

## CHAPTER 1

# Two Reversals: Why 1992 Was Not 1977

ASHER ARIAN

City University of New York and University of Haifa  
and

MICHAL SHAMIR

Tel Aviv University

### I. Introduction

Israeli voters have only twice changed the party in power at the polls, once in 1977 and again in 1992. The first time, the dominant Labor Party lost power to the Likud as Labor hemorrhaged from self-inflicted wounds and lost votes to the reformist Democratic Movement for Change, on the one hand, and to the Likud, on the other.<sup>1</sup> In 1992, the shift was less complex and numerically smaller, but the potential political impact was just as large, as the Likud lost its fifteen-year lease on power to Labor.

Motifs of the 1992 elections had been encountered before: an enormous number of new voters were added to the rolls through immigration, this time from the former Soviet Union; the party in power engineered for itself an electoral loss of major proportions, and Yitzhak Rabin became prime minister again after his first appointment in 1974, as Labor came back to power. In both 1977 and 1992, the combination of a ruling party in retreat and social and economic turmoil set the stage for the transfer of power. In both cases a significant number of voters abandoned the party in power; and

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these votes were dispersed to other parties on the same side of the political divide or to parties in the other camp.

We shall specify the factors that accompanied these transitions. Like others who have attempted to account for electoral change, we shall focus on "evolving social and attitudinal structures" (Franklin et al., 1992). The comparison of 1992 with 1977 will provide a temporal base for assessing the meaning of the 1992 election; in the concluding section, these results will be considered in a broader comparative and theoretical perspective.

## II. The Arithmetic of Reversal

The arithmetic of the elections indicates that there were some 330,000 valid votes more in 1992 than in 1988, an increase of 14.6 percent (see table 1.1). Although there was a large increase in the number of voters, the Likud vote decreased in both the relative and the absolute senses. Compared with that of 1988, the 1992 Likud vote decreased by 8 percent, from 709,305 to 651,229, reducing the party's parliamentary delegation from 40 seats in 1988 to 32 seats in 1992. Labor's delegation, on the other hand, grew from 39 to 44 seats, as its vote total swelled by a third, from 685,363 votes in 1988 to 906,810 votes in 1992. Labor's percentage of the vote grew faster than the electorate, as its percentage of the vote grew by fifteen points between 1988 and 1992. The left-wing Meretz vote grew handsomely by almost 30 percent, and its Knesset representation increased from ten to twelve members. The total increase of votes for religious parties was only 3.2 percent, since these parties were unable to make inroads with the new, secular immigrant voting stock. Tzomet, on the right, registered an amazing 265 percent increase compared with 1988 and had its delegation to the Knesset grow from two to eight seats.

On the whole, the parties of the left outdid the parties of the right. Voters for left-wing parties (Labor, Meretz, and the Arab lists) totalled 1,284,992 voters. Parties of the right (Likud, Tzomet, Moledet, and three parties of the right that did not achieve the minimum 1.5 percent needed for representation) won 928,380 votes. Including in the right the National Religious Party (first and foremost a religious party, but which positioned itself to the right of the Likud), the total for the right would be 1,058,043 votes. Adding to this total the two ultraorthodox parties, we obtain 1,273,557 for the right-wing religious bloc combined, very close to the total left vote. More votes for parties that failed to win representation were registered for the right wing than for the left wing.

In terms of seats won, the left bloc had a slight edge of 61:59 over the right-wing/religious bloc. This hardly qualified as a landslide for the left, or for Labor. The previous Knesset, elected in 1988, split 55:65 along these lines. Labor with its 44 seats of 120 in 1992 was as large as it was in 1984 and

**Table 1.1. Votes and Seats for Labor and Likud, 1988–1992**

|                        | Valid Votes | Labor       | Likud       |
|------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| 1988                   | 2,283,123   | 685,363     | 709,305     |
| 1992                   | 2,616,841   | 906,810     | 651,229     |
| Increase over 1988 (%) | 14.6        | 32.3        | -8.2        |
|                        |             | Labor seats | Likud seats |
| 1988                   |             | 39          | 40          |
| 1992                   |             | 44          | 32          |
| Increase over 1988 (%) |             | 12.8        | -20.0       |

*Note:* See note 1 at the end of this chapter.

**Table 1.2. Votes and Seats for Labor and Likud, 1973–1977**

|                        | Valid Votes | Labor       | Likud       |
|------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| 1973                   | 1,566,855   | 621,183     | 473,309     |
| 1977                   | 1,747,820   | 430,023     | 583,968     |
| Increase over 1973 (%) | 11.5        | -30.8       | 23.4        |
|                        |             | Labor seats | Likud seats |
| 1973                   |             | 51          | 39          |
| 1977                   |             | 32          | 43          |
| Increase over 1973 (%) |             | -37.3       | 10.3        |

*Note:* See note 1 at the end of this chapter.

3 seats smaller than its 1981 strength. Furthermore, more Israeli Jews voted for the right-wing/religious bloc than for the left bloc. The total of the parties of the left was bigger than the right and religious only in conjunction with the votes of Israeli Arabs.

In 1977, the Democratic Movement for Change (DMC) took away so many votes from Labor that the Likud emerged as the largest party, ushering in an era dominated by Menachem Begin and Yitzhak Shamir that lasted until 1992. Labor's loss of votes in 1977 (more than 30 percent of its 1973 total) was even larger than was the Likud loss in 1992 (see table 1.2). The Likud in 1977 increased its total vote over 1973 by almost a quarter. When the growth of the electorate is factored in, the Likud increased its proportion of the vote by 10 percent, while Labor's decreased by almost 40 percent.

Table 1.3 reveals the patterns of voting in 1992 based on the 1988 vote of the respondents.<sup>2</sup> In total, some 68 percent of the sample reported stable voting between the two time periods. This rate was similar to the 1973 elec-

tions, higher than the 50 percent rate in 1977, but lower than the usual rate of 75 percent in Israeli elections recorded in 1969, 1981, 1984, and 1988, as discussed by Arian (1989) and Zuckerman (1990). Table 1.3 reflects the grim performance of the Likud: in the prevote poll, a third of the sample reported voting for Likud in 1988, but only a quarter reported that they were committed to doing so in 1992. Moreover, of those who reported voting for the Likud in 1988, only about 60 percent (19 percent of 32 percent) said they would do so again in 1992.

