Shifting Political Sands:

When Politicians, Voters and [Even] Party Members

Are on the Move

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The political sands of Israel are shifting. The state of Israel was established in 1948 with a consolidated party system, in which cohesive parties were the dominant actors. With the changes that have occurred from one election to the next, it is almost impossible today, in 2013, to even characterize the nature of the party system. A large portion of the electorate changes its vote from one election to the next. Politicians can easily switch party allegiances too, and they do. What do party members do in such an unstable reality? This is the topic of this paper.

The paper begins with a presentation of Duverger’s concentric circles as a starting point for locating party members in relation to their party and to their political environment. It argues that over time, the borders between parties, as political sub-systems, have become blurred. We then turn to analyze the Israeli scene, which serves as an extreme example of party decline that goes together with significant rates of electoral volatility and party switching. The next section examines the behaviour of Israeli party members in this volatile environment. We see that membership is not only unstable in the sense that it is often a short-term actuality, but that members, just like voters and politicians, cross the lines with surprising frequency. The fourth section presents an integrative summary of our analysis of developments in Israel. Finally we turn to examine membership patterns in the two most successful parties in the recent (2013) elections, Jewish Home and Yesh Atid. These one-shot patterns may reflect the (oxymoronic yet real) consolidation of instability.
The Starting Point: Duverger’s Concentric Circles

Duverger’s (1954: 90-116) taxonomy of degrees of participation in political parties (Figure 1) sets a standard way of thinking about the structure of political parties and their relationship with their environment and, specifically for our purposes, about the position captured by party members. It is constructed from concentric circles of increasing affiliation and participation. The outermost circle represents the voters, citizens who merely vote for a given party. The next is that of supporters, voters who also voice their preference for a particular party and may occasionally speak on its behalf. The third circle is the party members, who are at minimum supporters who are formally registered with the party, and a minority of whom actively participates in party activities. Then we find the innermost circle of militants or activists, members who see to the party's organization, operation, propaganda, etc. To this we add the obvious inner circle of party representatives in elected institutions.

Figure 1. Degrees of Participation in Political Parties

Source: Elaborated from Duverger (1954: 90-91)
Following this line of thinking, the general party system would contain several separate sub-systems, each with its own similar set of concentric circles. Their boundaries will become blurred, almost only when it comes to the lowest affiliated group of voters (Figure 2). This is because voters will, at times, change their vote and support another party. Party members will likely renew their membership, but even if they do not they are expected to stay "close to home" as supporters or at least as voters. Cases of politicians crossing the lines are considered exceptional and dramatic. This line of thinking is correct when it describes polities in which party loyalty is the norm. It probably fits the politics of many consolidated democracies in the mid-20th century.

**Figure 2. The Traditional Volatile Zone**

Now consider what happens when party identification is weakened (Dalton 2000); when politics is personalized (Rahat and Sheafer 2007; Karvonen 2010); when even
intraparty politics is invaded by non-party actors (Rahat 2008); when levels of voters’ volatility significantly increase (Baldini and Pappalardo 2009); when politicians move from one party to the other (O’Brien and Shomer 2013). Then we find quite a different system: a political environment in which the borders between parties are blurred and in which party members are not necessarily supporters, not even voters who “belong” to a given party (Figure 3).

Figure 3. The New Volatile Zone

The Israeli Scene

In Israel we have witnessed a decline and destabilization of the parties, especially the large aggregative ones (Kenig and Knafelman 2013), and a destabilization of the party system up to a point that – unlike in the past (maybe even up to 2003) – its type can no longer be characterized (Rahat and Hazan 2009). The rate of this decline is exceptionally high not only in comparison to Israel’s past, but from a cross-national comparative perspective (Table 1). According to Kenig and Knafelman (2013), large
mainstream parties in Israel demonstrate the sharpest decline in comparison to similar parties in other consolidated democracies. Yet, while Israel is an extreme case, the trend is evident in all cases, so it may be indicative of the future of party politics in general.

Table 1. Israeli parties’ decline from a cross-national comparative perspective*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category (measure)</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Support for the largest parties</td>
<td>3rd-sharpest decline in comparison to 13 consolidated democracies since 1970s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(combined share of legislative seats)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party fragmentation</td>
<td>The highest increase in the ENPP in comparison to 16 consolidated democracies since 1970s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ENPP)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electoral volatility</td>
<td>5th-highest increase in comparison to 16 consolidated democracies since 1970s; 2nd-highest level in 2000-2009 in comparison to 18 consolidated democracies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Pedersen index)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voter turnout</td>
<td>4th-sharpest decline in comparison to 13 consolidated democracies since 1970s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party membership, self report</td>
<td>The sharpest decline in comparison to 14 consolidated democracies since 1970s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(members/voters ratio)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust in political parties</td>
<td>The sharpest decline in comparison to 15 consolidated democracies, 1998-2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identification with parties</td>
<td>A decline from over 60% (1969) to 24% (2009); the lowest percentage of citizens who feel close to a party in comparison to 13 consolidated democracies in 2008</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Based on Kenig and Knafelman 2013.

