

Voting for our Story: A Narrative Model of Electoral Choice in Multiparty Systems

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Abstract

This article presents a new approach for the study of voting behavior in multi-party systems based on narrative approaches. We develop an empirical technique to measure the similarities and dissimilarities between stories told by political actors and employ it to measure their effect of voting behavior. Even with other fundamental attitudinal and demographic factors held constant, we hypothesize that voters will usually prefer parties that hold and communicate the national narratives they possess. We demonstrate, for the first time, the potential contribution of this approach on the case of Israeli multiparty system using data gathered during the 2009 elections. Specifically, the article employs survey data to gauge voter attitudes about fundamental national narratives in Israel and systematic analysis of parties' discourse in parliamentary speeches to gauge parties' stories. Controlling for demographics and ideology in a series of logistic regressions we found that voting behavior for most parties is significantly affected by the narrative proximity between voters' stories and parties' stories.

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"Stories about what a nation has been and should try to be are not attempts at accurate representation, but rather attempts to forge a moral identity"
Richard Rorty (1998, 13).

There are various ways of telling national stories. These ways are neither a matter of truism nor are they a matter of scientific historiography. Rather they embody both a retrospective and prospective perception of the collective. Consider, for example, two versions of Turkey's national story. One version rests with the constitutional principles of "the secular Republic"¹ and views Atatürk's reforms as the main starting point of Turkey's nationality. Another perspective launches the collective story of Turkey with Mohammed and the Koran. In his famous speech in 1997, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the current Prime Minister of the Republic of Turkey, gave prominence to these stories by pointing to "two fundamentally different camps" in Turkey, "those who follow Atatürk's reforms [secularists] and the Muslims who unite Islam with Shari'a" (Baykal, 2009). Erdoğan made it quite clear where he stood between the two approaches, citing the following by the Ottoman Islamist poet Ziya Gökalp: "The mosques are our barracks, the domes our helmets, the minarets our bayonets and the faithful our soldiers..." (Baykal, 2009).²

The story of Turkey begins from a completely different starting point for president of Turkey and former Prime Minister, Abdullah Gül: "We, as the Turkish people, are the heirs of both a proud history and a nation that has established many great states and empires that have spanned the globe [...]. The goal, laid forth by the great Atatürk, founder of our Republic, of 'raising the Republic of Turkey higher than the level of contemporary

¹ See The Constitution of the Republic of Turkey, <http://www.byegm.gov.tr/sayfa.aspx?Id=78> (access, February, 2010).

² As a result of the speech he was removed from the office of mayor of Istanbul and was sentenced to a ten-month prison term (Baykal, 2009).

civilizations' must always be borne in mind".³ Obviously these different stories represent the core rift in modern Turkey.

Focusing on the manifestation of future developments and prospects sheds more light on the nuances of these national stories. For instance, Erdoğan's national story does not only differ from the secular tradition of modern Turkey, but it also does not comply with fundamentalist Islamism. Thus he does not call for the implementation of *Sharia* and the creation of a Nation of Islam by force. Rather, he occasionally stresses the "boundless tolerance culture of this country",⁴ or "cohabitation between the Christians and Muslims."⁵

Although there are obviously other nuances in Turkey's narratives and the context of each speech matters, understanding national narratives is a rather simple and straightforward way to gauge core political positions. Turkey is obviously not unique in that matter. Similar analyses can be made on other nations. If we were to ask a citizen of Italy to cite the major event in his national story, we are likely to get a range of answers spanning from ancient Rome through the Renaissance, the Italian unification of the 19th century and up to the establishment of the Italian republic in 1946. One citizen of Egypt may root the Egyptian story from biblical times while another may begin the narrative with the Egyptian Revolution of 1952.

Combining visions of history with current politics has always been a fundamental part of political life, as politics is always about building the future through visions of present and

³ Abdullah Gül, The acceptance speech by 11th President of Turkey at the Parliament August 28, 2007.
<http://www.developing8.org/files/storage/uploads/4thkwtl07/The%20acceptance%20speech%20by%2011th%20President%20of%20Turkey.pdf> (access, February, 2010).

⁴ Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Statement by Prime Minister Against Anti-Semitism, January 16, 2007.
<http://www.chicago.cg.mfa.gov.tr/ShowAnnouncement.aspx?ID=494>.

⁵ Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, "Why the EU Needs Turkey" Oxford, May 28, 2004.
<http://www.sant.ox.ac.uk/esc/docs/Erdogan1.pdf>.

past. Political leadership is tuned to the constant dialogue between founding fathers and the next generations, between heritage and future developments or between legacy and expectations for a better future. This existential political position makes the narrative mode of thought and talk, that strives to place experiences in time and place (Bruner, 1986) central for any political encounter. It is thus no wonder that just as we can learn about personal identity through the stories people tell about themselves, we can shed light on national perceptions through the stories people tell about their nation.

Still, national narratives are often more than historical account of the collective past since they always, implicitly or explicitly, refer to the future of the nation. Accordingly, the political perception of a person who begins his national story with a mythical past and tells the collective future in terms of a 'strong nation' will probably differ from a person that begins his or her story with the establishment of the modern state and prefers a future of 'civil equality'. Moreover, it is logical to assume that both sorts of people will communicate better and have a greater attachment to others or to a political organization that narrate the national story in a similar way. In this way, we can regard narrative similarity as a potential indicator of the political relatedness between people and political organizations. Here we see the possible impact of narrative similarity between voters and parties on voting behavior.

