WHO'S THE BOSS IN ISRAEL

Israel at the Polls, 1988–89

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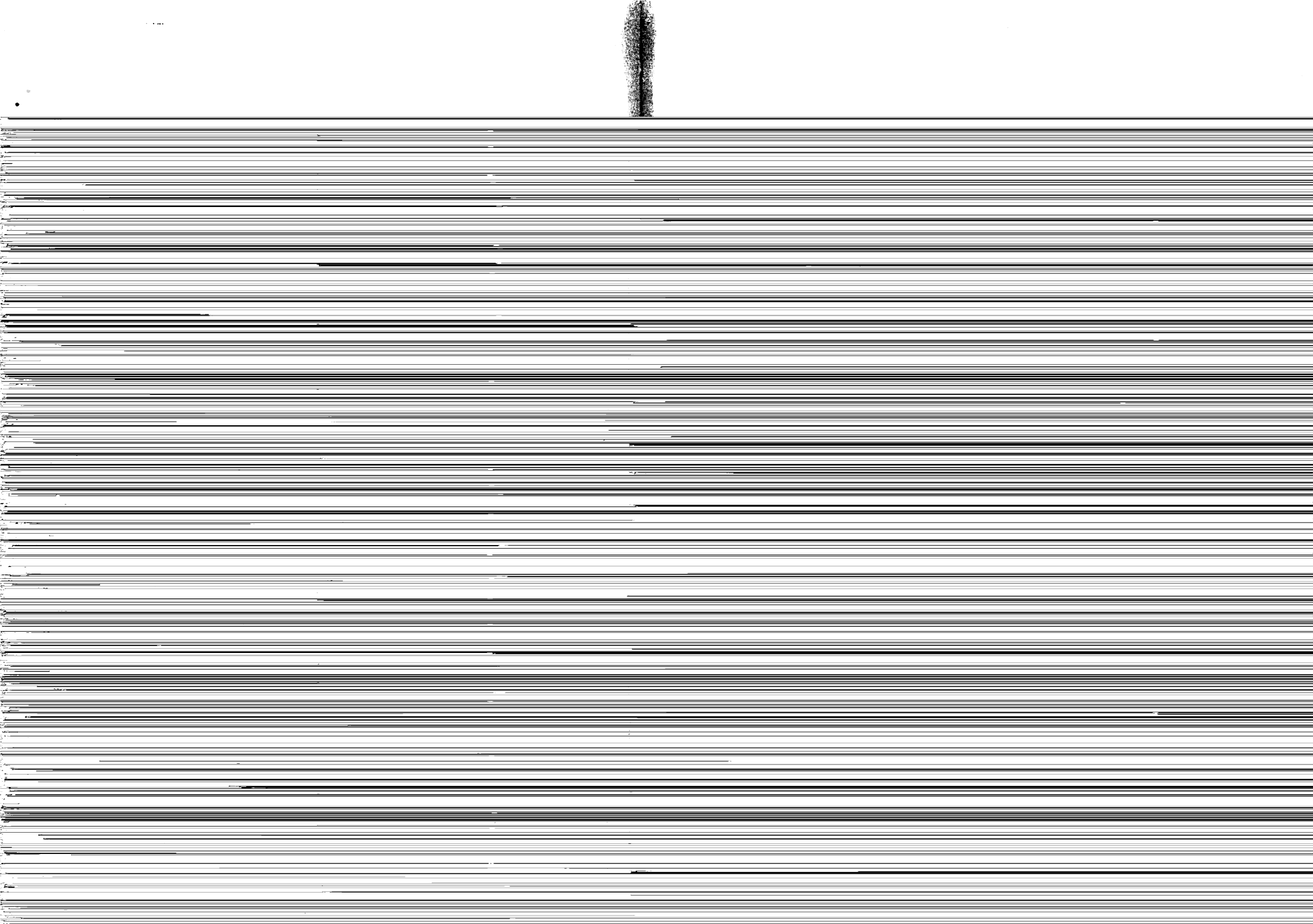


This chapter assesses the quality of the conflict pitting the values of the voters against the values of the elected by focusing on the election propaganda broadcasts on television. The main aim is to examine how successful each side was in implementing its goals; to what degree did the propagandists achieve maximal exposure in presenting their messages to the public, and, on the other hand, to what extent did the voters derive any benefit through their exposure to election broadcasts? The chapter concludes with a discussion of some theoretical and practical inferences that emerge from the findings of the research.