Labor did better, jumping from 23 percent to 30 percent for the vote totals and retaining 84 percent (19 percent of 23 percent) of its 1988 contingent. Not only was Labor's retention rate much more impressive, the percentage that had yet to decide about 1992 among former Likud voters was much higher (15 percent) than for Labor (7 percent). Likud lost large shares to Labor and to the parties of the right, while Labor lost much smaller fractions to the left and to the right and almost nothing to the Likud.

Based on these data, Labor won about half of its increased support from new voters and half from Likud voters. Of the votes that the Likud lost, about half went to Labor and half to parties of the right. It is reasonable to estimate that Labor won one hundred thousand votes from new immigrants and other first-time voters and another hundred thousand votes from people who had voted Likud in 1988. Anticipating the analysis that will follow, we can note that sixty-five thousand of the former Likud voters were Sephardim! The key to Labor's 1992 electoral success was in prying enough of these voters away from the Likud, after failing to do so throughout the 1980s. To this important topic we shall return.

In 1977 the rate of voting turnover was even higher. Most of the change was among those who had supported the Labor-Mapam Alignment in 1973 (see table 1.4). The Alignment was the 1973 choice of 37 percent of the 1977 sample, but fell to less than 20 percent. Of those who reported voting Alignment in 1973, only 40 percent (15 percent of 37 percent) reported that they would repeat in 1977. More than a third of former Alignment voters had yet to decide on their 1977 vote or were not about to tell a pollster whom they had just met their party of choice; about 10 percent said they would vote Likud; and another 10 percent, the DMC. Based on a postelection survey described in Arian (1989, 163), we know that the DMC received two-thirds of its voters who had participated in the 1973 elections from the Alignment, and the Likud almost 30 percent of its 1977 vote from that source. The 1973 Likud voters remained more loyal, with some 15 percent undecided, another 13 percent supporting the DMC, and about 10 percent switching to the Labor Alignment.

First-time voters just coming of age and new immigrants are potential spoilers in electoral contests. Although they are only segments of larger

**Table 1.3. The 1992 Vote Choice by the 1988 Vote**

| 1988               | 1992 |       |           |       |       |           | Row Total |
|--------------------|------|-------|-----------|-------|-------|-----------|-----------|
|                    | Left | Labor | Religious | Likud | Right | No answer |           |
| <b>Left</b>        |      |       |           |       |       |           |           |
| Count ( <i>n</i> ) | 72   | 15    |           | 1     | 1     | 8         | 97        |
| Row (%)            | 74.2 | 15.5  |           | 1.0   | 1.0   | 8.2       | 8.2       |
| Column (%)         | 55.8 | 4.2   |           | .3    | .7    | 4.5       |           |
| Total (%)          | 6.0  | 1.3   |           | .1    | .1    | .7        |           |
| <b>Labor</b>       |      |       |           |       |       |           |           |
| Count ( <i>n</i> ) | 17   | 227   |           | 3     | 7     | 18        | 272       |
| Row (%)            | 6.3  | 83.5  |           | 1.1   | 2.6   | 6.6       | 22.8      |
| Column (%)         | 13.2 | 63.4  |           | 1.0   | 4.7   | 10.2      |           |
| Total (%)          | 1.4  | 19.0  |           | .3    | .6    | 1.5       |           |
| <b>Religious</b>   |      |       |           |       |       |           |           |
| Count ( <i>n</i> ) |      | 2     | 52        | 10    | 7     | 9         | 80        |
| Row (%)            |      | 2.5   | 65.0      | 12.5  | 8.8   | 11.3      | 6.8       |
| Column (%)         |      | .6    | 64.2      | 3.3   | 4.7   | 5.1       |           |
| Total (%)          |      | .2    | 4.4       | .8    | .6    | .8        |           |
| <b>Likud</b>       |      |       |           |       |       |           |           |
| Count ( <i>n</i> ) | 6    | 44    | 10        | 227   | 40    | 56        | 383       |
| Row (%)            | 1.6  | 11.5  | 2.6       | 59.3  | 10.4  | 14.6      | 32.1      |
| Column (%)         | 4.7  | 12.3  | 12.3      | 75.9  | 27.0  | 31.6      |           |
| Total (%)          | .5   | 3.7   | .8        | 19.0  | 3.4   | 4.7       |           |
| <b>Right</b>       |      |       |           |       |       |           |           |
| Count ( <i>n</i> ) | 2    | 7     | 2         | 11    | 48    | 6         | 76        |
| Row (%)            | 2.6  | 9.2   | 2.6       | 14.5  | 63.2  | 7.9       | 6.4       |
| Column (%)         | 1.6  | 2.0   | 2.5       | 3.7   | 32.4  | 3.4       |           |
| Total (%)          | .2   | .6    | .2        | .9    | 4.0   | .5        |           |
| <b>No vote</b>     |      |       |           |       |       |           |           |
| Count ( <i>n</i> ) | 30   | 57    | 16        | 41    | 44    | 48        | 236       |
| Row (%)            | 12.7 | 24.2  | 6.8       | 17.4  | 18.6  | 20.3      | 19.7      |
| Column (%)         | 23.3 | 15.9  | 19.8      | 13.7  | 29.7  | 27.1      |           |
| Total (%)          | 2.5  | 4.8   | 1.3       | 3.4   | 3.7   | 4.0       |           |
| <b>No answer</b>   |      |       |           |       |       |           |           |
| Count ( <i>n</i> ) | 2    | 6     | 1         | 6     | 1     | 32        | 48        |
| Row (%)            | 4.2  | 12.5  | 2.1       | 12.5  | 2.1   | 66.7      | 4.1       |
| Column (%)         | 1.6  | 1.7   | 1.2       | 2.0   | .7    | 18.1      |           |
| Total (%)          | .2   | .5    | .1        | .5    | .1    | 2.7       |           |
| Column Total       | 129  | 358   | 81        | 299   | 148   | 177       | 1192      |
| Total              | 10.8 | 30.1  | 6.8       | 25.0  | 12.5  | 14.9      | 100.1*    |

*Note:* Based on preelection June 1992 survey; stable choices set italics.