One of the indicators of party decline is an increase in volatility, which is seen from this perspective as a behavioral indicator for decreased loyalty, identity and affiliation with political parties. Electoral volatility is measured by the Pedersen (1979) index, reflecting the transfer of votes between parties from one election to the next. Although the Pedersen index is easy to calculate, it presents researchers with some challenges. The difficulty concerns mainly the treatment of party mergers and splits between two consecutive elections (Barnea and Rahat 2011). The data shown below
are based on the more cautious, conservative approach elaborated by Bartolini and Mair (1990). This approach treats the vote for mergers and splits as voting for their previous components. Still, in real life the line between what can be considered a “new party” and a splinter are sometimes blurred (Arter 2012). We thus included an alternative calculation for the 2006 “Big Bang” elections (Hazan 2006). According to Arian et al. (2006), the volatility value for the 2006 Israeli elections is an extreme 37.5%. According to our calculations, the value for these elections is 17.3%. The difference centres on the Kadima party: Arian et al. consider it as a new party, while we consider it as a splinter party from Likud (Barnea and Rahat 2011).¹ In any case, the very establishment of Kadima, its demise and the emergence of new centrist parties in the 2013 elections support the case for the moving sands in Israeli politics. That is, while splits may not create genuinely new parties, they do indicate change.

In Figure 4 we can see that after showing relatively high volatility values in the early 1950s, voting patterns in Israel stabilized. For five consecutive elections to the Knesset (Israeli parliament) the Pedersen index showed values lower than 10% (1959-1973). In the 1977 and 1981 elections the values climbed, approaching 20%, mostly as a result of the emergence (and immediate disappearance) of the Democratic Movement for Change (Dash). Following another period of relative stability (1984-1992), volatility climbed, especially in 1996 with the adoption of direct elections of the prime minister that gave voters two votes, one for the prime ministerial candidate and one for the party list. It then reached new heights in the 1999 (second elections under the new system) and in 2003 elections (first elections following abolition of the

¹ Former Likud leader and Prime Minister Ariel Sharon established this new party in late 2005, attracting MKs from both Likud and Labour. Despite its youth, Kadima held power for three years (2006-2009) and enjoyed the largest electoral support in the 2006 and 2009 elections.
system). Yet, even after direct elections were annulled and the closed-list PR electoral system was reinstated, volatility values remained rather high. This may reflect a combination of a long-time downturn in voters’ loyalty -- evident in most consolidated democracies – and the lingering influence of the direct elections period. In any case they indicate instability in the realm of the voters.

Figure 4. Electoral Volatility in Israel, 1951-2013

In fact, the volatility values for the 1999 and 2003 elections are extraordinarily high not only for Israel, but also from a comparative perspective; they rank fourth and fifth out of 265 elections in Western Europe and Israel between 1950 and 2006 (see table 2 below). Note that these values are produced under Bartolini and Mair’s cautious approach. Had we used the bolder approach of Arian et al. (2006) the volatility value around the 2006 elections would have been the highest of all 265 elections. The value
for 2013 is also extremely high (31%), yet it does not appear on the table because we lack updated data from other countries.

Table 2. The Ten Elections with Highest Rates of Volatility in Western Europe and Israel, 1950-2006

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Election Year</th>
<th>Volatility (Pedersen Index)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Italy</td>
<td>1994</td>
<td>36.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Netherlands</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>30.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. France</td>
<td>1958</td>
<td>26.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Israel</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>25.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Israel</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>23.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Italy</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>22.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Netherlands</td>
<td>1994</td>
<td>21.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Denmark</td>
<td>1973</td>
<td>21.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Germany</td>
<td>1953</td>
<td>21.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Austria</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>20.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Levels of electoral volatility in Israel are indeed high, in comparison to its own past and to other countries. Yet this instability is not about teams of politicians that hold together and try to survive and adapt to a shaky electoral environment. Some politicians also adapt individually, by crossing the floor from one party to the other.

Legislative Volatility (Party Switching)

We have thus far seen evidence regarding the volatile behavior of voters. Electoral volatility in Israel is quite high but it still falls within the framework of what we called the traditional volatile zone: the movement of voters from one party to another
is high and growing but the trend is not exceptional. But in Israel, curiously, we can also point to volatile behavior in the political elite.

Figure 5 presents a longitudinal look at party switching. An MK who left his party and competed/elected under different label in the next consecutive Knesset elections was defined as a party switcher. We can see that party switching is a not a new phenomenon, and that it does not show a stable trend but instead there are peaks in certain years. Nonetheless, it is clear that party switching has become more common since 1992. The average (14.2) is almost three times higher than that of the past (5.3); the range was 0-17 until 1988 and since 1992 it was 6-33; If we rank the amount of party switching in the 18 Knesset terms we find that the 7 that were recorded since 1992 were relatively high in comparison to past records (#1, #3-6, #9-10). Party switching, which used to be a dramatic relatively rare event in Israeli politics, has become rather widespread in the last two decades.

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2 In defining party switchers we took a cautious, conservative approach and did not regard the following: MKs whose party merged with another; Splitters that left their faction during a Knesset term but did not compete in the next elections; MKs that competed under another label following their party's total disintegration; and MKs that competed with their original party under different electoral list.
Table 3 looks more closely and from a somewhat different perspective on legislative volatility on the last decade. Remarkably, almost one in every three MKs that were elected to the 17th Knesset (2006) had had a "past" (recent or distant) in other parties. This high figures reflects not only the “Big Bang” that occurred in the Israeli party system in the middle of the previous decade, with the establishment of Kadima, but also additional moves of politicians from one party to the other.

