's decisions.[53]

The main effect of domestic political processes is not that they determine the state's international behavior, but that they diminish or amplify the willingness of the leadership to make commitments or take risks.[54] Domestic opposition can have both "pull" and "push" dynamics, depending on the character of the political environment and international issues which the state faces.[55] Hagan identifies (1995) three basic strategies that leaders use in foreign policy-making to react to their opposition: ""bargaining and controversy avoidance", "legitimization of the regime and its policies", or "insulating policy from domestic political pressures"."[56]

Bargaining and controversy avoidance is representative of the strategy of accommodation. When the opposition is strong enough to challenge the leader on his policies, leaders seek to retain their power by avoiding controversial topics or actions that might be deemed as demonstrating weakness. A similar dynamic may emerge when the coalition itself is divided over policy-making issues or rivaling ambitions. When building coalitions based on accommodation, leaders use bargaining tactics with actors who need to

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[52] Mor 1997: 204.
[53] Mor 1997: 204.
[54] Hagan 1995: 134-135.
[55] Hagan 1995: 127.
[56] Hagan 1995: 128.

approve their decisions, thereby reaching compromises. All cases result in a foreign policy that is low-risk and often keeps the status quo. This happens because "[p]olitics constrains initiatives that are strong in intensity and commitment". This phenomenon most typically emerges in democracies, especially in non-first-past-the-post parliamentary systems that rely on coalition governments or which have a highly fragmented party system.[57]

Legitimization of the regime and its policies occurs under mobilization strategies, when leaders react to opposition to their plans by doubling down. While also directed at discouraging the opposition, the purpose of mobilization is to increase the support of the government by strengthening and widening its base. Hagan (1995) describes the leaders' various tactics under mobilization as "(1) appealing to nationalism and imperialist themes, or "scapegoating" or "bashing" foreign elements; (2) showing that the leaders have a special capacity and wisdom for maintaining the nation's security and international status; and/or (3) diverting attention away from divisive domestic problems".[58] With these methods, the ruling elite intends to retain its power.

In building coalitions, leaders are in the offense, drumming up their support and discrediting the opposition. This approach results in a foreign policy that is assertive and conflictual, demonstrating leader's ability to rule. While mobilization can occur in rhetorics only, it can also lead to making commitments to use force. In contrast with accommodation, mobilization is usually linked with authoritarian regimes, but is not exclusive to them. Legitimization of the regime can also be taken up under various conditions in democracies. These could be when the general audience looks for simple, black and white policy decisions; or when the leadership perceives itself as vulnerable to defeat in the next election and sees that pushing a particular position may improve their standing.[59]

Deflecting, suppressing, and overriding the opposition are parts of the insulation strategy. This dynamic differs from the preceding two because it characterizes a situation in which the domestic political impact on foreign policy is weak. This occurs when a

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[57] Hagan 1995: 128.
[58] Hagan 1995: 129.
[59] Hagan 1995: 130-131.

leader is able to establish a separation between domestic and foreign policy issues. This does not mean that the opposition to his views is always insignificant. Rather, the leader uses various tactics to ignore or suppress the opposition or pressure them into support with favors or concessions. In the short-term, this is most visible in a crisis situation, when the decision-making authority is concentrated on the very top. In other cases, leaders are able to play other actors against each other to retain power.[60]

These strategies demonstrate that the effect of domestic politics on foreign policy-making is not straightforward, but depends on the intensity of opposition and the strategies leaders choose to pursue to respond to it. Domestic political games are subtle, however, as there are still two other dimensions to consider. Firstly, unless under exceptional circumstances, the direction of policy on both levels is determined by the preferences of the leadership. Secondly, international constraints on the first level limit the range of options for the government. Taken altogether, domestic politics have an effect on whether the leadership is willing to increase their commitment to international agreements or to become more risk-taking.[61] This is dependent on how electorally vulnerable they perceive themselves to be and what are the best strategies to retain power.[62]

1.4 Assessment

Both the formation of a coalition and its subsequent policy actions do not occur in a vacuum, but within the context of a wide array of domestic and international pressures. Thus, while coalition politics can offer some insights into why a certain policy direction was taken or not, it is difficult to measure the impact of single actors within the decision-making group. This wide array of factors makes it impossible to offer a clear-cut and fully cohesive theoretical framework of the role and impact that domestic pressures can have on the government. Thus, the existing literature is splattered with notions of different factors and causal processes, but even more than usual the domestic approaches' theoretical concepts are either case-specific or difficult to place within larger framework.

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[60] Hagan 1995: 131-132.
[61] Hagan 1995: 132-133.
[62] Soetendorp 2007: 71-72.

To simplify, the thesis uses the approach of constraints and determinants. The domestic factors do not determine the specific decisions of the government, but constrain the choice of viable options that the government can make. The specific factions within the coalition aspire to become the determinants for the government's policy, that is to limit the power that other coalition partners can have on the decisions taken. To do that, they seek to increase their own bargaining power, either by increasing the share of seats they have that support the coalition in the legislature, or by positioning themselves so their influence on the cabinet's decisions is unproportionally large. While this approach gets around the problem of specifically measuring the domestic impact, it limits the explanatory power of concrete claims.

To summarize, the theoretical framework has been as following. The domestic actors have an effect on the state's foreign policy. These actors consist of various political groups within the society, but ultimately they are represented by the state's government. If this government is a coalition, it is, furthermore, divided internally into factions, with each faction looking to increase its power.[63] The end goal for the leadership is to retain power. In a case of a protracted conflict, the achievement of this goal is aided by using conflict-sustaining acts to enhance the need to keep the existing leadership in charge as protectors of the nation. Thus, protracting the conflict is a means for ensuring their own power if the alternative might result in overthrowing the government. The ruling elite uses the international level as an arena where they can project their power. The international level also constrains the actions that the government can take, but unless in an international crisis situation, the government is more concerned with the domestic arena because that is where their power is based.

The interaction between the public and the leadership in producing policy outcomes is not straightforward. The direction and the strength of the public opinion is dependent on the structure of it, the leadership's own preferences, and the leaders' sensitivity to audience costs. Leaders have three basic strategies to counter opposition to their actions in foreign policy: accommodation, discreditation and mobilization, and insulation. Hagan does not discuss the use of two or three at the same time because he is considering the overall effect

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[63] A similar process occurs in majority governments as well, but it is more salient in the coalitions.

of domestic politics in foreign policy. However, his ideas do not rule it out as the opposition can emerge from various sources and vary in strength.

The domestic approach theory, as outlined in this chapter, leads to a number of questions. The first one concerns the interrelated role of objectives, perceptions, and decisions. As a model, one can draw the causal chain of moving from the objectives of the state to the perceptions of the people to the decisions of the leadership, but in a specific case study, when factions within the leadership have different views over the optimal policy, the question of what should be included in the model is not as clear-cut.

A connected but separate question concerns the dynamic between the public opinion and the government's actions. This produces a chicken and the egg question over the direction of causality, with most applicable answer being "both each other at the same time", and the question over the extent that these views are reflected in the decision-making. The impact of public opinion is clear by the claim that the cabinet is unlikely to take up initiatives that are opposed by the majority of their constituency. The latter assertion is the usual notion in the theory, and this paper is not refuting it. However, party politics can also produce a situation where a majority of the population is supporting a certain outcome, but internal political contestation does not allow it to be realized.

The basic premise of the thesis is that the state's actions in international affairs are embedded in domestic politics. However, as the case indicates, the actions in foreign policy can also have unintended effects in the domestic sphere, when the effective use of the strategies mentioned before has far-reaching consequences at the domestic level. Accommodating to and bargaining among the coalition partners can empower the groups with radical views. These are the spoilers in the peace process, but their role is not contained to foreign policy. Rather, they gain strength to impose their demands to the society as a whole. Discrediting the opposition makes resistance to the government's actions seem illegitimate, if not traitorous. Insulation can give the leadership free rein to do as they wish without oversight. These are all extreme examples that require that the ruling elite achieves complete success in their strategies. However, they point to the direction of the effect.

The use of accommodating strategies can be observed by seeing the implications of bargaining and controversy avoidance within the coalition in order to avoid the toppling of the government. This could take the form of one coalition partner pressuring for their issue, and others yielding even if the demand does not advance their interests. The less there are available options for the formateur of the coalition, the more it has to look for compromises with the junior partners. The more it gives in to radical elements, the stronger they become, thus narrowing the options available even more. Controversy avoidance can lead to inaction in face of impending threats, forcing the senior party into a corner.

2 METHODOLOGY

This thesis uses an exploratory single case study design. It is grounded on the theoretical framework of domestic constraints and influence on the foreign policy of a state in the case of a protracted conflict. The aim of this thesis is to explore the protraction of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict during Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's second governing period, from 2009 to 2019, and to use this case to assess gaps in the theoretical literature.

The choice for an exploratory research design was made due to the limited scope of this paper. This limitation is made explicitly evident because the case under question lasts ten years and would require close insights into the decision-making process in Israel's government to control for all possible variables. Nevertheless, the analysis provided in the empirical chapters uses a thorough examination of sources to provide preliminary explanation for Israel's policy towards the Palestinians and the implications it has for the Israeli society.

The reasoning for case selection is following. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is an example of a protracted conflict that has a great impact on the domestic social life of the nations involved in it. It is also an internationalized conflict, i.e. it involves a high degree of secondary international actors among states and international organizations, and the Jewish and the Palestinian diasporas. The period under question can to some extent be divided into two phases, with the beginning of the President Donald Trump's administration in the United States as the turning point. The first phase is characterized by a higher American pressure for Israel and Palestine to reach a settlement, the second less so. In both phases, hower, domestic factors prevailed in maintaining control over the scope of the peace process. Thus, Israel/Palestine presents a case where there has historically been an international pressure for conflict resolution, and nevertheless due to domestic factors it has not occurred.

Because the conflict is closely present in the lives of the nations, it offers a case where the policy conducted by the government is expected to be under thorough scrutinization and interest by the constituency. Thus the domestic political impact on the

leadership's action is considered to be strong. As mentioned in the introduction, the marginalization of the Palestinian issue that has occurred under Netanyahu's rule has brought about widespread apathy. The Israelis are concerned with the security threats, but the impasse in the negotiations and the durability of the conflict has resulted in fatigue, where, despite rockets from Gaza and terror attacks originating from the West Bank and East Jerusalem, the general public is not demanding a change in the policy course.

The period under examination considers the parliamentary elections between 2009 and 2019, and consists of the second, third, and fourth Netanyahu governments. Netanyahu's rise to the prime minister's office did not happen in isolation, thus preceding events are taken into account when necessary. At the time of writing, Netanyahu has been appointed to form his fifth government, but it is yet to be presented, thus the empirical chapters end with the expectations about this process. The length of Netanyahu's power is unusual compared to previous Prime Ministers, hence offering a case where the effects of political contestation in the coalition under the lead of a same prime minister can be examined over time.

This thesis uses qualitative analysis, supplementing it with public opinion data when appropriate. The research relies on primary sources, such as election results and coalition documents, secondary sources, such as scholarly articles and NGO reports, and articles in the Israeli and international media. These sources provide a rich examination of the case study.

The primary subjects of research are parties, especially those that are in the coalition as they are holding the executive power in the government. In particular, the study focuses on the leaders of the parties. This is justified because leaders have larger power in politics than regular members of the parliament, especially in the highly personalised politics of Israel. In Israel, ministers in the government are also members of the parliament (members of the Knesset, MK), if they are so elected. Thus, the connection between the cabinet and the Knesset is close. Therefore, this thesis uses power in the Knesset and power in the coalition interchangeably.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is termed as protracted conflict,[64] or intractable conflict,[65] or enduring rivalry.[66] This type of conflict is identified by its extended duration over time, in which violence is frequently used against the adversary, and its significance in the politics and lives of the peoples involved.[67] The narrow conceptualization of this conflict defines two states as the primary conflict parties. The Palestinian side does not adhere to this notion. However, the conflict is being played out between two nations and the Palestinian National Authority (PA) has been recognized by Israel as being the representative of the Palestinian people. Therefore, for all practical purposes it fulfills the basic criteria of a prolonged interstate conflict.[68]

It is also an asymmetrical conflict, because the parties involved have vast difference in their power relative to each other. The territories of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip are claimed by State of Palestine. The control in the West Bank is divided between Israel and the Palestinian Authority (PA) by specific area types. Gaza Strip is *de facto* governed by Hamas, a Palestinian organization considered as a terrorist group by Israel. Both territories are internationally seen as being under Israeli occupation,[69] together with East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights, territories that Israel has in practice annexed.[70] The West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem are legally termed as the occupied Palestinian territories, shortened to occupied territories in this thesis. Thus, Israel has extended their control to the territories claimed by Palestine. This control gives Israel an upper hand in the negotiations.

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[64] Ibrahim Khatib, Daphna Canetti, Aviad Rubin, (2018) "Conflict perception: a new scale with evidence from Israel and Palestine", International Journal of Conflict Management, Vol. 29 Issue: 3, pp.376-397, https://doi.org/10.1108/IJCMA-06-2017-0048. P 379.

[65] Bar-Tal, Daniel & Sharvit, Keren & Halperin, Eran & Zafran, Anat. (2012). Ethos of conflict: The concept and its measurement. Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology. 18. 40-61. 10.1037/a0026860. P 44.

[66] Mor 1997: 212.

[67] Khatib et al 2018: 379.

[68] Mor 1997: 197, 212.

[69] United Nations Security Council Resolution 242, adopted on November 22, 1967. https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/0/7D35E1F729DF491C85256EE700686136 (used May 15, 2019)

[70] Basic Law: Jerusalem the Capital of Israel (5740-1980), passed by the Knesset on July 30, 1980. https://main.knesset.gov.il/EN/activity/Documents/BasicLawsPDF/BasicLawJerusalem.pdf (used May 15, 2019);
Golan Heights Law, 5742-1981, passed by the Knesset on December 14, 1981. https://knesset.gov.il/review/data/eng/law/kns10_golan_eng.pdf (used May 15, 2019)

For conceptualizing the different factors within the domestic setting, Mintz and DeRouen Jr divide them to four categories of determinants: the decision environment, psychological factors, international factors, and domestic influences.[71] Out of all four, this thesis focuses on domestic influences, conceptualizing it within coalition politics. The reasoning to disregard other determinants, although it limits the soundness of conclusions, is as following. A thorough research of individual psychological assessment of main actors in Israeli politics is not feasible to the author of this paper due to a lack of access and a language barrier. Environmental aspects, such as the stress of time and a lack of information are taken as given, as it is difficult to measure their impact in the decision-making process. Furthermore, while the timing of events is important and has consequences for policy-making, dwelling on the what-if's does not take into account that these factors are often out of actors' control.

A similar argument can be made for international factors. Developments in the international sphere have great influence on what is seen as the best action in foreign policy and conflict resolution, especially in such a internationalized conflict as the Israeli-Palestinian one. For the scope of this paper, however, these events are left aside unless they are significantly reflected in the Israeli part of the conflict dynamic, as the state leadership mainly responds to, not leads these developments. This thesis does not deny that the internal affairs of the PA and the international factors have had an influence on decision-making in the Israeli government or on the peace negotiations broadly. As mentioned before, Israel has been able to establish its terms on their Palestinian counterparts. Therefore, the focus on the internal political contestation in Israel is justified.

As explained in the theoretical framework, the domestic influences are a broader category than the formation of a government. Roughly, these can be distinguished between the government's actions and trends in the Israeli society. Because they are mutually reinforcing each other, the role of one cannot be analysed separately from the other. This thesis is focusing on the role of the government as an agent of decision-making. Even if demographic trends, such as increased religiosity and younger people having more hardline stances point to declining interest in implementing a two state solution, in a modern state

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[71] Mintz & DeRouen Jr 2010: 3-4.

there is a government who is enforcing these views. Therefore taking shifts in public opinion into account is important, but by themselves they do not explain the lack of progress in peace negotiations.

From its definement as an interstate conflict, it follows that Israel's actions towards the Palestinian entities can be considered as a type of foreign policy. It is closely linked to Israel's security policy or conflict management. Thus it involves more domestic issues than Israel's relations with other states. However, it can be distinguished from domestic policy. The distinction between a foreign and a domestic policy lies in their orientation. A certain foreign policy initiative can have domestic audience as its primary target group, but if that policy is at least partly directed to a sphere that is outside state's own domestic political system, it is considered to be foreign policy.[72] Hence, this thesis uses concepts of foreign policy theoretization in regard to the developments between Israel and Palestine.

These developments are changes in the conflict situation. Development does not necessarily entail positive or major shifts in Israeli-Palestinian relations. A change can occur both suddenly or gradually over time. On the Israeli side, the parliamentary elections constitute critical junctures in which the nation had a choice in deciding between alternative options in how the government conducts foreign policy. These junctures were a result of the events that occurred during the election cycle, thus the empirical research considers the events between the elections and in particular during the election campaign as factors for explaining the outcome of the elections. A certain baseline is taken as given, that is the research assumes some set of electoral power for a party based on its previous results and only explains the result if it considerably differs from it.

The operationalization is based on the processes of forming of a new coalition and the subsequent political contestation within the coalition, where factions are using their bargaining power to present demands to the other parties in the coalition to pass the policy proposals in their interest. 'Bargaining power' uses both the size of the share of seats the party holds in the Knesset and its position in relations with other coalition partners to measure the influence the party has in the coalition. It is a fuzzy variable, because only the

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[72] Morse, E. (1970). The Transformation of Foreign Policies: Modernization, Interdependence, and Externalization. World Politics, 22(3), 371-392. doi:10.2307/2009602. P 374.

first element can be expressed with a precise numerical value. For the second, the theoretical framework is used to make some premises. A party can improve its standing when an agreement cannot be reached without their consent, making them able to disproportionately influence both the content and the adoption of a proposal. In usual circumstances, this power is situated in the hands of a pivotal actor or largest faction in the coalition. However, when parties are using the threat of internally collapsing the coalition unless their demands are met, they can convince other members to support these demands.

The peace process refers to a broad effort for resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In the governmental level, this occurs through negotiations between the conflict parties. The two-state solution is taken to be the end goal for these negotiations, as envisaged in the Oslo Accords, or Oslo process. For this reason, support for two-state solution or support for the peace process is used interchangeably.

3 EMPIRICAL CASE

3.1 Implications of foreign policy conduct

The empirical analysis section is divided into two subchapters.

The first subchapter examines the internal political dynamics of Israel that create a background under which circumstances the foreign policy is carried out and the reasons why the paralysis in conflict resolution is dangerous for the Israeli society. Next, the chapter explores the peace negotiation strategy under the leadership of Netanyahu, and accommodating and discrediting strategies that the government has used to consolidate their power.