The Research and the Data

The findings represented are based on three surveys that the Guttman Institute of Social Applied Research conducted during various time periods during the 1988 election campaign, which are then compared with similar surveys from previous election campaigns. These surveys test the basic questions surrounding exposure patterns to electoral propaganda, and especially to broadcast electoral propaganda and the extent to which such propaganda influences the formation of electoral preference.

As one can discern, the questions to a large extent were formulated under the influence of the principles elaborated in the "uses and gratifications" approach (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974). The present study adheres most faithfully to the tradition of Israeli research in this sphere, which began addressing the issue immediately upon the inception of 1969 broadcast electoral propaganda (Gurevitch, 1972). The fealty of this research tradition allows us to observe the changes that have occurred over the years, and as it will emerge, we can presently evaluate trends ensuing over two entire decades.

The first of the three surveys of the election campaign for the 12th Knesset was conducted at an early stage of the campaign in the month of August 1988. A number of questions were asked regarding the election campaign, which was still being conducted on a placid note.

The second survey was conducted 12–18 October 1988, with a sampling of 520 interviewees from the group of 1,063 interviewees polled in July–August 1988. These consented to a second interview and to constitute a panel, in effect.

The third survey took place 19–25 October and involved a sample of 508 telephone owners among the adult Jewish population of Israel excluding the Kibbutzim.

Findings: The Communicative Setting

The monopolistic structure of the Israeli broadcast media has always guaranteed the growing centrality of election broadcasts in every election campaign (Caspi, 1984). According to Paragraph 15 of the Election Law, (Methods of Propaganda, 1959), "Each party and its candidates will be granted 25 minutes and each party represented in the outgoing Knesset will receive an additional 4 minutes per Knesset Member." Similarly, Amendment 3 to this law, arranges the distribution of time on television. According to Paragraph 15a to this amendment, "Each party and list of candidates will be awarded 10 minutes and each party represented in the outgoing Knesset will receive an additional 4 minutes per Knesset Member."

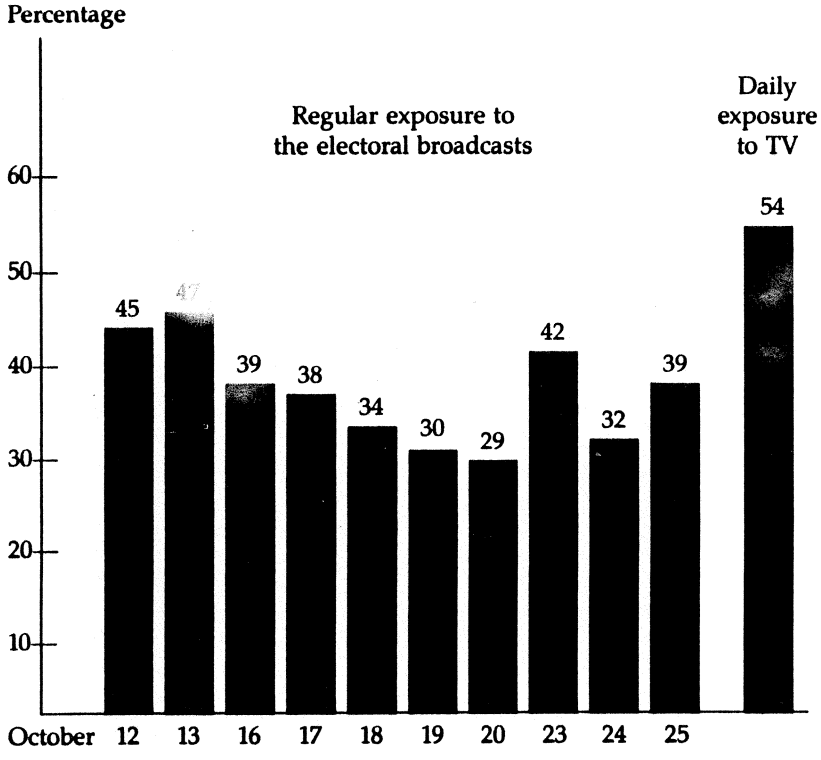
In the elections to the 12th Knesset, 1,151 minutes of radio broadcast time and close to 984 minutes of television time were allotted. The concentration of electoral propaganda through broadcasts even obligated the minor parties to gear themselves accordingly.