Table 3. Elected Members of Knesset (MKs) with a past in other parties (as MKs, candidates, representatives in other public offices or as party activists)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage (number)</th>
<th>16th Knesset (elected 2003)</th>
<th>17th Knesset (elected 2006)</th>
<th>18th Knesset (elected 2009)</th>
<th>19th Knesset (elected 2013)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>30.8</td>
<td>29.2</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(number)</td>
<td>(15)</td>
<td>(37)</td>
<td>(35)</td>
<td>(24)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the last decade, politicians have shown no reluctance leaving their “home” party and switching to another. Some have even made a “round trip”. For example, Tzachi Hanegbi, a former Likud minister, switched to Kadima in 2006 and moved back to Likud before the 2013 elections. Others have changed their affiliation several times. MK Amir Peretz started his legislative career in Labour, deserted it in 1999 to form a new party (One Nation), returned to Labour in 2004 and was selected as party chairman a year later. Peretz lost the leadership in 2007 but remained a Labour MK. Before the 2013 elections party members selected him to the third slot on Labour’s list of candidates but then he decided to jump ship again, joining the new Hatnua Party, headed by former Kadima chairperson Tzipi Livni.

As we have just noted, party switching is far from confined only to backbenchers. In fact, there were several cases in which candidates that were defeated in leadership contest, decided not to accept the voters’ choice and desert the party. David Levi (Likud), Shimon Peres and Amir Peretz (Labour) and Tzipi Livni (Kadima) are the notable cases. Even more bizarre, there were two cases where the incumbent party leader deserted the party to establish a new political platform. Ariel Sharon, Likud leader and a Prime Minister, decided in November 2005 to abandon his party and establish Kadima. Ehud Barak, leader of Labour, decided in January 2011 to leave the party and establish Atzmaut Party.

In other cases, party switching is not eventually materialized, but politicians loudly ponder this option. This might be as a result of a protest vis-à-vis the current party leadership or policy, or as a strategy to improve their position within the party. This reflects the personalization of Israeli politics a process that puts the individual
politician in the center, on the expense of the group, the party (Balmas, et al. 2014). Solidarity and loyalty give way to opportunism. The months leading to general elections sometimes resemble a free market where politicians and candidates go 'shopping for a party'.

So we can point to moving sands when it comes to the inner circle (party elite) and the outer circle (party voters). What can we say about the middle circle, the party members?

**Party Membership in a Volatile Environment**

Figure 6 presents an analysis of data from elections surveys (INES). It compares the levels of volatility among voters who identify themselves as party members to those who did not. Indeed, as expected, party members are more loyal voters. On average, only 65.3% of the respondents who identified themselves as non-members testified that they did not change their vote from the previous elections, while 80.5% of the respondents who identified themselves as party members testified that they did not change their vote from the previous elections. While a clear linear trend cannot be identified, a comparison of the averages for 1969-1988 to that of 1992-2013 do testify for a decline in loyalty: On average, 68.8% of the respondents who identified themselves as non-members in the 1969-1988 period testified that they did not change their vote from the previous elections, while only 62.3% of the respondents who identified themselves as non-members in the 1992-2013 period testified that they did not change their vote from the previous elections. On average, 82.8% of the respondents who identified themselves as party members in the 1969-1988 period testified that they did not change their vote from the previous elections, while only
78.6% of the respondents who identified themselves as members in the 1992-2013 testified that they did not change their vote from the previous elections. Looking more closely at the loyalty of party members, we can see the highest levels of loyalty were found in the earliest years, 1969 and 1973, while the lowest one in 2006.

The comparison between the early period and late period shows results in the expected direction, yet it is not steep. However, we should remember that the share of party members within Israeli population declined dramatically, and that there was even a decline in their absolute numbers (Kenig, Rahat, Philippov and Tuttnauer, forthcoming). This means that the decline in quantity did not breed an improvement of quality, in the sense of being left with the more loyal members. This claim would be further substantiated below in the analysis of the results of the 2010 membership survey.

**Figure 6: Voter Loyalty among Members and Non-Members**

![Graph showing voter loyalty among members and non-members over years](image-url)
Since the 1970s, Israel’s main political parties have undergone a gradual process of internal democratization. This process peaked in the 1990s, when Labour and Likud, the two largest parties at the time, adopted primary elections for the selection of their leaders and candidates to the Knesset. The adoption of primaries changed the distribution of power within the parties, empowering the rank-and-file party members by giving them unprecedented rights. At the same time, membership rates were dwindling, creating a reality in which fewer members enjoy more powerful privileges.

The combination of a volatile electoral environment, weakened voter loyalty and inclusive selection methods opened the door for several pathologies that evolve around the tier of party members (Rahat and Hazan 2007).

Many party members come and go (instant membership)

“Our base today are dues-paying members in the Labor party, about 80,000… …the number of people or residents of Israel that passed through membership in the Labor party in the last 4-5 years is about a quarter of a million people, maybe a little more.”

(Nisim Zvili, General Secretary of the Labor Party 15.6.1995)

In all Israeli parties that use inclusive methods for selecting leaders and candidates, membership registration campaigns (mifkadim in Hebrew) form a critical phase in every internal contest. Serious candidates who wish to have a chance of getting selected engage in extensive efforts to recruit new members to the party in order to
gain their votes. In addition, other actors who seek to influence politics see the campaign as an opportunity to create their own power base. Thus, heads of unions as well as “private” actors act as “vote contractors”, proposing “their” members’ support in return for political commodities (and in worse cases, for material returns).