The second subchapter analyses the elections, formation of the coalitions, and relevant events in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict dynamic in chronological order.

3.1.1 Case overview and analysis

The Arab-Israeli conflict is among the most enduring conflicts today. The core dispute lies between the Israelis and the Palestinians, two nations who aspire for self-determination in a limited territory. It has involved a multitude of primary and secondary actors and is multilayered, multidimensional, and multi-issue in its representation.[73] The underlying causes for this struggle have been considered to be primarily ethnic, religious, or colonial. The fear of insecurity for Israelis and struggle for national self-determination for Palestinians are the principal reasons this conflict continues to be. Eisenberg and Caplan (2010) accredit the contest over identity and existence to the persistence of conflict, as "two national communities appear locked in a double-edged existential struggle". The narrative for both parties is similar: we are the rightful owners of this land and we are the righteous victim, suffering through the hands of the other.[74]

Both nations base their claim on the land on their historical presence between the river and the sea, i.e. between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. In 1947, the

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[73] Brecher, Michael. (2017). Dynamics of the Arab-Israel Conflict: Past and Present: Intellectual Odyssey II. Palgrave Macmillan. P ix.
[74] Eisenberg, Laura Zittrain; Caplan, Neil. (2010). Negotiating Arab-Israeli Peace, Second Edition: Patterns, Problems, Possibilities. Indiana University Press. P 3.

United Nations adopted the Partition Plan, dividing what then was Mandatory Palestine into two independent states, one for Arabs and the other for Jews.[75] This plan was never implemented. The current phase of the conflict between the State of Israel and Palestine, the latter being a political entity with limited self-governance officially represented by the Palestinian Authority, began in 1993 with signing of the Oslo Accords. As envisaged in the Accords, the peace process between Israel and Palestine should lead to establishing two independent states. Despite the official declarations of the representative authorities, there has been limited progress in achieving that goal. In contrast, there is a growing belief that the implementation of the two-state solution is no longer even possible.

Drawing from the theory of war, Frieden (2016) lays out three reasons why countries would opt to bear the costs of a conflict rather than attempt to settle it by peaceful means. These are a lack of accurate information about their enemy, mutually exclusive demands for settlement, and a mistrust of the other party to carry out their political commitments. The first does not adhere to the Israeli-Palestinian case, because after decades of enduring conflict both sides have a clear understanding of the capabilities and the resolve of the other. Indivisibility might be significant, in particular over Jerusalem and the right of return for the Palestinians, as neither side would want to be seen giving up what they perceive to be their essential rights. Nevertheless, compromises for all core issues have been discussed. Thus, commitment problems seem to be the most significant obstacle for conflict resolution, as neither can be convinced that the other will carry out the concessions they promised.[76]

The commitment problems are grounded on the domestic politics of both sides. Mistrust, a lack of political will and a myriad of spoilers have created an environment that is hostile for reaching a peaceful settlement. With its sheer length and salience in Israel and in the occupied Palestinian territories, the conflict has become a cause of protraction in

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[75] United Nations General Assembly Resolution 181 (II), on Future government of Palestine, adopted on November 29, 1947. https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/0/7F0AF2BD897689B785256C330061D253 (used May 17, 2019)

[76] Frieden, Jeffry A. (2016). The Root Causes of Enduring Conflict: Can Israel and Palestine Co-exist? In Israel and Palestine: Alternative Perspectives on Statehood, Ehrenberg, John & Peled, Yoav (eds.) Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Education, pp 63-76. Pp 64-70.

itself. There are a number of actors, both internal and external who have vested interests in the continuation of the conflict.[77] Both sides trace their origin back to the conflict. This has led to the creation of a conflict mentality that hinders developments in the peace process.

Del Sarto (2017) describes it as having produced a mentality of siege. This notion characterizes both parties in the conflict, but it has higher impact on Israel, as it is asymmetrically more powerful party vis-à-vis Palestinians and thus has more choice in its actions. The conflict mentality in Israel has resulted in a paradox: the politicians, security establishment, and the general public perceive the security situation to be weak and strong at the same time.

This perception stems from the three core premises of Israel's national security. Firstly, it is the notion that Israel is located in a hostile strategic environment and has to constantly fight for its survival. Secondly, in that fight the State of Israel will always be David against Goliath, a weaker party against much stronger enemies. For that reason Israel has always seen itself as forced to be on the defense, even when they are carrying out offensive actions. This view has continued to persist even after several victories in wars and subsequent changes in their regional adversaries rhetoric of annihilating Israel. Thirdly, ultimately Israel cannot rely on any allies or partners, as they would be left alone to defend their country.[78]

In addition to this narrative of weakness, however, Israel's military superiority has led to the emergence of a conflicting notion: a feeling of arrogance. The conflicting perceptions in the security doctrine together with the high impact of the security and defense establishment has shaped Israel's foreign policy to become more risk-taking and less efficient in conflict management.[79] This is the second step of Brecher's causal chain of the persistence in the protracted conflicts: the perceptions that create the operational environment for the decision-makers. Going a step back, the discordant objective of Israel

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[77] Azar *et al* 1978: 43.
[78] Del Sarto, Raffaella A. (2017). Israel Under Siege: The Politics of Insecurity and the Rise of the Israeli Neo-Revisionist Right. Washington DC: Georgetown University Press. P 156.
[79] Del Sarto 2017: 156-159.

is maintaining a state where the Jews are protected.[80] Thus that operational environment is characterized as prioritizing security above all. It is a mindset that is willing to endure costly measures themselves and to impose these measures on others if that gives them security. The case study does not delve into these notions. However, they are necessary elements that create the backdrop for all decisions made in Israel's political arena.

The second element that protracts the conflict are the individual and institutional interests that parties have, either clearly manifested or potentially implied, creating tensions. The result is that attempts for reaching a settlement will be faced by double opposition: first, the already powerful opponents who present the minimum demands that an agreement must meet, and second, the pressure from groups who are yet unformed or weak, but which would become stronger as the potential loss of benefits becomes apparent to the public. While various societal groups might declare their longing for peace, changing the situation might bring about their loss of prestige, budget, or identity. The costs of a settlement are far more recognized than the uncertain benefits.[81]

Depending on the influence these forces have on the government, or how well they are represented within the government, they can be either constraints or determinants for the government's actions. The first group are termed spoilers in this paper. The spoilers are those actors that act for the failure of the peace process because they perceive peace as hindering their own interests. To gain ground for their positions, spoilers can play on the public or leaders' opinion.[82] Spoilers are usually characterized by using violence to achieve their goal of undermining the peace process.[83] Because the Israeli-Palestinian peace process has stalled, active use of violence does not form a good conceptual tool for defining the spoilers for this paper. Instead, they are described as actors who are actively

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[80] Helsing, Jeffrey W. (2004). The Regionalization, Internationalization, and Perpetuation of Conflict in the Middle East. In Ethnic Conflict and International Politics: Explaining Diffusion and Escalation, Lobell; Steven E, Mauceri, Philip (eds), pp. 133-163. P 162.

[81] Azar, Edward E.; Jureidini, Paul; McLaurin, Ronald. (1978) Protracted Social Conflict:Theory and Practice in the Middle East. Journal of Palestine Studies, 8(1), pp. 41-60. P 57.

[82] Atzili, Boaz. (2008). Peace Process. In International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, Darity, William A. (ed). Detroit, Michigan: Macmillan, pp. 185-186. 186.

[83] Stedman, Stephen J. (1997). Spoiler Problems in Peace Processes. International Security, 22(2), pp. 5-53. DOI: 10.2307/2539366. P 5.

working against any possibility of settlement. The two main groups of spoilers in Israeli politics are the settlers and the Ultra-Orthodox.[84]

The second group are skeptical towards peace process. They might become spoilers if their interests are threatened. In contrast with the spoilers, these actors could be won over to supporting a settlement if their concerns are addressed or they are persuaded by incentives. A significant segment of the Israeli public are sceptics. These are the people who do not support the two state solution because they do not perceive it as viable option. They do not have an ideological stance against the two state solution, but a pragmatic one, and their views can be changed by increasing the likelihood of its success. Nearly 30% of Israeli opponents would alter their position if the leadership endorsed the peace agreement. In addition, various tangible and intangible incentives can be used to raise their support.[85]

Lintl (2016) describes the locked in situation regarding the conflict and its settlement as an uncomfortable dilemma between principles and politics. "Whilst a majority of Knesset members argues in favor of a two-state settlement at least in principle, the party-political constellation only produces coalitions that work against it."[86] This is not to say that most members of the Knesset are active proponents of establishing two states in the foreseeable future. Like the Israeli public, they are cautiously supportive of the idea on the basis that there exists no other viable option with higher support. One unified democratic state would put the Jewish character of Israel under question. In 2018 19% of Israeli Jews supported that option. Annexation without full rights to Palestinians stood at 15%, and expulsion of Palestinians from the West Bank at 8% among Jews. Both ways would put an end to Israel's democracy. 16% of Jews opposed any offered solution,[87] and this seems to be the preferred course of action for almost all Israeli governments.

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[84] With the most radical force where these two meet: the Religious Zionists.

[85] Shikaki, Khalil; Scheindlin, Dahlia. (2018). Role of Public Opinion in the Resilience/Resolution of the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict. Palestinian-Israeli Pulse: A Joint Poll (2016-2018) Final Report. Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research; The Tami Steinmetz Center for Peace Research. Pp 4, 8-9.

[86] Lintl, Peter. (2016) The dynamics of a right-wing coalition: how the failure of the peace process encourages domestic populism in Israel. (SWP Comment, 45/2016). Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik -SWP- Deutsches Institut für Internationale Politik und Sicherheit. https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-48905-0. P 6.

[87] Shikaki & Scheindlin 2018: 7.

The main reason for lack of support is lack of belief in the feasibility of the two-state solution or any other process.[88] But the alternatives do not align with Israel's principles either. Israeli statesmen have never clarified how the two underlying principles of the state, of being Jewish and being democratic, fit together when a discrepancy between the two becomes salient. The right-wing governments, by and large in power since 1977, have emphasized the Jewish character, with Ultra-Orthodox parties securing the role of religion in public matters, and nationalist parties enforcing ethnic demands. This is representative of the public, with right-wing voters attributing more importance to the Jewish component, left-wing to democracy, and center split between choosing democracy and both equally.[89]

Left and right in Israel's context do not refer to socio-economic issues, but to positions on security and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, with right-wing being more hawkish and left-wing more dovish. It must be taken into account that all of Israel's leaders have assumed that the whole land of Mandatory Palestine is theirs. The difference in mentality between the right- and left wing mainstream was described by Yitzhak Rabin, the leader of the Labor party in the 1990s: while Likud would not be willing to give up on any territory, Labor would part with some if it gave Israel peace.[90] However, the case is not as simple, because in addition to Rabin and the Declaration of Principles signed by him, two other prime ministers that have withdrawn from Israeli-held territories have come from right-wing, namely Menachem Begin and Ariel Sharon.

After the collapse of the Oslo process, the Israeli governments have been eroding the chances for a successful settlement. In particular this is clear with the premiership of Benjamin Netanyahu, incumbent since 2009. Back then, he started in a position where the majority of public was supportive of holding peace negotiations, the party that had ran on the very same position - Kadima - had won the largest share of of seats in the Knesset and the international actors were putting pressure on Israel and Palestine to come to an

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[88] Shikaki & Scheindlin 2018: 4.

[89] Hermann, Tamar; Anabi, Or; Heller, Ella; Omar, Fadi. (2018b). The Israeli Democracy Index 2018, summary. The Israel Democracy Institute. P 12.

[90] Golan, Galia. (2014). Barriers to Peace in Israeli Peacemaking -- Process and Substance. Palestine-Israel Journal of Politics, Economics & Culture, 19(3), pp. 44–48. P 45.

agreement. Netanyahu's own views on the matter are inconclusive, but he has always been more of a pragmatic than an idealistic leader. From 2010, the government and the public have been moving further from reaching a settlement. As explained, a considerable share of the population is inclined to change their mind if there is a political will for peace process. Thus, the decline in the support reflects the decline in the political will in the government.

The marginalization of the Palestinian issue in the electoral campaigns has worn down the alternative vision that the mainstream left can offer, with perceived vulnerability in regards to security this has shifted the political landscape to the right. The formation of the right-wing coalitions has strengthened the radical groups within the government, who act as spoilers for any possible settlement. The right-religious bloc is not internally cohesive. It has been consisting of three pillars: Likud as the formateur, the secular parties, either formed around socio-economic issues such as Yesh Atid or Kulanu or with nationalist agenda such as Yisrael Beytenu, and thirdly, the religious parties: Shas and United Torah Judaism. A sharp dividing line between religion and secular nationalism has threatened to pull the bloc apart from inside, and tensions between the two camps led to the elections of 2013, 2015 and 2019.

Under Netanyahu, Likud started out as a pivotal actor in the coalitions, willing to sit with center parties and even with Labor after 2009 elections. Gradually, the share of MKs who could be considered left of Likud decreased in the government.[91] Until last year, the religious-nationalist Jewish Home was able to accommodate the religious and secular nationalism. With an internal split and subsequent merger into a United Right alliance with ultra-radical religious factions, the party can now be safely added to the religious camp. It appears that the optimal way of keeping religious and secular nationalists together has been to curtail all paths for finding a solution to the Palestinian question, as it has been one of the few issues where two camps within the bloc are in full agreement. The almost non-existent possibility of solving the conflict now is an obvious result of that process.

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[91] In 2015, 10 MKs from Kulanu joined the government. The 2019 government is yet to be formed, but it is likely to consist of the same parties as the last, bringing the share of Kulanu MKs down to 4.

Because the government has perceived itself to be vulnerable to overthrowal, they have used two strategies for countering that threat. Within the coalition, the main strategy has been one of accommodation. In order to cross the religious and secular line, the policy has not been to strengthen the power of traditionalists or find compromises, but to avoid making difficult decisions in the first place. In addition to the peace process, these also involve controversial topics surrounding the role of religion in the society. With the opposition in the Knesset and in the public, the government has opted for legitimizing their regime and discrediting the opponents as harmful to Israel's security.

The resulting approach to foreign policy has waved between being assertive and conflictual, to discredit all domestic actors who might threaten the ruling elite's power, and of avoiding a grand conflict that might actually endanger Israel's security and jeopardize the elite's power. To achieve this equilibrium, Netanyahu and his partners have been using the two levels of international and domestic auditoriums. For domestic mobilization, it is useful to create an impression of the society that constantly has to protect itself. As mentioned before, the use of this tactic aligns with the dominant view of national security that sees Israel as being fundamentally vulnerable. However, it has also resulted in depicting domestic opposition, such as Israeli Arabs, the left-wing parties and NGOs, but also judiciary and the media as a threat to the power of the right-wing government. Internationally the government must avoid to be seen as willingly protracting the conflict too much, because it would be harmful to Israel's international standing.

As a result of rising religiosity, which will be elaborated on later, and delegitimization of the left, is that it has become increasingly marginalized. Now, only 5% of Israeli Jews describe themselves as left-wing and 11% as center-left. In contrast, 33% of Israeli Jews call themselves right-wing and 26% center-right. 24% identify with center.[92] At the same time the perceived tension between the left and right on foreign policy and security issues has become more important throughout the 2010s. In 2012, only 9% of Jewish respondents named the tension between right and left as the strongest division in

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[92] Rosner, Shmuel; Fuchs, Camil; Slepkov, Noah. (2018). #IsraeliJudaism, A Portrait of a Cultural Revolution: English Summary. The Jewish People Policy Institute, December 31. http://jppi.org.il/new/en/article/israelijudaism-summary/?#.XIFNLKhqozQ (used May 20, 2019)

Israeli society. 47% saw the cleavage between Jews and Arabs as being the strongest. In contrast, in 2016 the numbers were, respectively, 29% and 48.5%, while in 2018 the former had risen to 36% and the latter dropped to 28%.[93] Thus, the internal schism between Jews along the line of left and right has become more salient while the share of population that identifies with the left-wing, as seen by electoral votes, is going down. This has happened while there has been no major developments in the peace process or a sudden setback to Israel's security.

The second outcome of coalition politics is the pressure it lays on the Jewish and democratic principles of the state. Classifying Israel's democracy in comparative politics has never been a straightforward case. Often, Israel is described as an unique case or its distinctions from other democracies are heavily emphasized. The dynamic nature of Israel's political system over time adds to this complexity, with the factional system transforming from a dominant party to a bipolar one and ultimately into an unstable system. Several authors make the case of Israel as a liberal democracy that has some tendencies for consociational politics and certain shortcomings.[94] A contrasting viewpoint sees Israel as an ethnic democracy. It takes into account that there has never been a separation of religion and state nor religion and ethnicity.[95] Deep dividing lines between the Jews and the Israeli Arabs and the state institutions' blatant preference for the first do not allow it to be classified as a consociational democracy in a classical sense.[96]

However, this model is useful in describing the relations between the secular elite and the Ultra-Orthodox segment of society during the first decades of Israel's independence. The practice was so successful in accommodating two exclusive sub-cultures that it gave way to consensus democracy, which sets restrains to majority rule, and then gradually shifted to majoritarian politics. Due to the extremely proportional electoral system and high correlation between demographics and voting patterns, both factors which

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[93] Hermann *et al* 2018b: 6.
[94] Cohen, Asher. (2004). Changes in the Orthodox Camp and their Influence on the Deepening Religious-Secular Schism at the outset of the Twenty First Century. In Critical Issues in Israeli Society. Dowty, Alan (ed). Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, pp. 71-94. Pp 71-72.
[95] With the words of prof. Gideon Rahat in his Israeli politics lecture, 2017: "In other countries there is freedom of religion. In Israel there is no freedom from religion."
[96] Smooha, Sammy. (1997). Ethnic Democracy: Israel as an Archetype. Israel Studies, 2(2), pp. 198-241. Pp 201-202.

help to sustain the fragmentation in politics, Israel cannot be termed as a fully majoritarian state.[97] Over time, however, it has significantly moved towards majority rule, further entrenched by the populist politics of 2010s that seek to depict the opposition as opponents to the will of the people.

Right-wing parties have been a major force in the government since 1977, when under the leadership of Menachem Begin, Likud won the elections and formed the coalition. Ultra-Orthodox parties started to gain strength in the 1980s, but in that and the following decade they were still willing to sit in the government with center-left parties, thus making the political system less locked in than it is today.[98] The Israeli party system was already fragmented due to various social divisions, a low electoral threshold to the Knesset and a single-district closed party list electoral system. In 1996, the electoral reform allowed voters to cast one vote for a prime minister and another for a party of their choosing, which strongly strengthened the smaller parties at the expense of Labor and Likud, the dominant left- and right-wing parties. In addition, the majoritarian elections in 1996 and in 1999 had a strong effect on religious parties, because they forced them to take sides. As religious beliefs are highly correlated with hawkish positions, almost all religious politicians have been openly backing the right-wing governments since.[99] These elections paved the way for the emergence of an unstable party system in early 2000s, with changes in the party landscape after every election. In this instability, the previously more accommodating relations between the various segments of Israeli society have weakened.