\* Total does not equal 100 percent due to rounding

**Table 1.4. The 1977 Vote Choice by the 1973 Vote**

| 1973             | 1977  |       |      |           |       | No answer | Row Total |
|------------------|-------|-------|------|-----------|-------|-----------|-----------|
|                  | Likud | Labor | DMC  | Religious | Other |           |           |
| <b>Likud</b>     |       |       |      |           |       |           |           |
| Count (n)        | 59    | 9     | 13   | 2         | 1     | 16        | 100       |
| Row (%)          | 59.0  | 9.0   | 13.0 | 2.0       | 1.0   | 16.0      | 20.7      |
| Column (%)       | 56.2  | 9.4   | 26.0 | 5.6       | 5.9   | 8.8       |           |
| Total (%)        | 12.2  | 1.9   | 2.7  | .4        | .2    | 3.3       |           |
| <b>Labor</b>     |       |       |      |           |       |           |           |
| Count (n)        | 21    | 73    | 18   |           | 4     | 65        | 181       |
| Row (%)          | 11.6  | 40.3  | 9.9  |           | 2.2   | 35.9      | 37.3      |
| Column (%)       | 20.0  | 76.0  | 36.0 |           | 23.5  | 35.9      |           |
| Total (%)        | 9.3   | 15.1  | 3.7  |           | .8    | 13.4      |           |
| <b>Religious</b> |       |       |      |           |       |           |           |
| Count (n)        | 3     |       |      | 29        |       | 5         | 37        |
| Row (%)          | 8.1   |       |      | 78.4      |       | 13.5      | 7.6       |
| Column (%)       | 2.9   |       |      | 80.6      |       | 2.8       |           |
| Total (%)        | .6    |       |      | 6.0       |       | 1.0       |           |
| <b>Other</b>     |       |       |      |           |       |           |           |
| Count (n)        | 2     | 6     | 10   | 2         | 10    | 10        | 40        |
| Row (%)          | 5.0   | 15.0  | 25.0 | 5.0       | 25.0  | 25.0      | 8.3       |
| Column (%)       | 1.9   | 6.3   | 20.0 | 5.6       | 58.8  | 5.5       |           |
| Total (%)        | .4    | 1.2   | 2.1  | .4        | 2.1   | 2.1       |           |
| <b>No vote</b>   |       |       |      |           |       |           |           |
| Count (n)        | 17    | 8     | 8    | 2         | 2     | 35        | 72        |
| Row (%)          | 23.6  | 11.1  | 11.1 | 2.8       | 2.8   | 48.6      | 14.7      |
| Column (%)       | 16.2  | 8.3   | 16.0 | 5.6       | 11.8  | 19.3      |           |
| Total (%)        | 3.5   | 1.6   | 1.6  | .4        | .4    | 7.2       |           |
| <b>No answer</b> |       |       |      |           |       |           |           |
| Count (n)        | 3     |       | 1    | 1         |       | 50        | 55        |
| Row (%)          | 5.5   |       | 1.8  | 1.8       |       | 90.9      | 11.3      |
| Column (%)       | 2.9   |       | 2.0  | 2.8       |       | 27.6      |           |
| Total (%)        | .6    |       | .2   | .2        |       | 10.3      |           |
| Column           | 105   | 96    | 50   | 36        | 17    | 181       | 485       |
| Total            | 21.6  | 19.8  | 10.3 | 7.4       | 3.5   | 37.3      | 99.9*     |

Note: Based on preelection May 1977 survey; stable votes set italics.

\* Total does not equal 100 percent due to rounding.

samples, the differences between the findings of tables 1.3 and 1.4 regarding the new voters are indicative of larger differences between these elections. The general impression from the 1992 results (see table 1.3) is how similar the behavior of the new voters was to the overall pattern followed by veteran voters. Those who reported not voting in 1988 made up a fifth of the sample, and as a group they supported Labor more heavily than the Likud, and the right more strongly than the left. Adding Labor and left together and Likud and right together provided an almost even split; they were only slightly more undecided or reticent in answering questions about voting preferences than was the sample as a whole.

These results hide differences between the group of young first-time voters and the new immigrants. The immigrants were much more likely to prefer Labor over Likud, whereas the youngsters split more evenly among them. The young first-time voters who were not immigrants voted much more than did the new immigrants for the small—left and right—parties. The immigrants split about equally between these left and right parties, while the first-time voters who were not immigrants favored the small right over the small left parties. Adding Likud with right-wing parties on the one hand, and Labor with left on the other, the results show that the right had a small advantage among the nonimmigrant first-time voters, and the left had a big advantage among the immigrants. But a comparison of the electoral preferences of the young first-time voters in 1992 with their counterparts in the 1970s and 1980s shows change in the same direction as the aggregate results. As was the case with other voters, the rate of support for the Likud dropped for nonimmigrant first-time voters, and their preference for right over left decreased as well. The new immigrants accentuated these trends, but in effect they reflected more than created them.

The 1977 picture was very different (see table 1.4). An astounding half of the new voters (mostly nonimmigrants) did not answer the voting question. New voters who did reply supported the Likud more strongly than did the total sample, and they went for Labor at a rate only half as large as the general population. About a quarter of those who did not vote in 1973 supported the Likud in 1977, with 10 percent or more each going to the DMC and Labor. New voters led the reversal in 1977; in 1992 they were part of it along with many others.

### **III. Issues and Demography**

When we move beyond the arithmetic of reversals and probe the sources of electoral change, attention turns to issues and sociodemographic factors (Franklin et al. 1992; Dalton et al. 1984). In order to get a broader perspective of the changes that have occurred, we will examine these factors since

the 1969 elections—the first election after the Six Days war of 1967—and not only for 1977 and 1992.

