

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

I. Four Variants of the Israeli Party System, 1965–2001

An *anecdote* is a short, concentrated, and structured narrative leading up climactically to an unexpected point whose significance may extend beyond the particular event described. One example is the meeting arranged by Menachem Begin—leader of the Likud, the main center-right opposition party in Israel, and Hillel Seidel of the Independent Liberal Party (IL), a junior partner in the labor-led government coalition. At this meeting Begin invited Seidel to join the Likud as head of an autonomous faction and hence a high-level leader. Seidel recollected¹ that the overture was not only a personal lifeline but also a means of enabling him to retain his representation of a body of loyalists whose interests he shared and hoped now to further. It took place some time before the 1977 general elections, which was to bring about the first turnover of government in the history of the state, at a time when the IL faced the possibility of being squeezed out in the competition between Israel's right and left. The IL's negotiations for an alliance with other minor parties² had failed, and its leadership was at a loss how to proceed. In a list-voting proportional-representation system, an assured position in the Likud's candidate slate would guarantee Seidel the continuation of a long and now-endangered political career. Nevertheless, he felt obliged to make quite clear what was involved for both sides. Being the chief advocate of his party in the national trade-union federation (Histadrut), he had tended to focus on socioeconomic issues rather than on the need to hold on to and settle the Territories occupied in the 1967 war, an issue which had top priority in Begin's agenda. Moreover, the IL had always been moderate, tending even to dovishness in matters of security and the relations with the Palestinians. "As you know," Seidel told Begin, "I could agree with a firm foreign policy, but I also believe that peace and the occupation of territories are mutually exclusive." To which the response was that this was precisely the reason why the offer was made. "But we are not at one on social and economic policies either," Seidel insisted. "Better still," said Begin; upon which the deal was made, and a new faction called Ahdut (Unity) came into being within the Likud.

The nub of the story is twofold. First is the extraordinary power possessed by the top party leadership at the time. The consideration of political parties as hierarchical organizations is hardly new, and Israeli parties tended to be even more oligarchical than their Western European counterparts. Even so, Begin's ability to offer a deal affecting his party without prior notification of his intentions testifies to exceptional authority. Nor, one should note, did Seidel question his ability to deliver. Indeed, as a leader of a later generation was to comment, "legendary leaders such as Menachem Begin" were treated "like gods or very close to it" within their parties, and "like fathers" by the general voter.³

The second point concerns the extraordinary use to which Begin seems to have put this extraordinary power. Walt Whitman's famous declaration comes to mind: "Do I contradict myself? Very well then, I contradict myself. I am large, I contain multitudes." But whereas the poet was defending himself against the charge of inconsistency, Begin apparently aimed quite deliberately at achieving inconsistency and was even prepared to pay handsomely for it. One could argue that in contemporary conditions the actual differences between his party and the IL were narrower than appeared on the surface. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s peace and the fate of the Occupied Territories had been a subject of domestic debate, but no expectations of actual peace were in the offing with any Arab state, let alone with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). Also, on the social and economic fronts, the Likud's positions had already become blurred in consequence of similar deals that had been made several years earlier with secessionists from the Labor party who had banded to form the La'am (For the People) faction. It is clear, nevertheless, that Seidel did attach importance to programmatic differences, that Begin did so too, and that it was precisely these differences that drew Begin to Seidel.

While Seidel's motivations for accepting the deal are obvious, those of Begin in offering it seem enigmatic. From the start one can eliminate several possibilities. Admittedly, the move might attract the small band of Seidel's followers in the forthcoming elections. However, voters of the IL were more likely to shift their allegiance, if at all, to the left, seeing that the party had a long-standing coalitional relationship with the dominant center-left labor party (up to 1969 called Mapai, and thereafter the Labor Alignment), that its tenets were closer to it, and that most of its leaders now tended in that direction. The move, then, must have been made with a wider electorate in view. For obvious reasons, it could not have appealed to the hard-core stalwarts of the right, nor for that matter to the hard-core stalwarts of the parties of the left. If so, it is plausible that Begin was thinking mainly of the centrist-leaning voters, the "floating voters" and disaffected voters, especially those of small nonextremist parties frustrated by the ineffectiveness of their vote. It is equally plausible that the move was intended to signal ideological flexibility and readiness to accommodate varying views. What Begin sought was a structural change that in effect would create a

double image. One was of openness and pragmatism, directed at the general public, which was encouraged to believe that varying views could find a home within the Likud framework. The other, directed to the Likud in general and within it to Herut, Begin's own doctrinaire faction, held the promise of the increased strength attendant on additional, less ideologically inclined voters. This would further the realization of the Likud's goals and render hopes of achieving power more realistic.

But the full implications of the anecdote can be assessed only once it is viewed within the context of what preceded it and what ensued from it. The formation of Ahdut was in itself no more than the latest in a series of amalgamations of parties, movements, and splinter groups that began in 1965. Under the guise of the old system, the resulting combinations gradually brought about a new variation of the party system that finally took over in the election of 1977. Nor was this the last of the metamorphoses. In contrast to the decades of stability of the Israeli party system in its earliest form, by the time its second variant came into its own it was already being undermined by the development of a third. Like a snake slowly sloughing its skin, this was finally freed from its predecessor only in the Knesset elections of 1988, and itself was short-lived. Its transformation was hastened by an electoral reform, which was legislated in 1992 and put into effect in the following Knesset elections of 1996, resulting in the release of the fourth and last variant of the Israeli party system before the millennium. Since 1965, then, the Israeli party system has undergone a constant process of change that may be divided into four shifts marked by the salient elections of 1977, 1988, and 1996.

What was referred to as the earliest form of the Israeli party system was bequeathed to the state by some three decades of party activity under the British Mandate. A major aspect of this heritage was the strong ideological tinge of the parties. Originating as political expressions of the semiautonomous ideological and social sectors of the Jewish population of Palestine, these differed not only in their *weltanschauungen* but in the idea of the future state they dreamed of. The persistence of these passionately held ideologies after Independence (1948) owed much to the proportional representation system, in which 1 percent (since 1992 1.5 percent) of the total vote sufficed to provide a seat in the 120-member Knesset. It opened the way to a great diversity of parties, and hence maintained the distinctions among them and the ideological homogeneity of each, especially when cardinal problems that would determine the nature of the new state were at stake. The proliferation of parties, however, created a situation where none ever enjoyed the ability to govern alone, and after elections ideological strains had to be relaxed under the imperative of forming government coalitions.

Another heritage of the past was the domination of Mapai, a centrist labor party that derived its strength not only from its plurality of votes and its pivotal position in a party system marked by the absence of cohesive opposition,⁴ but

from its control of the Histadrut and the Jewish Agency. The former, in addition to being a federation of labor unions, was itself the largest employer of labor in the country. The latter was the body responsible for organizing immigration into the country and the settlement of the newcomers. This had added significance in light of the fact that these had the right to vote immediately on their arrival. Election results therefore merely determined which parties Mapai would choose as coalition partners: usually one from its right, one from its left, and a religious party. The only ones that were ruled out were the parties of the extreme right and left, Herut and the communists. The latter was a fringe Arab-Israeli group, outside the pale of Zionist politics, which never dreamed of becoming an alternative to government and, in Sartori's terms,⁵ was not a "relevant Party." The former was the second largest party and since the birth of the party system considered itself to be the only alternative to Mapai.