Israel has five major social rifts: between Jews and the minorities, mainly Arabs; between religious and secular people; hawks and doves regarding the conflict; Ashkenazi and Mizrahi; and class divisions.[100] These rifts create identity groups with clear voting preferences. The Jewish-Arab ethnic animosity has historically been the sharpest split between Israeli citizens, its importance as a political dimension is only hindered by the fact

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[97] Hazan, Reuven Y. (1999). Religion and politics in Israel: The rise and fall of the consociational model. Israel Affairs, 6:2, pp. 109-137, DOI: 10.1080/13537129908719562. Pp 117, 121.
[98] Cohen 2004: 73-77.
[99] Hazan 1999: 127-128.
[100] Horowitz, Dan; Lissak, Moshe. (1989). Trouble in Utopia: The Overburdened Polity of Israel, chp 2, Israel as a Multi-Cleavage Society. State University of New York Press.

that Arab parties have never been acceptable coalition partners.[101] The existence of social divisions does not mitigate conflicts in itself. However, the extremely proportional representation in the Knesset has inclined smaller parties to advocate only for their small voters' base and push their demands into the coalitions. This has led to sustained social divides.

For example, in contrast to almost all Western democracies, the religious-secular rift in Israel has become a more powerful issue over time.[102] This has been caused by several reasons. Firstly, due to the higher birth rate of religious people, they increasingly form a larger share of the population. Secondly, the traditional and moderately Orthodox Jews have intensified their religious commitment as a way to increase their status.[103] The result of these two trends is that the share of population who thought that the public life has to be conducted in compliance with religious law rose from 31% in 1992 to 46% in 2009.[104] The growing power of religious parties have increased their demands of implementing their norms to other parts of the society, making the Israeli public sphere more religious.[105] The perceived tension between the religious and secular Jews has made an U-turn. In 2012, 21% of Jewish respondents chose it as the strongest cause for tension, in 2015 and 2016 it had dropped to 10% and 11%, respectively, whereas in 2018 the segment of population that saw it to be the strongest rift had risen back to 24%.[106] While left-right and secular-religious cleavages do not act as proxies to each other, there exists a wide overlap between the two.

As an ethnic democracy, Israel was stable between 1966 and 2000. Before that, the Arab citizens were living under a military regime, thus Israel cannot be validly classified as democracy between 1948 and 1966. Since the beginning of the Second Intifada Israel

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[101] Lijphart, Arend; Bowman, Peter J.; and Hazan, Reuven. (1999). Party systems and issue dimensions: Israel and thirty-five other old and new democracies compared, Israel Affairs, 6(2), pp. 29-51, DOI: 10.1080/13537129908719558. P 40.
[102] Lijphart *et al* 1999: 38-39.
[103] Fischer, Shlomo. (2012). Yes, Israel Is Becoming More Religious. Israel Studies Review, 27(1), pp. 10-15. http://www.jstor.org/stable/41804781. Pp 10-13.
[104] Olesker, Ronnie. (2014b). National identity and securitization in Israel. Ethnicities, vol. 14(3), pp 371-391. DOI: 10.1177/1468796813504093. P 385.
[105] Fischer 2012: 12-13.
[106] Hermann *et al* 2018b: 6.

has not been able to accommodate both a liberal democracy and ethno-nationalism, as required by the original principles of Israel being democratic and Jewish. The mediating element between them was civic republicanism, a notion that the degree of rights and privileges an individual has before the state is dependent on that individual's contribution to the Zionist project. In its essence, this conception was based on solidarity, not ethnicity, although it did drive a wedge between the nations as Arab citizens were unlikely to be eager Zionists. The shift to a neoliberal economy since the mid-1980s and subsequent liberalization of social life eroded the stability of ethnic democracy. When Arab citizens tried to use the liberalized political space to expand the character of the state to include them as well, they ethno-national principles demanded the continuation of their exclusion. Therefore when the legislation before 2000 infringed on the Arab citizens' rights, it was to achieve some other goal, be it related to security or Jewish demographic majority. Since then, however, it appears that the objective of the bills has primarily been to impair their rights.[107]

The backdrop for the government policies is, therefore, the salient tensions between ethnic groups and over religion. Both issues concern the character of the State of Israel and thus are of a fundamental nature, with no clear way of reconciliation as they present mutually exclusive demands. The democratic governance model and coalition politics have historically been the mechanism of accommodating different interests. In some ways, this has been gradually substituted with majority rule, with increased efforts to push through legislation that would adhere to the will of the majority, not to protect minority rights. In other ways, however, the coalition formation has given greater bargaining power for extremist factions. This has reinforced the pressure that these factions put to sustaining social cleavages that are crucial in maintaining their power base.

Thus, the dilemma of Israeli politics. The conflict has made possible to uphold the siege mentality that is holding the Jewish Israeli society together. The longer the conflict goes on, however, the harder it becomes to accommodate between being Jewish and being democratic. The decade under Netanyahu has seen an intensified emphasis of the Jewish

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[107] Peled, Yoav. (2014). The Challenge of Ethnic Democracy: The State and Minority Groups in Israel, Poland and Northern Ireland. London and New York: Routledge. Pp 147-149.

character of the state. At the same time, the shift in liberal-democratic norms is foreboding. Israeli politics operate within the context of salient tensions in the Jewish segment over security and religion, and between Jews and Arabs over ethnicity and nationalism. Baumgart-Ochse (2009) concludes that "the [Oslo] peace process was closely intertwined with a process of improving democratic governance in Israel".[108] While degradation in the peace process does not necessarily entail the decline in liberal-democratic norms in Israel, the cultivation of ethnic and religious nationalism with attempts to expand the authorities of the government has increased the risk for it.

3.1.2 Negotiation strategy under Netanyahu

The leadership's actions towards the peace process most closely resemble the insulation strategy. This application is with provisions, as Israel's security policy is not isolated from its domestic policy, and in regards to the Palestinians, it might be difficult to distinguish between the two. Nevertheless, the Netanyahu governments have separated the negotiations from general foreign policy, as they aim to warm up their relations with the Arab states despite the plight of the Palestinians. In the domestic arena, the political discourse has been fixed on blaming the Palestinians for the lack of progress.

The recognition demand, which Netanyahu has made a priority, effectively adds another hurdle for negotiations which are already riddled with obstacles. In using that strategy, the government can make use of the security mindset that has detached Israeli actions from the protraction of the conflict. The effective us of this tactic has led to an outcome in which Israelis have adjusted to the regular cycles of violence. In times when there has been a majority in support for establishing the two-state solution, the leadership has not taken it upon themselves to implement it. Since 2014, no talks have been held to even discuss the conditions under which Israelis and Palestinians could come to terms.

On 14 June 2009, Netanyahu held a widely covered speech in the Bar-Ilan University, in which he offered his conditional support for establishing a Palestinian state.

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[108] Baumgart-Ochse, Claudia. (2009). Democratization in Israel, politicized religion and the failure of the Oslo peace process, Democratization, 16(6), pp. 1115-1142, DOI: 10.1080/13510340903271761. P 1116.

In the speech, he declared that to achieve peace, Palestinians have to recognize the right of Israel to be a nation-state for Jews. In addition to the recognition, he added demilitarization as a necessary condition.[109] This is the strongest endorsement for two-state solution that Netanyahu has come to. However, his demands set new conditions for the success of a peace process. While demilitarization had been a condition for the previous negotiations, with recognition Netanyahu added a requirement that demands the Palestinian Authority to refute Palestinian citizens of Israel. He also placed it at the top of the negotiation priorities, without which no negotiations can be concluded or possibly even started.[110] The cause for this speech has been considered to be significant US pressure, not a change in the Prime Minister's views.[111] Additionally, on 25 November, Netanyahu succumbed to the US' pressure and declared a 10-month moratorium on building settlement houses in the West Bank.[112]

The joint poll conducted in June, before the speech, found that 59% of the Israeli population supported a two-state solution, while 36% opposed it.[113] In December, 73% of Israelis supported the two-state solution; however, the question asked was about the best solution to the conflict.[114] A similar poll conducted in August did not ask about general support, but found a minor rise in support among Israelis for the Arab Peace Initiative (from 36% in June to 40%) and a steady decline in support of the Clinton package to 46%, from 52% in December 2008.[115]

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[109]   Address   by   PM   Netanyahu   at   Bar-Ilan   University,   June   14,   2009. https://mfa.gov.il/MFA/PressRoom/2009/Pages/Address_PM_Netanyahu_Bar-Ilan_University_14-Jun-2009.aspx (used March, 9 2019)

[110] Mustafa, Mohanad; Ghanem, As'ad. (2013). The Israeli negotiation strategy under Netanyahu: settlement without reconciliation. International Journal of Conflict Management, 24(3), pp. 265-283. Pp 275-277.

[111] Golan, Galia. (2013). Peace plans, 1993-2010. In The Routledge Handbook on the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, Peters, Joel; Newman, David (eds). Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, pp. 92-106. P. 104.

[112] Statement by PM Netanyahu on the Cabinet Decision to suspend new construction in Judea and Samaria, November   25,   2009. https://mfa.gov.il/MFA/PressRoom/2009/Pages/Statement%20by%20PM_Netanyahu_suspend_new_construction_Judea_Samaria_25-Nov-2009.aspx (used 9 March 2019)

[113]   Joint Israeli-Palestinian Poll 32, June 2009. Palestinian Center for Policy and Research. http://www.pcpsr.org/en/node/412 (used March 9, 2019)

[114]   Joint Israeli Palestinian Poll 34, December 2009. Palestinian Center for Policy and Research http://www.pcpsr.org/en/node/408 (used March 9, 2019)

[115]   Joint Israeli Palestinian Poll 33, August 2009. Palestinian Center for Policy and Research. http://www.pcpsr.org/en/node/410 (used March 9, 2019)

The timing and possible formulation differences in these questions hinders the validity of making any undisputed claims about shifts in the Israeli public's opinion and its connection with the leadership's actions. However, the 73% support in December and 71% support in March 2010[116] is the highest support that the Israeli public has given to the two-state solution in the last decade. Other than the Prime Minister's speech, there were no major events related to conflict resolution in Israel that could have raised the public support. There was, however, international pressure on Netanyahu to make progress with the Palestinians. In 21 August 2009 the Palestinian Authority issued a plan for building strong state institutions, despite the stalling of the peace process.[117] This was met with scorn from some of Netanyahu's coalition members but support from the US.[118]

Surveys indicate that even though neither the Israeli nor Palestinian public is eager to make compromises on any issue, when the whole peace agreement is presented as a peace "package" from the government, they would accept. Crucially, this occurs when the peace package is backed by the government.[119] The Arab Peace Initiative has never had the support from the Israeli leadership, whereas the Clinton parameters were proposed during the eventually unsuccessful Camp David negotiations in 2000 and accepted with reservations.

Despite the costs that the conflict imposes on both nations and the possibility of gaining a majority support in the referendum, the Israeli government has not been inclined to move towards the conflict resolution. Mustafa & Ghanem (2013) claim that the Israeli approach for settlement that has been carried out under Netanyahu did not emerge as a plan to wreck the peace process. Rather, it was a compromise that the Israeli right had to internally make to come to terms with the recognition of the PLO, long deemed as illegitimate, and the subsequent establishment of the PA. The State of Israel had acknowledged the Palestinians and the need to work with them to find a solution to the

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[116] Joint Israeli Palestinian Poll 35, March 2010. Palestinian Center for Policy and Research. http://www.pcpsr.org/en/node/406 (used March 9, 2019)

[117] Palestinian National Authority. Palestine: Ending the Occupation, Establishing the State. Program of the Thirteenth Government, August 2009.
https://unispal.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/0/A013B65A5984E671852576B800581931 (used March 9, 2019)

[118] Kershner, Isabel. (2009). Palestinian Leader Maps Plan for Separate State. The New York Times, August 25. https://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/26/world/middleeast/26mideast.html (used March, 9 2019)

[119] Golan 2014: 44.

conflict. Thus, the mainstream right could no longer deny the Palestinians the agency in the peace process. Instead, they took upon themselves the language of having no partner for peace in the Palestinian side, i.e. Israel is willing, but the current leadership of the PA makes it impossible to have any progress in the negotiations. In this vein, Netanyahu set a demand to recognize Israel as a Jewish state before the negotiations could progress.[120]

The PLO officials have rejected this proposal and have indicated that Israel is using it as a tactical move to prolong the negotiations without showing wholehearted commitment.[121] In 2015, the Palestinian chief negotiator answered to Israel's stances with declaring that that after Netanyahu's victory in the polls, there is no Israeli partner for the peace process.[122] Israeli right wing has used this rejection to support their argument that the Palestinian side is not accepting the two-state solution.[123] The recognition demand is not new, as it has been discussed in the academic literature as an obstacle to reconciliation between the two nations. Netanyahu has brought it into the political arena and presents it as a requirement to a final settlement, even though a settlement in principle does not need a moral acknowledgment of each other between the conflict parties.[124]

The recognition demands offers large political benefits for the government that is using it. In one strike, it appeals to their voter base, who are more interested in preserving and promoting the Jewish character to the state, sets another obstacle for PA, which already has deep grievances over the losses they have had to cut, and allows to present the Israeli government as willing party for negotiations in the international arena. It can also offer a hint in regards to the perceptions that Netanyahu has about the conflict. Instead of

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[120] Mustafa & Ghanem 2013: 266-267.
[121] Buttu, Diana. (2014). Behind Israel's Demand for Recognition as a Jewish State. Journal of Palestine Studies, 43(3), pp. 42-45. DOI: 10.1525/jps.2014.43.3.42. P 42.; Ynet News. Abbas: We won't recognize Israel as Jewish state, October 15, 2010. https://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3969948,00.html (used May 13, 2019)
[122] The Times of Israel. Abbas says two-state solution impossible with Netanyahu, March 19, 2015. http://www.timesofisrael.com/abbas-says-two-state-solution-impossible-with-netanyahu/ (used May 13, 2019)
[123] Dershowitz, Alan. (2017) Why Abbas won't accept '2 states for 2 peoples'? The Jerusalem Post, June 13. https://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Dershowitz-on-why-Abbas-wont-accept-two-state-solution-496719 (used May 13, 2019)
[124] Mustafa & Ghanem 2013: 269, 274-275.

associating the 1967 war and the occupation as the causes of the perpetuation of the conflict, he attributes it to the very existence of the Jewish state.[125]

The backdrop for this demand was the polarized environment for the peace initiatives from the 1990s. The negotiations of 1990s and early 2000s had broken several taboos of the Israeli right, such as acquiescing, if not exactly admitting Israel's part in the Palestinian Nakba and the ensuing refugee crisis.[126] At the same time, the Oslo Accords were a peril to the settlement movement, which became afraid of losing its power and the foundation of the power at the same time.[127] Gagnon identifies it as one of the first conditions of when a ruling elite is willing to impose costly measures to retain their power.[128]

Throughout Netanyahus's premiership these views have transformed into a wide campaign that accuses the PLO of delegitimizing Israel. This was a response to a diplomatic initiative that the PLO had started in 2011 with the objective of becoming a full member in the United Nations which would grant the State of Palestine the international recognition it seeks. US is expected to veto such proposals in the Security Council, thus the Palestinian proposal was intended to gain international attention to the Palestinian cause but by that time the Western audience was fatigued of the matter and the Arab states were occupied with their internal matters.[129] Furthermore, the PA looked to gain some political leverage in relations with Israel that would force the Israelis to come to negotiations with more equitable terms.[130]

Israel swiftly rejected this plan**,** but as a response to this initiative together with proposed resolutions in the UN, which demand action on the Israeli-Palestinian peace

[125] Mustafa & Ghanem 2013: 275.

[126] Aggestam, Karin; Cristiano, Fabio; Strömbom, Lisa. (2015). Towards agonistic peacebuilding? Exploring the antagonism-agonism nexus in the Middle East Peace process. Third World Quarterly, 36(9), pp. 1736-1753. Pp 1743-1746.

[127] Feinstein, Yuval; Ben-Eliezer, Uri. (2018). Failed peace and the decline in liberalism in Israel: A spiral model. Mediterranean Politics, pp. 1-20, DOI: 10.1080/13629395.2018.1434595. P. 6.

[128] Gagnon 1994: 135.

[129] Beck, Martin. (2015). The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict in Transition: From Occupation to De)Legitimization? E-International Relations, July 8. https://www.e-ir.info/2015/07/08/the-israeli-palestinian-conflict-from-occupation-to-delegitimization/ (used May 14, 2019)

[130] Elgindy, Khaled. (2011). Palestine Goes to the UN. Brookings, September 12. https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/palestine-goes-to-the-un-2/ (used May 14, 2019)

process, and the reinforced Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement they increased their delegitimation attacks to ensure that their positions prevail in the international domain.[131] Falk (2014) describes the current phase of Palestinian national movement and Israel's descriptions of it as a "delegitimation project" or "lawfare" as a turn towards the legitimacy struggle, in which both parties use the domestic and international arena to claim that the other is victimizing them.[132] After gaining their status as an observer state, the PA suspended their efforts for a while, until in late 2018 they announced that they are again seeking to hold a vote in the Security Council on the matter of their sovereignty.[133] In February 2019, Israel did not grant permission for the Security Council to pay a visit to the West Bank, declaring it to be a part of international Palestinian propaganda.[134]

3.1.3 Accommodating settlers

The Jews have been settling in the occupied territories following the 1967 war. While all Israeli civilian settlements in the territories are illegal under the international law, most of the settlement blocs have been authorized by the Israeli government. In addition, some one hundred outposts have been built. These are the settlements that are illegal under Israeli law as well, even though the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) sometimes provide them with security.[135] In the Knesset the settlers have been mainly represented by the Jewish Home, a party most keen on expanding the Israeli sovereignty to the West Bank. By the

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[131] Yogev, Einav; Lindenstrauss, Gallia. (2017). Preface. In The Delegitimization Phenomenon: Challenges and Responses, Yogev, Einav; Lindenstrauss, Gallia (eds). Institute for National Security Studies, Memorandum no. 169, pp 7-10. https://www.inss.org.il/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/memo169.pdf. (used May 14, 2019). Pp 7-8.

[132] Falk, Richard. (2014). Palestine: The Legitimacy of Hope. Just World Books. P 207.