Political homogeneity of groups in the Israeli population increased from the 1970s through 1984 in terms of ethnicity, social-class indicators, and religiosity, and this process was interpreted as an indication of a realignment process in the electorate (Shamir 1986, 272–75). This same analysis also established the growing electoral importance of the territories issue over time. Extending the analysis to the 1988 and 1992 elections seems to indicate that the role of demographic factors has receded since 1984 while the role of issues has continued to be high.

Table 1.5 presents the correlations between the Labor/Likud vote and various demographic and issue variables.<sup>3</sup> Inspecting table 1.4 along the columns, it is apparent that the twin issues of God and nationalism, always good predictors of the vote, have become more powerful over the years. For these issues, 1977 and 1992 do not stand out as critical years in the time series. On the state/religion issue, the trend of increasing correlations is smooth over time. The identification of Labor as an anticlerical party has strengthened, while the Likud has played to the traditional sympathies of much of its voting base, even though the origins and ideology of the Likud are very secular, as Liebman and Don-Yehiya (1983) showed.

On the territories issue, the trend of growing correlations is less smooth, with the critical election being 1984, the one following the war in Lebanon and the first one with Shamir replacing Begin as the head of the Likud. Since 1984, the correlations of the territories issue with the vote have been very high and of similar magnitude.<sup>4</sup> Over time, Labor has more unambiguously identified itself as the territories-for-peace party, and the platform of Labor has become less vague on this issue. The public perception of the difference between these two parties on the territories issue did not change much; almost two-thirds of the respondents in the 1981, 1984, and 1992 surveys thought that these differences were big or very big. Yet 1992 was different from previous elections in that many more voters said that the territories would be an important consideration in their voting decision. Of our 1992 sample, 52 percent said that the issue of the territories would very greatly influence their vote; less than a third said this in previous elections. Adding the next category of response, 81 percent said in 1992 that it would influence them greatly or very greatly; 63 percent responded thus in previous elections.

The correlations between the vote and the classical economic cleavage between capitalism and socialism do not follow a clear pattern over time. They were strongest in 1984 and 1988. In 1992 there was no relationship whatsoever between voters' position on this question and their preference for Likud or Labor. We will return to this point shortly.



**Table 1.5. Correlations between Likud/Labor Vote and Demographic Variables and Issues, 1969–1992**

| Survey <sup>a</sup> | (N)   | Demographic Data |        |         |           |        |          |           | Issues                   |                        |            |
|---------------------|-------|------------------|--------|---------|-----------|--------|----------|-----------|--------------------------|------------------------|------------|
|                     |       | Age              | Gender | Density | Education | Income | Religion | Ethnicity | Territories <sup>b</sup> | Socialist <sup>c</sup> | Capitalist |
| Oct. 1969           | 1,017 | .17              | (.05)  | .07     | (.00)     | (-.04) | .08      | .13       | -.15                     | .23                    | .12        |
| May 1973            | 1,062 | .27              | (.01)  | .15     | (-.02)    | (-.01) | (.04)    | .13       | -.23                     | .17                    | .17        |
| Mar. 1977           | 620   | .29              | (-.03) | .18     | (.01)     | (.06)  | .18      | .32       | -.28                     | .22                    | .17        |
| Mar. 1981           | 798   | .13              | (.06)  | .07     | .09       | (.00)  | .19      | .23       | -.27                     | .16                    | .20        |
| July 1984           | 807   | .20              | (-.03) | .25     | .22       | .08    | .37      | .53       | -.57                     | .32                    | .24        |
| Oct. 1988           | 532   | .16              | (.04)  | .09     | .15       | (.01)  | .27      | .27       | -.61                     | .30                    | .24        |
| June 1992           | 657   | .10              | (.07)  | .13     | .24       | (-.02) | .40      | .35       | -.57                     | (.05)                  | .29        |

Notes: Pearson correlations, significant above the .05 level, except those in parentheses. See note 3.

The coding for these correlations was Likud = 1, Labor = 2. Low scores for the other variables indicate young age, female, sephardi, high density, low income, low education, high religiosity, willingness to concede territories for peace, favoring capitalism over socialism, and favoring public life in accordance with Jewish religious law, respectively.

<sup>a</sup> Preelection surveys used. In years for which multiple surveys were available, the one that contained the most variables used in the table was chosen.

<sup>b</sup> Before 1984, a question concerning the maximum amount of territory Israel should give up in order to achieve a peace settlement. In 1984 and after, constructed from two questions, the first asking preference between return of territories for peace, annexation, or status quo, and a follow-up question forcing a choice of those who chose the "status quo" option. See note 4, and Arian 1992.

<sup>c</sup> The question asked about preference for the socialist or capitalist approach. The 1973 question asked if the Histadrut labor union should both own industries and represent workers.

<sup>d</sup> The question asked whether the government should see to it that public life in Israel be conducted according to the Jewish religious tradition.

Focusing now on 1977 and 1992, we note that the correlations in table 1.5 provide important clues as to the nature of these two electoral reversals. Age has had a consistent relationship with vote, with the young somewhat more likely to vote Likud and the old, Labor. This relationship has been generally regarded as indicating generation rather than life-cycle effects (Abramson 1990). Yet it is important to note that this correlation peaked in 1977 (and 1973) and reached its recorded nadir in 1992. The 1977 reversal was led by the young: youth abandoned Labor for the promises of the Likud or the DMC. In 1992 the Likud was forsaken by both the young and the old. Even though young voters were more attracted by the right (see table 1.5), it is also true that Labor was more successful than in the past in attracting voters across generations.

Gender has never been related to vote choice in Israeli surveys, and it played no role in either of the two electoral reversals. Class differences mattered to a degree, although the correlations were not consistent, and not very strong. There was usually no relationship between the Likud/Labor vote and income, but the income variable is not the best measure of class in Israel, as it is the kind of topic an Israeli is unlikely to discuss in an open manner with an interviewer-stranger. Two other measures of class, living density (the number of persons per room) and education, tell a different story.