The second phase in the development of the Israeli party system can be traced back to the creation of two new parties as a step toward the Knesset campaign of 1965. One was an opposition alliance between Herut and the Liberals, a centrist party that had on occasion joined the Mapai-led government coalition. The other was between Mapai and one of its coalition partners to its left. Each of the two new formations, which I call *cluster parties*, presented to the electorate a broad front based on the lowest common denominator of its components. At the same time, each of these components retained to a greater or lesser extent its ideological independence and organizational structure. The effect on the party system was profound, leading to what will be referred to as the cluster party system. The blurring of the ideological differences between the factions within each party inevitably led to the blurring of the cleavages between the main rivals. Coupled as it was with the structural simplification and polarization of the party system, this intensified the electoral competition and concentrated attention on the jockeying for power between government and opposition. What eventuated was an amorphous center into which the two large parties were drawn in the attempt to attract potential floating voters and the electorate of smaller parties. Gradually, gravitational pulls drew these into the orbits of the larger rivals. A multiparty system the stability of which had been maintained by a dominant party was thus replaced by a competitive party system, in which each of the main contenders consisted of a mini-party system in its own right.

The third variation of the Israeli party system emerged out of the severe seismic shocks, which one after the other rocked the government clusters after the Yom Kippur War of 1973, when critical decisions had to be made at a time of dwindling resources. The effects on the two main adversaries were similar but not synchronous. After 1981 they were hemorrhaged by new ideological parties on their flanks that competed with them for the votes of their more programmatically committed members although remaining their "natural" allies and coalition partners. Changes took place also within the larger competitors. Some of the

issues that divided them before the mid-sixties had been so blurred that distinctions of principle could no longer be made and the positions of individual members crisscrossed the parties. This was especially true in the socioeconomic domains. Yet already in 1981, the cluster centering on the erstwhile Herut party retrieved key elements of the ideology of its main component, decisively moving away from the center to the right. Likewise, following its poor performance in the elections of 1981 and 1984, the labor cluster emulated its rival by moving away from the center and crystallizing more coherent positions, especially on the complex of questions relating to the destiny of the Occupied Territories and its domestic and foreign ramifications. The overall effect was a centrifugal movement into two large party-blocs, each with its largest member on the moderate end of the divide. The continued development of propaganda techniques and reliance on media experts enabled the large parties to persist in their effects to draw the undecided and moderate voters to their respective sides. But between the blocs, in the hitherto crowded center of the party map, an empty space appeared as the contenders drifted apart.

To clarify the nature of these fluctuations one may use Sartori's distinction between polarized party systems and those characterized by moderate pluralism. The terms refer to the distance between the ideological poles of the party system and to the extent of the distribution of opinion between its political components. Polarized systems are marked by a large distance between the poles. Moderately plural ones are distinguished by the closeness of the poles, reflecting small ideological distances between the parties. What took place in Israel may be compared to the alternating closing in and opening out of the bellow-folds of an accordion. Consequent on the formation of the clusters and the increased support given them by the electorate, the period between the mid-1960s and early 1980s witnessed a centripetal process that transformed what Sartori described as a system belonging to the polarized "class of extreme pluralism"⁶ into a moderately plural one. The following period, on the other hand, witnessed the repolarization of the system. The widening of the ideological gaps between the main rivals and the reduction of their electoral support ended in the formation of a new party system marked by the centrifugal competition between two hostile blocs.

The fourth variant of the party system combined *mutatis mutandis* some of the main features of its two predecessors and brought them to the extreme in a kind of contrived schizophrenia. Amendments to the *Basic Laws*, which took effect in 1996, inaugurated the direct popular vote for the prime minister to be conducted at the same time as the vote for the Knesset. Whereas in the latter the party list proportional representation system was retained, the choice of prime minister was to be determined by the competition between individual candidates. The winner would be the one who garnered, whether in a first or a second round, a 50 percent plus majority. This accentuated the approximation to a two-party

competition, the commercial marketing of politics, and the emphasis on the leadership factor. All these had been in evidence to a greater or lesser degree since the 1970s, but the apogee they now reached amounted to a change from quantity to quality. The competition among the candidates for the premiership turned on images contrived by rival promotional teams led by foreign professionals, whereas the parties supporting them shed the vestiges of their distinctive referents and faded into the background. On the other hand, the shift from the categorical to an ordinal system that permits the voter more than a single choice⁷ empowered parties that did not field prime ministerial candidates to pursue specific sectional and ideological interests. Party competition at the Knesset level thus retrieved the logic of the proportional representation system that had been distorted by the clusters and the blocs. The upshot was that side-by-side with the reconvergence of the large competitors was a remarkable increase in the strength of smaller parties appealing either to specific ideological tenets or to specific ethnically, religiously, or culturally based communities. What came into being was a hybrid characterized by simultaneous centripetal and centrifugal drives; by the fishing for voters with the baits of market approaches and commercial techniques and by the calls for tribal solidarity. This I shall call the parlia-presidential system.

At this point we can return to take note of further implications of the anecdote that served as our starting point. In addition to directing us to the process of change, the Begin-Seidel encounter focuses attention on several issues that will become central to my analysis. One is the connection between party change and party system change. This becomes clearer once we bear in mind that a party system consists of the aggregate of the parties within it. Changes in one party regarded by others as negatively affecting their ability to compete are most likely to precipitate counteradjustments and to produce a ripple effect. Begin's effort to engineer a change in the voter perception of Herut, which would relocate the party from the extremist right to the center of the party spectrum, in itself made for a significant change in the party system, serving to hasten similar processes of party amalgamation between the labor parties. The party-bloc and the parlia-presidential systems can likewise be ultimately traced all the way back to the same party changes of which the anecdote is one instance. The causal sequence reminds one of traditional folk tales, often in verse, such as "The House that Jack Built" or "The Old Woman Who Swallowed a Fly." However, the demise of the cluster-party system and later the institution of the parlia-presidential system show the reversibility of this cause and effect. Changes of circumstances in the one case and legislative intervention in the other had a direct impact on the party system, which in turn caused changes in the parties and their behavior. Consequently, the consideration of the process of party and party-system change in Israel confronts us with the question of when, how, and to what degree do party changes bring about party-system changes and vice versa.

But the anecdote no less relates to the two personalities who worked out a particular form of relationship. In a sense, a parallel exists between party systems and parties on the one hand and parties and individuals on the other. A party after all is the aggregate of its members, and, as in the units of the party system, the members are not of equal stature or influence. As a result we are up against a version of the question raised about the two-way relationship between parties and party systems. To what extent and in what circumstances were the party changes orchestrated by party leaders, and in what ways were these constrained by circumstances and by their own parties? What may explain the fact that at times leaders took actions virtually on their own initiative, whereas on other occasions they seemed to have had virtually no choice in the matter?