In other words, many scholars of elections in a variety of different countries have used theoretical frameworks and found strong empirical evidence that voters cast their ballots on retrospective performance (e.g., Fiorina 1981). Of course, this work points to fairly immediate retrospection about the state of the economy, the competence of the government in a crisis, or the recent standing of the nation in the world. We have no disagreement with these findings, but explore in this article whether really retrospective evaluations going back hundreds or thousands of years can have an impact even when controlling for fundamental ideological factors and recent events.

Specifically, this study is the first attempt to bring narrative analysis into the field of voting behavior. We develop an empirical way to measure narrative similarity between political stories of parties and voters and demonstrate its effect on voting preferences in the Israeli multiparty system. This demonstration shows that narrative similarity between voters and parties explains voting choices, even when controlling for the fundamental, familiar, and powerful correlates of voting behavior, such as ideology and socio-demographic factors.

In this article, we begin with a discussion of narrative theory, focusing on the concept of 'narrative identity' and the meanings of narrative similarity in the political domain. Next, we present our approach to measuring narrative proximity, which represents narrative similarity. Then we discuss the potential contribution of the study of narrative proximity to our understanding of and ability to explain voting behavior. Finally we demonstrate the impact of narrative proximity in the 2009 Israeli elections, and discuss our findings in the larger theoretical frame of voting behavior and narrative study. This demonstration is only one indication of the potential contribution of narrative approaches to our understanding of the complicated perceptual processes that drive voting behavior.

Narrative Identity and Narrative similarity in the Political Domain

The role of narratives was central to Plato's concerns on the potential danger of stories and myths in his *Republic*; it was part of Aristotle's *Poetics* and *Rhetoric*; and it played an important role in Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria*. More recently, there has been increasing scholarly attention on the effect of narratives (e.g. Buthe 2002; Cornog 2004; Fischer 2003; Fisher 1985; Hajer 1995; Ku 1999; Linde 2001; McBeth et al. 2007; McGee and Nelson 1985; Patterson and Monroe 1998; Roe 1994, 1998; Shenhav 2006; Yanow 2006) with a "growing belief that narrative represents a universal medium of human consciousness" (Lucaites and Condit 1985, 90; Elliott 2005). Stemming from the basic understanding that human beings are essentially story-telling animals (MacIntyre 1981) with a natural impulse to

narrate (White 1981), these studies put forward the unique feature of the narrative form and its application to the political domain.

By and large, as put forward by Fischer (2003), the narrative mode is not only understood as a basic form of communication, but also as a "mode of thoughts" that "furnishes communication with the particular details out of which social meaning is constructed." Moreover, "it is through storytelling that people assesses social positions in their communities, understand the goals and values of different social groups, and internalize social conventions" (179). The presence of narratives in the political arena can, therefore, have a dominant impact on the way people perceive their political reality. Hajer (1995), for example, sees narratives as "discursive cement" that keeps a discourse-coalition together (65). Fischer (2003) regards narrative as a distinct "cognitive scheme", which imposes "coherent interpretation on the whirl of events and actions that surrounds us"(163). Narratives, he asserts, places "social phenomena in the larger patterns that attribute social and political meaning to them" (179).

This unique and distinct quality of the narrative form resides in the concept of 'narrative identity', developed by Ricoeur (1991). Narrative, according to this concept "provides the practical means" by which persons "can understand themselves as living through time, a human subject with a past, present, and future, made whole by the coherence of the narrative plot with a beginning, middle, and end" (Elliott 2005, 125).

Studies, led by scholars of psychology, have provided support for the effects of narratives. For example, studies show that people think, perceive, imagine and carry out moral decisions using narrative structures (e.g., Sarbin 1986). Empirical studies of "transportation theory" that "emerged to explain the persuasive effects of narratives" (Green, Brock and Kaufman 2004, 312) provide yet another support for the understanding of the dominant presence of narrative in human mind. This relatively new area of research shows

that "to the extent that individuals are absorbed into a story or transported into a narrative world, they may show effects of the story on their real world beliefs" (Green and Brook 2000, 701; see also Green 2008; Gerrig 1993; Nell 1988). For example, experiments showed that pre-existing familiarity with aspects of the narrative world can increase the transportation of individuals to the narrative world (Green 2004, 2008) and that transportation does not depend on whether a narrative is fictional or reflects real-world (Green, Brock and Kaufman 2004). These studies also found that individuals who were transported into a narrative are likely to change their beliefs in response to events or claims in a story, and that "Transportation may reduce individuals' ability to counterargue assertions or events in the story because the reader's cognitive capacity is committed to imagining story events" (Green 2008).

Linking these empirical findings with the concept of narrative identity leads to the conclusion that narratives do more than produce a sense of belonging. They also decrease our sense of criticism toward parts of this narrative, and by inference increase criticism toward those who are outside the border of ones' narrative.

This expectation is in line with the scholarly writing on the role of cultural resonance in the transference of frames. According to these writings when it comes to frames, some "have a natural advantage because their ideas and language resonate with a broader political culture" (Gamson 1992, 135; see also, e.g., Benford and Snow 2000; Entman 2004, 2008; Frenley and Michaud 2006; Miller and Riechert 2003; Pan and Kosicki 2003; Snow and Benford 1988; Wolfsfeld 1997). A similar claim is raised by Patterson and Monroe (1998) that ties the cultural level with a narrative theoretical framework, asserting that "[t]he shared stories of a culture provide grounds for common understandings and interpretation" (321). It is, thus, fair to assume that if the way we "story the world" (Mishler 1995, 117) tells us much on the way we make meanings, similarities or dissimilarities in the stories people hold about their nationality should be indicative to a wide scopes of political perceptions.

Narrative Proximity and Voting Behavior

Voting behavior is an ideal context to evaluate the role of political narrative similarity. In this context we should focus on the relationship between voters and parties. It is plausible that voters would not only be attracted, passively, to those parties who share similar national narratives, but just like the case with ideology would also actively choose parties that share similar narratives to their own.