What was true of the past obtained this time as well. The slated time framework followed the major news broadcast, and this scheduling was not accidental. The electoral broadcasts of the various parties were aired for 30–40 minutes every evening. From this standpoint the politician, and not by happenstance, was awarded a time slot that was considered prime time and enjoyed a high viewing rate. Did the propagandists manage to make the most of this communications potential?

Figure 6.1 compares the rates of normal exposure to television and the rates of exposure to electoral broadcasts during that same time slot. Previous surveys on exposure patterns to media indicate that the daily news broadcast Mabat in the single-channel television station commands very high viewing rates, nearly three-quarters of the Israeli public. Before and immediately after it, nearly half of the public, 54 percent, is riveted to the television screen. This viewing extent plunges downward as the night grows longer (Levinsohn, 1988).

The data reveals that electoral broadcasts only barely managed to maintain normal viewing rates. A daily monitoring shows that the percentage of those viewing the broadcasts declines the closer one approached Election Day. During the first days of the survey, nearly half, 45–47 percent, responded that they regularly viewed the election broadcasts. The ratio plummeted to 29 percent during the second half of the month. It appears that the electoral broadcasters lost the initial magic that they enjoyed in the previous

Figure 6.1. Patterns of Daily Exposure to Television and to Electoral Broadcasts During that Same Time Slot (9:30–10:30 P.M.)



campaigns and exposure to them was condemned to a process of erosion or routinization.

One can also ascribe the moderate exposure to electoral broadcasts to the general nature of the election campaigns. As opposed to previous election campaigns, the parties this time refrained from involving artists and entertainers. Therefore, the allure of the broadcasts declined for quite a few of the viewers. The decline in general interest in the broadcasts is also undoubtedly connected with the progressive professionalism of electoral propaganda (Caspi & Eyal, 1983), which produces a tendency toward uniformity, standardization, and stylization in the electoral broadcasts of most of the parties.

Although the viewers of the electoral broadcasts dwindled, it appears that the social-demographic make-up was slightly al-

tered. The data of the surveys indicate that, as opposed to the familiar general trends (Levinsohn, 1988) this time men and young people were exposed to the election broadcasts more than women and more mature age groups.

Motives for Political Support

In this election campaign for the 12th Knesset, the print media was flooded with polls data. Some of them were taken at the behest of the journalists (Weimann, 1984). This practice has aroused no small degree of public controversy, especially as the data have produced surprises in terms of their inaccuracy (Shamir, 1986). It seems that the publication of poll results has become an electoral tactic in the hands of a few propagandists, even if the desired influences are not guaranteed in advance.

The various polls, both before and in the course of the election campaign, repeatedly presaged that the deadlock and equality of forces between the two parties would continue after the forthcoming elections as well. The figures of table 6.1 attest that the public did probably assimilate the picture of a tie between the two major parties.

During the month of August, more than two-thirds adhered to the prediction of a tie, a perception that gathered strength as the election campaign progressed, until it was shared by three-quarters of those surveyed (see table 6.1). This tendency is all the more prominent among those who believed that the two parties would receive an equal number of votes. Their number rose from 27 percent in August to 40 percent at the height of the election campaign, and indeed their anticipation proved correct.

It appears that the publication of pre-election polls might structure the political reality. Most people considered the electoral race to be a close one from the very outset, a view that also contributed to diminished tension and reduced general interest in the electoral campaign and perhaps even turned into a self-fulfilling prophecy. The prediction of a tie could in effect ensnare many voters in a spiral of silence web (Noelle-Neumann, 1974) and perhaps dissuade them from dramatic changes in their voting patterns.

Sometimes the campaigners not only ignore survey findings but try to shape them as well. Thus a reciprocal influence is created between the pollsters and the propagandists. The propagandists, who are captives to alien professional concepts, encourage the electoral polls, which are tailored according to a "Hit Parade" concept (Keren, 1986). These polls frequently report on

Table 6.1:
Public Perception of the Electoral Balance between the Two Major Parties during the Course of the 1988 Election Campaign (in percentages)

Perception	Time of the Survey: Ten Weeks Before The Elections	Three Weeks Before The Elections	One Week Before The Elections
Likud would win by a small margin	26	19	20
Labor would win by a small margin	15	15	13
Likud and Labor would receive the same number of votes	27	41	40
Likud would win by a large margin	9	5	4
Labor would win by a large margin	4	2	2
Impossible to predict	8	7	13
No opinion	12	12	9
Total %	100	100	100
N	1,196	520	508
Total % of those predicting a tie between the parties	68	75	73

the popularity of the candidates and their fluctuating rank in the eyes of the public. The frequent publication of gossipy findings regarding the personal popularity of political candidates underpins the legitimacy of a professional strategy that harps on the personalities of the politicians.