Finally, the anecdote raises the bottom-line issue of the connection between party change and electoral results. Each partner in the deal regarded the structural change to which he had committed himself as a form of investment, the interest on which would be an improvement in the fortunes of his party in the competition. How in fact did the structural change impact intraparty competition and to what degree can it justify a generalization about the linkage between these factors? Yet another question in this context concerns the relationship between principles in the name of which parties seek power and the competitive struggle to achieve such power. Seidel, and certainly Begin, were generally held to be firm advocates of their respective principles. Yet both were ready to enter into a relationship that at least for the time being would set limits to their pursuit of them. The justification for what appears to be a contradiction was however that the deal would add to their chances of acquiring power, which would enable them to put their principles into practice. What, then, were the relationships between strategies adopted in the here-and-now of the competition and the future goals of ideological realization? How far did they contradict each other and how far were they supplementary? The question becomes even more acute when we position the anecdote in relation to future developments. Among the factors that differentiated the cluster party, the party-bloc and the parlia-presidential systems from one another were the ebb and flow of ideological emphasis in the strategies of the larger parties. What were the circumstances in which ideological emphasis served competitive strategies, and in what circumstances did the reverse operate?

II. The Literature on Party System Change and the Case of Israel

The questions raised in part I are neither new nor peculiar to Israel. They have been widely debated in the literature, both with regard to specific countries and general problems. An analysis of the Israeli case should therefore be preceded by at least a cursory overview of the main approaches that have appeared in studies of party and party-system change, and in particular of the dynamic links between party structures, ideologies, and electoral strategies. Such approaches may help

in selecting avenues worthy of exploration as well as in evaluating the significance of the findings. On the other hand, the specificity of the case study itself may enrich our understanding of the general subject and validate or refute hypotheses raised elsewhere. This statement is nothing more than the usual claim made in elementary political science teaching concerning the links between the different levels of analysis that are commonly referred to as *comparative*. Nevertheless, in the case of Israel, a few preliminary words of elaboration are in place.

A common problem in the comparative study of single countries is the need to identify and isolate unique factors that help to produce the patterns of behavior under observation. This sets a limit to the degree of detail the researcher looks for, because only beyond the level of the noncomparable peculiarities lie the comparable. Israel is often held to be *sui generis* to the degree that precludes all comparison. As far as its politics after the mid-1960s go, however, the argument advanced here is that its very uniqueness serves, as the saying has it, to render it “like any other country, only very much more so.” It is usually considered to be typical of Western Europe rather than of the Middle East, featuring as it does so many of the political characteristics and processes typical of small liberal-democratic multiparty systems. Yet, it is generally recognized that it is exceptional in the rapid tempo of the development of its society, and in its powerful resonance to change caused by its precarious position as a threatened country. At least in the first decades of its existence, and periodically since then, it was also characterized by critical differences among its parties, which centered not only on the evolving character of the polity but also on strategies to ensure its very survival. Such factors taken together contribute to the unusual prominence of politics in the public mind. Where else does all activity pause virtually every hour of the day to listen to the latest news bulletins? Considering that government policy plays for such high stakes, and especially that many policies are perceived to have an impact on the state’s survivability, government assumes unusual prominence in the eye of the citizens. Parties and the activities of their leaders and Knesset representatives are similarly in the limelight, and elections are more often than not conducted at a feverish pitch. The overall result is of a magnifying effect. Processes that occur elsewhere at a slower pace are tinged with high drama, bringing into greater relief factors that may escape clear observation in other environments.

In this context another factor assumes importance. Until recently, Israeli parties could run campaigns on the issues that divided them without being subject to pressures from abroad. In the steadily integrating world of the post-World War II era, such freedom has become increasingly unusual, particularly where the policies of a relatively developed state have significant ramifications extending far beyond its borders. In the case of Israel the surprise is the greater, seeing that Jewish organizations in the Diaspora have had obvious stakes in the Jewish state and have helped it financially throughout its existence. Moreover, the country

was at the heart of a conflict that regularly occupied world attention. Most surprising of all had been the consistent U.S. policy of negotiating with Israeli governments when they are in power but refraining from attempts to influence the campaigns of parties in government (or, for that matter, of their rivals) or the electoral results irrespective of the centrality in the party contests of the issues over which the United States and Israel had earlier dealt. Such a policy constituted in the words of one observer “a diplomatic version of affirmative action toward the Jewish state, which protected it from the kind of U.S. diplomatic pressure that countries in other parts of the world experience regularly.”⁸ The 1990s witnessed a marked change. In 1992, 1996, and 1999 the United States intervened both directly and indirectly to further the electoral chances of labor. The timing of the 2001 competition for the premier, in the seam between the outgoing Clinton and the incoming Bush administrations, reduced such intervention; but the campaign was heavily influenced by U.S. efforts to forge an Israeli-Palestinian deal that would enhance Barak’s reelection bid, Diaspora leaders placed full-page ads in the press to make their preference known, and the Rev. Jerry Falwell arrived in person to convey the Christian right’s support of the opposition. All these were joined in the final days of the campaign by senior officials of the Palestinian Authority who called on Arab citizens to cast their ballots for Barak to prevent a sweeping victory of the Israeli right.⁹ And yet the comparative freedom from “contamination” of external constraints up to the very last decade of the millennium adds to the hypersensitivity of Israel, making its party politics a highly suitable seedbed of hypotheses to be tested elsewhere.

We may now come back to the consideration of the theories of party and party-system change. The subject can be approached by recalling the truism that all things are in a state of perpetual flux and that the only condition of complete stability is rigor mortis. In R. L. Stevenson’s words, “wherever we are, it is but a stage on the way to somewhere else, and whatever we do, however well we do it, it is only a preparation to do something else that shall be different.” This equally applies to groups of individuals acting together in pursuit of political interests. When students of party change employ the term *change* they do not refer however to continuous day-to-day changes, irrespective of their possible cumulative importance, but to relatively large-scale changes of contingent nature that disrupt continuity; a difference that may be less precisely defined than intuitively felt.¹⁰

The earliest scholarship on party change in this sense was taken from the social structure perspective. The underlying assumption was that the behavior of voters does not generally conform to the conception of a rational, freely choosing electorate postulated in democratic theory. Most partisans identify with their parties as extensions of their class, ethnic, religious, or regional affiliations. Parties indeed tend to behave as group-institutions in that their candidates represent the groups supporting them, and their programs express the groups’ interests. The linkage has also an important emotional dimension. From the point of view

of the parties, electoral campaigns are occasions when deep-rooted attachments are appealed to and reinforced by the call to action. From the point of view of the voter, campaigns offer opportunities similar to those proffered to fans of football matches: the reaffirmation of group loyalties strengthened by the solidarity associated with common action. This normally ensures the party system of a degree of stability.¹¹ To be sure, no society is a fixed and unchanging entity, but changes in socioeconomic structures and in the political culture are usually sufficiently gradual to allow slow party adjustment. However, when change is deep and persistent, a growing incongruence between the concerns of increasing numbers of voters and what the parties offer renders inevitable major changes in the fortunes of individual parties and in the configuration of party systems. Party system change, in brief, derives from processes that affect society at large, and over which parties have little control.