Class differences appeared with the reversal of 1977, with lower-class voters abandoning Labor in favor of the Likud. Voters' education level gained in importance after 1981, with the return to Labor of more highly educated voters who had deserted for the DMC in 1977. This process of class stratification continued in the 1980s and was still in evidence in 1992, although over time the education variable was stronger than the living-density indicator. But based on the nonconsistent and not too strong correlations of the vote with class indicators, combined with the pattern of correlations between the vote and the socialist versus capitalistic views, the class cleavage does not seem to be the driving force behind electoral choice and change in Israel. Note that in 1992 there was virtually no relationship between voters' preferences as to the structure of the economy and their vote, and in 1977 the correlation was of the same magnitude as throughout the seventies. Moreover, we read the responses to this question more as an indicator of whether or not a voter belongs to the camp of socialism-Zionism socially, politically and culturally, than as one of ideological commitment. And class is not the most potent correlate of the vote in Israel.

Ethnicity and religiosity are much stronger correlates of the vote. For both, 1977 was the critical election year. Before 1977, both dimensions barely distinguished Labor voters from Likud voters. In 1977, they both became important. Religiosity gained in importance over time, reaching an all-time

high in the 1992 election. The relationship between ethnicity and the vote reached its highest point in the 1984 election, and it has receded since.

For the two reversal elections, 1977 and 1992, both sociodemographic factors and issue concerns were important, but their impact was very different. To summarize their respective roles, we calculated multiple regressions for each year to explain the Likud/Labor vote with blocs of explanatory variables of sociodemographics and of issues (all appearing in table 1.5).<sup>5</sup> We used stepwise regression in the following way: We defined two blocs of variables, one including the sociodemographic variables, the other including the three issue variables. We then computed two stepwise regressions, entering once the sociodemographic bloc first, and once the issue bloc first.

We were better able to account for the vote in 1992 than in 1977 with these variables (the total  $R^2$  for 1992 was .37, and for 1977 it was .22). But more importantly, issues were dominant in the explanation of the 1992 vote to a much greater degree than were the sociodemographic characteristics of the voters. When coming first in the regression, issues "explained" 30 percent of the variance of the vote in 1992; sociodemographics accounted for 18 percent when they came first. In the full regression, the territories question had the strongest impact as measured by beta (.46); the other variables that achieved statistical significance were age, ethnic background, religiosity, and whether the respondent supported socialism or capitalism, with betas that ranged between .09 and .19.

The 1977 results were exactly the opposite: the  $R^2$  for the bloc of sociodemographics alone was .18, compared to .11 for issues alone. In 1977 demography carried the weight, although the additional effect of the territories issue cannot be denied. In the full 1977 regression, three variables were statistically significant, with age, territories, and ethnicity each having betas around .20.

Ethnicity has been a very important theme of the first two generations of Israeli independence and has occupied a major place in social science studies of Israeli society and politics (see Shamir and Arian 1982; Smooha 1987; Diskin 1991). The 1977 reversal and the ascent of the Likud and the right in Israeli politics have been attributed by many to the ethnic cleavage. We therefore wish to expand somewhat on this theme.

The social and political tension between Ashkenazim and Sephardim referred to as the "ethnic issue" emerged from the imbalances occasioned by the dominant community of European background in new-born Israel absorbing hundreds of thousands of immigrants from Asia and Africa in the years after independence in 1948. The terms themselves are related to different ritual practices and usage adopted by scattered Jewish communities, but they have been used to distinguish Jews of European origin from those stemming from North Africa and the Middle East. The Ashkenazi/Sephardi terms are

very problematic and imprecise. Thus, for example, many Jewish communities of southern Europe were Sephardim, while communities in the eastern Mediterranean, India, Yemen, and Ethiopia could not appropriately be put in either category. Especially in the last half of the twentieth century, flourishing Sephardi communities have been established in the Americas and conspicuously in France. On the other hand, Ashkenazim lived in Egypt and China. Regardless of the misleading impression incorporated in the terms, this Sephardi/Ashkenazi division became part of the political reality of Israel and has emerged as a major theme in Israeli politics.

The theme, however, while still important, has changed. To begin with, the proportions of the groups in the population have changed over time. In 1977, the majority (53 percent) of the electorate was Ashkenazi, 43 percent were Sephardi, and 4 percent were Israeli born with fathers also born in Israel. In the 1988 election, for the first time the Jews of Sephardi background outnumbered the Jews of Ashkenazi background in the electorate. In 1992, with the addition of many Ashkenazi voters in the mass immigration from the former Soviet Union, the proportions were 48 percent Ashkenazim, 44 percent Sephardim and 8 percent Israeli born whose fathers were also born in Israel.<sup>6</sup> As a larger percentage of Israeli Jews were native born, this cleavage became more distant. Consider as indicators that a majority of Israeli Jewish voters and 90 percent of Jewish children in Israeli elementary schools at the beginning of the 1990s were native born. They were exposed to a culture that downplayed—if it did not successfully alleviate—the disparities of these ethnic distinctions. The rate at which a member of one group married a member of the other group was a high and constant 20 percent. The number of children from these “mixed marriages” grew with the blurring of the terms heightened.

Beyond the label is the question of social and political meaning. While fading, the labels are still of enormous importance. The major political parties vied to recruit politicians who could be presented as authentic leaders of these groups, and by 1992, the lists of both Labor and the Likud featured impressive and almost equal numbers of Sephardi politicians. And yet, in spite of significant headway achieved by Sephardim in and through politics, equality in terms of actual power was not achieved.

Two telling incidents involving the ethnic theme occurred during the 1992 campaign. One involved David Levy, then foreign minister in the Likud government. When the convention of his party determined their candidates for the Knesset and their positions on the Likud list, Levy did poorly in this preelection politicking. He attributed this to ethnic discrimination and threatened to withdraw from the Likud and run on a separate list which would appeal to Likud voters of Moroccan descent. He was ultimately placated by being granted various concessions and promises, and he

remained on the Likud list, but the incident rekindled the animosities common to Israeli politics in the 1980s and raised the question whether ethnicity had faded as an issue.