[133] Ahren, Raphael. (2018). For first time since 2011, Palestine to apply for full UN membership. The Times of Israel, December 27. https://www.timesofisrael.com/for-first-time-since-2011-palestine-to-apply-for-full-un-membership/ (used May 14, 2019)

[134] Lederer, Edith M. (2019). Israel rejects UN Security Council visit to West Bank. The Times of Israel, February 14. https://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-said-to-reject-un-security-council-visit-to-west-bank/ (used May 14, 2019)

[135] Cohen, Gili. (2013). Despite High Court Ruling to Evacuate Illegal Outposts IDF Provides Security for All West Bank Settlements - Regardless of Legal Status. Haaretz, April 3. https://www.haaretz.com/.premium-outpost-s-illegal-no-mind-army-will-guard-it-1.5236535 (used May 18, 2019)

wishes of this party the government has been attempting to retroactively legalize these outposts. The leadership's approach towards the settlers is represented by accommodating their interests within the coalition with their representatives. This strategy has resulted in undermining the peace process, as the settlers constitute the strongest spoilers for implementing the two-state solution. It has also made Israeli rule of law more fragile.

Israeli settlers warrant attention because they are the most visible way how Israel is expanding the magnitude of spoilers. While all other final status issues are contentious in themselves and both parties present mutually exclusive demands, an agreement about them could, at least theoretically, be reached between the two sides around the negotiating table and implemented by two governments. With the settlements, the people on the ground are likely to fight against the implementation of any such agreement, possibly by using violence.

The sheer number of settlements in the West Bank has made the evacuation of all settlements on Palestinian land to be in practice impossible, and even from just a few would be very difficult. While swapping the Green Line settlements for some uninhibited Israeli land is a feasible option, in order to establish territorial continuity for a Palestinian state, some evacuation is necessary. The settlers who are living in these settlements and outposts are the most zealous members of the movement, already making it difficult to convince them to leave. The settlers have also been promoting like-minded people to work in the bureaucracy and gain positions in the army, thus potentially obstructing the implementation of any evacuation plan.[136]

Before 2010s, the settlers had opted for establishing facts on the ground rather than gaining electoral power, because Menachem Begin and Ariel Sharon disengaging from Israeli-controlled land had proven to them that even right-wing politicians are not trustworthy supporters of the settlers. In the past decade they started gaining more electoral representation in the Knesset as well.[137] This is not to say that previous Israeli governments, both right- and left-wing, have been less than sympathetic towards settlers,

[136] Gorenberg 201: chp IV, Children of the Hills.
[137] Perliger, Arie; Zaidise, Eran. (2015). The Peculiar Victory of The National Camp in the 2013 Israeli Election, Israel Affairs, 21(2), pp. 195-208, DOI: 10.1080/13537121.2015.1008243.2015. Pp 204-206.

even if their actions have been illegal under the Israeli law. But the right-bloc's dependence in the coalition-formation on the Jewish Home, and United Right now, together with hardliners in Likud, have spearheaded their influence in the political arena.

In similar fashion to the previous Israeli governments, Netanyahu has promoted settlement construction in East Jerusalem and in the West Bank. He has advanced this policy further than most, however. The settlements in the West Bank fall into two categories based on their location: either near the Green Line, as in the settlement blocs, or in isolated locations deep in the West Bank, on the other side of the Separation Wall. While both are illegal under international law, the first category has been considered as a possible option for a land swap under a peace agreement. The isolated settlements are built with the intention of settling in Judea and Samaria, of building physical obstacles to the congruity of any Palestinian entity.

40% of the construction permissions that the second Netanyahu government approved of were in isolated settlements, contrary to 20% in previous years. In addition to granting new construction rights, the governments have made use of retroactively legalizing the outposts that even the Israeli law deems illegal. Similarly, the intensity of construction planning in East Jerusalem and the sensitivity of some locations shows a support for settlement expansion that is considerably higher than in the previous governments.[138] By 2018, this figure rose to 70%. At least 11% of construction have occurred in the illegal outposts. Published tenders for construction have also reached record highs under Netanyahu. According the the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics, 18 500 new housing units were built between 2009 and 2017,[139] with a jump in the construction permits issued in 2013[140] and an increase in spending on settlement

[138] Americans for Peace Now. Settlements & the Netanyahu Government: A Deliberate Policy of Undermining the Two-State Solution, 2012. https://peacenow.org/images/Summary%20of%20the%204%20years%20of%20Netanyahu%20Government.pdf (used May 13, 2019). P 1-7.
[139] Peace Now. So How Much was Built in the Settlements?, March 12, 2015. https://peacenow.org.il/en/so-how-much-was-built-in-the-settlements (used May 14, 2019)
[140] Peace Now. Special Annual Settlement Construction Report 2018: A Glance at 10 Years under Netanyahu, May 14, 2019. http://peacenow.org.il/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Annual-Settlement-Construction-Report_2018-1.pdf (used May 14, 2019). Pp 2-3.

infrastructure in 2017.[141] Altogether this added 120 000 new settlers, bringing the number of Israelis living in the West Bank to nearly 450 000 (2018) and in East Jerusalem to 210 000 (2016).[142] At the same time, the growth rate in the West Bank settlements has been gradually declining for a decade, from an annual rate of 5% to 3%.[143]

Settling in illegal outposts, on the 'hilltops', became increasingly blatant during Netanyahu's first premiership and was then halted in 2005. In 2012, this phenomenon returned, although in comparatively smaller numbers that in the 1990s and early 2000s.[144] Israel's Supreme Court had ordered to dismantle these outposts, to which the government answered with starting to retroactively legalizing them.[145] In 2015, the Jewish Home reportedly asked for a plan to move forward with the legalization process as part of their coalition demands.[146] In the next year, a ministerial committee unilaterally agreed to a legislation that retroactively legalized over 4000 settlement buildings,[147] and in early 2017 this was passed in the Knesset.[148]

The trouble with illegal outposts had become evident in late 2016, when the deadline issued by the Supreme Court to dismantle Amona approached. Netanyahu issued a video statement, pleading the Amona settlers to refrain from using violence against the evacuation. He also stated that the government is increasing their efforts to fight against

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[141] The Times of Israel. Trump's election appears to have boosted Israeli settlement construction, May 14, 2019. https://www.timesofisrael.com/trumps-election-appears-to-boost-israeli-settlement-construction/ (used May 14, 2019)

[142] B'Tselem, The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories. Statistics on Settlements and Settler Population, January 1, 2011, updated January 16, 2019. https://www.btselem.org/settlements/statistics (used May 14, 2019)

[143] Magid, Jacob. (2019) Settler growth rate down for 7th year, but still higher than national average. The Times of Israel, January 8. https://www.timesofisrael.com/settler-growth-rate-in-west-bank-down-for-7th-year-in-a-row/ (used May 14, 2019)

[144] Peace Now. Settlement Watch: Population. https://peacenow.org.il/en/settlements-watch/settlements-data/population (used May 14, 2019)

[145] United Nations. Analysis: Israeli government challenges the law to embrace illegal settler outposts, 15 May 2012. https://www.un.org/unispal/document/israeli-government-challenges-the-law-to-embrace-illegal-settler-outposts-analysis-irin-article/ (used May 14, 2019)

[146] Lazaroff, Tovah. (2015). Netanyahu's new government to tackle authorizing illegal settler construction. The Jerusalem Post, May 10. https://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/Politics-And-Diplomacy/Netanyahus-new-government-to-tackle-authorizing-illegal-settler-construction-402590 (used May 14, 2019)

[147] Beaumont, Peter. (2016). Israeli ministers vote in favour of legalising outposts. The Guardian, November 14. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/nov/14/israeli-ministers-vote-in-favour-of-legalising-outposts (used May 14, 2019)

[148] BBC News. Israel passes controversial law on West Bank settlements, February 7, 2017. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-38888649 (used May 14, 2019)

illegal housing in all Israel, a clear reference to the Arab districts.[149] After meeting with the Amona settlers, the government convinced them to relocate to another outpost nearby, a move that was widely criticized as yielding to people that had broken the Israeli law.[150] In 2017, Netanyahu approved establishing a new settlement site in the West Bank, becoming the first Israeli prime minister since Oslo accords to grant such permission.[151] He justified that he was upholding the promises he had made to Amona settlers.[152] The new permission and the retroactive legalization were parts of the accommodation strategy to secure the support of the settlers within the coalition and in the public.

The Regulation law, as it is shortly known, was referred to the Supreme Court by several human rights NGOs.[153] In August 2017, the Court issued an interim order to suspend its enforcement.[154] The defense minister Lieberman stated that Regulation law is sabotaging the settlement movement because it would give chances for Palestinians to legalize their own illegal houses. At the same time, he stated that he would agree for a legislation that bans violent settlers of the outposts from the West Bank.[155] The attorney general, who has been opposing the legislation on the grounds that it is unconstitutional

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[149] The Times of Israel. PM to meet with Amona residents, pledges to demolish illegal construction 'all over Israel', December 16, 2016. https://www.timesofisrael.com/as-amona-evacuation-looms-pm-pledges-to-demolish-illegal-construction-all-over-israel/ (used May 14, 2019)

[150] Kershner, Isabel. (2016). Israel Reaches Agreement to Relocate Amona Settlers, December 18. https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/18/world/middleeast/israel-amona-outpost-west-bank.html (used May 14, 2019)

[151] Peace Now. Jurisdiction of The New Settlement "Amihai" Approved, May 30, 2017. https://peacenow.org.il/en/jurisdiction-new-settlement-amihai-approved (used May 14, 2019)

[152] Kershner, Isabel. (2017). Israel Approves First New Settlement in Decades. The New York Times, March 30. https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/30/world/middleeast/israeli-settlements-netanyahu.html (used May 14, 2019)

[153] Adalah - The Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel. Responses of Israeli government and attorney general in Settlements Regularization Law Case, January 2018. https://www.adalah.org/en/content/view/9371 (used May 14, 2019)

[154] Magid, Jacob; Winer, Stuart. (2017). High Court freezes controversial outpost legalization law. The Times of Israel, August 17. https://www.timesofisrael.com/high-court-freezes-controversial-outpost-legalization-law/ (used May 14, 2019)

[155] Magid, Jacob. (2017). Liberman slams illegal outposts as 'sabotaging settlement movement'. The time of Israel, August 29. https://www.timesofisrael.com/liberman-slams-illegal-outposts-as-sabotaging-settlement-movement/ (used May 14, 2019)

and violates the Palestinians' rights, has recommended the government to look for alternative legal measures for regulating the outposts.[156]

A similar legislation, which addressed 66 outposts, was approved in the ministerial committee for legislation in late 2018, with the Jewish Home threatening to bring the coalition to collapse if it is not passed.[157] This initiative would authorize the outposts temporarily and give the state two years to decide on their status. Within that two years these outposts cannot be demolished and the government has to provide them municipal services. Because both of these clauses are already in practice fulfilled, the proposal was symbolic, but with an implied intention to press the government to resolve the quarrel with the Supreme Court.[158] Thus far, the bill has not been put on a vote in the Knesset and its main proponents were not elected back to the Knesset. However, the disagreement between the government and the Supreme Court continues.

3.1.3 Legislation

Some of the legislation passed or attempted to pass during Netanyahu's governance demonstrate the strategy of discrediting the opposition and legitimising the regime. The use of this strategy will be discussed only briefly, because these tactics have been directed primarily to the domestic level and have less salient links to foreign policy. However, they erosion of the left-wing's credibility has resulted in establishing a frame that the current leadership's hawkish but apathetic policy towards the Palestinian issue is the only possible stance. This is best demonstrated with comparing the rivals to Netanyahu in 2009 and 2019: in the former, Tzipi Livni was running on the platform of negotiating with the Palestinians, in the latter Benny Gantz was a Chief of Staff during the 2014 operation in

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[156] Magid, Jacob. (2018). AG urges court to strike Regulation Law, points to new ways to legalize outposts. the Times of Israel, December 18. https://www.timesofisrael.com/ag-urges-court-to-strike-regulation-law-given-new-ways-to-legalize-outposts/ (used May 14, 2019)

[157] Magid, Jacob. (2018). Ministers to vote on bill legalizing 66 outposts deep in West Bank. The Times of Israel, December 16. https://www.timesofisrael.com/ministers-to-vote-on-bill-legalizing-66-outposts-deep-in-west-bank/ (used May 14, 2019)

[158] Lis, Jonathan; Berger, Yotam. (2018). Israeli Ministers Approve Bill That Would Legalize 66 West Bank Outposts. Haaretz, December 16. https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-israeli-ministers-approve-bill-that-would-legalize-66-west-bank-outposts-1.6747792 (used May 14, 2019)

Gaza and in the election campaign declared that in the Palestinian side there is no one to talk to.[159]

Since 2009, the coalition parties have launched an effort to shape the legislation in ways that have been described by Gorenberg (2011) as going against basic democratic principles. "That offensive, I must stress, faced resistance within the Knesset and in the general public. Nonetheless, the tidal wave of legislation aimed against the Arab minority, human rights activists, and critics of the occupation was unprecedented."[160]

For example, in 2009, Yisrael Beytenu ran on the platform of sowing mistrust towards the Arab citizens of Israel. They used the slogan 'no loyalty, no citizenship' and promised to install loyalty tests to non-Jewish citizens of Israel to gauge whether they are worthy of the citizenship. This test would bestow certain civil rights, such as voting, running in the elections, working for the state, identity cards, and citizenship only to those who give the oath which acknowledges Israel's Jewish, democratic, and Zionist nature.[161] A proposal that required only new citizens to pledge loyalty to the state on Jewish and democratic terms was passed in the cabinet in 2010, but it has not been taken to the Knesset floor.[162]

Of those that have been passed, Adalah - The Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel counts 26 discriminatory laws for the period of 2010-2017, compared to 14 in the 2000s and less than 5 for decades before it.[163] The numbers do not reflect the content of these bills and thus do not measure the extent that they infringe on the Arab citizens' rights. Therefore it only offers a rough comparison. However, the adopted legislation shows signs of using normal governance procedures for a process that ultimately

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[159] Hoffman, Gil; Harkov, Lahav. (2019). Gantz: No partner on Palestinian side. The Jerusalem Post, March 20. https://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/Gantz-No-partner-on-Palestinian-side-583937 (used May 18, 2019)
[160] Gorenberg 2011: chp VI: Importing the Revolution.
[161] Olesker, Ronnie. (2014a). Law-making and the Securitization of the Jewish Identity in Israel, Ethnopolitics, 13(2), pp. 105-121, DOI: 10.1080/17449057.2013.773156. Pp 109-110.
[162] Lis, Jonathan. (2010) Cabinet Approves Loyalty Oath, but Only for non-Jewish New Citizens. Haaretz, October 10. https://www.haaretz.com/1.5123442 (used May 11, 2019)
[163] Adalah - The Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel. Discriminatory Laws in Israel, updated September 2017. https://www.adalah.org/en/law/index (used May 11, 2019)

securitizes the government's policy preferences. With that move, otherwise political questions are raised out of the realm of politics to represent existential matters.[164]

The ongoing dispute with the Supreme Court over the constitutionality of the legalization of outposts has also increased the attempts to bring it under political control. Ayelet Shaked, who served as a Minister of Justice in the 2015 government, pushed for reforms in the judiciary system that would limit the authority of the Supreme Court by stripping it of the power to oversee the Knesset's legislation, while giving the parliament the right to appoint judges.[165] These reforms failed to gain a majority support because of Kulanu blocking the initiatives.[166] Before the elections, it was reported that Kulanu is considering to stop opposing the coalition partners in the new government.[167] With Shaked and Bennett failing to cross the threshold, it is unknown if the proposal will be carried forward.

In July 2018, the Knesset adopted the Basic Law of Israel as the Nation-State of the Jewish People, a law enshrining Israel as the national home for the Jews.[168] The origins of the bill trace back to 2011, when it was first proposed as a basic law. In 2017, a special joint committee for discussing the law was established, and after extensive debates in the Knesset and in the public it was passed with 62 favorable votes against 55. Before the legislation went into second and third reading, Israel's President Reuven Rviin criticized it harshly as harmful to the Jewish people by allowing communities to establish separate communal settlements and thus permit discrimination. The bill's original sponsor, Avi Dichter, who had moved from Kadima to Likud, defended the bill as protecting the

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[164] Olesker 2014a: 109-110.

[165] Wootliff, Raoul. (2019). Shaked vows to scrap panel that appoints judges, as right takes on Supreme Court. The Times of Israel, March 19. https://www.timesofisrael.com/right-moves-against-supreme-court-as-shaked-presents-plan-for-legal-upheaval/ (used May 12, 2019)

[166] Lintl, Peter. (2016). The dynamics of a right-wing coalition: how the failure of the peace process encourages domestic populism in Israel. (SWP Comment, 45/2016). Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik -SWP- Deutsches Institut für Internationale Politik und Sicherheit. https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-48905-0. P 4.

[167] The Times of Israel. Kahlon reportedly reconsidering opposition to reforms in judicial system, March 9, 2019. https://www.timesofisrael.com/kahlon-reportedly-reconsidering-opposition-to-reforms-in-judicial-system/ (used May 12, 2019)

[168] Basic Law. Israel - the Nation State of the Jewish People, adopted on July 19, 2018. https://knesset.gov.il/laws/special/eng/BasicLawNationState.pdf (used May 18, 2019)

majority rights.[169] Subsequently, the language was softened to state promoting the development of Jewish communities.[170]

The adoption of the law was largely symbolic, with the coalition boasting that it is a defining moment in the annals of Zionism and the opposition warning of impairing the relations between Israeli Jews and Arabs.[171] Livni lamented that she had insisted on adding the clause of committing to the equality for all its citizens, but it had been rejected by the coalition because they were not even interested in gaining the support from the opposition.[172] Netanyahu rejected the inclusion of such clause because civil rights are enshrined in the Basic Law: Human Dignity and Liberty.[173] The EU voiced its concern over adopting the law as it would further complicate the implementation of the two-state solution.[174] Whereas the law itself has more declaratory that actual effect, it is representing the trend in which the legislation is increasingly directed at consolidating the majority's rights.

3.2 Election cycles

In the second subchapter the parliamentary elections of 2009, 2013, 2015, and 2019, and the events during the election cycles are analyzed to assess the changes in the government formation that have brought about the strategies presented before. Election results are referred in appendix 2.