This deterministic framework with its neo-Marxist reverberations had its obvious attractions. Because parties were viewed as dependent variables, continuity and change could equally be explained on the basis of environmental factors alone, without the need to treat particular party organizations and behaviors. The benefit for cross-country analysis is evident in the research on Western multiparty systems on both sides of the watershed of the early 1970s. During the first period the main problem was to explain the relative stability in the face of sweeping changes in the demographic, economic, and technological aspects of post-World War II societies. The basic diagnosis can be summed up in the verdict of Seymour Martin Lipset and Stein Rokkan, the two most influential exponents of the approach, that the party systems of the 1960s “reflect with few but significant exceptions the cleavage structure of the 1920’s.”¹² In the second period the question was replaced by the need to explain the destabilization of virtually all the Western party systems. Among the scholars who tackled the issue, Ronald Ingleheart figures prominently, not least because he continued to explore his thesis, extending it to other parts of the globe.¹³ The post-World War II prosperity, he maintained, has caused a shift from the focus on material issues and parties representing them to postmaterial concerns and new competitors. Side by side with the blurring of the old socioeconomic cleavages, questions that began to assume preeminence, especially among the young generation, related to matters such as the environment, equality of the sexes, or gay rights. If the old parties with their materialist agendas did not fall victim to the shift up to the 1970s, it was largely because only then did the old generation of voters show signs of waning by natural attrition. The overall patterns that then began to take shape have persisted because of the continued rise in the standards of living, notwithstanding occasional “blips.” More still, the “great dying” of the communist systems and rising standards of living in developing countries are bringing about similar changes in the class structures and the political preferences of publics in Central Europe, Latin America, and Asia.

Dissatisfaction with the ascription of such a passive role to parties in determining their own fate was probably the prime reason for an alternative explanation, which attributed change to the dynamic interaction of parties and their environments. Parties were conceptualized as adaptive organizations that set up institutional frameworks and devise strategies that result in the structuring of the electoral choice among them. Such activities stem from the identification of the factors that condition the environment and influence the preferences of various categories of voters, and are geared to maximizing effectiveness. However, in adjusting their structures and programs, parties are not free from constraints. Each has its own bounded rationality reflecting its history, electoral base, and internal politics. These of necessity affect the perception and interpretation of changing realities and the challenges they pose. Parties must also take into account the counterbuffeting of rivals in the election boxing ring. The upshot is not only that processes affecting party change are taken to be more complex and less predictable at the unit level, but also that uncertainty derives equally from the feedback effects of party adjustive behavior on the environment. Party response to “one set of pressures or demands may either deflect pressures and inhibit more extensive changes, or lead to more extensive changes.”¹⁴

Of special relevance to my interpretation of how and why the Israeli party system was transformed, particularly in the early phases of the process, are two of the earliest and most influential of the theories of this school, those of Otto Kirchheimer (1966) and Leon Epstein (1967). Both shared the assumptions of what has been termed the “end of ideology” thesis, namely, that conditions in the post-World War II Western societies were rendering the ideologies that had grown from the cleavages and dislocations of the Industrial Revolution progressively irrelevant. Welfare policies, the emphasis on mass consumer goods, and the blurring of social, religious, and regional distinctions resulting from the enormous expansion of the mass-communications media were all infecting the general public with apathy toward traditional party programs. Both writers identified a pattern in party adaptation to such trends, and this allowed them to predict major party transformations. Parties, they argued, would dispense with most of their ideologies in an effort “to exchange effectiveness in depth for a wider audience and more immediate electoral success.”¹⁵ Manifestos would skirt group interests and in their place rely on accepted generalities and pragmatic issues such as leadership and economic system management. Any proposals they might present would be sufficiently vague and sweeping to forestall counterattack by adversaries. To inundate society with their message, parties would increasingly depend on the intensive use of mass-communications media and on professional public relations experts guided by frequent indications of public opinion provided by polls and modern communications techniques.

Both Kirchheimer and Epstein were in effect adopting a Darwinian approach, according to which parties undergo a process of evolution that enables

them to meet the challenges of their environment better. Because Western European mass parties were operating in environments that increasingly resembled those of the United States, they would gradually approximate to the U.S. type of "cadre party." In Kirchheimer's terms, they would evolve into "catchall parties."¹⁶ Moreover, because parties form part of the environment of one another, the improved electoral performance of those that succeed in adapting themselves will exert pressure on the rest to follow suit. What Epstein termed "contagion"¹⁷ comes into play. To resist mutation is to fall behind in the struggle for political survival so that the unfit pay the penalty meted out by natural selection unless they "reassess" their strategies.

Whereas the two theorists restricted their analysis to a particular form of change in a specific type of context, more recent work by Richard S. Katz and Peter Mair¹⁸ illustrates how similar basic assumptions may be generalized to serve as a research strategy applicable to other forms of party transformation and to other settings. A discrimination is drawn between "ultimate" and "immediate" sources of party change. The former are those that take place in the environment. The latter are the internal dynamics that determine the way parties perceive and react to environmental changes. Party changes are identified and traced back to their ultimate origins and this enables an evaluation of the immediate factors and of the influence of party structures on the nature and extent of the change. Adaptation may take several forms. Where organizational modifications offer no adaptive advantages, parties may respond to environmental change by shifting their issue positions. Where this too provides no benefit, parties may have recourse to a change in the leadership. They could of course try to avoid adaptation of any kind, but then they court electoral defeat or even total extinction.

The third and most recent approach again sprang from dissatisfaction, this time mainly with the prevalent tendency to treat parties as whole units. Neglect of the facts that they consist of individuals, that among them power is unequally distributed, and that particular members' decisions ultimately determine party activity, obscures the sources of change, leading researchers to focus on background factors rather than on the foreground. As forcefully put by Frank Wilson, the first to formulate both the criticism and the alternative it engenders, "the notion that parties are transformed by unnoted socioeconomic, cultural, or political forces while their members and leaders remain unaware is misleading. Parties change primarily because their leaders and members see the need to change and make efforts to change them." Zeroing in on flesh-and-blood initiators had profound implications for both the general conception of party change and the research into particular cases. These implications were made explicit in Wilson's later work¹⁹ as well as in that of others such as Angelo Panebianco, who presented a model of party change,²⁰ and Robert Harmel and Kenneth Janda, who took up similar propositions, developing them into an "informal 'discursive' exposition" of a theory.²¹ All of them consider party change as the result of calculated

leadership decisions. This leads by necessity to a view of change as a discontinuous chain of events rather than as a gradual process unfolding as it were without clear beginnings and ends. It also raises an epistemological question. Any number of socioeconomic, political, or cultural changes may contribute to gradual, piecemeal changes, or alternatively prepare the grounds for possible large-scale and abrupt change. The critic, however, must not forget that individual perception involves selection and interpretation. The greater the immediate impact on the perceiver, the greater the significance attached to the percepta. Thus, for Wilson only those environmental changes with direct effects on the competitive situation have decisive influence on party change; Panebianco speaks of unspecified "severe environmental challenges" (whose severity, of course, is measured subjectively), whereas Harmel and Janda integrate their theory of party change with a theory of party goals. The latter form a hierarchy headed by a primary goal (e.g., vote maximizing or the furthering of ideology). When this is endangered by an "externally induced shock," party decision makers are compelled to "undertake a fundamental reevaluation of the party's effectiveness on that goal dimension,"²² leading to abrupt, dramatic changes with significant effects on the entire organization.