If indeed the propagandistic concepts emphasize the personal factors, did these factors motivate the Israeli voter at the polling booths as well? Did the Israeli voter behave according to beliefs and estimates of the professional propagandists?

Table 6.2:
Reasons for Shaping an Electoral Preference (in percentages)

Reasons for Supporting a Particular Party	1969	1977	1981	1984	1988 Time 1	1988 Time 2
Party Identification	17	26	31	32	24	25
Party Candidates	21	15	18	10	13	11
Party Positions	37	46	38	53	53	58
Party Status	7	6	6	4	1	1
Other Reasons	18	7	7	2	9	5
Total %	100	100	100	100	100	100
N	1,314	1,372	1,237	1,259	520	508

The question of the Israeli voter's motives was initially researched in the Elections to the 8th Knesset, and, save for the 1973 Electoral Campaign, it was repeatedly depicted in electoral surveys. The issue was included this time as well, in the two polls taken during the peak of this election campaign. Then, as now, the same general picture obtained. The empirical findings strongly challenge the personal tactical assumptions of the professional propagandists (see table 6.2).

The parties position on the issues was and remains the most prevalent factor for formulating the electoral vote. In contradistinction, the party's candidates are a marginal factor in eliciting support for certain parties. This data fits the prevailing electoral system—proportional and nationwide elections—to an amazing degree. Television's penetration of Israeli politics and the professional strategies in the electoral campaigns may accelerate the familiar tendency toward the personalization of electoral politics.

All this notwithstanding, it emerges that over the years, and with an impressive consistency, the issue component has strengthened and in tandem the personal factor has weakened. In the 1969 electoral campaign, 37 percent singled out the positions of the party on certain issues as the principal factor in determining

their support. This percentage has risen continuously with each election campaign and totaled 53–58 percent in the last election contest.

In contradistinction, during the election to the 8th Knesset, every fifth respondent noted the personal factors, whereas, in the last election campaign, only one out of ten emphasized this factor. The party identification factor exhausted itself toward the election to the 10th Knesset, declined in the election to the 11th, and since then it has eroded. It is also conceivable that the atmosphere of a National Unity government cast its influence on the electoral campaign of 1969 and on the present election campaign in terms of loosening party loyalties. The absence of data for the election year 1973 hinders the consolidation of this explanation.

For similar reasons the political location of the party, be it in the coalition or the opposition, is becoming an extinct factor, and only a solitary 1 percent noted it, in comparison with the 6–7 percent who noted it in the previous election campaign.

It would appear that the high frequency with which the issue motive appears has its roots in the political background surrounding the elections to the 12th Knesset. The elections took place in the midst of the Intifada, which had erupted some ten months previously. The election propaganda of the parties did not ignore the Intifada, but the election broadcasts continued to focus quite a bit on the candidates.

The Alignment's broadcasts sought to exploit the new young faces among the candidates, in order to deepen the public's awareness of the fresh image presented by the party list. The figure heading the party's list adorned almost every television broadcast as well as quite a few ads in the written media. When the results became known, there were many people in political and professional circles who ascribed the Alignment's electoral debacle to the strategy of focusing the election campaign on the figure of Shimon Peres. The ideological disputes between the parties were also transposed to a personal vein. In one of the fiercest Likud election ads, the producers dissolved Peres's portrait into a portrait of Arafat, in order to buttress the Likud's counter-argument that an international conference as recommended by the Alignment would lead to the establishment of a Palestinian State.

In contradiction, the last events during the campaign did serve for an explanation of the electoral results. Thus the Alignment propagandists found a convenient alibi in the political reversals that accompanied the election campaign. These reversals, they contended, harmed the presentation of the Alignment's platform

Table 6.3:
Percent of Exposure to the 1988 Election Campaign Broadcasts

Answer	Time of the Survey: Ten Weeks Before The Elections	Three Weeks Before The Elections	One Week Before The Elections
Follows all the time/ nearly all the time	40	51	49
Watches broadcasts 3–4 times a week	*	58	56
Watches all the election broadcasts	*	56	49
Does not watch the election broadcasts	*	17	26
Gets messages via interpersonal communication	16	32	*

* Not examined.

and ideas. Thus, for example, Hussein, king of Jordan, announced that he was abandoning responsibility for the West Bank, an act that consigned the "Jordanian Option" of the Alignment to impracticality.