The notion of similarity between narratives has been occasionally discussed under the concept of 'narrative proximity'. This concept is typically applied to studies on nurse-patient relations, where "Both physical proximity — nearness to the patient's body — and narrative proximity— understanding the patient's story" are under scrutiny (Peter and Liaschenkob 2004, 219). We prefer this concept for two major reasons. First, as detailed below, our empirical and methodological goal is to measure distances between voters' stories and parties' stories, and not merely to account for the dichotomy of similarity versus dissimilarities. Second, we are cautious of the ambiguous set of potential parameters that one can utilize when referring to similarity and dissimilarity between stories. Since we employ our analyses on a particular parameter of narratives, we prefer this more technical term of proximity.

Our model focuses on the role of stories held by people about their nationality and the proximity between these stories and parties' stories. Similar to the general premise of proximity voting (i.e., voters prefer parties that are closer to them on an issue dimension), the premise of the narrative proximity approach developed here is that voters prefer parties that are closer to them on the dimension of national story or share their national story to a greater extent. This expectation, as explained above, rests on the assumption that similarity between the way people conceive the story of their nation and the way it is conceived by parties should be correlated with voting preferences.

The explanation behind this assumption is that national stories are indications of core identities; they reflect collective national perceptions and in that sense differ from explicit political identities or issue preferences. We therefore expect that narrative proximity will add to our current understanding of voting behavior. Specifically we hypothesize that even with other fundamental demographic characteristics and political attachments accounted for,

H1: The greater the proximity between a voter's national story and a party's national story, the greater the probability that the voter will cast his or her vote for that party, all else being held constant.

Narrative Proximity in a Multiparty System

Due to problems associated with modeling multiple alternatives, empirical analyses of voting behavior in multiparty systems is usually more complicated than in two-party systems, (Quinn, Martin and Whitford 1999; Whitten and Palmer 1996). That said, main explanatory factors such as sociodemographic and issue proximity still play a central role in these models.

Israel, the empirical focus of this study, is a classic multiparty system, with approximately a dozen parties being elected to the *Knesset* in a typical election. Shamir and Arian's (1999) model of voting behavior in Israel emphasizes the role of collective identity in Israeli electoral competition. It controls for socio-demographic variables such as age, gender, education, income, ethnic background and religiosity and for issue preferences such as the question of the occupied territories, embodied by the left-right position.

Several studies analyze additional explanations, such as bloc identification and media priming (Sheafer 2007; Sheafer and Weimann 2005); strategic voting (Bargsted and Kedar 2009; Blais, Aldrich, Indridason and Levine 2006) or issue proximity (Bargsted and Kedar 2009).

While many of these studies can explain significant variance when it comes to voting behavior, this study adds the narrative proximity explanation. We believe that this is an important finding – especially in multiparty systems – since it allows for understanding nuances in “block” behavior.

Measuring Narrative Proximity

The fundamental empirical challenge in this study was to operationalize national narrative in a way that would allow us to measure voters' narratives, parties' narratives and the proximity between them. Narrative can be broadly defined as “the representation of *at least two* real or fictive events or situations in time sequence, neither of which presupposes or entails the other (Prince 1982, 4, original emphasis; see also Franzosi 2010; Rimmon-Kenan 1983).” Though narratives usually have much more than this minimal qualification, it nevertheless makes a valid operational definition for political narrative analysis (Shenhav 2005).

The focus in this context is not on the textual qualities of narratives, but rather on the stories in peoples' mind that can be the result of numerous oral or written texts. Some apply the concept of meta-narrative, namely the 'story of the story' (Aurbach 2009), or the concept of 'master narrative' or 'Big-N Narrative' (Tannen 2008). All of these concepts refer to stories which are basically abstracted from many texts. For the sake of simplicity, we shall use the concept of 'story' as narrated events, similar to Rimmon Kenan (1983), but stressing that in line with the above understanding of meta-narrative, these events can be abstracted from one or several texts.

We offer a simple, straightforward and easy to generalize way to measure narrative proximity, based on crude differences between story lines. Note, however that we cannot account for all rhetorical and poetical devices included in the process of narration of the stories.

We offer a new three-step approach to operationalizing narrative proximity between voters and parties. First, we build a list of major national stories; second, we identify the national stories of the political actors (voters and parties); and third, we analyze the proximity between voters' stories and parties' stories. We discuss these three steps below, using data from the 2009 Israeli elections.

Step 1. Building a List of Major National Stories

Our approach requires that we pre-determine a set of stories that comprise at least the past and the future as major benchmarks of stories. These stories should be important enough, relevant and explicitly manifested both for voters and for parties. Sources for major stories can be found, for example, in major national documents such as constitutions or major speeches. Our source for Israeli national major stories is the *Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel*, a constitutive text which embodies the Zionist argument that leads to Israeli statehood. The declaration was written, edited and re-edited (Rozin 2009; Shachar 2002, 2009) in a process that eventually captured the Israeli-Zionist collectiveness encompassing the differences within main political groups in Israel.⁶

Following the minimal requirement of the narrative form, we shall focus this study on a limited number of stories resulting from combinations of past and future developments. Obviously, accounting for the future in national narratives cannot take the concrete form of past events, but rather refers in a more general mode to the future of the nation. We have identified four major past and future events or developments implied or explicitly manifested in the *Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel* (see quotations in brackets).

⁶ Note that the Arab population was broadly excluded from various stories offered in the declaration. As expected, most Arab respondents in our exit poll (see below) did not identify with past events offered in the survey. Although this is an interesting and important fact, we excluded the Arab voters from our analyses, mainly for the sake of comparability with previous analyses.