The shift from the system level to the unit and the focus on the behavior of party leaders and activists within it also entail an emphasis on intraparty processes such as other approaches ignore. For Wilson, changes in external behavior are rendered possible by the ability of strong leaders to overcome party inertia and reinforce the elite with younger, reform-minded supporters. For Panebianco party change will occur when an environmental challenge is followed by "the discrediting of the old [dominant party] coalition which was unable to handle the crisis, the formation of new alliances, and the replacement of the leading group."²³ When internal conditions prevent such a sequence, as for example when no generational turnover has given rise to new potential leaders, party change, regardless of the external challenge, will not take place. And Harmel and Janda take an extra step when they postulate that changes in leadership and or dominant coalition themselves may suffice to produce party change, albeit of a more restricted nature than of the kind generated by externally induced shocks. New leaders may have a mandate necessary to implement changes already agreed to, or may bring with them new ideas that party members can be persuaded to follow. Displacement of dominant factions could likewise lead to change when the factions dispute over fundamental questions of ideology, strategy, or organization.

Such an approach accentuates, to use Wilson's phrase, "the idiosyncratic and unpredictable nature of change rather than helps us to discover probabilistic theories of party transformation."²⁴ For self-evident reasons employing it at the particular case study level is easier. Notwithstanding this, broader efforts to test it empirically can be made. Harmel, Janda, and their collaborators made a prelimi-

nary effort in this direction.²⁵ Data for 40 years relating to six British and German parties was collected, annualized, and arranged into dependent and independent variables using judgmental coding techniques. The dependent variables were party change and its magnitude. Independent variables included electoral performance and its evaluation by the party, party leadership change, and change of dominant factions. The two sets of variables were then matched according to their proximity in time with a view to establishing their causal relationships. Party changes that occurred within two years of an independent variable (in the case of elections and leadership change not including the same calendar year as the event itself) were attributed to it. The hypotheses could now be examined in light of the entirety of the results.

It may be said that the theories touched on constitute a progression in the concept they provide of the degree and nature of the contribution that parties make to their own change. The social-structure perspective assumes that parties are confronted by realities that determine their course irrespective of their volition. According to the adaptive-organizational approach, parties do play a part in their alteration, but what remains in question is the degree to which their participation is purposive and whether they have any options in the matter. The prevalent assumption among those who adopt the approach is that parties respond to shifting circumstances by piecemeal modifications that themselves gradually affect their environments. However, such an assumption is not an imperative. The metaphor of "jettisoning the ideological cargo," central to Kirchheimer's catchall party thesis, indicates a willed act, whereas Epstein recognizes that parties occasionally face "unusually sharp changes" in the environment and must willy-nilly take decisions.²⁶ Nevertheless, the stark alternative to parties facing the growing irrelevancy of their programs and dwindling of their electoral base is either to change or to risk being reduced to small relics of the past or even to cease altogether. Finally, the purposive-action approach posits that what critics such as Epstein regarded as possible only in exceptional circumstances, namely that parties change because they have decided to do so, is the normal way in which party transformation occurs. As for options, it assumes that parties have leeway not only whether to change, but also to determine the nature, direction, and magnitude of the process. This by no means suggests that parties act independently of their environments. What it does mean is that party decision makers are an intervening variable. Environmental change serves as a stimulus to party change only when it is perceived and interpreted as requiring reaction. Likewise, large-scale party reaction to the stimulus occurs only after the party has been convinced and guided by its decision makers. Because of the pivotal role individuals play, each with his or her own particular understanding and capabilities, change of leadership and/or of dominant factions may suffice to become in themselves a source of change.

The analysis of the four variants of the Israeli party system and the transition from one to another undertaken in this book clearly shows that each of the

above-mentioned theories has something to contribute. It is equally clear that the degree of the contribution is contingent on particular circumstances. According to these, one or other of the theories, and sometimes several together, become especially suggestive. It is therefore best to regard the theories as complementing one another rather than as alternatives. However, none of them can be used as a template for the Israeli case. It is essentially as heuristic devices that they prove most valuable, and it is their use as such that may teach us more about these theories. Moreover, even when used cumulatively and heuristically, the theories do not suffice to provide a satisfactory explanation of what prompted the changes, especially the first fundamental ones in the patterns that had dominated the Israeli party system from the preindependence era. Fuller comprehension can best be attained by carrying the progression of theories concerning the degree of party involvement in their transformation beyond the limits set by the purposive-action approach.

The social structure approach suggests focusing on the socioeconomic processes that Israel had undergone preceding the initiation of the change in the mid-1960s. These certainly amount to a sea change. In the mid-1960s the country was still among the "have-not" nations of the world. The main sources of hard currency remained the export of citrus fruit and polished diamonds, as well as foreign aid and the donations of Diaspora Jews. The Israeli citizen usually had to wait for years to acquire a private telephone line, car ownership was a rare luxury, and travel abroad was restricted to the few who were relatively affluent. Nevertheless, most of the new immigrants were by now settled and the expansion of social services, the advent of the modern media, and the growing emphasis on mass consumer goods helped to blur the social cleavages, rendering the country to a growing extent comparable with the societies of Western Europe. Indeed, without such developments seeing how parties so different could have merged to form cluster parties, bringing about the diffusion of their ideologies, is difficult. This, however, is not to say that it was such environmental factors that caused the change, sweeping the parties along in the current. The most drastic demographic, economic, and social shifts had occurred during the first decade of independence and then again after the Six Day War of 1967. Yet during the first period the parties were so wedded to their traditional ideologies and organizational structures that they could not be divorced from them because of environmental pressures, and when it came to the second period the parties were already well into the process of transformation. By the mid-1960s the country had acquired a considerable degree of stability, and it was precisely then that the party transformation began. In brief, that the changes in the Israeli society were preconditions for the transformation is a plausible argument, but they were not its cause.

The resemblance at a first glance between the party formations that appeared in Israel and the catchall or Americanized parties as expounded at the time

by Kirchheimer and Epstein could suggest the impact of party competition as precipitating factor. Actually, when one examines the growth of the new composite cluster parties of the center-right and center-left at the expense of smaller parties from the late 1960s to the late 1980s there can be little doubt as to the importance of the competitive element. What developed constituted a vicious circle. As the process of structural polarization of the party system into large parties intensified, so did the rivalry between them and the concentration of the electorate on this rivalry. Conversely, as the competition became more acute so did the incentive of the larger parties to absorb smaller ones, and so did the inducement of such small parties not tied to any particular ethnic or religious segment of the population to find a place within the larger parties to escape being squeezed out. This helps to explain why the first party changes of the mid-1960s created ripple effects that spread to the entire party system. However, all that this explains is the continuation rather than the origins of the process of transformation.

The purposive-action approach certainly serves to identify causes that contributed to party clustering both on the center-right and on the center-left. Herut's first partner, the Liberal party, had suffered repeated electoral losses and its failure to make inroads into the large constituency of new immigrants boded ill for the future. In addition, it had not been invited to join the Mapai-led coalition, and the signs were that it was unlikely to be so in the near future. On the other side of the aisle, the transformation Mapai underwent can be explained at least in part by factional strife and change of leadership ending with the secession of Israel's first prime minister, David Ben-Gurion, and his charismatic band of relatively young followers. Neither of the two parties were, however, the active initiator of the formation of the new parties. Rather, it was Herut on the one hand, and Ahdut Ha'avoda, to the left of Mapai, on the other.