Patterns and Motives for Exposure

Usually the public interest increases as the election day approaches, and the political tension between the contending lists rises. Thus the rate of responses of those claiming to follow the election campaign all the time and most of the time rose from 40 percent in August to half of the public in the weeks approaching the elections (see table 6.3).

The exposure frequency to electoral propaganda broadcasts remained relatively stable between the two periods, apparently at the expense of a decline in the intensity of viewing. Approximately 56 to 58 percent responded that they were accustomed to watch the electoral propaganda broadcasts every day or three to four times a

Table 6.4:
Reasons Given for Exposure to Propaganda Broadcasts (percentage of positive responses)

Reasons Given	Three Weeks Before The Elections	One Week Before The Elections
To follow the race between parties	41	42
To decide on whom to vote for	22	24
To have something to argue with	27	27
To be in the know	50	51
To be entertained	52	49

week. Nevertheless, the viewing rate for all broadcasts declined from 56 to 49 percent, and in tandem the rate of those responding that they did not watch the electoral propaganda broadcasts rose from 17 to 26 percent in the last week prior to the election.

Previous studies propose that cognitive needs, which are embedded in the thirst for knowledge, constitute the most prevalent incentive for the public exposure to broadcasts (Caspi, 1984). With the passing of years, this motivation has attenuated, and this is due, in no small measure, to the changing style of the broadcasts. Concomitantly over the course of time, affective and entertainment needs have strengthened. This too can be seen as the influence of the tactics of placing entertainers and artists in the electoral broadcasts.

This time the interviewees were requested to evaluate positively or negatively each of five different motivations. The findings of table 6.4 again reveal a consistency between the two surveys conducted during the course of the election campaign. Half of those interviewed confirmed that they exposed themselves to electoral broadcasts in order to be entertained or to be "in the know."

The known "horse-race" motive, "to follow the competition between the parties," emerged as the third most frequent. Only every fourth interviewee mentioned one of the two additional motives: "to have something to argue with in a political debate" or "to formulate an opinion on whom to vote for," which expresses a need for guidance.

The Influence of Electoral Propaganda Broadcasts

The issue of the propaganda influence was and is apparently doomed to remain an example of the limited ability of empirical research. The questions regarding the degree of influence that electoral propaganda broadcasts and electoral propaganda in general exert on the voter recur continuously. In the absence of an indisputable conclusion, the issue continues to feed discussions and disputes, and this is true of Israel as well. In Israel, especially, the issue is fueled by the high cost of the propaganda. The involvement of professionals and the technological innovations jack up the costs of the electoral broadcasts. If, indeed, electoral propaganda exerts so modest an influence upon the voter, what is the need to expend, seemingly profligately, such financial resources, particularly in a poor society such as Israel?

The surveys data again fail to provide an unambiguous answer that will settle the debate between the skeptics and the adherents of electoral propaganda. Furthermore, each of the two sides can draw encouragement from findings that sustain its position.

The skeptics can draw encouragement from a confirmation of the long familiar pattern. Most voters testify that they have decided how to vote even before the campaign opens. The findings of table 6.5 reconfirm once again that old verity: an election campaign influences, if at all, solely a minority of the voting public, which formulates its preference during the campaign, and even this is difficult to demonstrate.

Most of the voters, about three-fourths in both 1988 polls and two-thirds in the 1981 polls, acknowledged that they had made up their minds in the pre-campaign stages, at least three to six months preceding the election. Similar to the figure of the 1981 pre-election poll, only about 10 percent noted that they had decided on a list only during the last month of the 1988 campaign, similar to the figure of the 1981 pre-election poll. In the survey taken after the 10th Knesset election, up to a third of the voters admitted that they decided on it during the last period of the campaign.