Identifying these events was based on our reading of the text. Doing so, we have tried to focus on the relevant ramifications of the declaration. Therefore, some of the events are not specifically mentioned in the text itself, but rather implied by it.⁷ We are aware that the text offers other possible interpretations. Nevertheless, studies that analyzed open-ended responses to survey questions where respondents were asked to indicate the most important historical events in Israel resulted in a similar list of events (Schuman, Vinitzky-Seroussi and Vinokur 2003).

These events and developments constitute several different national stories, or sub stories, of Zionist Israeli statehood:

Past events: (1) Revelation on Mt. Sinai (the Jewish people "gave the world the eternal Book of Books...")⁸; (2) The holocaust ("The catastrophe which recently befell the Jewish people – the massacre of millions of Jews in Europe... Survivors of the Nazi holocaust in Europe"); (3) The establishment of Israel ("We... hereby declare the establishment of a Jewish state in Eretz Israel, to be known as the state of Israel"); and (4) The peace agreement with Egypt (the first peace agreement Israel signed with an Arab state – "We extend our hand to all neighboring states and their peoples in an offer of peace and good neighborliness").

Future developments: (1) A strong state that will know how to defend its people ("...a thriving community... knowing how to defend itself..."; "Placing our trust in the 'rock of Israel'"); (2) A state lives in peace with its neighbors (The state of Israel "will be based on freedom, justice and peace"; "We extend our hand to all neighboring states"); (3) A state that will ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex ("it will ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all its

⁷ For example we concretized the declaration's call for peace by the peace agreement with Egypt, an event that took place some 30 years after the declaration was written.

⁸ All quotes are taken from the *Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel*.

inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex"); and (4) A state that will be the spiritual, cultural and national center of the Jewish nation ("spiritual, religious and political identity was shaped" in Israel; "re-establish" in the "ancient homeland").

Step 2. Identifying the National Stories of the Political Actors

The second step includes identifying national story preferences by voters and parties. Surveys, interviews and focus groups can be used to find out which stories actors such as voters prefer, or what is the relative importance accorded by voters to each story. Similarly, textual analyses of speeches made by party officials, party platforms or even autobiographies of party leaders can be used to glean leaderships' major national stories. For the purpose of this study we have measured voters' stories and parties' stories in the following way:

Voters' stories. All voter information is based on a representative Election Day exit poll conducted in Israel on February 10, 2009 during the contest for the 18th Knesset. We took a random sample of 75 polling stations across Israel. The sampling frame was precincts over 25 voters, stratifying on *Kadima* (the incumbent prime minister's party) vote from the previous election ($n = 2,058$). An indication for the accuracy of the sample can be seen by comparing reports about party vote with actual election results. For example, 23.4% of exit poll respondents reported voting for *Kadima* compared with 22.5% of the total vote that *Kadima* received in the elections. *Likud* received 20.8% in the poll compared with 21.6% and *Shas* 7.8% in the poll compares with 8.5%. The average difference between the party vote in the exit poll and the party vote in the elections is 1.46%.

A voter's story is based on two poll questions, one asking for past events and the other for future developments. Each question included four events (see above) and respondents were instructed to select the most important option in each. As discussed above, we regard the combination of these questions as an indicator of the voter's preferred national story (Figure

1). For example, if a voter chose the establishment of Israel as a past event and Israel as a strong state as a future developments, we can broadly see him as a person who adheres to *Israel-Strong* national story. If another person shared the same past event, but preferred a future prospect of peace with Arab nations, we refer to him or her as one who adheres to a different story, which we can broadly characterize as an *Israel-Peace* story.

[Figure 1 about here]

There are seven main stories that were chosen each by at least five percent of the respondents. These stories were: (1) *Israel-Peace*, which consists of the establishment of Israel (past), and peace with Arab neighbors (future) (18%); (2) *Israel-Strong*, which consists of the establishment of Israel (past), and a strong state (future) (18%); (3) *Biblical-Jewish spiritual*, which consists of the Revelation on Mt. Sinai (past), and a spiritual, national and cultural center for the Jewish nation (future) (11%); (4) *Israel-Equality*, which consists of the establishment of Israel (past), and a state that will guarantee equal rights (future) (9%); (5) *Biblical-Strong*, which consists of the Revelation on Mt. Sinai story (past), and a strong state (future) (8%); (6) *Holocaust-Strong* story, which consists of the holocaust (past), and a strong state (future) (5%); and (7) *Holocaust-Peace*, which consist of the holocaust (past), and Peace with Arab neighbors (future) (5%). The story that each voter selected was coded as 1, while the other stories as 0.

Parties' story preferences. We are looking for indicators for the emphasis given by parties to the story components (past events and future developments) in Knesset discussions. We have translated the past events and future developments included in the major seven stories into a set of key words. In some cases we employed more than one key word so as to encompass the event. We employed a computerized search engine of the Knesset's archive to systematically retrieve speeches of members of the Knesset from each party in which these keywords appeared. Speeches given during the term of the Knesset prior to the 2009

elections, that is, the 17th Knesset encompassed the universe of speeches. Alternative texts, such as campaign ads, are also possible here, although these texts are usually very personal (Rahat and Sheaffer 2007) and heavily tactical, driven by the competition over the agenda of the elections.