This phenomenon may be interpreted in two ways. On the positive side, primary contests provide the party (through the candidates) with the opportunity to reach out to a lot of people, persuade them to enroll and participate in the contests and thereby expand the democratic engagement of citizens. Furthermore, they allow the party to present itself as open, democratic, responsive and popular. On the negative side, recruiting new members to the party as the prologue to a primary election may create an uncommitted stratum of members who perceive their membership as merely a temporary status allowing them to take part in the primaries. This layer (instant members) has the same rights as the more faithful layer of veteran members, who regard their membership as more than just the right to vote in primaries.

Many times, membership has doubled and even tripled in recruitment campaigns that were conducted prior to a primary contest, only to drop shortly afterwards (Table 4). The incentives for mass registration create a situation in which membership is related to the selection event, not to the party. Many people, for example, join in order to support specific candidates. This does not engender a long-time relationship between the party and these new members.
Table 4. Membership at the Beginning and the End of Registration Campaigns in Israel’s Main Parties, 1991-2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th># of Party Members at Beginning</th>
<th># of Party Members at the End</th>
<th>Growth Rate from Beginning</th>
<th>Decline Rate till Next Beginning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Labour</td>
<td>1991-92</td>
<td>80,000</td>
<td>164,163</td>
<td>105%</td>
<td>-45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1995-96</td>
<td>80,000</td>
<td>261,169</td>
<td>223%</td>
<td>-73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2001-02</td>
<td>70,000</td>
<td>110,998</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>-45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>48,000</td>
<td>119,717</td>
<td>149%</td>
<td>-50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>60,000</td>
<td>103,568</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likud</td>
<td>1992-93</td>
<td>50,000</td>
<td>216,000</td>
<td>332%</td>
<td>-58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1995-96</td>
<td>90,000</td>
<td>178,852</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>-44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2001-02</td>
<td>100,000</td>
<td>305,000</td>
<td>205%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Hazan and Rahat 2010.

Some party members are not loyal to “their” party.

We have seen that members easily come and go. This means that the boundaries in the classical model between members, supporters and voters are wide open. Yet this is only a part of the story. There are indications that the movement of members is not limited to the party outer circles, but occurs also between parties, often without first taking a rest (or some time to think) in the less-affiliated circles of party supporters and voters.

Some members vote for another party (“insincere membership”)

One indication of the existence of a significant group of party members who do not vote for “their” party is found when the number of party voters in a specific local
community is compared to the number of party members in the same community. Several comparisons suggest that in some Israeli Arab towns and villages (and also in some Jewish communities), Labour has more members than voters. In 2011, for instance, the Labour Party had 336 party members in the Arab town of Shfar’am and 166 registered members in the Arab town Kafr Qasim, where it received, respectively, 232 votes and 47 votes in the 2009 Knesset elections (Kenig, Rahat and Philippov, 2013: 18).

These members, as far as we know, are not “political animals” who try to double their influence by selecting candidates in one party and voting for another but rather belong to opportunistic herds led by opportunistic shepherds. The shepherds are known as “vote contractors,” people who can get votes for a candidate running in party primaries in return to fulfilling the mediator’s material interests. In Likud there are similar phenomena, and an additional one – that of Jewish settlers in the occupied territories who join Likud so as to push it further to the ideological right, though they vote for extremist right-wing parties, not for Likud.

Another indication of insincere membership was found in a survey of party members that was conducted in 2010. Fifteen percent of the members of the three largest membership parties at the time (Kadima, Likud, Labour) claimed that they did not vote for “their” party. These data reflect only part of the phenomenon, as it is possible to speculate that some respondents found it difficult to admit that they supported another party or maybe "fixed" unconsciously their vote to show consistency perceived as a feature of normality. An extreme yet indicative case is that of Kadima.
In early 2012, the party had 95,000 registered members; a mere year later, in the general elections of January 2013, it received only 79,000 votes.

Some people are members in two parties at the same time (double membership)
According to the Israeli Party Law (1993), it is forbidden to be a member of more than one party at any given time. Yet, in 1996 the Israeli Party Registrar – who was authorized to cross-check membership lists – revealed that 8% of Labour members and 12% of Likud members were also members of another party (Party Registrar 13.3.96). While this general examination of double membership was not repeated, voluntary crossing of party membership lists that are initiated from time to time reveal that this phenomenon continues.

A significant minority of party members are former members of other parties
According to the party members' survey mentioned above, nearly a quarter of members in the three largest parties in Israel stated that they were formerly registered in other parties. Fifty percent of the members of Kadima, a party that was established by politicians who defected from Likud and Labour, acknowledged that they were members of other parties prior to joining Kadima. That is, a large herd of members, not only of voters, followed the politicians who defected from their parties. In addition, 14% of Labour and Likud members said they were members of other parties in the past. This group probably includes citizens who follow vote contractors from one party to another (people who are in some kind of patron-client relationship with political bosses). It also likely includes more individual self-driven political animals who – like voters and politicians – are on the move from time to time.
To conclude, some citizens join (or are recruited to) a party but demonstrate a weak affiliation to it. Some join a party just to promote a special interest or candidate but actually give their vote in the general elections to another party. Some exploit the perks of being a party member and are registered to more than one party. Others quite easily switch from one party to another. All these factors create a fluid, volatile environment in which party membership – a layer that theoretically encompasses the backbone of the party organization – becomes an open field, subject to misuse and manipulation.