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[169] Wootliff, Raoul. (2018). In rare rebuke, Rivlin urges MKs to amend 'discriminatory' Jewish state bill. The Times of Israel, July 10. https://www.timesofisrael.com/in-rare-rebuke-rivlin-urges-mks-to-amend-discriminatory-jewish-state-bill/ (used May 18, 2019)

[170] Lis, Jonathan. (2018). New Version of Nation-state Bill: Israel Will Encourage Establishment of Jewish-only Communities. Haaretz, July 15. https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-compromise-reached-on-jews-only-communities-clause-1.6271813 (used May 18, 2019)

[171] Halbfinger, David M.; Kershner, Isabel. (2018). Israeli Law Declares the Country the 'Nation-State of the Jewish People'. The New York Times, July 19. https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/19/world/middleeast/israel-law-jews-arabic.html (used May 18, 2019)

[172] Horovitz, David. (2018). The trouble with Israel's Jewish nation-state law. The Times of Israel, July 29. https://www.timesofisrael.com/the-trouble-with-israels-jewish-nation-state-law/ (used May 18, 2019)

[173] Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Press Room. PM Netanyahu's remarks at the start of the weekly Cabinet meeting, July 29, 2018. https://mfa.gov.il/MFA/PressRoom/2018/Pages/PM-Netanyahu-s-remarks-at-the-start-of-the-weekly-Cabinet-meeting-29-July-2018.aspx (used May 18, 2019)

[174] Reuters. EU expresses concern over Israel's Jewish nation-state law, July 19, 2018. https://www.reuters.com/article/us-israel-politics-law-eu/eu-expresses-concern-over-israels-jewish-nation-state-law-idUSKBN1K91K7 (used May 18, 2019)

3.2.1 Elections in 2009: Kadima wins, but Likud forms the government

The 2009 parliamentary elections in February were preceded by Operation Cast Lead against Hamas in the Gaza Strip. The military campaign followed a near-total closure on Gaza in the first two weeks of December 2008, to which Hamas responded with a declaration that they would not renew the truce that had, with some infringements, held in effect since summer 2008. The Palestinian rocket fire was responded with an Israeli air campaign, followed by a ground invasion.[175] In January 18, Israel declared to implement an unilateral ceasefire after gaining security pledges from Egypt and the US. Hamas responded with their own cease-fire at the same day.[176]

The immediate effect of the military operation on the elections was diminishing the attention paid by the Israeli public. All leading parties had chosen their prime minister candidates,[177] but up until the end of the operation there had been no public debates between them.[178] During the operation, all parties froze their election campaigns.[179] When the dust settled and the political campaign became prominent again, security was reinforced as the central issue. Likud had used the rallying around the flag tactic throughout the operation. Now they shifted back to attacking Tzipi Livni's capabilities and willingness to crush Israel's enemies.[180] In general, the parties' campaign agendas primarily included security issues, such as terrorism, attacks and intifada. Altogether 28% of campaign videos addressed the security questions, compared to 23% of videos about socio-economic issues and 6% of videos about negotiations with the Palestinians.[181]

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[175] Prelude to Operation Cast Lead Israel's Unilateral Disengagement to the Eve of War. (2009). Journal of Palestine Studies, 38(3), pp. 139-168. DOI: 10.1525/jps.2009.xxxviii.3.139. Pp 164-168.

[176] Esposito, Michele K. (2009). Quarterly Update on Conflict and Diplomacy: 16 November 2008–15 February 2009. Journal of Palestine Studies, 38(3), pp. 286-319. DOI: 10.1525/jps.2009.xxxviii.3.286. P 295.

[177] Tzipi Livni for Kadima, Benyamin Netanyahu for Likud, and Ehud Barak for Labor.

[178] Esposito 2009: 299.

[179] Rahat; Gideon; Hazan Reuven Y. (2009). One Winner, Two Winners, No Winners: The 2009 Elections in Israel. Representation, 45(4), pp. 405-420, DOI: 10.1080/00344890903236981. P 408.

[180] Gerstenfeld, Manfred. (2010). The run-up to the elections: a political history of the 2009 campaign. Israel Affairs, 16(1), pp. 14-30. Pp 22-23.

[181] Tsfati, Yariv; Sheafer, Tamir; Weimann, Gabriel. (2011). War on the Agenda: The Gaza Conflict and Communication in the 2009 Elections. In The Elections in Israel 2009, Arian, Asher; Shamir, Michal (eds). New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, pp. 225-250. P 233.

The Israeli Jewish public strongly supported the operation and was suspicious of the Palestinians. This sentiment carried on to the elections. On January 12, Israel's Central Elections Committee banned two Arab parties from running in the elections on the request of the extreme right Yisrael Beytenu party and the National Union-National Religious Party. The Supreme Court overturned this decision on January 21.[182] In the run-up to elections, Netanyahu took hard-line positions on the settlements and Hamas, and opposed the creation of a Palestinian state.[183]

The average weekly polls gave similar support to both the ruling center-left government and the opposing right-religious bloc. As Hamas continued with limited retaliations after the cease-fire, the most hawkish parts of the electorate, those who had been supporting the government during the operation, returned to right. This gave the right-wing some advantage in the polls. Within the blocs, however, left-wing Labor and right-wing Yisrael Beytenu gained support in the expense of front-runners Kadima and Likud, respectively, as these parties successfully used the military operation to mobilize their supporters.[184] The success of smaller parties continued in the news coverage, with Yisrael Beytenu's loyalty oath pledge becoming much more central issue in the news than with the public.[185]

As the gap between the blocs increased before the elections and parties were unlikely to get voters from across the aisle just before the election, they tried to secure the vote in their own bloc, rather than gaining them from the other side. Kadima launched a last minute campaign to encourage left-wing voters to strategically vote for Tzipi Livni, instead of Labor and Meretz. This tactic proved to be successful, as Kadima did gain most votes in the elections, winning 28 seats in the expense of smaller left-wing parties. However, this also demonstrated that Kadima had predicted the overall victory for right-religious bloc and tried to gain more leverage for bargaining with them. Both Livni and

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[182] Supreme Court Overturns Ban on Arab Parties From National Elections. Haaretz, January 26, 2009. https://www.haaretz.com/1.5067719 (used March 9, 2019)
[183] Esposito 2009: 299.
[184] Rahat & Hazan 2009: 409.
[185] Tsfati *et al* 2011: 232-234.

Netanyahu had supported forming a national unity government between Kadima and Likud, so the decisive struggle was over the prime minister's seat.[186]

Although Likud had received one seat less in the Knesset than Kadima, the right-religious bloc had a majority of 65 seats, of which Likud held 27. In net shift, the right received 15 more seats than in the 2006 elections. The four religious parties all lost a seat each to Likud. Yisrael Beytenu, launched in 1999 as a splinter from Likud, focusing on new immigrants from Russia, became the third largest party by expanding its electoral base with nationalist voters.[187] Instead of forming a national unity government with Kadima, Netanyahu included Labor in his coalition. Therefore the 32nd government of Israel started with 5 parties and 30 ministers:[188] Likud (27 MKs), Yisrael Beytenu (15), Labor (13), Shas (11), The Jewish Home (3).[189] In terms of ministerial posts, this was an exceptionally large cabinet, suggesting the use of side-payments to gain support.

By excluding Kadima, the forming of this coalition does not adhere to the size principle and the policy distance principle. In both security and religious dimensions, center-Kadima and center-hawkish Likud were closer to each other than more dovish and secular Labor to Likud, even more so if comparing Labor to religious and nationalist coalition members.[190] There were two controversial demands made by Kadima that resulted in their exclusion. First, Kadima insisted on the rotation of the prime minister's seat. The negotiator for Kadima claimed that Netanyahu was prepared to agree to that, but the deadlock emerged over the issue of negotiations with the Palestinians, which Livni wanted to continue from the terms reached in Annapolis in 2007.[191]

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[186] Rahat & Hazan 2009: 410.
[187] Rahat & Hazan 2009: 410-415.
[188] An ultra-orthodox United Torah Judaism (5 MKs) joined in April 1, 2009, bringing the number of parties in the coalition to 6 and their share of seats in the Knesset to 74. The party formally refuses to take up ministerial posts.
[189] The Knesset, Eighteenth Knesset: Government 32. https://knesset.gov.il/govt/eng/GovtByNumber_eng.asp?govt=32 (used March 9, 2019)
[190] Rahat & Hazan 2009: 416.
[191] Horovitz, David. (2013). Netanyahu was ready to 'rotate' PM's job with Livni in 2009. The Times of Israel, November 4. https://www.timesofisrael.com/netanyahu-was-ready-to-rotate-pms-job-with-livni-in-2009/ (used 9 March 2019)

Netanyahu was hesitant to form a narrow government, after having seen one fall apart under the competing demands of smaller parties in the late 1990s.[192] For widening the government and to exclude the extreme right-wing National Union, Netanyahu approached Ehud Barak, even though a majority of Labor MKs were against of joining the coalition. To gain their support, Netanyahu offered a payment of five ministerial appointments, raising Labor to same level as Yisrael Beytenu.[193] Therefore even though the size principle and the policy distance principle on the surface did not seem to apply in the coalition forming, this deviation is explained with Netanyahu securing for Likud the greatest leverage within the coalition.

As a result of forming such coalition, Netanyahu underlined Likud's role as the pivotal actor: even though most of the coalition partners were positioned to their right, strengthening Labor and excluding the most nationalist party secured Likud's role in the center. While converged to a right-wing bloc, Yisrael Beytenu is largely secular and opposed to ultra-orthodox parties on religious issues. This makes them unlikely to reach a deal over Likud, but makes it more difficult to keep them on board in clashes over religion.

3.2.3 Maintaining the grand coalition

Until September 2010, when a fresh round was launched in DC, no direct negotiations between Israel and the PA had been held since September 2008. This brief round came to halt when the 10-month moratorium on settlement construction passed on 26 September 2010. The negotiations reached an impasse when PA demanded an extension to the freeze, but Netanyahu declared that the PA must recognize Israel as a Jewish state before. At that time, the Jewish public was split whether a long-term freeze would be of Israel's interest, even if it was compensated by a stronger U.S. commitment against the

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[192] Kershner, Isabel. (2009). Netanyahu to Form New Israel Government, New York Times, February 20. https://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/21/world/middleeast/21israel.html (used 9 March 2019)
[193] Abraham Diskin. (2010). The Likud: the struggle for the centre. Israel Affairs, 16(1), pp. 51-68, DOI: 10.1080/13537120903461995. P 66.

possible Iranian nuclear program.[194] However, a large majority of 74% backed Netanyahu in his demand of recognition before the extension.[195] Netanyahu was stuck between American pressure and criticism of his right-wing coalition partners, including members of Likud, accused of cowering before the PA. With the PA rejecting Netanyahu's proposal, talks stalled.[196]

Without any formal termination, both Israel and the PA, as well as the international community reached a stalemate that lasted throughout the end of 2010 and into 2011. In February 2011, Netanyahu declared that security is of utmost importance in the negotiations, implying that its priority is higher than of recognition. To counter the international pressure and the PA's strengthening push for establishing a state within the 1967 borders, Netanyahu expressed a wish to discuss laying down some temporary borders. Despite that, no plan for an interim agreement was proposed.[197]

On 22 November 2010, the Knesset amended a law from 1999 about ceding Israeli territory. The new law requires a national referendum for land-for-peace deals, unless two thirds of the Knesset support the concession.[198] In practice, it refers to the annexed East Jerusalem and Golan Heights, as well as possible land swaps. It does, however, lay additional restrictions for any government that wishes to hold successful negotiations with the Palestinians, especially if some parts of disputed territories are further annexed. On the other hand, the referendum requirement was also seen as a possibility to overcome the far-right's opposition in the Knesset to giving up the West Bank , thus weakening their stance as a domestic constraint.[199]

The law passed by a vote of 65 to 33. However, most of the ruling Labor party ministers abstained from voting despite lobbying from the right-wing parties, additional

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[194] The Peace Index: November 2010.
http://www.peaceindex.org/indexMonthEng.aspx?num=199&monthname=November (used April 28, 2019)
[195] The Peace Index: October 2010.
http://www.peaceindex.org/indexMonthEng.aspx?num=198&monthname=October (used April 28, 2019)
[196] Diskin, Abraham. (2011). Israel. European Journal of Political Research 50, pp. 1011–1017.
DOI: 10.1111/j.1475-6765.2011.02027.x. Pp 1013-1014.
[197] Golan 2013: 104.
[198] Israel: Legal Aspects of Ceding Israeli Territory. The Law Library of Congress.
https://www.loc.gov/law/help/ceding-territory/israel.php/ceding-israeli-territory.pdf (used April 28, 2019)
[199] Fisher-Ilan, Allyn. (2010). Israeli parliament approves referendum-for-peace law. Reuters, November 23.

five MKs from Labor voted against.[200] After the law was challenged in the Supreme Court for limiting the Knesset's capacities, the next Israeli government of 2013 decided to pass same terms by embedding them in a basic law. Israel does not have a formal constitution, but basic laws create a constitutional basis for overruling other legislation.[201]

In January 2011, the leader of the Labor party and defense minister Ehud Barak split from Labor to form a breakaway faction, the Independence Party. Barak's move came after intense pressure from within the party and left-wing public to walk away from the government because of its right-wing orientation, including towards the peace process. Subsequently, Labor joined the opposition. Five MKs from the Independence Party remained in the coalition, thus a fairly comfortable majority of 66 seats was maintained.[202]

The biggest winner of this split, however, was Netanyahu. He was able to remove the threat that the whole Labor leaves, which would have brought the coalition to a very narrow majority of 61 seats. Labor MKs had not been reliable in votings, but a remaining smaller split-off depended on Netanyahu in their political standing. Barak remained as a counter-balance to Likud's right-wing allies. It is unknown if and how much Netanyahu pressed for the move, but his involvement was suggested in the reporting.[203] In any case, the move made the coalition in general and Likud in particular, being the pivotal actor, less vulnerable to losing power.

In 2011 and 2012 the Israeli government was occupied by domestic issues. They had just recovered from a historically low support after a surprising wave of protests against the rising costs of living in 2011, when a religious split in the coalition threatened to bring the government down.[204] The crucial vulnerability to Israel's right-wing bloc is the issue of exceptional rights for Ultra-Orthodox Jews. With religious parties demanding that

[200] Sofer, Roni. (2010). Referendum bill passes Knesset vote, Ynet News, November 22. https://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3988447,00.html (used April 28, 2019)

[201] Knesset News. Knesset passes Referendum Law; PM: Now the people can decide on land-for-peace deals, March 12, 2014. https://m.knesset.gov.il/EN/News/PressReleases/pages/Pr11198_pg.aspx (used April 28, 2019)

[202] Haaretz. Netanyahu: Barak's Split From Labor Strengthens Israel's Government, January 17, 2011. https://www.haaretz.com/1.5109167 (used April 28, 2019)

[203] Sherwood, Harriet. (2011). Ehud Barak quits Israeli Labour Party. The Guardian, January 17. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/jan/17/ehud-barak-quit-labour-israel (used April 28, 2019)

[204] Rahat, Gideon; Hazan, Reuven Y. (2013). Increased personalisation in an unstable party system: The 2013 elections in Israel. Representation, 49(3), pp. 375-389, DOI: 10.1080/00344893.2013.830477. P 377.

their base's exemptions from the Israeli Defense Forces continue and secular-nationalist parties fervently against it, any renewal of this or any other religiously driven issue makes the task of keeping a government together extremely difficult for the pivotal actor.

At first, Netanyahu's decision was to call for early elections. It was prompted by Likud's strong showing before their main rival, Kadima, and it replacing the more popular leader Livni with Shaul Mofaz. However, while the Knesset was working on legislation to dissolve itself, Netanyahu and Mofaz agreed to form a national unity government in order to find a solution to the Ultra-Orthodox conscription issue. The attempt failed, weakening the position for both major parties. The short-lived government lasted for just over two months, but it did bring about the largest majority coalition in Israel's history: 94 seats. The government kept itself together in the autumn, but when the need to make major cuts to the 2013 budget became apparent, Netanyahu chose to face elections rather than a budget fight in an unstable coalition.[205]

Neither Likud nor other parties tried to play the Palestinian issue above Israeli domestic concerns. Presumably, they realized that this gambit could easily fail by questioning the occupation's role in rising expenses. The government declared their opposition to the PA's efforts for accession the United Nations and voted against their upgrade to a non-member observer state in 2012.[206] The Obama administration tried to convince Israelis to negotiate, but with lack of political will their efforts did not bear fruit.

The Palestinian issue gained attention again only with Operation Pillar of Defense against Gaza in November 2012, but even then it did not rise to become the prominent issue in the upcoming elections. The public opinion about the operation was divided, with almost half of Israelis wishing to see a ground invasion. Some right-wing politicians attacked the government for agreeing to a ceasefire and as a result, Likud lost support in

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[205] Rahat & Hazan 2013: 376-377.

[206] UN News. General Assembly grants Palestine non-member observer State status at UN, November 29, 2012. https://news.un.org/en/story/2012/11/427052-general-assembly-grants-palestine-non-member-observer-state-status-un (used April 28, 2019)

the polls.[207] Overall, however, the usual security dimension gave way to socio-economic and religious issues that had been defining the political developments in 2011 and 2012.

3.2.3 Elections in 2013: Likud wins but loses

These elections saw the prominence of social media as a campaign platform. Particularly, Lapid, Netanyahu and Naftali Bennett from the Jewish Home were labeled even before the elections as successful users of Facebook as a political channel; their pages were all considerably more popular than the parties they were members of.[208]

The 2013 election race was played out more within the blocs than between them. The polling before the election did not indicate a close fight. Furthermore, the merger of Likud and Yisrael Beytenu had all but secured Netanyahu's seat as a prime minister, because even though it did not raise their support compared with share of seats in the outgoing Knesset, the alliance had no close rival. With the common assumption that Netanyahu was going to form the government, all parties tried to gain votes at the expense of their close neighbors. This played out strongest in the center and on the right, because these parties had more to win by gaining a larger presence in the upcoming coalition.[209]

This proved troubling for Likud-Yisrael Beytenu due to their perceived winner status: without a legitimate call of mobilization, they saw their support shifting to a religious-Zionist alliance, the Jewish Home.[210] After the elections, it became apparent that additionally, some moderate right-wing voters had shifted to a new center party, Yesh Atid, leaving Likud-Yisrael Beytenu with 31 seats in the Knesset, a considerable setback from 42 seats they had held between them before.[211]

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[207] Gerstenfeld, Manfred. (2015). The Run-Up to Israel's 2013 Elections: A Political History. Israel Affairs, 21(2), pp. 177-194, DOI: 10.1080/13537121.2015.1008240. P 180.
[208] Samuel-Azran, Tal; Yarchi, Moran; Wolfsfeld, Gadi. (2018). Rhetoric Styles and Political Affiliations During Israel's 2013 "Facebook Elections". International Journal of Politics Culture and Society, 31, pp. 15-30. DOI 10.1007/s10767-016-9247-1. P 19.
[209] Gerstenfeld 2015: 178-186.
[210] A merger of the Jewish Home and the National Union, both national-religious and hawkish, announced before the election.
[211] Rahat & Hazan 2013: 380.