There were a total of 1,233 references to keywords in speeches. For example, if MKs from a certain party used expressions such as 'Revelation on Mt. Sinai' or 'Israeli torah', and expressions like 'strong Israel' or 'strong nation', we coded it as expressions of the *Biblical-Strong* story. Although each voter was assigned to a single story, in the case of party discourse our data is sensitive to the relative frequency of all stories. Specifically, we calculated the relative weight that each party granted for each story compared to other parties. This was done by dividing the frequency of a story (past and future events) in the discourse of party A by the total frequency of the story in the discourse of all parties. Each party was then granted a score for each story (past and future events) that ranged between 0 (the event did not appear at all in the speeches of the party's MKs) and 1 (the event appeared only in the party's speeches and not in other parties' speeches). Notice that in this procedure, the total scores of all parties in each story resulted in a value of 1. On the other hand, the total score of each party on all stories does not have to result in a score of 1.⁹

Step 3. Analyzing Narrative Proximity

We calculated narrative proximity by the distance between a voter's story and a party's story. For each voter, we measured only the distance between his or her story (coded as 1) and the parties' similar story. For example, if a voter has an *Israeli-Strong* story his narrative proximity from the *Likud* party is 1 minus the score of the *Likud* party on the *Israeli-Strong*

⁹ Note also that we do not standardize the results for the size of the party. Indeed, larger parties may, and should, get higher results on all stories simply because they have more members of Knesset. Nevertheless, we found that standardizing the results by the number of MKs in each party did not affect significantly the results of the analyses.

story, and his narrative proximity from *Kadima* is 1 minus the score of *Kadima* on that story. If another voter's story is *Holocaust-Peace*, the proximity between herself and the *Likud* is 1 minus the *Likud*'s scores on the *Holocaust-Peace* story.

Narrative Proximity and Party Vote in the 2009 Israeli Elections

Our hypothesis states that the greater the narrative proximity between a voter and a party, the greater the probability that the voter will cast his or her vote for that party. The first examination of this hypothesis is rather straightforward. We demonstrate it on four main parties: the center-left *Labor* party, the center *Kadima* party, the center-right *Likud* party, and the biggest Jewish religious party *Shas*. Each of the four graphs in Figure 2 compare the relative story emphasis of each party with the stories of all voters, and the stories of those voted for that party. Notice that the two vertical axes present average values for party voters and all voters, on the right hand side, and the average values given for each story by the party on the left hand side. Reading the figures should be done vertically for each story. According to the proximity hypothesis we shall expect to find that the voters for the party are closer the party compares with all voters.

[Figure 2 about here]

Let us first take the case of *Kadima*, the biggest party following the elections. The triangle represents the relative emphasis of each story by the party, the dark diamond indicates the percentage of *Kadima* voters who preferred each story, and the gray square the percentages among all voters that preferred each story. As can be seen, the Israel-Peace story is the most popular story among *Kadima* voters, with 29% preferring this story. It is clear that for this story the voters of *Kadima* are much closer to the party than all voters. This finding supports the proximity hypothesis. Note that similar results, yet somehow less decisive, can also be

seen for the following three leading stories of *Kadima's* voters (i.e., Israel-Strong, Israel-Equality, and Holocaust-Peace).

A similar support for the hypothesis is seen in the case of the second largest party, *Likud*. Its voters are closer to the party compares to all voters in all the stories that are most important to them: Israel-Strong (28% of *Likud* voters hold that story), Israel-Peace, Biblical-Strong, and Holocaust-Strong. The ultra orthodox *Shas* party also seems to support the hypothesis. Here there are two main stories held by *Shas'* voters, Biblical-Spirit (46% of the voters) and Biblical-Strong. In both cases, the party's voters are much closer to their party compares with all voters.

The *Labor* party, on the other hand, is a clear example where the hypothesis is not supported. Notice, for example, that for the most important story for the *Labor's* voters, the Israeli-Peace story, the party is positioned very far from its voters and closer to all voters.

Next, we ran separate logistic regressions for all Jewish parties. The dependent variable, party voting, is coded as 1 if a person voted for a certain party and 0 otherwise. As above, the main explanatory variable is narrative proximity. All regressions, also control for variables found relevant by previous analyses of voting behavior in Israel (e.g., Bargsted and Kedar 2009; Shamir and Arian 1999). These include the following standard sociodemographics: religiosity (1= secular; 2= traditional; 3= religious; 4= orthodox), gender (male= 1), age, education, income, and ethnic background (based on the respondent's father birthplace: Sephardic= 1; Russian= 2; Ashkenazi and Jews whose father was born in Israel= 3). Another control is the respondent's bloc identification/ideology, operationalized as his or her identification with either the left (= 1), center (= 2) or right (= 3) bloc. The analyses are presented in Table 1.

Notice that we did not control for the respondent's party identification, which is typically operationalized in multiparty systems as the party vote in the previous elections (Merrill and Grofman 1999, 93). The reason is because the Israeli party system has undergone a dealignment process since the 1990s (Shamir, Ventura, Arian, and Kedar 2008), which is characterized by "a general loosening of the ties between the society and the political parties" (p. 16). An evidence for that process is the high electoral volatility in Israeli elections in the last decade (Kenig, Rahat, and Hazan 2005; Shamir, Ventura, Arian, and Kedar 2008). For example, our own exit poll shows that only 23.7% of all respondents voted in 2009 for the same party they supported in the previous election.

[Table 1 about here]

Table 1 shows that ideology has a significant impact in the expected direction in all but the cases of the two ultra-religious parties (in one of them the impact is marginally significant). As other analyses in Israel find (e.g., Shamir and Arian 1999), religiosity is the most important demographic variable. And as expected, Sephardic Jews preferred the Sephardic party *Shas*. And on the opposite ends of the ideological spectrum, support for *United Torah & Judaism* and for *Meretz* came from Ashkenazi voters. Such an ethnic vote was also apparent in the case of the only 'Russian' party, *Yisrael Beiteinu*, which enjoyed high levels of support from immigrants from the former Soviet Union voters. *Kadima* enjoyed high rates of support by women. Yet, as can be seen in Table 1, even after accounting for all these major controls, for most parties the effect of narrative proximity on the vote choice was still significant and in the expected direction (i.e., positive). The positive sign indicates that the greater the narrative proximity (or the lower the narrative distance) between a voter and a party, the higher the probability of voting for the party. For two parties (*Meretz* and *Yisrael Beiteinu*) the effect is marginally significant, while for two parties (*Labor* and *United Torah & Judaism*) the effect is insignificant.