**Returning to Duverger’s concentric circles**

Below are several additional findings from a survey that was conducted in 2010 among members of the three large inclusive parties in Israel at the time: Kadima, Likud, and Labour (Kenig, Philippov and Rahat 2013). This analysis allows us to examine some of Duverger’s circles, those that delineate former and current members and between active and passive members (in terms of behavior and roles). The results seem to confirm the proposed description in Figure 3 above. Duverger’s model holds in the sense that the concentric circles describe levels of loyalty to the party: Party members who left the party are less loyal than those who stayed; Activists (in terms of behaviour and of holding a position within the party) are more loyal than non-activists. Yet, the borders are not closed and there are significant shares of members that are not loyal to “their” party. In addition, between a fifth and a quarter -- and even a small portion of the activists -- testified that they had been members of other parties.
It is striking that there are no significant differences concerning past membership in other parties between activists and non-activists. Moreover, we find such a significant difference between current and former members, but it's in the opposite direction to what could be expected. A higher percentage of current members have past membership in other parties than former members, perhaps indicating it's the more fluid that stay in the membership game, while the less volatile just leave the parties altogether. What is further interesting – and may indicate a trend -- is that many respondents seem to be unsure in their future loyalty, many more than those who testify they were disloyal in the past. This is even true for the much more loyal group of activists.

Table 5: Party Loyalty according to 2010 Party Members' Survey

Have you voted in the last general elections (2009) for the party you were a member in?
(Those who answered “Yes”)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Former party members (301)</th>
<th>Current party members (909)</th>
<th>Active Party members± (111)</th>
<th>Passive party members (790)</th>
<th>Members who hold a party position±± (123)</th>
<th>Members who do not hold a party position (780)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Have you voted in the last general elections (2009) for the party you were a member in?</td>
<td>54.4% (161)***</td>
<td>85.4% (763)***</td>
<td>94.6% (104)***</td>
<td>84.0% (651)***</td>
<td>95% (115)***</td>
<td>83.8% (643)***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While you were a member of the party/ Since you joined the party, did you ever vote for another party in the general elections?
(Those who answered “Yes”)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Former party members (301)</th>
<th>Current party members (909)</th>
<th>Active Party members (111)</th>
<th>Passive party members (790)</th>
<th>Members who hold a party position (123)</th>
<th>Members who do not hold a party position (780)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Have you voted in the last general elections (2009) for another party?</td>
<td>23.5% (69)</td>
<td>22.5% (202)</td>
<td>15.3%* (17)</td>
<td>23.8%* (185)</td>
<td>10.7%*** (13)</td>
<td>24.2%*** (187)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How certain are you that you will continue to support the party in which you are a member in the future?

(Those who answered “I am certain I will support it”)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Active Party members (111)</th>
<th>Passive party members (790)</th>
<th>Members who hold a party position (123)</th>
<th>Members who do not hold a party position (780)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>71.3%*** (77)</td>
<td>35.5%*** (268)</td>
<td>67.5%*** (79)</td>
<td>36.1%*** (271)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Were you a member in other party/parties before joining this party?

(Those who answered “yes”)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Former party members (301)</th>
<th>Current party members (909)</th>
<th>Active Party members* (111)</th>
<th>Passive party members (790)</th>
<th>Members who hold a party position** (123)</th>
<th>Members who do not hold a party position (780)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17.2%*** (51)</td>
<td>26% (232)**</td>
<td>29.1% (32)</td>
<td>25.6% (199)</td>
<td>20.8% (25)</td>
<td>26.8% (206)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*P>0.05, **P>0.01, ***P>0.001, Chi Square test
±Party position is either membership in a party institution or being the party representative in an elected institution.
±±Active party members are those that testify that they devote 3 or more hours a month to party activities.

Discussion: Is Everything Volatile?

The Israeli political system has demonstrated in the last decade increasingly volatile behaviour not only among voters, but also among politicians and party members. This reflects a de-alignment, that is, members leaving parties (Mair and Van Biezen 2001; Van Biezen et al. 2012) and citizens become disloyal voters (Baldini and Papapalardo, 2009). But at the same time, it also reflects movements from one party to another, of members as well as politicians, a phenomenon that can be labeled realignment; in Israel this phenomenon is almost constant and so intensive that because of it we may no longer be able to distinguish between “critical” elections and “normal” elections.
Figure 7 describes these “musical chairs” between political parties towards and through the 2013 elections. They seem to result from long-term developments in Israeli society (Kimmerling 1999), the political implications of which received a boost from the adoption of direct elections for the Prime Minister (Kenig, Rahat and Hazan 2005).

**Figure 7. Musical Chairs: The Constant Motion of Mainstream Parties**

The volatile, unstable environment does not apply to all parties, however. Most sectarian parties – those that appeal to specific sectors in society – have actually shown remarkable stability in the past decade. As reflected in Figure 8, the sectarian parties (shown in black lines) enjoy a stable electoral performance. The mainstream
parties, on the other hand (Likud, Labour and Kadima, shown in coloured lines), go up and down, sometimes drastically. Likud, for instance, dropped from 38 parliamentary seats (out of 120) in 2003 to 12 seats three years later and then rose to 27 in 2009. Kadima fell from 28 seats (the largest party) in 2009 to a mere 2 seats four years later.