Yair Lapid, the leader of Yesh Atid, became the biggest winner of the elections. After Kadima's collapse due to their short and unsuccessful endeavor in the government, the center vote promised returns for all moderates. Throughout the campaign Lapid had insisted that he is 'center-center', not leaning towards the left bloc. He also did not declare that he would not support Netanyahu as Prime Minister. These tactics worked and Yesh Atid was able to secure the center vote, together with gaining some support from the moderate right. Thus it became the second-largest party with 19 seats, just one seat less than Likud's share from the alliance.[212] While Yesh Atid was hailed as the kingmaker,[213] the 61 seats that the right-religious bloc had won, without counting center seats, would have given a narrow majority to Netanyahu regardless.

The outcome of the elections for Likud was a loss of their bargaining power and shift to right. Even though Netanyahu remained central in coalition-forming, the pivotal power of Likud was lost, when Yesh Atid and the Jewish Home announced their alliance in the coalition negotiations. Together, they held 31 seats, tying Netanyahu's hands to either include them both or form an ideologically incohesive coalition with the Ultra-Orthodox parties and the left. Ideologically, Likud-Yisrael Beytenu was able to regain their pivotal position by forming a coalition with Yesh Atid and Hatnuah, a Livni-led split-off from Kadima in their left, and the Jewish Home in their right. But the partnership between Yesh Atid and the Jewish Home, apparently based on socio-economic issues and their leaders' personal sympathies, had greatly reduced Likud's standing in the government. Yesh Atid's demand to cut the cabinet size meant that Netanyahu lacked bargaining power within his own party too.[214]

The right and left, concerning security and religion, are the main dimensions of Israel's coalition forming. In the 2013 elections this was not as salient than in others. The Palestinian issue was marginalized, with clear dividing lines between the parties only on the topic of Ultra-Orthodox conscription, which is more connected to internal cohesion and the economic expenses of supporting a large class of non-workers than just a security

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[212] Rahat & Hazan 2013: 379-382.
[213] Zilber, Neri. (2013). Israel's New Kingmaker. Foreign Policy, January 29. https://foreignpolicy.com/2013/01/29/israels-new-kingmaker/ (used April 29, 2019)
[214] Rahat & Hazan 2013: 387-388.

issue. This, however, meant that the success of far-right nationalist parties was understated. Having gradually grown since the end of the 1980s, the far-right parties won over a third of the seats[215] and several cabinet posts that are closely related to settlement building.[216]

Because the Ultra-Orthodox electoral potential was already maximized in the 2000s, the growing support has been attained by ultra-nationalist and more secular parties. They have been expanding from their natural stronghold of Israeli settlers to other segments in the society, gaining support from the middle class and higher echelons as well. Furthermore, the far right parties were able to push their terms to the election's discourse. The right-wing has long claimed that Israel is willing to work for peace but there is no partner for that on the Palestinian side, and that the two-state solution is neither attainable nor legitimate. Because the left-wing has not been able to provide a credible ideological alternative, the beliefs of the right have been imposed on the center and center-left parties as well.[217]

3.2.4 From negotiations to war

The 33rd government did not adopt similar policy guidelines as the previous one had. Instead Netanyahu signed individual agreements with coalition partners: the first with Hatnuah and then, right before the deadline of the allowed coalition-forming period, with Yesh Atid and the Jewish Home, the latter two containing detailed plans about reforming the military service and the electoral system. On paper, these agreements were quite promising for progress on the Palestinian issue. The first contract with Hatnuah included a section for designating a ministerial negotiations team, consisting of Netanyahu, Livni as a minister of Justice, and the Ministers of Defense and of Foreign Affairs. The objective of that team is to reach "a political agreement with them that will end the conflict". Similar provisions were agreed with other two coalition partners.[218]

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[215] Counting Shas, United Torah Judaism, the Jewish Home, and Yisrael Beytenu.
[216] Perliger & Zaidise 2015: 198-203.
[217] Perliger & Zaidise 2015: 201-206.
[218] Levush, Ruth. Government Composition and Coalition Agreements: Israel. The Law Library of Congress, https://www.loc.gov/law/help/israel-govenment-comp-

Following a coalition agreement and intense persuasion by the US Secretary of State John Kerry, a new round of direct negotiations between the Israelis and the Palestinians was started in July 2013, facilitated by the US. These talks were described as only a third serious and extended attempt to reach an understanding between to parties after the collapse of the Oslo process, and the first time when the final status talks had an Israeli leader from Likud in the driving seat. Final status issues concern the most contested matters, with the objective of ending the conflict by finding a solution to these issues.[219]

Both parties had to make unpopular concessions so the negotiations could resume, although unlike last time, Israel did not have to implement a moratorium on settlement construction. The reason for not including this clause to the restart agreement was a mistaken belief by the US negotiators that Israel had informally agreed to such a clause. When Israel announced their plans to advance with the settlements, the Palestinian public accused their representatives of selling out. Similarly, the Israeli government met fierce criticism, especially from the right wing public, for having agreed to release some Palestinian prisoners. Because the prisoners were not released at the same time, but in three stages, a loud outcry against the government was repeated throughout the autumn. All prisoner releases where accompanied with announcements of settlement building. Even though the prime minister is not in charge of all steps in the process of gaining an approval for a construction, they can stop it at any point. Furthermore, the timing of these announcements was unlikely to be accidental, showing an intent to win over the hostile domestic public.[220]

In addition to the public backlash, the negotiators faced opposition from within the government as well. In December, the MKs of Likud pushed for a bill that would annex parts of the Jordan Valley and maintain the settlements there. Netanyahu was vague in his support for settlements, while simultaneously insisting that the Jordan Valley should remain under Israeli control. Livni from Hatnuah was opposed to such legislation, as it

agreements/israel.php#The%202013%20Coalition%20Agreements (used April 30, 2019). The original documents are in Hebrew, translated by Levush, Ruth.

[219] Goldenberg, Ilan. (2015). Lessons from the 2013-2014 Israeli-Palestinian Final Status Negotiations. Center for a New American Security, Voices from the Field series. P 3.

[220] Goldenberg 2015: 5-6, 20.

would set another domestic constraint for matters that in her view should have been left for negotiations.[221]

During the nine months dedicated to the talks, the leading negotiators met on a regular basis, and Kerry met separately with Netanyahu and the PA President Abbas. When at the end of the year it became apparent that a comprehensive agreement would not be reached, the parties opted to find an understanding of what the parameters would be for a final agreement. A framework document was drafted by the Israelis and Americans and proposed to Abbas. Then the talks stalled. Abbas did not want to discuss the matter further before the fourth release of prisoners that was set for March had been completed, because he did not want to allow the Israelis to use these prisoners as leverage in the negotiations. Netanyahu insisted that the prisoners would only be released if the negotiations were continued.[222]

No mutual agreement was reached. The remaining set of prisoners was not released, the PA joined several UN bodies and the criticism over settlement construction continued. An already difficult environment for negotiations had turned into a blame game, due to the complete absence of trust. The final blow to the negotiations occurred when Fatah and Hamas formed an unity government in April 2014, giving Israel an excuse to call of the negotiations few days before they were set to expire. It was reported that Netanyahu was the initiator for suspending the talks, as it had not been decided in a meeting with other senior ministers.[223]

The Israeli public had been skeptical towards the negotiations since the beginning. In July, 80% of Israeli Jews said that the negotiations are unlikely to reach an agreement; the Israeli Arabs were split. The skepticism was due to negative views towards the Palestinian engagement in the peace process: 64% of Jews did not believe that they are genuinely interested in negotiations; nearly the same share had that opinion regarding the Israeli government. The trust in the government was highest among the centrist voters.

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[221] The Times of Israel. Likud MK's bill would annex the Jordan Valley, December, 26 2013. https://www.timesofisrael.com/likud-mks-bill-would-annex-the-jordan-valley/ (used May 14, 2019)
[222] Goldenberg 2015: 6-7.
[223] Black, Ian; Beaumont, Peter; Robers, Dan. (2014). Israel suspends peace talks with Palestinians after Fatah-Hamas deal. The Guardian, April 24. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/apr/24/middle-east-israel-halts-peace-talks-palestinians (used May 3, 2019).

60% of Jews trusted that Netanyahu would safeguard Israel's security, but only 48% believed that his conduct would be guided by the ethic "to the extent that it depends on Israel, a peace treaty will be signed".[224]

In April 2014, 57.5% of Jews saw the Fatah-Hamas agreement as dangerous for Israel; an even larger majority of 68% supported halting the negotiations for having signed a reconciliation agreement. Crucially for the government, the support was determined by the political views of the respondents, with 82% of right-wing voters and 59% in the center backing the government, but only 26% on the left in favor.[225]

The relations between the Israelis and the Palestinians reached a new low in the summer of 2014. The tunnel building under Gaza's borders increased after Operation Pillar of Defense in 2012. The construction sector had been vital for employment, thus Israel's decision to prohibit construction materials from entering Gaza weakened the already fragile economy. On June 12, 2014, three Israeli religious students were kidnapped in the West Bank. Both Israel and the PA laid the blame on Hamas, but the extent of their involvement is unclear.[226] The same day Israel launched raids in the West Bank to locate the students. With the blame game, Hamas had lost a possibility for reconciliation which would have alleviated their dreadful economic situation. Hence, they opted for a heightening of tensions in the occupied territories, with the hope that a military confrontation would ensure their stay in power. Weeks of retaliation and counter-retaliation followed, involving both Hamas operatives and the IDF troops as well as the general public.[227]

Israel's political leadership was not eager to go to war, but Netanyahu and the Defense Minister, together with the Chief of Staff were withholding information from the security cabinet. According to some accounts, the military misread Hamas's evolvement

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[224] The Peace Index: July 2013.
http://www.peaceindex.org/indexMonthEng.aspx?num=254&monthname=July (used May 3, 2019)
[225] The Peace Index: April 2014.
http://www.peaceindex.org/indexMonthEng.aspx?num=274&monthname=April (used May 3, 2019)
[226] Chorev, Harel; Shumacher, Yvette. (2014). The Road to Operation Protective Edge: Gaps in Strategic Perception. Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs, 8(3), pp. 9-24, DOI: 10.1080/23739770.2014.11446599. Pp 11-14.
[227] Cohen, Raphael S.; Johnson, David E.; Thaler, David E.; Allen, Brenna; Bartels, Elizabeth M.; Cahill, James; Efron, Shira. (2017). From Cast Lead to Protective Edge. The RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, California. Pp 69-82.

into a hybrid terrorist-state structure and the latter's necessity to address the economic distress of Gaza's residents, even if that meant escalating the conflict with Israel.[228] On a scale from 0 to 10, from inadequate to excellent, the right-wing Israelis assessed the prime minister's actions during the kidnapping and the subsequent searches to be at 6.8, among centrists it was 6.2 and among left-wingers 4.1. Thus, the evaluation of the government's supporters was above the medium but not notably high. 67% thought that Israel should not have had release the Palestinian prisoners for the negotiations.[229] All this created a tense political environment, where the domestic pressures were inclining the government to take action, Hamas was launching rockets daily and the cabinet was sharply divided over the extent of a military operation.[230]

The Operation Protective Edge was launched on July 8. The ground forces were pulled out from Gaza on August 5, and the ceasefire was announced on August 26, making it the longest war Israel has had with Gaza. The Israeli leadership still held that Hamas was dragging them into a war they did not want to have. Notably, the military offered to de-escalate the conflict even after the operation had begun, they were against deploying IDF troops to Gaza for a long-term period and the government insisted that their intention is not a regime change in Gaza. This sharpened the internal divisions within the cabinet, with some ministers supporting far grander ambitions than the Israeli leadership was willing to demonstrate.[231]

In the first weeks of the operation the Jewish public was almost unanimously backing the operation, with several right-wing senior politicians and some army officers criticising the government for not being forceful enough. A deputy defense minister lost his job for publicly questioning the government.[232] At the end of the ground operation, fully 83% of Israelis approved the performance of the Chief of Staff Benny Gantz, while Netanyahu and the Defense Minister Moshe Ya'alon were supported by 77%. The political

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[228] Cohen *et al* 2017: 82-83.
[229] The Peace Index: June 2014.
http://www.peaceindex.org/indexMonthEng.aspx?num=294&monthname=June (used May 3, 2019). This survey included less than half of the respondents than usual (281), raising its maximum measurement error to 6% at a confidence level of 95%.
[230] Chorev & Shumacher 2014: 15-17.
[231] Chorev & Shumacher 2014: 17-19.
[232] Del Sarto 2017: 201-202.

leadership was able to secure the support from both the center-left, which was not interested of toppling Hamas, and their natural camp of right-wing voters, which was at least pleased that Israel had taken military action against Hamas, if not entirely satisfied with the limited outcomes of the operation.[233] The rallying around the flag effect continued even after the end of the operation, with paradoxical results: over half of the Jews did not believe that Israel had achieved many of its objectives, 61% did not trust the Israeli leadership, but a same amount considered the government's performance security-wise to be satisfactory. Slightly more were in favor of resuming the negotiations with the Palestinians,[234] although a large majority was against inviting Hamas.[235] Despite the potential support for holding negotiations, no direct talks have occured since.

3.2.5 Elections in 2015: Likud's surprise victory

An internal rift within the coalition became evident, when in early December 2014 Netanyahu fired Finance Minister Lapid and Justice Minister Livni, thus effectively getting rid off two coalition partners. Netanyahu justified his decision with the claim that both had plotted for his removal from the prime minister's office, and that after the collapse of negotiations in the spring Livni had had a separate meeting with the PA president Mahmoud Abbas behind the cabinet's back. In a few days, the Knesset passed a resolution of dissolving itself and calling for new elections in March 2015. The election campaigns started immediately, with former coalition partners attacking each other fiercely. The first opinion polls had Likud in the lead, then the Jewish Home and Labor, with Yesh Atid losing half the seats they had won in the previous elections. The newcomer in the center was Kulanu, led by a former Likudnik Moshe Kahlon.[236]

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[233] Verter, Yossi. (2014). Haaretz Survey: Israelis Think Neither Side Won Conflict, but Approve of PM's Decisions. Haaretz, August 6. https://www.haaretz.com/.premium-haaretz-survey-israelis-think-neither-side-won-conflict-but-approve-of-pms-decisions-1.5258243 (used May 4, 2019)

[234] 50% to 44%, though the support was overwhelming in the left and center and less than a third in the right

[235] The Peace Index: September 2014.
http://www.peaceindex.org/indexMonthEng.aspx?num=284&monthname=September (used May 4, 2019)

[236] Gerstenfeld, Manfred. (2016). The run up to Israel's 2015 elections: a political history. Israel Affairs, 22(3-4), pp. 578-596, DOI: 10.1080/13537121.2016.1174374. Pp 578-579.

These were the first elections with the highest threshold in Israel's history. In May, Yisrael Beytenu had pushed through the proposal of raising the threshold to 3.25%, a plan that was clearly directed against the Arab parties, which would have difficulties passing a higher threshold. To gain the approval for this bill, however, it was packed together with the laws of expanding the conscription of Ultra-Orthodox Jews and making the referendum bill for withdrawing sovereignty from a territory to a basic law. Each of these bills were in the interest of a separate coalition partner, with others much less enthusiastic about voting in favor, thus passing them together ensured Netanyahu that the coalition would stand together.[237]

In December, Jordan pushed the UN Security Council to establish terms for the Israeli-Palestinian peace treaty, but the resolution was rejected, gaining only eight approvals instead of the needed nine. In any case, the US had declared intent to use its veto power against passing any Palestinian measures before the Israeli elections.[238] Livni tried to reap the benefits by declaring that the US had taken her advice, making world leaders listen to her. The right-wing responded harshly, with the leader of the Jewish Home, Naftali Bennett saying that Livni had taken action behind the government's back and Defense Minister Ya'alon from Likud criticizing her for involving foreign leaders in Israeli political matters.[239]

On the left, Labor and Hatnuah merged to form the Zionist Union, a joint list that in the polls showed to be more popular than two parties separately. Both the Union and Likud strengthened its support throughout the winter. Netanyahu ruled out the formation of a national unity government. The uncovering of a corruption scandal involving the leadership of Yisrael Beytenu had caused substantial damage to their popularity, pushing Lieberman to appeal also to center, rather than solely right-wing voters.[240] The four Arab parties merged to a Joint List to ensure that they cross the threshold, thus the bill that was

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[237] Lis, Jonathan. (2014). Israel Raises Electoral Threshold to 3.25 Percent. Haaretz, May 12. https://www.haaretz.com/israel-raises-electoral-threshold-1.5332503 (used May 4, 2019)

[238] Levy, Elior. (2014). UN Security Council rejects Palestinian statehood resolution. Ynet News, using Reuters, March 31. https://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4609565,00.html (used May 4, 2019)

[239] Gravé-Lazi, Lidar; Keinon, Herb. (2014). Livni: The world listens to me. The Jerusalem Post, December 22. https://www.jpost.com/Arab-Israeli-Conflict/Livni-The-world-listens-to-me-385369 (used May 4, 2019)

[240] Gerstenfeld 2016: 581-586.

directed at weakening the Arab parties had the effect of consolidating them.[241] United Torah Judaism and Shas announced that they would oppose inviting Yesh Atid to a coalition.[242] These developments reinforced the two constraints in coalition-building: center-left cannot include the Arab parties and right-wing cannot leave out the Ultra-Orthodox parties unless they have a strong center support or a national unity government. With the UTJ and Shas statements, the religious parties all but declared their complete support for Likud, making coalition-forming without Netanyahu improbable.

Up until the last two weeks, the campaign had been unfocused, with fragmented statements in the social media and criticism of the prime minister over the damaging housing crisis report, but not much public attention to elections. In the last phase, the parties reinforced their attempts to define the election's central issue. Netanyahu called for supporting him so the left-wing would not win, while the Zionist Union hammered that it is time for Netanyahu to go home.[243] The latest opinion polls showed stronger support for the Zionist Union than Likud, leading Netanyahu to launch his Gevalt campaign,[244] a last-minute attempt to mobilize right-wing voters by all costs.[245]

On March 16, a day before the elections, Netanyahu declared that he would never allow a Palestinian state and enhanced pledges in favor of settlement building.[246] Three days later and after a fierce reaction from the US, he retracted from that statement, declaring his continuous support for the positions he had laid out in his Bar-Ilan speech in 2009. He clarified that his earlier claim referred to the current Palestinian leadership whose

[241] Rudnitzky, Arik. (2016). Back to the Knesset? Israeli Arab vote in the 20th Knesset elections. Israel Affairs, 22(3-4), pp. 683-696, DOI: 10.1080/13537121.2016.1174384. P 689.