A further robustness test for the hypothesis is presented in Figure 3. Based on the estimates produced in Table 1, we calculated the change in predicted probabilities of supporting each party, as narrative proximity (distance) between voters and parties changes from the greatest (smallest) to the smallest (biggest). All analyses in Figure 3 were conducted while holding all the control variables at their mean or median. The predicted probabilities in the figure were calculated using *Clarify* software (King, Tomz, and Wittenberg 2000; Tomz, Wittenberg, and King 2003).

[Figure 3 about here]

The values on the horizontal (x) axis of each graph in Figure 3 represent the narrative proximity between voters and parties, running from the greatest proximity/smallest distance to the smallest proximity/greatest distance. The vertical (y) axes show the predicted probability of voting for the party. It is apparent that the hypothesis is mostly supported, since in most parties greater narrative proximities resulted in a higher probability of voting for the party. The hypothesis, however, is not supported in the cases of *Labor* and *United Torah & Judaism*.

Conclusions

This study brings a new approach to the field of electoral behavior. As far as we know, this is the first attempt to incorporate narrative analysis into an empirical study of voting behavior. The study develops the concept of narrative proximity, which refers to similarities and dissimilarities in narrative identities of voters and parties – that is, between major stories held by voters and parties. It demonstrates that this narrative proximity approach contributes to our understanding of, and ability to predict electoral behavior. The mostly significant impact of narrative proximity suggests that when voters make electoral decisions, they look beyond socio-demographic similarities and ideology; they are searching for a deeper sense of a shared political meaning, which such national stories can provide.

Narrative proximity analysis rests on the premise that the political domain, especially in democratic regimes, offers various collective stories about our past and future developments. These stories, whether implicitly or explicitly, can elevate the political experience from current affairs to larger collective experiences. By and large, these national stories position day-to-day politics in a large perspective of a long national story. Thus, political actors that share similar stories on their nationality will not only have similar interpretations on current affairs, but also have the sense of identification with similar aspects in national existence. As this sense of identification is associated with reducing counterarguments and strong affections toward the protagonist of national stories, the political consequences of narrative proximity becomes clear.

Narrative proximity between voters and parties was found to significantly contribute to the explanation of voting preferences above and beyond more traditional explanations of voting behavior. We believe that what is particularly impressive is that this contribution is demonstrated in a multiparty system, in which the distance between parties is sometimes minor and where traditional models often do not perform very well. Thus, we found indications for some of the major theoretical claims stated by scholars of narrative inquiry.

We expect narrative proximity to be especially valuable in cases when apart for major explanatory variables, such as left-right ideology and religiosity, one seeks to increase sensitivity of the analysis so as to account for nuances in voting behavior. That makes the potential contribution of narrative proximity analysis especially valuable in multiparty systems. Yet we see no reason to expect that it would not contribute to analysis in two-party systems as well.

Our methodological contribution refers to the development of a rather simple method to measure narrative proximity, based on three main steps: (1) extracting a list of major national stories from major national texts. For example, the analysis of the Israeli case rests on a list of

major national stories extracted from Israel's Declaration of Independence; (2) extracting the national stories of the political actors, based on methods such as exit polls and content analyses of speeches; and (3) measuring narrative proximity between the story preferences of any two or more actors. This method allows various quantitative analyses of narrative proximity and its various effects in politics or any other field.

Israel, a prototype of a multiparty system, is a challenging case for testing this newly developed narrative proximity hypothesis. We believe that the fact that the hypothesis is mostly supported is impressive and points to its usefulness. Having said that, the cases in which narrative proximity does not explain voting preferences are no less interesting than cases in which it does. A lack of narrative proximity effect might hint that either the stories emphasized or the discourse forums are not relevant for the political actors under investigation. The two parties for which narrative proximity did not work in this study, *Labor* and *United Torah & Judaism*, seem to be examples for the above explanations. In the case of the ultra orthodox party, *United Torah & Judaism*, voters and politicians from this non-Zionist party might be at odd with the stories offered by the declaration of independence. More important, it will be reasonable to assume that the setting of political community for this unique party does not at all happened in parliament but rather by religious leaders in Yeshivas, synagogues and other religious institutions. *Labor* is a historical party that suffered a dramatic decline in its parliamentary power.¹⁰ In this case the explanation is different. Although we do not have longitudinal data, it appears that over a course of several years the party's national narrative has drifted away from its left-bloc potential voters. Most notably (as can also be seen in Figure 2), the *Labor* – the party that led the establishment of Israel and the Oslo peace agreement with the Palestinians – almost completely deleted the Israeli-peace story. This may be the reason for two events: first, a loss of the party's loyal voters, many of

¹⁰ Within less than 20 years the *Labor* lost more than two thirds of its seats in parliament.

whom voted for *Kadima*, which emphasized this story to a much greater extent. And second, a division within the party due to the loss of its major story. Indeed, immediately after the elections and at the beginning of the 18th Knesset almost half of the party's Knesset section has declared itself as 'rebels' and have started to act to form a new party, arguing that the party has lost its way.