**Figure 8. Stable Sectarian Parties, Volatile Mainstream Parties**

![Graph showing changes in seats for different parties from 2003 to 2013](image)

This differentiated volatility can be distinguished on the voters' level as well. Table 6 presents data on electoral volatility in the 1996-2013 elections in select communities that represent the different sectors of Israeli society. The level of volatility among Jewish secular voters, who tend to vote for the large, aggregative, democratic membership parties is higher: This is evident when we compare Tel Aviv and Haifa to Jerusalem, that has much larger religious population who vote for religious parties;
and when we see the much lower levels of volatility in the Ultra-orthodox city of Bnei Brak and the Arab city of Nazareth.

Table 6: Electoral Volatility (Pedersen Index) in selected communities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Tel Aviv</th>
<th>Jerusalem</th>
<th>Haifa</th>
<th>Bnei Brak</th>
<th>Nazareth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>16.8</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>17.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(238,674)</td>
<td>(223,640)</td>
<td>(159,191)</td>
<td>(59,931)</td>
<td>(25,687)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>26.6</td>
<td>26.8</td>
<td>28.5</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>12.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(234,637)</td>
<td>(223,249)</td>
<td>(157,197)</td>
<td>(60,086)</td>
<td>(28,643)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>24.5</td>
<td>22.1</td>
<td>27.4</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>17.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(209,477)</td>
<td>(210,947)</td>
<td>(140,028)</td>
<td>(59,834)</td>
<td>(25,069)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>44.3</td>
<td>31.0</td>
<td>49.8</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(211,867)</td>
<td>(208,997)</td>
<td>(132,516)</td>
<td>(60,502)</td>
<td>(23,138)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>22.1</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>6.7 (63,433)</td>
<td>12.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(224,000)</td>
<td>(215,743)</td>
<td>(134,710)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>44.1</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td>39.3</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(244,901)</td>
<td>(238,733)</td>
<td>(139,363)</td>
<td>(75,147)</td>
<td>(27,705)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>29.7</td>
<td>23.1</td>
<td><strong>31.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>11.8</strong></td>
<td><strong>12.5</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In (Parenthesis) the number of valid votes cast.
* Voting for mergers and to party alliances or splits of parties from party alliances were calculated as voting for the same party. In case a party is established out of a split from another party than voting for it is calculated as voting for a different party.

Accidentally or not, the mainstream parties are also the ones that used inclusive methods to select their leaders and candidates. As explained above, these parties have massive recruitment campaigns that open the door to the activities of vote contractors and create a loose, disloyal and sometimes opportunistic layer of party members. Some of these members move in and out of the party or from one party to another. The stable sectarian parties, by contrast, have almost no party members. In other words, roughly speaking, there are two kinds of parties: the unstable large, aggregative, democratic membership parties and the stable sectarian autocratic parties.
Recent Developments: One-Shot Membership?

Adding to the fluidity of the system is the appearance (and rapid extinction) of short-life centrist parties. The revived Shinui, the Centre Party and Gil (Pensioners Party) were all one-shot (or, at best, two-shot) phenomena. Kadima was very close to joining this list but escaped their fate by just barely surpassing the electoral threshold in the 2013 elections. These parties' contribution to the high electoral volatility is significant and they are also an expression of the party switching of many politicians. As we saw, party members are also on the move.

In the 2013 elections, the mass membership parties did not strike success. Kadima, the largest party in the previous Knesset (28 seats), only by a hair’s breadth passed the electoral threshold and won 2 seats; Likud (which ran in an alliance with Yisrael Beitenu) lost about 25% of its seats; while Labour increased its support by only 2 seats, much less than anticipated in the circumstances of the fall of centrist Kadima. The big winners were the Jewish Home, an alliance of two existing parties that as one entity increased its strength from 7 to 12 seats, and a new party, Yesh Atid, which won 19 seats and thus at birth became the second largest party in the Knesset. In the following analysis we will try to clarify what they are about when it comes to party membership. Was it about renewing (Jewish Home) and inventing (Yesh Atid) different kinds of membership? Or do these parties represent one-shot successes that likely signify the stabilization of instability and will soon return to the familiar patterns of party participation?
The Jewish Home

The “renovated” Jewish Home (Habayit Hayehudi) is a notable example of the volatile trends that were previously addressed. It is a new flexible framework that was originally formed before the 2009 elections. It was supposed to include all right-wing religious parties, but internal tensions following leadership and candidate selection kept them divided. What was ultimately left under the banner of the Jewish Home was just one, the veteran National Religious Party. In 2013 the attempt to run in an alliance succeeded following the predetermination of the allocation of list positions between the Jewish Home and its ally, the extreme-right wing Tkuma party. The alliance leadership and about two thirds of the seats were allotted to the Jewish Home.