Herut was created by the graduates of two militant underground movements that had been active in the struggle with the British and the Arabs in the prestate era. The fact that they were outlawed as terrorists by the British and delegitimated as apostates by the rest of the Jewish prestate community goes far to explain their cohesion and esprit de corps. When the party was formed its leaders were still in their thirties so that its Knesset representatives had little fear of younger challengers. Begin himself was still commonly referred to as "The Commander" and any who dared question his leadership was blacklisted and evicted. Nor did his party suffer any externally induced shocks. Mapai's undisputed dominance ever since the very beginning of the 1930s could conceivably imply an uninterrupted string of Herut defeats. But the stability of the Israeli political system, both in terms of electoral results and of the parties forming the government coalition, accounts for the general tendency to estimate success or failure by comparison with the numerical results of the previous elections. For example, a minor party of, say, three or four members of Knesset (MKs) and no hope of effectively challenging Mapai's hold on political power (e.g., the

Communists or the Progressive Party) could count the addition of one (e.g., the Progressives in 1955) or two MKs (e.g., the Communists in 1961) as an electoral victory. By such a yardstick, Herut was not a victim of an electoral failure but was steadily improving its showing. The party began the 1950s with 8 MKs and ended them with 17. Nor, one may add, was there a reason to fear any sudden future decline. As for Mapai's partner, Ahdut Ha'avoda, it did suffer serious electoral losses in 1959, from 10 to 7 Knesset members. But two years later it retrieved one, and it could expect a continued recovery. Moreover, its efforts to bring about the unity of the labor parties preceded 1959 and were mainly prompted by the fear of attempts by Herut to form a cluster of its own and the wish to ensure the perpetuation of labor superiority in face of the vast socio-economic developments that were taking place. In brief, the gist of the argument presented in part I of this book is that it was not externally induced shocks or leadership changes that motivated the party transformations of the mid-1960s and 1970s but rather the wish to challenge the stability of the party system on the one hand and the counterattempts to preserve it on the other.

Already in the mid-1950s Begin had come to the conclusion that Herut's main problem as an opposition lay in its inability to project an image of a credible alternative to Mapai and its coalition partners. What was necessary was a jolt to the party system that would insinuate into the public mind the feasibility of a change of government. As yet, this proved inauspicious. After the Knesset elections of 1961, and especially after the change of prime ministers in 1963, new opportunities presented themselves, encouraging Begin to take action and enabling him to gain the necessary support both within his party and with its potential allies. First and foremost among these opportunities was the growing disarray within Mapai. To a large extent, it was this threat itself that prompted Mapai and coalition partners to its left to find ways to gloss over their differences to forge a united front. Each of the opposing couples foresaw the crystallization of a new center-right party or a new center-left party, and this galvanized both to conclude their respective deals thus setting the party system on a new trajectory. A basic assumption shared by the social-structure, the adaptive-organization, and the purposive-action approaches is that change springs from conditions that prevail at the time. Here, on the contrary, the case is of transformations motivated largely by the anticipation of what the future might bring. As in chess, the players concentrated on future scenarios while bearing in mind possible adversarial countermoves. The opposition sought to set in motion changes in the party system that could lead to a new political climate such as would improve its electoral fortunes. Mapai and its allies sought mainly to introduce such modifications as would foil such intentions. In both cases what was at stake were the considered decisions of party leaders bent on widening their electoral appeal by shifting public attention from principles to pragmatic issues, while confining their ideologies to the inner circles of the party-cum-factions within the new formations.

This autonomy of party policies explains how transformations that brought about party styles and manner of campaigning so reminiscent of what Kirchheimer was prognosticating occurred in precisely the conditions in which he predicted they would not occur, namely, in the case of a small democracy with a large party in power for many years and dependent on the cooperation of smaller parties.

Part II illustrates how such autonomy of party policies hinges on the existence of an environment that allows it to take place. In treating the long drawn-out transition from a system in which converging cluster parties formed the center of gravity to one dominated by opposing party-blocs I will argue that the precipitating force was an unforeseen change in the environment. It was a rare relaxation of the febrile tensions of Israeli politics from the mid-1960s to the early 1970s that made party clustering possible. The 1973 Yom Kippur War opened a Pandora's box of escalating economic tensions, disputes about the territorial identity of the state, and conflicts over its religious and democratic nature. What now occupied the center stage of the party system were two large contenders, both of which had emerged in a different era, and neither of which were suited to deal with the challenges of the day. Against this background the adaptive-organizational and the purposive-action approaches appear suggestive.

Party clustering constitutes a compromise between a common desire to attain or retain power and the desire of each component to realize as many of its interests as possible. Here it may be in place to comment briefly on the efforts to account for the number of parties vying for power in democratic systems. Two factors have been offered. One is the rules of the electoral game. What has been often referred to since the 1960s as the "Duverger's Law" (or, more particularly its second part, "Duverger's Hypothesis") is that simple majority single-ballot constituency systems (often called "first-past-the-post") favor two-party competitions, whereas simple majority with second ballots and proportional representation systems favor multiparty competitions.²⁷ Another explanation, closely related to the social structure theory, hinges on the patterns of social cleavage. Parties align themselves with specific segments of society, and hence shifts in the social structure are reflected in changes in the number of parties. Proponents of each of these explanations do not regard them as necessarily mutually exclusive, and recent discussions suggest various combinations.²⁸ But in Israel significant changes in the numbers of competing parties occurred regardless of the stability of the electoral laws and of social-cleavage structures. The consequence was that each of the factions that had joined together remained attached to the segments of the electorate that it had relied on before. As long as the benefits to these groups outweighed the costs of cooperation this raised few difficulties. But once the costs ratcheted up because of resolute decision that had to be made on divisive issues touching factional bases, or because of quarrels concerning positions of power, factions were tempted to engage in tactics of brinkmanship or even to secede to avoid mass desertion. At such times however the shift

toward factional fusion may equally be accelerated. Smaller, less doctrinaire and less structurally developed factions may be faced with the alternative of leaving the party altogether or paying an ever higher price in terms of compromises to their more aggressive counterparts. Their identities may thereby be weakened, their ability to mobilize supporters threatened, and their credibility in brinkmanship tactics reduced.

This explains why following the 1973 war, when critical decisions on issues that were not in general agreement (e.g., defense issues involving the very survival of the state) had to be made, the cluster party constituting the mainstay of government became subject to factional rivalry and leadership feuds on the one hand and to fusion tendencies on the other. As a result, whichever party was in office underwent a transformation. Equally important stimuli to change were the external shocks of electoral debacles. The value of the purposive-action approach for the understanding of what took place is especially evident in the case of labor in 1988. In the elections of 1981 and 1984, the party adopted similar strategies in similar, highly favorable circumstances. The results were similar too: in both cases it snatched defeat out of the jaws of victory. In consequence the party chairman, together with a few of the high-ranking officials, resolved on the eve of the 1988 campaign to effect a fundamental change of direction. To do so they had to overcome considerable resistance, leading to serious intraparty conflict before the elections and a good deal of rancor after them.