This study applies narrative proximity analysis as a specific addition to models of electoral behavior, using Israel as a case study. To substantiate this newly developed approach more comparative data leveraging on cross-country variation is required. However, our model does shed a light on a neglected angle of voting preferences, that takes into account that people do not only vote for their ideology but also for their national stories.

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Table 1
Party Vote as a Function of Narrative Proximity

	Mertzt	Labor	Kadima	Likud	Yisrael Beitenu	Ichud-Mafdal	Shas	Torah & Judaism
Narrative Proximity	13.106# (7.880)	-1.525 (1.448)	2.156** (.724)	2.683*** (.706)	10.097# (5.851)	8.337*** (2.164)	3.410* (1.581)	.543 (1.602)
Ideology/Left-right position	-2.748*** (.425)	-1.021*** (.135)	-.338*** (.097)	1.669*** (.150)	1.723*** (.257)	1.343*** (.351)	.561# (.322)	-.364 (.654)
Religiosity	-.598 (.491)	-.856*** (.214)	-.905*** (.160)	-.260** (.099)	-.906*** (.179)	.333* (.146)	1.164*** (.191)	3.358*** (.620)
Age	.039 (.063)	.099* (.041)	-.006 (.032)	.062# (.035)	-.031 (.054)	-.082 (.063)	-.057 (.071)	.172 (.134)
Gender	-.362 (.277)	.392* (.182)	-.548*** (.141)	.032 (.155)	.480# (.258)	.211 (.251)	.115 (.282)	-.335 (.508)
Education	.318 (.184)	.006 (.107)	-.109 (.081)	.035 (.082)	-.175 (.131)	.350** (.130)	-.361** (.138)	.101 (.233)
Income	.102 (.119)	-.027 (.077)	.069 (.059)	.120* (.061)	-.026 (.099)	.079 (.094)	-.010 (.105)	-.139 (.185)
Ethnicity: Sephardic	-1.210* (.495)	.412# (.217)	.068 (.172)	.072 (.172)	.254 (.307)	-.105 (.265)	1.478*** (.302)	-1.892** (.710)
Ethnicity: Russian	-.287 (.413)	-.405 (.294)	-.309 (.209)	-.042 (.224)	1.649*** (.290)	-1.132* (.548)	.357 (.562)	1.062 (.936)
Constant	-1.177 (.417)	-9.050*** (.220)	-3.439*** (.236)	1.741* (.269)	5.858 (.279)	5.055*** (.315)	4.515*** (.456)	2.624* (.597)
Nagelkerke R ²								
Model X ²	211.854***	159.435***	223.206***	244.700***	148.673***	174.850***	260.450***	169.487***

#p ≤ .10; *p ≤ .05; **p ≤ .01; ***p ≤ .001

Notes: Entries are logistic regression coefficients. Standard errors in parentheses. Number of cases in all regressions: 1,258. Ethnicity: Ashkenazi/father born in Israel is the reference category.

Past Event +	Future Event =	National Story
Revelation on Mt. Sinai	Spiritual Jewish	Biblical-Spiritual Jewish
+	=	
Revelation on Mt. Sinai	A strong state	Biblical-Strong
+	=	
The holocaust	A strong state	Holocaust-Strong
+	=	
The holocaust	Peace with neighbors	Holocaust-Peace
+	=	
The establishment of Israel +	A strong state	Israel-Strong
+	=	
The establishment of Israel +	Peace with neighbors	Israel-Peace
+	=	
The establishment of Israel +	Equality and rights	Israel-Equality
+	=	

Figure 1. Main National Stories of Israeli Voters.