[242] Sharon, Jeremy. (2015). United Torah Judaism's Litzman: 'Fiercly [sic] opposed' to sitting with Lapid who caused Haredi poverty. The Jerusalem Post, February 4. https://www.jpost.com/Israel-Elections/United-Torah-Judaisms-Litzman-fiercly-opposed-to-sitting-with-Lapid-who-caused-Haredi-poverty-390027 (used May 4, 2019)

[243] Gerstenfeld 2016: 593.

[244] A Yiddish term for sounding alarm.

[245] Mitnick, Joshua; Casey, Nicholas. (2015). Late Strategy Switch by Netanyahu Swayed Israel Election. The Wall Street Journal, March 20. https://www.wsj.com/articles/late-strategy-switch-by-netanyahu-swayed-israel-election-1426895648 (used May 4, 2019)

[246] The Times of Israel, using AFP. Netanyahu: No Palestinian state on my watch. March 16, 2015. https://www.timesofisrael.com/netanyahu-no-palestinian-state-under-my-watch/ (used May 4, 2019)

views must be changed for achieving progress in the peace process.[247] On the election day, he pleaded all voters to vote for Likud, because left-wing NGOs are bringing Arab voters on buses to booths to overthrow the right-wing government. Additionally, Likud sent an SMS to voters to alert them against the plot by Abbas and American money to encourage Israeli Arabs to vote. This warning was immediately repeated by Yisrael Beytenu and the Jewish Home.[248] A week after the elections Netanyahu claimed to regret his remarks and that his intention had not been to offend the Israeli Arabs, but the Joint List did not accept his apology.[249]

Nevertheless, these tactics proved effective, as Likud made a jump in the polls and won 30 seats against the Zionist Union's 24. While Netanyahu had maintained his position despite the unprecedented mobilization of opposition members, citizen activists, a number of senior defense officials and the US criticized his actions harshly.[250] In addition, the religious parties, the Jewish Home, Yisrael Beytenu and Yesh Atid all lost seats, thus limiting their bargaining power vis-à-vis Likud. A new center party Kulanu emerged with 10 seats, ensuring their involvement to any coalition.[251]

Even though Likud had emerged as the clear winner from the elections, the coalition-formation process succeeded only through difficult negotiations and within the last hours of the deadline.[252] The coalition involved Likud (30 MKs), Kulanu (10), the Jewish Home (6), Shas (7), and United Torah Judaism (6), giving it a minimal winning coalition of 61 seats in the Knesset. Netanyahu had very limited room to manoeuvre in the negotiations: the number allocation and the already ruled out coalition possibilities meant

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[247] Stoil, Rebecca Shimoni. (2015). Netanyahu backs away from rejection of two-state solution. The Times of Israel, March 19. https://www.timesofisrael.com/netanyahu-backs-away-from-rejection-of-two-state-solution/ (used May 4, 2019)

[248] Harkov, Lahav. (2015). Netanyahu warns: The Left is busing Arabs to vote, the Right is in danger. The Jerusalem Post, March 17. https://www.jpost.com/Israel-Elections/Netanyahu-warns-The-Left-is-busing-Arabs-to-vote-the-Right-is-in-danger-394176 (used May 4, 2019)

[249] BBC News. Netanyahu apologises to Israeli-Arabs over election remarks. March 23, 2015. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-32026995 (used May 4, 2019)

[250] Orkibi, Eithan (2016). Israel at the polls 2015: a moment of transformative stability, Israel Affairs, 22(3-4), pp. 573-577, DOI: 10.1080/13537121.2016.1174383. P 574.

[251] Gerstenfeld 2016: 595-596.

[252] Ofek, Dganit; Meydani, Assaf. (2016). A new integrated model of the formation of coalitions: perspectives on the Twentieth Knesset. Israel Affairs, 22(3-4), pp. 613-627, DOI: 10.1080/13537121.2016.1174382. P 613.

that the only choice he had was whether to include Yisrael Beytenu (6 MKs), United Torah Judaism, or both. He did, however, manage to strengthen his hand against all coalition partners. Netanyahu also kept the power over several central portfolios, such as the Foreign Ministry, as a way to lure other coalition partners, if they arose.[253] The model by Ofek & Meydani (2016) suggests that when comparing the coalition to the Knesset, it is not only significantly more inclined towards right-wing and religious stances than the whole parliament, but the positions of the coalition were further from the center point than any other Knesset formation.[254]

In the fragmented and personalized Israeli political system, a minimum winning coalition does not bode stability. Because Yisrael Beytenu had not been satisfied with the religious concessions made to Ultra-Orthodox parties and to the Jewish Home that was supporting them, they initially opted out of the government.[255] Their absence, however, was not in Netanyahu's interest and he kept working on finding solutions to bring them onboard. Yisrael Beytenu joined the coalition in May 2016, expanding the majority to 66 seats. The final compromise was cut between the leaders of Yisrael Beytenu and Kulanu, with the former demanding a rise in the pensions for the immigrants from the former Soviet Union. Finance Minister Moshe Kahlon only agreed to that by expanding the increase of allowances to all eligible pensioners. While announcing that agreement, Netanyahu also called for the Zionist Union to form a unity government that could pave way for reaching peace accords with the Palestinians. For Isaac Herzog, leader of the Labor party, joining a coalition steered by the two nationalist hawks, Avigdor Lieberman from Yisrael Beytenu and Naftali Bennett from the Jewish Home, was unacceptable.[256]

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[253] Rahat, Gideon; Hazan, Reuven Y.; Bloom, Pazit Ben-Nun. (2016). Stable Blocs and Multiple Identities: The 2015 Elections in Israel. Representation, 52(1), pp. 99-117, DOI: 10.1080/00344893.2016.1190592. P 115.

[254] Ofek & Meydani 2016: 619-620.

[255] Rahat & Hazan 2016: 115.

[256] Lis, Jonathan; Khoury, Jack. (2016). Likud, Yisrael Beiteinu Sign Coalition Deal, Netanyahu Calls on Herzog to Join Unity Government. Haaretz, using Reuters, May 25. https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-netanyahu-lieberman-confirm-coalition-deal-reached-1.5386849 (used May 5, 2019)

3.2.6 Israelis adjust to violence

While Netanyahu had backtracted from his position against the two-state solution, several ministers from his new government, such as Deputy Foreign Minister Tzipi Hotovely and Education Minister Bennett rose up to declare their stances against it. Specifically Bennett associated his refusal of the two-state solution with the international BDS movement against Israel, claiming that the Israeli answer to the boycott is building more settlements.[257] The Jewish Home has long been advocating for annexing parts of the West Bank, with Bennett proposing an unilateral annexation plan in 2014.[258]

In addition to organized rocket attacks from Gaza, individual Palestinians from the West Bank have used violence against the Jews in the occupied territories and in Israel proper. Several phases of violent outbursts can be identified. In 2014, a wave of violence erupted in East Jerusalem, gaining strength throughout the following year. Dubbed the Jerusalem Intifada in Palestinian social media, these assaults were described as being carried out by individual lone-wolf aggressors, using knives or vehicles.[259] In October 2015, the preliminary phase gave way to a full-scale unrest. The level of violence decreased in the summer of 2016. From October 2015 to September 2016, 280 attacks by 330 individuals were perpetrated.[260] In contrast, during the preliminary phase 16 attacks were carried out, or 'tested'.[261]

This surge of violence differed from the intifadas in several ways. Instead of a large popular uprising, the outbreak of violence included a small segment, mostly consisting of teens and young adults. The choice of targets shifted from the Israeli civilians to security officials. Most importantly, the stabbings lacked strong support from both the Palestinian

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[257] Turner, Mandy; Hussein, Cherine. (2015). Israel-Palestine after Oslo: mapping transformations and alternatives in a time of deepening crisis. Conflict, Security & Development, 15(5), pp. 415-424, DOI: 10.1080/14678802.2015.1100019. P 416.

[258] Baruch, Uzi; Benari, Elad. (2014). Bennett: The Oslo Era is Over. Israel National News, June 9. http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/181501 (used May 13, 2019)

[259] Bartal, Shaul. (2017). Lone-wolf or terror organization members acting alone: new look at the last Israeli–Palestine incidents, Middle Eastern Studies, 53(2), pp. 211-228, DOI: 10.1080/00263206.2016.1217844. P 211-212.

[260] Chorev, Harel. (2017). Palestinian Social Media and Lone-Wolf Attacks: Subculture, Legitimization, and Epidemic. Terrorism and Political Violence, pp. 1-23. DOI: 10.1080/09546553.2017.1341878. P 1.

[261] Bartal 2017: 211.

authorities and the Palestinian general public.[262] The exact extent of the involvement of organizations in these attacks is disputed. In the media they were characterized as lone wolf-attacks, meaning the assailant does not follow the orders from a terrorist organization.[263] In the 2014 cases, however, previous connections with Hamas were identified.[264] In 2015 and 2015, the Palestinian organizations did not seem to be directly involved.[265]

Israel's government's reaction was to tie the eruption of violence with the assaults of radical islamists in the Western countries. Thus, Netanyahu made a link between the Palestinian nationalistic terrorism to Islamic terrorism as originating from the same source.[266] Hence he used the tactic of framing the issue in terms that would appeal to the international audience, while subduing the specific conditions of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

At the same time when stabbing attacks were gaining ground, there appears to be a relative serenity in the firing of rockets to Israel from Gaza. In 2015, 23 rockets were launched at Israel and in 2016, the number dropped to 15. In the following year the figure doubled to 35, but most of them were launched in december after Trump declared his intent to move the US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, thus implicitly recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's capital. These are all very small figures compared with the 4879 rockets fired during Operation Protective Edge in 2014. This reflects a usual pattern in the

[262] Chorev 2017: 1-2.
[263] Barnea, Avner. (2018). Challenging the "Lone Wolf" Phenomenon in an Era of Information Overload. International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence, 31(2), pp. 217-234, DOI: 10.1080/08850607.2018.1417349. P 220.
[264] Bartal 2017: 212-216.
[265] Lavie-Dinur, Amit; Yarchi, Moran; Karniel, Yuval. (2018). The portrayal of lone wolf terror wave in Israel: an unbiased narrative or agenda driven?. The Journal of International Communication, 24(2), pp. 196-215, DOI: 10.1080/13216597.2018.1453368. P 196.
[266] Booth, William. (2015). Netanyahu wants Palestinian violence linked to radical Islam. The Washington Post, December 11.
https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/netanyahu-wants-palestinian-violence-linked-to-radicalislam/2015/12/10/6a62d522-9d07-11e5-9ad2-568d814bbf3b_story.html (used May 13, 2019)

Israeli-Hamas conflict dynamic: the attacks escalate to the point where Israel retaliates harshly, then the rocket fire dies out for some time.[267]

In 2018 and 2019, this pattern, however, changed. There is no summarized data for rockets launched in those years, but the number is counted in the hundreds. Both sides also suffered casualties.[268] While Israel did respond to the waves of rockets by ordering air strikes, the response has not been on the same level as during the operations in 2008, 2012, and 2014. The limited response has occurred despite members of the coalition demanding harsher measures. At the end of 2015, when Israel and Hamas had signed another ceasefire after two days of intense rocket fire and Israel's retaliations, the Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman quit from the government. He explained that in his view, Israel is capitulating to terror that is going to bring long-term damage to national security.

Hamas in the Gaza Strip is the biggest headache for Netanyahu. Toppling them would bring Gaza back under Israel's full control, as PA does not have power nor legitimacy to claim Gaza, but which Israel does not want because of the costs involved. However, as long as Hamas keeps on firing rockets and escalating tensions, the Israeli population is pressing the government to act. The hardline members of the coalition are voicing their criticism openly, but Netanyahu cannot look for support from the center any more because the center-left parties are unwilling to work with him. A ground invasion is dangerous for him, however, because while it might produce a rally around the flag effect in a short run, the support might easily be lost after Israeli casualties start coming in.

Thus he has opted for a compromise, in which Israel is responding to eruptions of rocket fire with airstrikes. The hardline politicians on the right do not see it as doing enough, and with each outburst they gain more support for uncompromising views. The IDF would be interested in looking for alternative ways, such as allowing some work

[267] Kubovich, Yaniv. (2018). 2017 Saw Highest Number of Rockets Launched From Gaza Since 2014 War, Israeli Army Says. Haaretz, January 7. https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-idf-2017-saw-highest-number-of-gaza-rockets-since-14-war-1.5729601 (used May 17, 2019)

[268] Romo, Vanessa. (2019). Netanyahu Orders Continued Pounding In Gaza As 600 Rockets Fired Into Israel. NPR, May 5. https://www.npr.org/2019/05/05/720452125/netanyahu-orders-continued-pounding-in-gaza-as-600-rockets-fired-into-israel (used May 17, 2019)

permits for the Gazan workforce.[269] With the humanitarian situation in Gaza fragile, which prompts Gazans to force Israel to accept their demands, it is only a matter of time before another round of violence is escalated to a war.[270] Yet the government does not seem to be willing to lay down a long-term strategy for neither fixing the crisis in Gaza nor combating the security threat. While inaction might be beneficial for securing their power in the short run, in the end it is only increasing the odds that the conflict would go out of hand.

3.2.7 Elections in 2019: A referendum over Netanyahu

As mentioned, the announcement of Yisrael Beytenu that they are resigning from the coalition due to the government's limited response to rocket attacks from Gaza put the Prime Minister to a dire position. Having already survived a number of crises within the coalition and back to a minimum winning coalition, Netanyahu lasted another month before dissolving the government. Again, the controversial Ultra-Orthodox conscription law proved itself to be the dividing line among the right-religious coalition, as it was unable to gain the majority needed to pass it. The elections were set for April 9, 2019.[271] The public approved of the Prime Minister calling for early elections, but was divided over the reasons for it: 37% of Jews thought that Netanyahu wanted to hold elections before the attorney general makes known if he will be indicted, 25% thought that he wanted to expand the coalition from 61 seats, and 24% thought that he was driven by both factors equally.[272]

Netanyahu has been under criminal investigation since 2016. At the end of 2018 it started to present a concrete threat to his power, as the police recommended indicting him on charges of bribery, fraud, and breach of trust. The attorney general accepted their

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[269] Gottesman, Evan; Novik, Nimrod. (2019). Israel: Lost in Gaza? Israel Policy Pod, May 9. https://israelpolicyforum.org/2019/05/09/israel-lost-in-gaza/ (used May 15, 2019)

[270] Tzuri, Matan. (2019). IDF officer warns humanitarian crisis in Gaza could trigger attacks on Israel. Ynet News, April 17. https://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-5495872,00.html (used May 17, 2019)

[271] The 2019 Elections. The Israel Democracy Institute. https://en.idi.org.il/israeli-elections-and-parties/elections/2019/ (used May 5, 2019)

[272] The Peace Index: December 2018. http://www.peaceindex.org/indexMonthEng.aspx?num=338&monthname=December (used May 5, 2019)

recommendation, but declared that he would not prosecute him before the elections.[273] Netanyahu has been calling the criminal investigation against him as a political ploy by left-wing opponents, judiciary, and the media. He has also pledged that he would not resign if he was indicted.[274] In the past years, proposals to expand the immunity of the MKs, and via expansion, of the ministers of the government, have been circulating in the Knesset. MKs enjoyed immunity until 2005, when their privileges were cut. Now they can request protection on the floor, but it is not granted immunity automatically. The proposed law has not yet been passed, but the possibility of adopting it is seen as interfering in an ongoing criminal investigation against the Prime Minister.[275] Hence, these elections focused only on Netanyahu, with the right bloc rallying behind him and a new emerging center power proclaiming to protect Israel's rule of law.

This threat to Netanyahu's power came from Benny Gantz, a former Chief of Staff who had worked under Netanyahu during the 2014 Gaza war. A day after calling for elections, he declared to be launching a new political party against Netanyahu. In February 2019, Gantz, former defense minister Ya'alon, and Yair Lapid joined in a centrist alliance named Kahol Lavan, translated Blue and White, spearheading the merger to become a serious rival to Likud.[276] In the next weeks, both Kahol Lavan and Likud as well as the center-left bloc and the center-right bloc raced in a dead heat. Without strong policy differences, both Netanyahu and Gantz tried to depict the other as a danger to Israel's democracy and power.[277] Similarly to the two-party system that had characterized Israeli politics in the 1980s and 1990s, Likud and Kahol Lavan were competing to become the

[273] Pfeffer, Anshel. (2018). The Netanyahu investigations. The Economist, December 3. https://www.economist.com/the-economist-explains/2018/12/03/the-netanyahu-investigations (used May 17, 2019)

[274] Holmes, Oliver. (2019). Netanyahu to be indicted on corruption charges, Israeli attorney general says. The Guardian, February 28. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/feb/28/benjamin-netanyahu-corruption-charges-decision-expected-today (used May 17, 2019)

[275] The Israel Democracy Institute. Everything you Wanted to Know About the Immunity Law, May 16, 2019. https://en.idi.org.il/articles/26750 (used May 17, 2019)

[276] Lubell, Maayan. (2019). Explainer: Israeli parties running in the 2019 election. Reuters, April 7. https://www.reuters.com/article/us-israel-election-parties-explainer/explainer-israeli-parties-running-in-the-2019-election-idUSKCN1RJ09V (used May 5, 2019)

[277] Frenkel, Guy. (2019). Breaking Down Assumptions About Israeli Elections. Israel Policy Forum, in Israel Policy Exchange, April 3. https://israelpolicyforum.org/2019/04/03/breaking-down-assumptions-about-israeli-elections/ (used May 6, 2019)

biggest party in the Knesset, while the rest were either struggling to cross the threshold or comfortably above it, such as the Ultra-Orthodox parties and the far-left Hadash-Ta'al list, but unlikely to gather wider support. Hence the first fight was played out between Kahol Lavan and Likud as in who would gain the most votes. Even more importantly, however, the formation of the coalition after the elections would be determined by how many smaller parties crossed the threshold.