When we go into the form that the changes took, however, it is the adaptive-organizational approach, especially in its Kirchheimer-Epstein version, that comes to mind. Shortly after its rise to power the greater ideological differences within the Likud as well as the doctrinaire nature of its largest party-cum-faction, Herut, brought about a series of secessions from the party on the one hand and the acceptance of the Herut line by those members who remained on the other. At the same time Labor, where the ideological differences were less severe and where the most doctrinaire faction was also the smallest one, cohered to become something resembling a European catchall party. What helped was that being an opposition party it was free from the necessity to bind itself to clear positions. Moreover, Mapai had actually disappeared following the resignation of the Old Guard that was tainted by the failures on the eve of the Yom Kippur War. The outcome was that in the elections of 1981 and again in 1984 the showdown became one between an ideological party in government and a catchall party in opposition. The fact that in spite of all its advantages Labor gained disappointing results in both elections suggests that in a competition of this kind it is precisely the catchall parties that are liable to suffer serious losses unless they undergo programmatic change and present concrete stands on the fundamental problems confronting society.

This would seem to disprove the Kirchheimer-Epstein thesis. Both predicted that the adoption of catchall tactics would be unidirectional. Once a party

became a catchall party, both it and the party system could be expected to stay the course. Such predictions, however, were made during the optimistic 1960s, when the common assumption in the West was of ever-continuing progress towards greater prosperity. This assumption was shaken by the unemployment and stagflation of the 1970s, paralleling what happened in Israel, and in part deriving from the same source, namely, war in the Middle East. What in Israel ushered in a new era proved in Europe to be more of a passing phase; yet the lessons Israel seems to teach may be pertinent elsewhere. Paradoxically, these are that as significant changes occur in the environment, parties must adapt themselves—and those that hesitate to adopt the required changes will suffer at the polling booth; to wit, the very principle Kirchheimer and Epstein claimed, although in contexts different than theirs the results could be the negative of the picture presented in their predictions. The “end of ideology” thesis assumed that in the increasingly amorphous and affluent societies of the West what divides the parties are essentially pragmatics such as leadership and system management, suitably spiced to add zest to the competition. However, where the electorate is caught up with serious problems of contentious nature catchall tactics obfuscate the alternatives and undermine the ability of the voter to exercise his power of choice. Especially when the concentration of the people falls on a few major issues such as that they perceive to affect their lives directly, parties that ignore them are in peril. Hence the full circle gone through by the main Israeli parties. In the mid-1960s the environment permitted them to carry out transformations the goal of which was to shape the preferences of the voters and thereby to maximize electoral gain. Under the changed circumstances of the 1980s, this permission was in effect revoked, and the range of freedom allowed the parties was curtailed. Both periods were characterized by far-reaching party changes, but there was a world of difference between them. In the former period, party leaders acted creatively to produce a market for their merchandise. In the latter period, they found themselves compelled to reconsider their strategies and react to market demand to avoid bankruptcy.

If the transformation of the party system of the prestate and early statehood era into the cluster party system resulted from deliberate efforts to bring about environmental change, and if the subsequent transformation of the cluster party system into the party-bloc system resulted from adaptations to environmental change, then the third transformation, treated in part III, was a combination of both. It was rooted in a legislative act aiming at resolving the paralysis caused by the stalemate of the hostile party-blocs: it was, in short, a willed effort to bring about a change in the party system. But the result was a change in the environment that set off unintended contradictory impulses. One was exhibited in the Knesset competition, where the list-based proportional representation format was retained; the other in the separate prime ministerial vote in which a candidate-oriented majority system was introduced.

What happened at the level of the rivalry over the Knesset seats best lends itself to an analysis from the social structure approach. One of the most consistent attributes of the Israeli party system had been the incongruence between the large number of parties that attempted to aggregate the interests of particular socioeconomic and ethnic segments of the Jewish population in virtually all the legislative matches on the one hand, and their lack of electoral effectiveness on the other. Much of the explanation can be found in the centripetal pressures generated by the need to take critical decisions on vital common issues, particularly that of defense. As a result, Jewish ethnic and sectoral parties, with the important exception of the ultraorthodox, have rarely passed the electoral threshold, and those who have made it have won meager results and have been disbanded or absorbed by the larger parties. The redirection by the electoral reform of the main common issues into the channel of the competition for the premiership had consequently the effect of the bursting of the dam, releasing pent-up needs. Inglehart and others argued that party-system change will arise from the appearance of new needs in the postindustrial society. This, they claimed, explains such new parties as the Greens or women's liberation movements. But in Israel it was needs anchored in the past that suddenly won a political space they had never enjoyed before. *New* in this context does not necessarily imply "unprecedented." In 1996, the first elections held under the electoral reform, and even more in the elections of 1999, new parties in the above-mentioned sense did indeed show up.²⁹ In the latter elections there were a casino party, a women's rights party, a men's rights party, and even a party seeking the practice of yoga as a solution for all problems. Not one of them achieved a single seat. What did succeed, and that to the degree that the party system "has undergone dealignment, almost deconstruction,"³⁰ were parties giving expression to the hitherto repressed ethnic, cultural, or narrowly defined social and economic groups. The term *communitarian parties*³¹ may help to clarify the needs that came to the fore: the erection of borders from within the mass society through the reintegration of the individual into a subcommunity and the improvement of his welfare by the advancement of its interests.

The flip side was that the two larger parties that failed to adapt themselves to the new-old needs lost so heavily that together they entered the millennium with roughly the same number each had mustered in the early 1980s. Not that they remained as they had been before the electoral reform. In point of fact, they underwent significant structural and programmatic change, as well as shifts in style and methods of campaigning. But these were engineered to attain a different objective, reflecting a switch in the primary goal of the parties. Whereas earlier it had been to maximize Knesset vote or to promote party ideology, now it became to gain an absolute majority in what has become in effect a two-party (or three-party in 1999) competition for the premiership. Anthony Downs, a forerunner of what was to become the adaptive-organizational approach, had already

pointed out in the 1950s that parties acting on rational grounds would adapt themselves to changes in the number of contenders amounting to a change from a multiparty to a two-party competition through modifications of their style and message. A multiparty competition invites an ideological style, whereas a two-party competition entails a veering to what Kirchheimer was to call *catchall tactics*. Notwithstanding the fact that on the face of it such an analysis could contribute little to the understanding of earlier party transformations in Israel, it would seem that Downs's theorizing was on target as concerns the full-scale adoption of the "American style" of political discourse in the personalist contest for the highest office: the commercial drives conducted by self-promoters and teams of professional mass-media consultants who craft messages geared to attract the entire electorate by substituting simplicity for substance and by appealing to the hedonistic drives of the voter. Such a generalized solicitation of individuals would seem to be in contradiction to the particular address to narrow group interests by the communitarian parties. Yet, the relations that developed between them allowed not merely their cohabitation but mutual encouragement because the parties that fielded candidates for the premiership directed their appeal to the very electorate that chose to support communitarian parties in the Knesset competition. To such, the message was not that they must choose one option over the other, but that they should vote for the one interest in the Knesset and for the other in the premiership. In other words, the call was for a split choice epitomizing the struggle for the soul of modern Israel. This, in turn, deprived the larger parties of the ammunition necessary for effective Knesset competition, leaving them with little to offer their own supporters as incentives to prefer them at the parliamentary level.