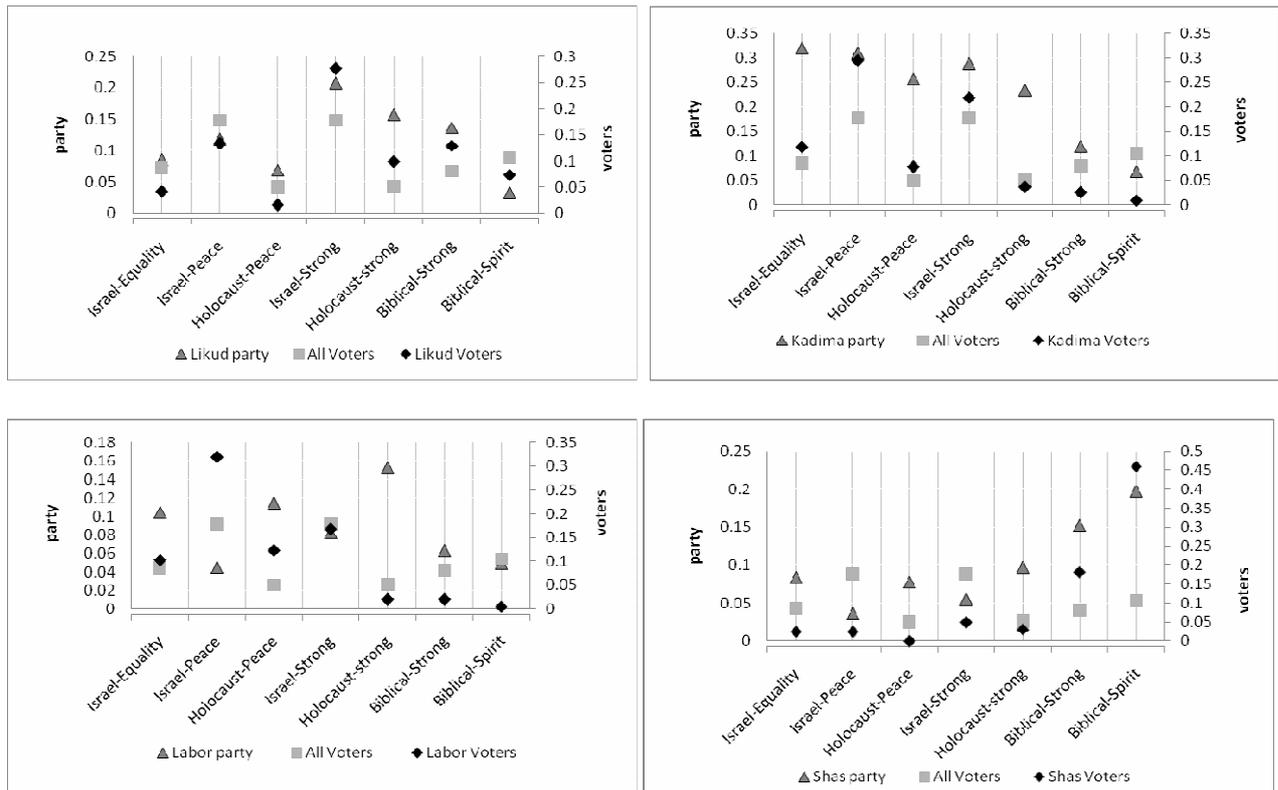


Figure 2. The Proximity between Voters' and Parties' Story.

Notes: The left-hand y axis represents the relative emphasis of each story by the party. The right-hand y axis represents the percentages of voters (either all voters or the voters for the specific party) that mentioned each story.

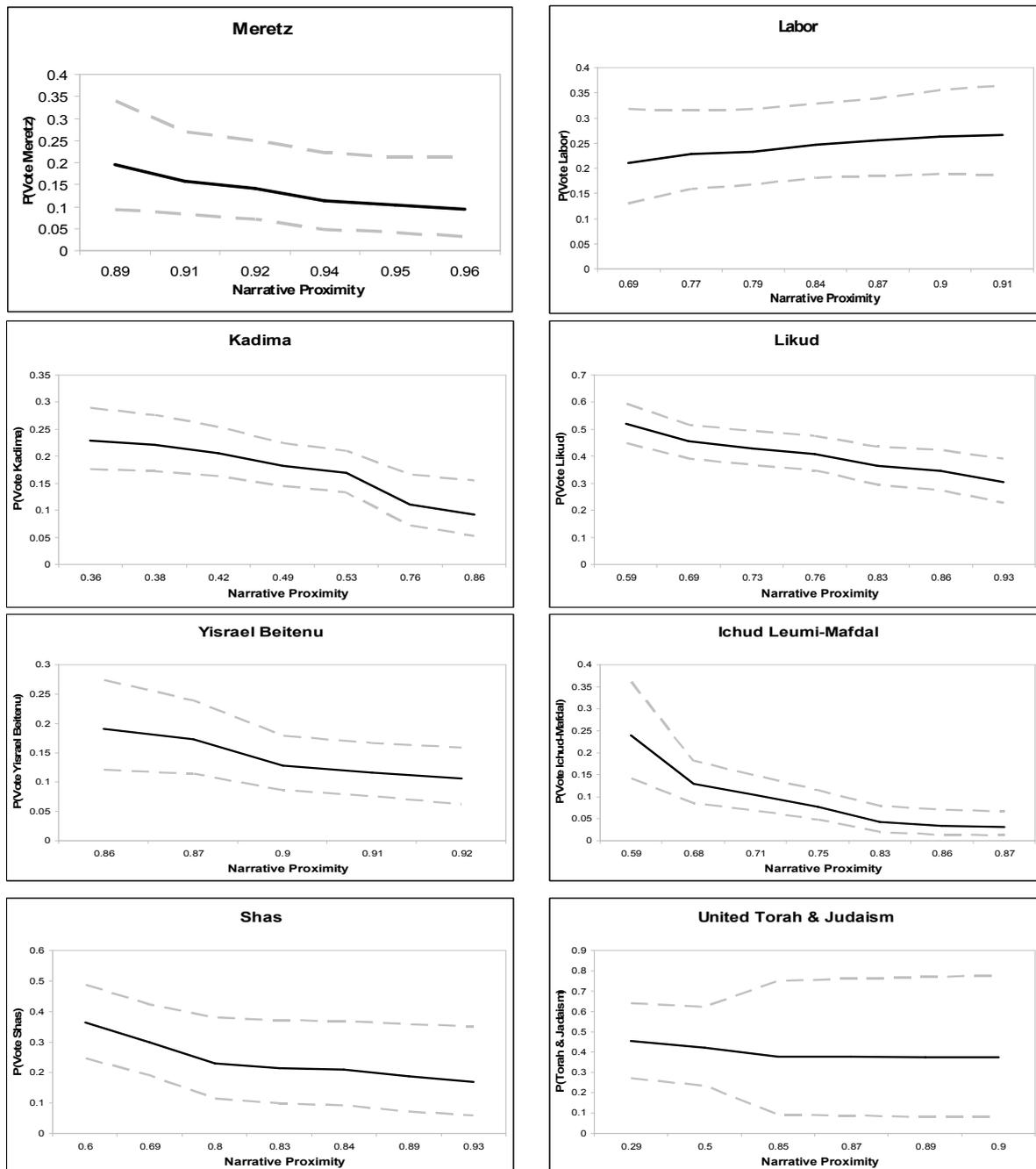


Figure 3. The impact of narrative proximity on the probability of voting for a party. *Note:* The solid black line represents the probability of voting for each party, given changes in the value of narrative proximity (from high proximity/small distance to small proximity/high distance), while holding other variables constant at their means (age, education, religiosity, income, ideology) or median category (sex, ethnicity). The gray lines represent 95% confidence intervals around the probability of voting.