Two people that symbolize the new character of the Jewish Home, vis-à-vis the “old” National Religious Party, came from another party background, Likud. These are the new selected party leader, Naftali Bennett, and the first ever non-religious female candidate of a national religious party, Ayelet Shaked. Both, it seems, attracted numerous voters. The alliance garnered 345,985 (9.1%) of the votes, in comparison to 209,335 (6.2%) that its components won in the previous elections. This alliance succeeded in bringing back national religious voters who had voted for Likud in the previous elections and also in winning significant support from non-religious voters.

The Jewish Home decided to conduct primaries in which party members would select both the party leader and their candidates to the Knesset. It conducted an extensive recruitment campaign at the end of which it had 54,055 registered members, a very impressive number considering that this party won only 96,765 votes in the 2009 elections. And this is even though an extreme-extreme right-wing faction left the National Union and ran independently, winning 66,775 votes (1.8%).
elections. We can learn much about the recruitment of party members from the messages Bennett posted on Facebook: “We are making history right now. More than 16,800 people have already registered online, and many more through hard-copy registration forms” (September 8, 2012). And a day later: “…Amazing. 20,000 good people registered online. An Israeli record…” (September 9, 2012). These members produced a relatively impressive turnout for party primaries in Israel: about 36,000 (66.6%) of them took part in the selection of the leader and 33,212 (61.4%) in the selection of the list of candidates. Only time will tell whether these are mostly “instant” members. Yet, it is clear that some members were of a problematic nature. About 2,800 Jewish Home members were also members of Likud (5.2%).

The Jewish Home and its leader, which were presented in the very personalized election campaign as almost a single entity, ran an extensive internet campaign with a special intense focus on the social networks. Every day, sometimes several times a day, Bennett (himself) posted on his Facebook and Twitter accounts, receiving thousands of “Likes” from his followers. A month before the general elections his page had in excess of 100,000 “Likes”, and a week before the elections it surpassed 150,000 mark – making him the third leading politician in this playing ground. His YouTube account also became sensational with Bennett's performances in foreign television interviews, enjoying more than 2 million viewers. That is, parallel to the attempt to formally recruit party members to take part in leadership and candidate selection, efforts were made to campaign through cyberspace. Thus, the Jewish Home represents a blend of both formal (suspiciously instant) membership and new kinds of linkages through cyberspace’s social platforms.
Four months after the elections and the use of the Facebook still continues at the same pace. With more than 177,000 followers (making him third, after Benjamin Netanyahu and Yair Lapid), Bennett still posts status updates that touch on the top stories of the day. The cyber-supporters seem to be more active than the formal party members. Discussions about canceling primaries for the candidate list seem to point to the face that formal membership is not as appreciated as cyber-support.

Yesh Atid

Yesh Atid (There Is a Future) was founded in April 2012 by the celebrity TV anchorman, talk-show host, writer and columnist Yair Lapid, who announced his running for politics in the previous January. Over all, a year passed since his announcement and until Election Day for the 19th Knesset. Taking into account that early elections were already on the parliamentary agenda when the party was founded, Yesh Atid was born straight into a lengthy election campaign. At its end, Yesh Atid won over 500,000 votes, winning 19 seats and becoming the second-largest party in the Knesset.

In Lapid's frequent statements, aired mainly through his Facebook page, he heralded what he called “new politics”. While his centrist, secular and civil agenda and his able use of social media indeed gave the impression of “new”, most aspects of Yesh Atid's campaign activities would be more appropriately called “retro politics”. According to his Facebook statements, in less than a year Lapid attended 251 rallies, talking face-to-face to about 150,000 potential voters. Over 15,000 activists were recruited and managed through 102 regional campaign headquarters, in addition to special sectors' headquarters directed at the young, the elderly, the gay, voters of Russian-decent, of Ethiopian-decent, etc. A party constitution was written, and institutions such as a
party conference and party central committee were established. All this stands in contrast to established parties as well as to other new parties running for the 19th Knesset, such as Hatnua or Eretz Hadasha, which overlooked party institutionalization and approached voters mainly through the mass media (the former) or the internet (the latter).

Nonetheless, a closer look at the various modes of Yesh Atid's activities does show a move away from Duverger's classic model. In essence, Yesh Atid is a new party. Its leader has no political experience; its list of candidates does not include former MKs, but does include former mayors, activists and some candidates who previously ran unsuccessfully in other parties. Thus, it could actually create a party whose inner circles were relatively “pure”. On the other hand, most of its voters (except for first-time voters) must have been voters of other parties. And what about the middle layers – activists and members? Until a very late stage in the campaign, the party did not have formal members. They were not needed for leadership selection, candidate selection or any other party activity because the party was all about its leader. He determined everything.

Let's take a look at each circle of participation, one by one. The huge electoral success implies inherently a high level of volatility in the voters' circle. Coupled with the near-disappearance of Kadima, the largest party in the previous Knesset and itself a new party label dating from 2006, it is the case that many Yesh Atid voters are not new to party switching and were voting for the “new kid on the (centre-) block”.

Moving on to the supporters, we may look to the social networks. On Election Day over 111,000 people “Liked” Lapid's Facebook page, which was soon used as the
party’s official page. Similar to Jewish Home's Bennett, Lapid wrote his own posts on a daily basis (at least), putting to use his famous writing abilities. Over 36,000 people were “talking” about his posts online, responding to them directly posts or mentioning Lapid and his party in their own posts. Granted, inferring supporters' numbers from Facebook is problematic, but it has two advantages (aside from ease of access to data): first, from the supporter's side, it is a public form of expressing support, which is stronger than merely having a preference; and second, from the party's side, the campaign staff of Yesh Atid indeed considered their Facebook followers as “a representative sample of potential voters” (Interview with anonymous staff member).