The second episode took place in the non-Zionist ultraorthodox Haredi community. A venerated spiritual leader well into his nineties, Rabbi Eliezer Shach, pronounced that it was desirable to vote for the haredi-Ashkenazi United Torah list rather than for the haredi-Sephardi Shas list, because Sephardi leaders had not yet developed sufficient maturity to be entrusted with political power. Incensed, many of the devout Sephardi followers abandoned their rabbi and voted Shas, a list which met their desire to vote for an ultraorthodox party and satisfied their desire to identify with their slurred ethnic group. Perhaps Rabbi Shach had a correct theological point to make; his understanding of the social psychological correlates of electoral behavior in Israel—or most places—however, was imperfect.

Ethnicity matters in Israeli politics, just as it does in social spheres. Politicians of Sephardi background are more obvious in both big parties, although often in places lower on the electoral lists submitted by the parties, not in top positions. Ashkenazim still dominate much of the economy and bureaucracy, and while Sephardim are abundant in numbers, on the whole they are in positions of lower status. Stubborn facts of the reality of Israel in the early 1990s are that Ashkenazim continue to dominate in the two major parties, in the smaller parties of both right and left, and, more broadly, in other social institutions such as the media, the armed forces, and the universities, while Jews in Israeli jails are still overwhelmingly Sephardi, mostly North African, and especially Moroccans.

The ethnic cleavage manifested itself in voting behavior dramatically in the 1977 election when many voters abandoned their long-standing practice of supporting Labor. But they shifted largely along ethnic lines. Sephardim gravitated to the Likud, and Ashkenazim to the DMC. These two defections so weakened Labor that the Likud could take over the reins of power, resulting in the beginning of the Likud era of Israeli politics. In 1981 and 1984 many of the Ashkenazim were back with Labor; the campaigns were especially bitter and focused on the feelings of exploitation toward labor felt by many Sephardim. The ethnic vote was most pronounced in the 1984 elections, although the 1981 election campaign was most taken up with the ethnic cleavage.

As the proportion of Sephardim grew in the electorate, it was clear that Labor would always have an uphill battle regaining power until it could increase its share of the Sephardi vote. That shift occurred in 1992. The trend was not overwhelming, but the movement of Sephardim to Labor was substantial enough to provide the bounce that Labor needed to regain power. This transformation worked only because it occurred in conjunction

with two other things: the movement of other former supporters away from the Likud to parties of the right and the impetus given Labor by the new Soviet immigrants who supported it.

The ethnic bounce that Labor received is depicted in table 1.6. Of those born in Asia and Africa or whose fathers were born there, 26 percent reported that they had decided to vote Labor in 1992. This was slightly lower than the 1977 rate (29 percent), but the sheer numerical increase of the sephardi population made the net electoral increase dramatic. At the same time, the Likud's share of this group fell from 53 percent to 41 percent. So while it is accurate to report that the Likud still did much better among Sephardim than Labor did, the relative and absolute successes of Labor within this group must be considered to attain a complete picture. If we consider only Likud and Labor voters, Labor's share of the two-party vote was higher in 1992 than in 1977. Moreover, the comparison between 1977 and 1992 is incomplete in another sense as well. In all the elections since 1977 the share of the Labor vote among Sephardim continually decreased; only in 1992 did this share increase.

The group born in Israel whose fathers were also born in Israel is another important indicator of the fortunes of the parties. Likud was twenty percentage points less successful with these voters in 1992 than it was in 1977, while Labor's draw was nine points higher. To calculate the political significance of these figures, recall that the size of this group in the sample doubled in the course of these fifteen years. Labor in 1992 did best among the shrinking group of Ashkenazim (those who were born or whose fathers were born in Europe and America) at the rate of 47 percent of their vote, but Likud's support was minuscule at 16 percent.

Looked at the other way, by considering the contribution of each group to the electoral fortunes of the parties (see table 1.6), a fascinating picture emerges. Likud was more heavily Sephardi in 1992 than in 1977, with two-thirds of its votes coming from that group in 1992 compared with about one-half in 1977; Labor was much more balanced, with half of its voters Ashkenazim, one-third Sephardim, and the rest second-generation Israelis. The Likud came close to being left with only the hard core of its supporters, while Labor in 1992 was able to enlarge the circle of its voters.

The conclusions regarding other parties confirm many of the trends discussed above. Meretz did more than three times better among Ashkenazim and second-generation Israelis than among Sephardim, and the parties of the right were twice as popular among Sephardim than they were among Ashkenazim. The religious parties drew equally from all ethnic groups in 1992, very different from their 1977 pattern, which showed strong support among ashkenazim.

**Table 1.6. Ethnicity and Voting Behavior, 1977 and 1992**

|                    | Election | Birthplace of Respondent or Father |                   |                |
|--------------------|----------|------------------------------------|-------------------|----------------|
|                    |          | Asia or Africa                     | Europe or America | Both in Israel |
| Likud              | 1977     | 53*                                | 20                | 44             |
|                    | 1992     | 41                                 | 16                | 24             |
| Labor              | 1977     | 29                                 | 40                | 26             |
|                    | 1992     | 26                                 | 47                | 37             |
| DMC                | 1977     | 12                                 | 26                | 20             |
| Meretz             | 1992     | 6                                  | 20                | 18             |
| Right-wing parties | 1992     | 19                                 | 10                | 13             |
| Religious parties  | 1977     | 5                                  | 11                | 9              |
|                    | 1992     | 8                                  | 8                 | 8              |

\* Percentage of ethnic group reported to vote for each party; other vote choices not reported.

**Table 1.7. Ethnic Composition of Parties, 1977 and 1992**

|                    | Election | N   | Birthplace of Respondent or Father |                   |                |
|--------------------|----------|-----|------------------------------------|-------------------|----------------|
|                    |          |     | Asia or Africa                     | Europe or America | Both in Israel |
| Likud              | 1977     | 305 | 52*                                | 38                | 10             |
|                    | 1992     | 297 | 68                                 | 21                | 11             |
| Labor              | 1977     | 337 | 26                                 | 69                | 5              |
|                    | 1992     | 356 | 35                                 | 50                | 15             |
| DMC                | 1977     | 202 | 18                                 | 75                | 6              |
| Meretz             | 1992     | 129 | 23                                 | 57                | 19             |
| Right-wing parties | 1992     | 148 | 64                                 | 24                | 12             |
| Religious parties  | 1977     | 83  | 17                                 | 76                | 7              |
|                    | 1992     | 81  | 51                                 | 36                | 14             |

\* The percentage of the party's vote received from that ethnic group; percents sum horizontally.