A comparison of the data from the five surveys in table 6.6 indicates to us that the picture of the 1988 Knesset election was essentially similar to the 1981 election. As election day approached, the "waiverers" contracted and the political conviction was renewed: 14 percent expressed a month before the 1981 elections that they were absolutely uncertain on their vote, but this number dropped to 5 percent after two weeks. Moreover, the number of

Table 6.5:
Timing of the Decision on Whom to vote for In the Two Election Campaigns of 1981 and 1988 (in percentages)

When Did You Decide Whom To Vote For?	1981 Election Time of Survey		1988 Election Time of Survey	
	Two Weeks Before the Elections	Six Weeks Following the Elections	Three Weeks Before the Elections	One Week Before the Elections
half a year ago	58	64	72	69
three months ago	7	—	5	7
a month ago	5	15	4	3
one to two weeks ago	3	10	2	2
during the last days	4	11	5	5
has not decided/ will not	23	—	12	14
Total %	100	100	100	100
N	554	597	620	508
Total % deciding during last days	7	11	7	10

Table 6.6:
The Firmness of the Electoral Preferences in 1981 and 1988 Election Campaigns (in percentages)

Are You Certain Whom You Are Voting For?	1981 Election Time of Survey		1988 Election Time of Survey		
	One Month Before the Elections	Two Weeks Before the Elections	Ten Weeks Before the Elections	Three Weeks Before the Elections	One Week Before the Elections
absolutely certain	42	59	45	54	58
certain	25	16	19	19	14
not quite certain	20	18	21	21	24
absolutely uncertain	14	8	15	6	5
Total %	100	100	100	100	100
N	554	554	1,196	520	508
% with uncertain electoral preference	34	26	36	27	29

respondents who were firmly decided to support any list rose during the same period from 42 percent to 59 percent. A similar pattern is observed in the 1988 election: as the election day advanced, the number of voters who were absolutely uncertain rose from 45 percent ten weeks before to 54 percent and 58 percent in the last weeks of the campaign. Consequently, the number of the undecided voters diminished from 15 percent to 5 percent.

Those skeptical of campaign effectiveness will undoubtedly contend that agonizing is a luxury to be enjoyed between elections. However, as election day draws near, the citizen must make decisions which usually are independent of electoral propaganda. Nevertheless, it is a plausible assumption, based also on the data in table 6.4, that quite a few are aided by the electoral propaganda in formulating their electoral preference. The number rises a bit in the survey near election day and more after the campaign is over. After the 1981 election one-third of the voters acknowledged that they made up their minds during the last campaign weeks (table 6.5).

In both 1988 surveys women (24 percent and 29 percent in the second poll), people without higher education (28 percent of the respondents with up to 12 years education and 30 percent of those with up to eight years education, respectively), young people below age 35 (30 percent of the 30–34-years group in the first poll and 28 percent of those below 30 years in the second poll), those born in Muslim countries (30 percent in the second poll), and those born in Israel to parents immigrated from Asia and Africa (35 percent in the second poll), somewhat frequently report of exposure to broadcasts "in order to decide whom to vote for."

The "skeptics" will remain adamant and will point to the responses obtained when the issue of the influence of propaganda broadcasts was examined directly. A vast four-fifths majority reconfirmed what their colleagues had already voiced in the past, namely, that the broadcasts were neither a help to them nor a hindrance. The remaining one-fifth divides nearly evenly between two responses, with only 11 percent prepared to concede that the propaganda broadcasts aided them in formulating their decision.

On this point the "adherents" of electoral propaganda can draw encouragement from the beliefs of various strata who presumably parallel the twin profiles of exposure to propaganda broadcasts. Precisely, young people after military service (24 percent) and Israelis born of Sepharadic parents (17 percent) responded more than others that the propaganda broadcasts aided

them. The elderly, who are chronic viewers, are niggardly in expressing their appreciation of the personal contribution of the broadcasts: only 3–5 percent of the respondents above 55 claimed that the political broadcasts aided them in deciding whom to vote for.

This finding hints to a possible differentiation between two main social groups both with respect to uses and gratifications of propaganda broadcasts: the "challengers strata" versus the "challenged strata." The first group, delineated by a low socioeconomic profile, is basically composed of young voters, women, and sepharadim and their children, whereas the latter group, characterized by a higher sociological profile, is mainly composed of the men, Israeli-born of Ashenazic parents, and the middle-aged.

It is precisely the "challengers," whose integrative needs are apparently stronger, that frequently report exposure in order to follow the race and get to know the parties and their candidates. These are the same people who frequently appreciate the propaganda broadcasts and their contribution in facilitating a decision on how to vote. In contrast, the "challenged strata" more frequently note that they had already decided how to vote and more frequently quoted the entertainment motive as well as the cognitive motive in explaining their exposure to election broadcasts.