In February, Netanyahu pushed the Jewish Home, Tkuma, and Otzma Yehudit to form a joint list, under the name of the United Right, to ensure that they would gain enough support to win seats in the Knesset. Tkuma had run with the Jewish Home previously, in both the 2013 and 2015 elections. The inclusion of Otzma Yehudit, however, faced harsh criticism in Israel and from abroad due to their affiliations with the extremist Kach party, which is outlawed in Israel.[278] The powerful Jewish lobby groups in the US, The American-Israel Public Affairs Committee and the American Jewish Committee condemned publicly Netanyahu's alignment with such parties.[279] Followingly, the Israeli Supreme Court banned one of Otzma Yehudit's leaders from running in the elections. While the court has been outlawing entire lists before, selecting a single member was an unprecedented move.[280]

On March 25, 2019, US President Donald Trump officially recognized the Golan Heights as part of the Israeli territory. This move was perceived as a public endorsement for Netanyahu before the upcoming elections,[281] giving Netanyahu a chance to depict himself as being able to make the US take steps that are benefitting for the Israeli cause. The Golan Heights were *de facto* annexed to Israel in 1981, even though for diplomatic reasons the Israeli government refrained from using this term. Up until the Syrian Civil

[278] Halbfinger, David M. (2019). Netanyahu Sparks Outrage Over Pact With Racist Party. The New York Times, February 24. https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/24/world/middleeast/benjamin-netanyahu-otzma-yehudit-jewish-power.html (used May 6, 2019)
[279] Einhorn, Alon. (2019). AIPAC condemns Netanyahu's alliance with Otzma Yehudit. The Jerusalem Post, February 27. https://www.jpost.com/Israel-Elections/AIPAC-condemn-Netanyahus-alliance-with-Otzma-Yehudit-581496 (used May 6, 2019)
[280] Shalev, Tal. (2019). Gantz's Cell Phone, Bibi's Submarine. Israel Policy Forum, in Israel Policy Exchange, March 18. https://israelpolicyforum.org/2019/03/18/gantzs-cell-phone-bibis-submarines/ (used May 6, 2019)
[281] Rampton, Roberta. (2019). Trump says he made Golan Heights decision after a quick history lesson. Reuters, April 7. https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-trump-israel/trump-says-he-made-golan-heights-decision-after-a-quick-history-lesson-idUSKCN1RI0N7 (used May 13, 2019)

War the Prime Ministers of Israel were willing to treat the Golan Heights as deposit for securing a peace treaty with Syria. Contrary to the official positions of Likud, Netanyahu was seeking to conduct covert negotiations with Syria in 1998, and in 2010-2011 as a precaution against the growing influence of Iran. The Syrian Civil War that brought various rebel groups to the bordering territories in Golan broke this plan off, as the Syrian government could no longer guarantee the security arrangements.[282]

In 2015 it was reported that Netanyahu tried to convince the US President Barack Obama to grant US recognition for the annexation, but the president did not submit to his attempt.[283] With a change in the US administration, the Israeli government reinforced their efforts. When these requests bore fruit, almost all politicians running argued in favor of the recognition.[284] Unlike the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, Golan has never been a contentious issue in Israeli politics. In this case, shifts in the Israeli government's actions are likely to have occurred due to external reasons, with the combination of a collapsed Syrian state and an accommodating US president granting Israel the recognition it welcomed, but had not impatiently sought since the 1980s. The timing of that decision, however, justifies connecting it with the Israeli political campaign as an attempt to influence the internal political contestation.

As another bid to rally the right behind him, few days before the elections Netanyahu announced his intentions of annexing the settlements in the West Bank if he gains another victory in the polls. He said that by extending Israeli sovereignty, he will not be distinguishing between settlement blocs and the isolated settlements far from the Green Line. He also stated that he would not transfer any sovereignty to the Palestinians, a clear refutation of the two state solution.[285] The statement was widely reported in the Israeli and

[282] Hauser, Zvi & Zarfati, Isaac. (2018). Recognition of Israel's Sovereignty over the Golan Heights. Coalition for the Israeli Golan, a position paper. Pp 19-20, 24-25.

[283] Ravid, Barak. (2015). White House Official: U.S. Won't Recognize Israeli Sovereignty in Golan. Haaretz, November 12. https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-u-s-won-t-recognize-israeli-sovereignty-in-golan-u-s-official-says-1.5420820 (used May 13, 2019)

[284] Landau, Noa. (2019). How Secret Netanyahu-Assad Backchannel Gave Way to Israeli Demand for Recognition of Golan Sovereignty. Haaretz, March 22. https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-how-netanyahu-team-s-golan-for-peace-talks-with-assad-failed-1.7044956 (used May 13, 2019)

[285] Holmes, Oliver. (2019). Netanyahu vows to annex Jewish settlements in occupied West Bank. The Guardian, April 7. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/apr/07/netanyahu-vows-to-annexe-jewish-settlements-in-occupied-west-bank (used May 18, 2019)

international media. As the research has explored, this move is significant in two aspects. First, just as in 2015, Netanyahu made use of the Gevalt tactics, mobilizing the voters' base behind him with calls that the loss of their power is imminent. In that sense, the pledges made during the election campaign do not demonstrate clear intent for legislation, as Netanyahu has retracted from his words before. However, the announcement also represented the right-wing's foreign policy, which does not even try to hide their unwillingness to resolve the Palestinian issue any more.

The close race in the election campaigns carried on until the end of the counting of the votes, as the double envelope ballots from the soldiers, hospitals, and prisons take several days to be added to the main count. In the end, Likud and Kahol Lavan tied on 35 seats. The right-religious bloc, though several of its expected members did not cross the threshold, was able to gain the upper hand with 65 seats. All 65 right-wing MKs recommended to appoint Netanyahu as the prime minister and thus the president granted him a right to form the new government. At the time of presenting this thesis,[286] the coalition has not been formed.

Netanyahu has asked for an extension because the negotiations stalled over Yisrael Beytenu not accepting the demands of the religious parties for military exemption for Ultra-Orthodox Jews. Reportedly, he might establish a non-majority government on the hopes that Yisrael Beytenu would not oppose its swearing in, a move that would put all subsequent policy implementation into question.[287] At the same time, there are speculations over the possibility that the Prime Minister might request adopting the immunity law from his future coalition partners, and over the demands that they might present in return - such as upholding his pledge to annex the settlements. Thus far, these are only speculations, although a MK from Likud has filed the bill to be presented in the Knesset.[288]

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[286] May 20, 2019.

[287] The Times of Israel. Amid coalition talks impasse, Netanyahu said looking at non-majority government, May 16, 2019. https://www.timesofisrael.com/amid-coalition-talks-impasse-netanyahu-said-looking-at-non-majority-government/ (used May 18, 2019)

[288] The Times of Israel. Netanyahu loyalist said to file bill to grant PM immunity from prosecution, May 3, 2019. https://www.timesofisrael.com/netanyahu-loyalist-said-to-have-filed-bill-to-grant-pm-immunity-from-prosecution/ (used May 18, 2019)

Netanyahu has confirmed that he seeks to enforce some legislation curbing the authority of the Supreme Court in order to pass the bills that have been struck down before. He named three bills: the expulsion of the family members of convicted terrorists, the capital punishment for terrorists, and deportation of illegal immigrants. However, the Court has rejected only the last, as the first two have not yet been adopted in the Knesset. If the Knesset gains supremacy over the Supreme Court for both past and future rulings, the Prime Minister can ensure that he is protected from criminal prosecution.[289] As the Supreme Court has been the main institution that has prevented the government to adopt unconstitutional laws or amend the legislation they seek to pass so it would comply with the existing Israeli law, dismantling their powers would endanger the rule of law. The Supreme Court has also upheld the rights of the Palestinians, to some extent, so it would also hinder the possibility of conflict resolution. Having said that, before such legislation in the Knesset is passed, no concrete claims can be made.

However, the standstill in the formation of the government implies difficulties in finding a common ground between the coalition partners. For a decade, Netanyahu has managed to maneuver between the religious parties, nationalists, and center to find compromises among ideologically distant factions. Skorek (2018) suggests that the almost fully right-wing coalition of 2015 is an anomaly, because Likud is ideologically closer to center-left parties than to its radical coalition partners. Netanyahu has excluded far-right or Ultra-Orthodox elements before, whereas they cannot form a government with the center-left parties due to the incompatible demands and thus have less room for manoeuvre than Likud.[290]

While this might be true in perspective of all Netanyahu's governments, the stances of the parties before the 2019 elections and the criminal investigation of Netanyahu makes it unlikely that Likud and Kahol Lavan are willing to form a national unity government under Netanyahu's lead. The resulting political situation is one where there exists a clear

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[289] Wootliff, Raoul. (2019). Unbridled government: How Netanyahu's purported plan will cripple the High Court. The Times of Israel, May 15. https://www.timesofisrael.com/unbridled-government-how-netanyahus-purported-plan-will-cripple-the-high-court/ (used may 18, 2019)
[290] Skorek, Artur. (2018). Benjamin Netanyahu's Long Premiership and the Rise of the New Political Center: Is there a Qualitative Change in the Israeli Party System?. Polish Political Science Yearbook, 47(2), pp. 201-214. P 208-209.

majority for moderate policies, but the two major parties representing the center and center-right are unable to co-operate with each other. Instead, the right bloc is entrenched in a situation where almost no one has other options for sitting in a government, while contentious bills have been circling in the cabinet for years.

It is yet unknown what would be the composition of the next government or its adopted policies. It will be probably based on the right-religious bloc as in the previous one, but shifted even more to the right. The thin majority of the probable coalition might convince partners to look for further concessions over controversial issues, increasing bargaining and controversy avoidance. It might also induce them to double down in their demands, as partners do not have other options to accommodate them. In all likelihood, however, the hawkish but apathetic behavior in foreign policy in regards to the Palestinians is going to continue and reinforce itself, as it has been the in the common interest of the right-religious parties.

CONCLUSION

The aim of the thesis was to explore the role and impact of domestic factors in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict dynamic. To simplify between all sources of possible influence, the thesis has focused on the formation of the government and its actions in regard to the conflict. The choice to focus on the government was made on the basis of it being the main channel for domestic influence, as it executes the interests of its voting base to secure its stay in power. It limits the validity of the conclusions presented, but due to the impossible task of deducing all separate influences in the decision-making, restrictions were necessary.

The last decade in Israel's politics has been characterized by rise of ethno-nationalism, as indicated by the growing emphasis of the Jewish character of the state. This is due to the visibility and strength of the religious and nationalist parties in the government. Likud under Netanyahu started out as a pivotal actor in the government at a fairly centrist position. Nevertheless, maintaining the grand and ideologically diverse coalition during the second Netanyahu government eventually ran into the sand. With each subsequent election Netanyahu has had less of a choice in coalition partners, as junior parties have presented exclusive demands.

Increased powers for religious and radical factions have resulted in the government's paralysis in resolving the contentious issues in Israeli politics. In addition to the Palestinian question and the costs the protraction of the conflict entails for the society, these vexed issues are also the military conscription of the Ultra-Orthodox Jews and the extent of the powers of the judiciary system. The military exempt for Ultra-Orthodox has been ruled as unconstitutional by the Supreme Court, yet several governments have been incapable of finding a compromise; including Netanyahu's third government in 2013-2015 which did not contain religious parties and was thus in the best position to pass enforcing legislation. At the same time, the attempts to retroactively legalize Israeli outposts in the West Bank set the government on a collision course with the Supreme Court.

These bills demonstrate the internal divisions within the coalitions. Secular nationalists wish to prevent expansion of the role of religious law, settlers wish to expand

Israel's control over the West Bank, which requires curbing the judicial authority, which has been occasionally blocked or toned down by center parties, and the latter join nationalists in resisting the religious forces. All these forces thrive on the stance of defending the majority rights against the internal and external enemies. Thus they have used divisive tactics, proven to be efficient in a fragmented Israeli electorate.

To overcome the conflictual interests within the coalition, the government has sought to avoid controversial issues or demonstrated inactivity towards them. At the same time, they have attempted to legitimize the regime by antagonizing the opponents: first Arab citizens of Israel and human rights organizations as vocal criticizers of the regime, then the media and judiciary system, are all lumped together as leftist enemies. In addition to the internal troubles within the left, the delegitimization of the opponents has led to the state in which current left and center politicians have difficulties in presenting a credible alternative to the conflictual policy pursued by the government. This has resulted in decline in support of the two-state solution (appendix 1) and the general turn to the right, which has been characterizing Israeli society in the past decade. Both of these developments further reinforce the hawkish foreign policy conducted by the government, and get reinforced when this hawkish policy results in antagonism from the other side. This policy has been carried out despite the costs and the threats that the continuation of the conflict presents.

The conflictual foreign policy in regards to the Palestinians has been based on the government's perception that offering concessions to the Palestinians harms Israel's security. Nevertheless, the policy of gradually eroding the possibility of a peaceful conflict resolution has a high chance of escalating into violence. Furthermore, the persistence of the conflict increases the danger of having to choose between being Jewish and being democratic. The continuation of the current policy of undermining judicial independence and retroactive legalization, strengthened by an increased dependence on extreme political factions, while sustaining the social divisions, makes upholding the principles of rule of law and democracy more fragile.

This thesis presents an exploratory research into the reciprocal relations of domestic politics and foreign policy. It has examined a case of domestic actors conducting

conflictual foreign policy to entrench their power. As discussed, this conflictual behavior is not contained to only foreign policy, but has also had repercussions for the society as a whole. Controversy avoidance among and the accommodation of radical factions in the coalition can secure its power in the short-term, but puts the government in a more difficult position to solve long-term problems. The Israeli case has a specific condition in the form of the criminal investigation instigated against the Prime Minister, thus, in other cases the leading power's dependence on radical elements might be weaker. Nevertheless, accommodating to radical elements without requiring them to tone down, or with limited success in achieving that, increases their power.

Legitimizing the regime might be more efficient in retaining power in long-term. However, it is dangerous for the pluralist Israeli society. The consequences of using the strategy of insulation is not as straightforward, as the negotiations and policy in regards to the Palestinians are still under domestic influence. The government has, however, achieved in sustaining a stance under which the society is willing to endure the costs of the conflict, does not believe in the feasibility of resolving it and does not demand it from the leadership.

The results of the study indicate to possible ways for developing the theoretical framework to take into account the reciprocal nature between domestic politics and foreign policy in the situation of a protracted conflict. However, a single case study can only provide limited answers, thus, a comparative overview of cases is needed to lay the grounds for generalization. As the case is still ongoing, meaning that future developments can significantly affect its evaluation, further research is needed to review and refine the inferences made on the basis of the current evidence.

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APPENDICES

Support for two state solution

Support for two-state solution

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Israelis	68%	65%	69%	59%	71%	66%	56%	63%	58%	51%	55%	53%	49%
Palestinians	71%	66%	68%	61%	57%	55%	52%	53%	48%	51%	44%	52%	43%
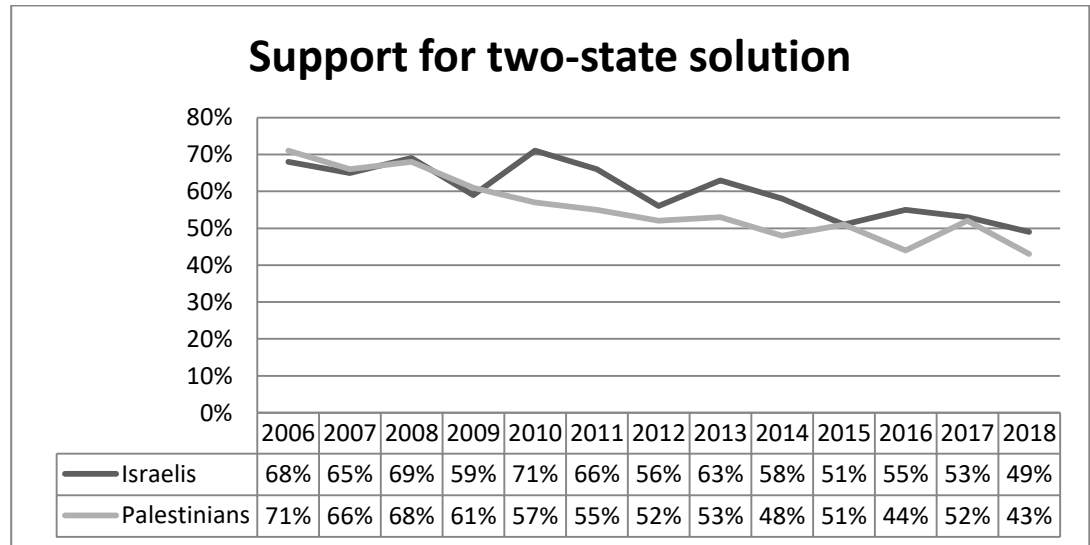
Data from Shikaki, Khalil; Scheindlin, Dahlia. (2018). Role of Public Opinion in the Resilience/Resolution of the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict. Palestinian-Israeli Pulse: A Joint Poll (2016-2018) Final Report. Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research; The Tami Steinmetz Center for Peace Research. P 2.

Election Results

These lists present the parties that won seats in the Knesset with the number of seats gained. Parties are divided according to their political alignment as right (R), center (C), or left (L). The classification is made by the author with Likud and Labor as the key anchor points for right and left, thus labelling all parties between them as being in the center.

The parties that formed the coalition after the elections are in bold, the parties that joined the coalition during the election cycle are in bold and italics.

Data is from the Knesset website.[291]

Elections in 2009

Kadima – 28 (C)

Likud – 27 (R)

Yisrael Beytenu – 15 (R)

Labor – 13 (L)

Shas – 11 (R)

United Torah Judaism – 5 (R)

United Arab List – 4 (L)

National Union – 4 (R)

Hadash – 4 (L)

Meretz – 3 (L)

The Jewish Home – 3 (R)

Balad – 3 (L)

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[291] The Knesset, Elections for the Knesset. https://main.knesset.gov.il/EN/mk/Pages/Elections.aspx (used May 19, 2019)
The Knesset, Currently Functioning Parliamentary Groups.
https://www.knesset.gov.il/faction/eng/FactionCurrent_eng.asp (used May 19, 2019)

Elections in 2013

Likud-Yisrael Beytenu – 31

Yesh Atid – 19 (C)

Labor – 15

The Jewish Home – 12

Shas – 11

United Torah Judaism – 7

Hatnuah – 6 (C)

Meretz – 6

United Arab List – 4

Hadash – 4

Balad – 3

Kadima – 2

Elections in 2015

Likud – 30

Zionist Union – 24 (L)

Joint List – 13 (L)

Yesh Atid – 11

Kulanu – 10 (C)

The Jewish Home – 8

Shas – 7

Yisrael Beytenu – 6

United Torah Judaism – 6

Meretz – 5

Elections in 2019

Likud – 35

Kahol Lavan – 35 (C)

Shas – 8

United Torah Judaism – 8

Hadash-Ta'al – 6 (L)

Labor – 6

Yisrael Beytenu – 5

United Right – 5 (R)

Meretz – 4

Kulanu – 4

Ra'am-Balad – 4 (L)