Most of Meretz's support came from Ashkenazim; this was similar to the rate of support for the DMC, for which three of every four voters were from that group. Two-thirds of the voters for the parties of the right in 1992 were Sephardim. The most notable shift was for the religious parties. They successfully adapted to the demographic shifts in Israel after 1977. From a situation in which three quarters of their vote came from Ashkenazim, in 1992 half their vote was Sephardi, one-third was Ashkenazi, and one in seven



was a second-generation Israeli. The pattern of their support was almost identical to the distribution in the general population. This is a political achievement of enormous magnitude; had one of the large parties been able to achieve that distribution of appeal at a high level, its electoral victory would have been massive.

#### IV. Who Went Where?

An important determinant of the 1992 election result was the blunting of the high degree of support that Sephardim gave the Likud. As seen in table 1.5, the correlation between ethnicity and the Likud/Labor vote was still high in 1992 at .35, although lower than the peak 1984 correlation of .54. It was enough for certain slippage to take place; coupled with the flow of Likud supporters to the right and the influx of Labor supporters from the new immigrants, the added support for Labor was sufficient. The correlations reported in table 1.5 provide the cross-sectional picture; we can explore the dynamics of these elections by analyzing the patterns of respondents who switched. For example, we shall focus on the Likud voters in 1988 and ask: How did they vote in 1992? Among them, who remained loyal and who deserted? In which direction did they go? What was their demographic profile? What position did they hold regarding the territories and the PLO? What influenced their vote? In parallel fashion, we ask the same questions for respondents who supported Labor in 1993; How did they vote in 1977? Who stayed with Labor and who left it? Where did they go? What was their attitude about the territories and the PLO? What effected their vote?

The analysis considers only those respondents who reported voting for Likud in 1988 and who said that they would vote for the right, the Likud, or Labor in 1992 (see table 1.8) and those who had voted Labor in 1973 and said they would vote for the Likud, Labor, or the DMC in 1977 (see table 1.9). Those who had not made up their minds or gave no answer to the vote intention question were not included in these analyses.<sup>7</sup>

When we examine the sociodemographic profiles of the three 1992 groups, it is clear that the predominant distinction among them is along the religiosity dimension. It is also the only statistically significant distinction. The largest differences both between 1992 Likud and Labor voters (34 percent to 14 percent) and among the three groups of voters are in the percent religious. Moving from the 1992 right voters through the 1992 Likud group to the 1992 Labor voters, the chances decrease that a respondent is religiously observant (45 percent to 34 percent to 14 percent).

In 1992, all three groups of 1988 Likud voters were overwhelmingly Sephardim, explaining why there is no statistical difference among them. The figures range from 78 percent for those who shifted to the right,



**Table 1.8. Profile of 1988 Likud Voters by Their 1992 Vote**

|   | 1992 vote |       |       |
|---|-----------|-------|-------|
|   | Right     | Likud | Labor |
| N = 310   | 40        | 226   | 44    |
| Of 1988 Likud voters:   |           |       |       |
| Demographic data  |           |       |       |
| % religious   | 45        | 34    | 14    |
| % Sephardim <sup>a</sup>  | (78)      | 70    | (64)  |
| % under 30  | (46)      | 32    | (32)  |
| % female  | (60)      | 52    | (43)  |
| Attitudes   |           |       |       |
| % opposed to returning territories <sup>b</sup>                   | 67        | 66    | 24    |
| % opposed to negotiating with PLO <sup>c</sup>                    | 85        | 72    | 61    |
| % for Jewish religious law<br>in Israeli public life <sup>d</sup> | 38        | 41    | 21    |
| % considered security/peace to be<br>most important issue         | (59)      | 54    | (41)  |
| % preferred capitalism <sup>e</sup>                               | (60)      | 58    | (59)  |
| Vote motivation (%)   |           |       |       |
| party   | 22        | 43    | 23    |
| candidate   | 17        | 12    | 20    |
| issues  | (61)      | 45    | (57)  |
| Effect on vote choice   |           |       |       |
| economic stand of parties   | 48        | 25    | 55    |
| territories stand of parties                                      | (65)      | 50    | (55)  |

Using the chi-square test, differences are statistically significant above .05 level except for those in parentheses.

<sup>a</sup> Respondent or father born in (1) Asia-Africa (here labeled "Sephardim"), contrasted to (2) those born in Europe or America or both born in Israel.

<sup>b</sup> Question described in table 1.5, note b.

<sup>c</sup> Based on a yes-no question on whether Israel should be willing to conduct negotiations with the PLO.

<sup>d</sup> Question described in table 1.5, note d.

<sup>e</sup> Question described in table 1.5, note c.

through 70 percent of those that stayed with the Likud, to 64 percent for those who shifted to Labor. Winning this nucleus of Sephardim away from the Likud was crucial for Labor to succeed in 1992. Although Labor attracted them at lower rates than did the right or those who stayed with the Likud, the fact that Labor did it at all shows that the party was at least partially success-

ful in changing its image from a party of Ashkenazim with antipathy toward Sephardim. Labor managed to retain Sephardim in its ranks while simultaneously drawing away others from the Likud.<sup>8</sup>

The three groups of voters differed also on the other variables, but these differences were generally much smaller. This result is consistent with the high correlation between religiosity and the vote for all Likud and Labor voters in table 1.5—the highest among the sociodemographic variables.