Conclusions

Any encounter between the voters and the candidates during an election campaign invariably leaves a residue and imparts several lessons. The present findings regarding the 12th Knesset campaign can at the least shed light on four principal aspects of such an encounter.

First, the influence of electoral propaganda has always been the central and substantive issue of each electoral campaign. Presumably this issue will for a long time pose a research challenge and serve as a topic for intellectual and public discussions.

Indeed, the present data can attest that the propaganda broadcast has a not negligible effect. From this standpoint the political marketing industry can draw encouragement and receive additional confirmation for its raison d'être and the part it plays in the election campaign and election propaganda. According to the present data, it appears that precisely the "challengers" derive benefit from the electoral propaganda. In contrast, the "challenged" strata may have alternative sources of communication that diminish their dependence on broadcast electoral propaganda.

Second, even if the electoral propaganda appears to be a vital and inseparable part of the election campaign in Israel, a number of questions arise regarding the accepted formats of broadcast political propaganda. After six televised election campaigns, a degree of routinization is evident in the public's exposure to broadcast electoral propaganda. As stated, the election broadcasts have lost quite a bit of their initial magic and have undergone an erosion typical of other broadcasting formats.

Faced with this trend, the politicians and their propagandists may have to reevaluate the format of electoral propaganda. Especially, they may have to refresh the format of broadcast electoral propaganda. This pressing need may grow in future election campaigns in line with the projected changes in the monopolistic structure of the broadcast media. The initiation of unconventional media events can serve to reengage the attention of listeners and viewers to the election broadcasts.

Third, an evaluation of the general influence and efficiency of the formats accentuates questions regarding the position of the

more than a quarter of the interviewees were satisfied with the place accorded to what they deemed the most important issue in the electoral advertisements. In a poll conducted three weeks prior to the elections, about 40 percent expressed the evaluation that the security issue was the most important one and deserved to be the centerpiece of the election campaign. An additional 25 percent named peace or the future of the territories as issues fitting for the electoral agenda, and another 16 percent preferred to view the revitalization of the economy as the paramount issue.

Fourth, the election campaign for the 12th Knesset and its results restored general and research interest in interpersonal communication. The professionalization of electoral propaganda attracts attention on mass media in particular. However, the electoral success of the Haredi parties restores our awareness of the status and importance of interpersonal communications in Israeli society and particularly in politics. This assessment is especially applicable given the survival of both significant traits of a traditional society and enclaves populated by many traditional commu-

data banks, a measure that provoked certain ethical dilemmas concerning confidentiality and the right to privacy.

On the occasion of both surveys, in August and three weeks prior to the elections, we examined the extent to which interpersonal communications were employed, and the results were modest. Even on the basis of the few responses received, one is impressed by the increasing scope of interpersonal communication, which doubled between the two periods: 16 percent in August and 32 percent in October responded that they were exposed to such communications (see table 6.3). In the two surveys most of the interpersonal contacts reported involved friends, acquaintances, and neighbors, 7 percent in the first survey and 20 percent in the second. Party officials took second place with 6 percent and 8 percent respectively.

Finally, whoever wants to influence others and believes in his ability must allow himself to be influenced by others. Whoever exploits scientific knowledge in the professional conduct of election campaigns must respect findings even if they are liable to clash with the basic assumptions that direct his work.

Despite the monopolistic structure of the communications media, and despite the reservation of peak viewing time for the election advertisements, the routine format and the propaganda strategy that emphasized the personal aspects did not realize the potential for influence. The present findings have again revealed the importance of the ideological factor in the eyes of the Israeli voter. The personal aspects do not predominate in the voters' deliberations, even among those voters who acknowledged their being influenced. The ideological factor and the way problems of existence were treated proved decisive to the Israeli voters.

A large portion of those exposed to propaganda broadcasts criticized the agenda of the electoral propaganda. True, the "weak strata" house a vast latent potential in terms of susceptibility to electoral propaganda. Professional propagandists seeking to implant concepts that have proved themselves in other political cultures are liable to miss the mark and shape, probably, an alienating encounter between the voters and their candidates.

The present findings of the research obligate the professional propagandists to reevaluate their traditional concepts. It seems that one must conduct the election campaign in Israel by addressing the essential issues on the national agenda in a business-like manner. This will satisfy the varied need of the voters, i.e., not only the "challengers' " integrative needs within society but the diffuse cognitive needs of other segments of the public.

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