Perhaps unlike other politicians using Facebook, Lapid's team used this medium not only as another channel for top-down mass communication, but also for bottom-up communications to the party elite, analyzing comments on Lapid's posts, estimating which campaign messages gained more support and relaying the results to campaign headquarters (Ibid).

The possibility of joining Yesh Atid as party members was opened to the public only around September 2012, four months before elections day. Party staff admitted that the recruitment of campaign volunteers, not party members, was a top priority before the elections (Correspondence with the party CEO). Until now, Yesh Atid has maintained a policy not to release membership data (except for the names of around 300 “founding members”, as required by the Party Registrar). However, elections for the party conference and party central committee were not held. The central committee was abolished while it was determined that the party conference was based on the group that established the party. This seems to result from having too few members to constitute the selectorate and a pool of potential candidates to head these institutions. Hence, we can assume that the numbers of members are in the hundreds.
Finally, we have the party activists. These 15,000 volunteers were mainly used in regular party-militant tasks – handing out brochures at main traffic junctions, hanging banners from balconies, organizing rallies, recruiting supporters and persuading the undecided. As noted above, their activity was highly organized, structured mostly around local headquarters. Of these activists, very few chose to pay the membership fee (a low NIS 40, about €8.5) to become a card-carrying member. Those who did pay form the vast majority of the party's membership.

To sum up this overview, it seems that in the case of Yesh Atid, the participation degrees of members and activists have undergone a role reversal: instead of the activists representing the inner circle, comprised of party members who make the extra effort of volunteering for the party's cause, it is the members who form the inner circle, as they are all activists who made the extra effort of paying a small membership fee.

The limited recruitment of party members is understandable from the party's perspective, as electoral success was the more important and immediate goal. Nonetheless, the question still stands – why out of the thousands of volunteers who gave their time and effort to the party, have so few chosen to be party members? The answer is that it might not be very attractive. Yesh Atid party members were only supposed to be entitled to vote for, and run for, the conference, yet even this opportunity has been recently canceled. The conference elects the party centre which in turn elects the party leader, but will do so only following the elections to the 20th Knesset, probably at least four years from now. Lapid, the leader for the next two parliamentary terms, is the decision maker on every important issue – he selects the
list of candidates, heads the negotiations to join or form a government, decides who will be appointed as a minister on behalf of the party, is the party centre's chairman, selects the party's management staff, its treasurer, spokesperson, etc. (Yesh Atid's Constitution).

So, as long as the party constitution remains so extremely exclusive and centralist, party members will lack any significant rights and privileges and thus will not wield any influence within it. It is hard to see the number of members rise without at least some opening of the candidate selection process. It is also doubtful that a governing party, holding important ministries such as the Treasury and Ministry of Education and having to live up to very high expectations, will draw such a large number of volunteers again. It is further doubtful that Lapid, now the minister of finance, will have the time to hop between rallies in the next electoral campaign. Chances are that in advance of the next election campaign, Yesh Atid will either open up the candidate selection process to attract members and activists or will stay autocratic and use the state funding that comes with being a large party to pay its activists. Another option available to the party was to begin establishing its grassroots through the upcoming municipal elections. The party attempted to do so, yet with no significant success. The options seem to point to a return to elements of “old politics”.

**Conclusion**

Israeli political scene – once a fairly stable system with relatively low volatility rates and strong citizen-party bonds – have transformed in the past two decades. As this paper demonstrated, large portions of the system are now built on shifting sands. It has become open, competitive, free market in which actors (voters, activists, party members and politicians) ‘go shopping’ for a party they would support in a specific
point in time. Thus, voters easily change their electoral preferences, new parties constantly emerge (while others rapidly disappear) and politicians change allegiances, hopping from one party to another. In this environment, even party membership becomes volatile. It may be the case that membership reached a point that it is becoming mainly a one-shot seasonal thing rather than a display of any long-term affiliation to a party.

Ironically, the inclusive membership parties (Likud, Labour, Kadima) are the victims of these developments. The sectarian parties, usually lacking meaningful party membership, retain a solid voter support. In these circumstances, party membership might be seen as burden which entails no benefits to the party. The inclusive democratic parties might be persuaded to abandon membership altogether or to ponder new forms that are, as stable as one-shot membership.

Our findings concerning volatile voters and even party members could be interpreted as signs of the development of a crowd of healthy critical citizens. Citizens who are constantly looking for the best they can achieve replaced party loyalists. The diehard loyalists are gone and new-sophisticated consumers are here. For three reasons, we find it hard to except this optimistic interpretation. First, politicians are also on the move, and thus the system lack stable points of reference (aggregative parties) that can be punished or rewarded for their performance. Second, with the lack of stability we get a very high level of legislative turnover (of a third and even more of the legislature), and this may harm responsiveness and accountability. Third, within this system there are parties that enjoy stability. These are the sectarian, small non-democratic parties whose contribution to the system is rather limited. Moderate
volatility may serve a democratic system by creating healthy pressures on parties and politicians. These would be able to respond to them by changing their ways, not their party.

References


Israeli Party Law (1993)


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