Regarding age the differences are not statistically significant, and it is interesting to note that there was no difference in the percent under the age of thirty between the Likud loyalists and the 1992 Labor voters (32 percent); in the past Likud was much more often the party of the young than was Labor. Taken together with the small difference (6 percent) in the ethnic composition of these two groups of voters, we see the curbing of the two factors that were crucial in the 1977 turnout and in voting patterns since. Age and ethnicity were still meaningful in distinguishing between Labor and Likud supporters, as the 1992 cross-sectional correlations in table 1.5 showed, but their discriminating power was diminishing. The group that moved from the Likud to parties of the right had a much higher percentage of people under the age of thirty than did the other two groups (46 percent compared to 32 percent). The higher preference of the young for the right—a pattern long established—continued in 1992. It is only in the comparison of the Likud loyalists with 1988 Likud voters who switched to Labor in 1992 that this relationship no longer holds.

The differences among the three groups of voters in their attitude toward the territories are the largest in table 1.8. The group that shifted to Labor was much more conciliatory regarding the future of the territories than were the other groups. Those who shifted from the Likud to the right were as likely as Likud loyalists to oppose returning territories, but they were much more likely to oppose negotiations with the PLO.

On the question of state end religion, there were also clear differences: about 40 percent of the right and Likud groups supported the position that the government should see to it that public life be conducted according to religious tradition; this was true of only 21 percent of those who switched to Labor. On the economic cleavage of capitalism and socialism there was no difference among the three groups of voters.

How different was the 1977 picture? Labor in 1977 lost a greater percentage of its previous vote than did the Likud of 1992, and many more of the 1973 Labor respondents were undecided or refused to tell how they would vote in 1977. The number of voters that selected Labor in 1973 and Likud in 1977 was almost twice as large as the number that went to the DMC (see table 1.9). The 1992 shift was less along ethnic lines and more along issues, whereas the voters in 1977 who had chosen Labor in 1973 split by both

ethnicity and policy. Most of those who left Labor for Likud in 1977 were Sephardim (56 percent), while those who stayed with Labor and those who shifted to the DMC were predominantly Ashkenazim (only 25 and 15 percent Sephardi, respectively). Also the age and gender differences among the groups were more pronounced in 1977 compared to 1992, as seen by their size and statistical significance. Those who moved either to the Likud or to the DMC in 1977 were more likely to be young and more likely to be female than those who remained with Labor.

The ones who moved from Labor to Likud were clearly different from those who stayed and from those who shifted to the DMC in their more hawkish policy stand regarding the territories and their greater affinity to religious observance (also in their preference for Jewish religious law in Israeli public life, although these differences were not statistically significant). The majority of all groups opposed dealing with the PLO, although this was much more prevalent among those who eventually voted Likud than for those who went for the DMC. The switchers to the DMC supported capitalism more strongly; those who remained with Labor clung stubbornly to their socialism.

In 1977 the dynamic was driven much more by social factors, as judged by the size of differences among the three groups of voters, and in particular between Likud and Labor voters. Of the sociodemographic factors, ethnicity was the most important. Issues mattered as well. By 1992, the edge of the ethnic sword was deflected, while the ideological blade remained keen. Actually, of the demographic factors only religion remained a meaningful distinction in 1992, and the issue of the territories gained in strength over 1977. In 1977, the difference in the ethnic profile between Labor loyalists and deserters to the Likud was 31 percent; the difference between these two groups in their attitude toward the territories was 26 percent. In 1992, the comparable figures were 6 percent and 42 percent!

It is fascinating to note how similar the 1977 and 1992 patterns were for the samples when survey subjects were asked what factors determined their vote: identification with a certain party, the stands that a party takes on issues, the candidates offered, or whether a party is in government or in the opposition. In both cases, the parties' stands on issues were credited with determining the vote much more than were the others. This choice was followed by party identification, and then the candidates; the opposition option was negligible. For those who were loyal to the same party in both periods, however, the rate of choosing the ideological factor was lowest compared to the other groups. Almost as high as the platform for the loyalists in both time periods was identification with the party. Ideology was flaunted by the changers; whether this was real or an artifact of the political culture was immaterial, what mattered was that the norm was to report that change of party tended to be driven by ideological reasons.

**Table 1.9. Profile of 1973 Labor Voters by Their 1977 Vote**

|   | 1977 vote |       |      |
|---|-----------|-------|------|
|   | Likud     | Labor | DMC  |
| <i>N</i> = 382  | 77        | 265   | 40   |
| Of 1973 Labor voters:   |           |       |      |
| Demographic data  |           |       |      |
| % religious   | 33        | 17    | 10   |
| % Sephardim <sup>a</sup>  | 56        | 25    | 15   |
| % under 30  | 35        | 14    | 30   |
| % female  | 63        | 43    | 53   |
| Attitudes   |           |       |      |
| % opposed to returning territories <sup>b</sup>                   | 53        | 27    | 27   |
| % opposed to negotiating with PLO <sup>c</sup>                    | 67        | 59    | 51   |
| % for Jewish religious law<br>in Israeli public life <sup>d</sup> | (57)      | 43    | (34) |
| % considered security/peace as<br>most important issue            | 38        | 49    | 32   |
| % preferred capitalism <sup>e</sup>                               | 25        | 15    | 36   |
| Vote motivation (%)   |           |       |      |
| Party   | (30)      | 41    | (24) |
| Candidate   | (19)      | 15    | (19) |
| Issues  | 51        | 44    | 57   |
| Effect on vote choice   |           |       |      |
| Economic stand of parties   | 33        | 20    | 50   |
| Territories stand of parties                                      | 40        | 25    | 22   |
| Corruption  | 44        | 16    | 62   |

*Note:* Using the chi-square test, differences are statistically significant above .05 level except for those in parentheses.

<sup>a</sup> Based on the background of whether respondent or father were born in (1) Asia-Africa (here labeled "Sephardim"; or (2) Europe or America, or both born in Israel.

<sup>b</sup> Question described in table 1.5, note b.

<sup>c</sup> Based on a yes-no question on whether Israel should be willing to conduct negotiations with the PLO.

<sup>d</sup> Question described in table 1.5, note d.

<sup>e</sup> Question described in table 1.5, note c.

This finding is fortified by considering the answers to the questions in the two periods about whether various issues will effect the vote decision of the respondents. Stands of parties on the territories or the economic issue were least important for the stayers and most important for the strayers. In 1992, territories was important for at least half of each voting group, but they