Neither the adaptive-organizational approach nor either of the two others provide however a fully satisfactory explanation of the far-reaching party modifications determined by the candidates for premiership, each with his small cadre of loyalists. Such modifications included the major shift in ideology and strategy enforced in mid-campaign by the Likud's Netanyahu, which mesmerized not only the public at large but even his own party, contributing greatly to his immediate success in the 1996 campaign but also to his stunning defeat in the following contest of 1999. They also included arrangements that drew small parties into the framework of the Likud on the eve of the 1996 elections and into a new cluster party centering on Labor towards the contest of 1999. In the latter case, despite the timing of the change, coming as it did on the eve of the campaign, clearly this was no mere response to the exigencies of electioneering. What was involved rather was a gambit designed to lead to a fundamental restructuring of the party system as a whole. As Prime Minister Barak defined it some three months after taking office, "a process of renewal such as would lead to the crystallization of a new political body . . . comprised of political movements and entities and of various personalities."³² The objective in either case was to

improve party competitiveness. In 1996 it was through the redirection of public attention away from the basic ideological differences over the peace process that had distinguished the party-blocs. In 1999 it was to be achieved by blurring the sociological referents of labor as well as by moderating its positions. Barak actually described the sought-for transformation as “the right way to adapt the party to the new political circumstances.”³³ Nevertheless, it is important to note that in both cases it was not an adaptation to a new environment as much as an attempt to shift public attention and thereby to redirect the issues in debate among the parties. Nor was it any external shock that brought about the change. The formation of One Israel, it is true, did take place after the heavy losses incurred by both large parties in the parliamentary race of 1996. But if we bear in mind that these were caused by the inability to satisfy the new-old communitarian needs that were emancipated by the electoral reform, the party change clearly was not intended to resolve the problem as much as to improve Barak’s starting point in the prime ministerial race. Under discussion then are purposive party transformations of the kind that lie outside the continuum presented by the current approaches to party and party-system change. The wheel seemed to have come full circle with the end of the millennium witnessing the type of modifications that initiated the 35 years of accelerated party change that began in the mid-1960s and that was illustrated by the Begin-Seidel anecdote.

The shifts of 1996 and 1999 were however short lived, and the entire parlia-presidential format was legislated out of existence fewer than five years after it was put into practice. The reason lies in its unforeseen consequences, not only at the Knesset level but, perhaps more important, also at the prime ministerial one. The direct popular election of the prime minister obviated the key question in previous coalition making, namely, how far was the party that garnered the largest number of votes from ensuring parliamentary majority, and how close to it was its largest rival. Instead, postreform calculations turned on how much would the candidate-elect have to pay potential coalition allies to ensure the requisite majority. In both cases however the point of departure was an inverse relation between the size of the candidate’s party and the price needed to be paid to coalition partners. Although the new electoral setup deprived the smaller parties from their king-making capacity, the precipitous decline of the larger parties raised the price winning candidates had to dole out to put together multimembered coalitions comprised of different and even competing interests. Nor was the cost restricted to the coalition formation stage or to the distribution of portfolios and policy positions alone. The fact that the coalitions were always prone to paralysis on the one hand and to internal combustion on the other compelled the prime ministers to engage in constant bargaining with their members and arbitration among them. Chapter 7 treats the outcome through an analysis of what happened to Netanyahu and to Barak, the two prime ministers whose tenure in office marked the time boundaries of the new system and who suffered, each in

his turn, humiliating defeats in early elections. The abrogation of the direct election of the prime minister and the return to proportional representation as the only form of national suffrage could be read as a tacit admission that political engineering had come short because of insufficient sensitivity to the environment. Ironically, the repeal of the direct elections for the prime minister seems to suffer from the same problem because it failed to take into account the new configuration of the party system and the changes in voter outlook and behavior brought about by the reform itself. Judging by the lessons of the former attempt to alter the structure of the party system at a single stroke, the results cannot be wholly foreseen, a subject that chapter 8 briefly addresses.

III. Some Methodological Considerations

Before going into the specifics of my argument a few comments may be in order. Our subject being the changes occurring in the major Israeli parties, the impact they had on the competition among them, and the effect of this competition on the party system as a whole, the accent will fall on the focal points of electoral campaigns. It is more usual in political science literature to treat electoral campaigns separately, like beads strung on a necklace, but here the attempt will be to show the connection of the campaigns as a single ongoing story. The common thread is the interrelationship of party structures and party ideology, and of electoral strategy and electoral tactics in changing environments. Because the first pair has already been touched on, a word of clarification is called for with regard to the second. Rather than offering a formal definition, it suffices for my purpose simply to describe them while admitting that in practice they may overlap somewhat. *Strategy* here refers to two issues. One is the identification of the public to be courted and, in a world of limited resources, also the nonwinnable public and those whose vote can be counted on with minimal cost. The other issue is the designing of a "message" directed to the winnable portion of the electorate such as will offer an interpretation of reality that will serve to justify ideas, policies, leaders, and a general set of anticipations for the future. *Tactics*, on the other hand, refers to the operational means by which the strategic decisions are carried out. This includes when, where, and by whom the message is broadcast, the attendant activities best suited to enhance its persuasiveness, and the way of defending it against the tactics of adversaries.

Another question is which main parties are under scrutiny? The choice of subject in any narrative is inevitably highly selective, and the selection of any perspective, as with all definitions, involves a further degree of exclusion. My main protagonists will be the two largest Israel parties in their varying guises; the plot will turn on their shifting identities, their rivalry, and the impact of their competition on the Israeli party system. It has already been mentioned that Israel has known since the preindependence era a relatively large number of smaller

parties. In coalition making those in the Jewish sector have always played a significant role, and a sign of the neck and neck race for power in the 1980s and 1990s was the growing relevance not only of Jewish religious parties but also of the Arab contenders, although they as yet were mainly partners in a “negative” group trying to block the formation of right-wing coalitions. The “breaching of the dams” by the electoral reform that came into effect in 1996 furthered the number and importance of the Jewish communitarian parties. The postreform governments were considerably dependent on them, and the rift between the ultraorthodox Sephardis and the secular-minded Russian immigrants was an important factor in the landslide Likud defeat of 1999, just as the constant bickering between the ultraorthodox and secular parties in Barak’s coalition hastened its demise. Nevertheless, because the communitarian parties do not compete for the votes of the general electorate but of closed communities, they are not germane to my subject. They are therefore referred to only in the context of their role in the strategic and tactical calculations of Labor and the Likud, or when their performance has a bearing on the larger competitors, as in the cases mentioned earlier.

Another ground justifying the relative inattention to the smaller parties is to render this work accessible to the nonspecialist in Israeli affairs. The number of Hebrew names and personages, as well as of events and the details of socioeconomic, defense, and other issues have therefore been minimized. Likewise, no attempt is made to analyze the nature of Israel as an evolving state or the nature of its political elites, nor is any treatment of the roots of the party system or of any specific electoral results included. On all these there exists a plethora of studies, surprising in the instance of so small a country, and to them there is little the present work can add. But an abstraction cannot go beyond a certain limit. The opening section of chapter 2 offers a sketch of the historical milieu, which may help to orient the nonspecialist in the broad outlines of the original party system the deviations from which are the theme of this book. In the chapters that follow only such details are mentioned as are necessary for following the strategic calculations of the chief contestants, and this too only as they were understood by them. The hope is that such a minimalist approach may cast the central thesis in greater relief. For this purpose I end each part of the book with a short summary placing the specific variety of the party-system discussed in the context of the general theory. The work will end by suggesting some parallels to party and party-system change in other countries and times. If the first section of the next chapter serves as a prologue, this final chapter constitutes a short epilogue putting the main strands of the thesis in a comparative geographical and temporal setting.