Asher Arian: *Politics in Israel. The Second Generation*. Chatham, New Jersey: Chatham House Publishers, 1985, 281 pp.

Gadi Wolfsfeld: *The Politics of Provocation. Participation and Protest in Israel*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988, 193 pp.

Politics in Israel. The Second Generation is a brilliant introduction to the domestic politics of Israel. Arian has successfully merged huge masses of data from political science, a big dose of cynicism, and linguistic lucidity. *The Politics of Provocation* by Gadi Wolfsfeld is a sociological study not that easily penetrated. The main theses and findings of these two studies are as follows.

Israel – a Jewish State

The State of Israel is intended to be the home into which all Jews of the world should be re-gathering after 2,000 years of diaspora. In 1982, 3.3 million Jews actually lived in Israel – only 23 percent of a world Jewry of 14.5 million. The United States of America, not Israel, is still the state where most Jews are living. But Israel is a *Jewish* state. The Arab citizens of Israel are regarded as a 'minority', granted all formal rights. Since they are not serving in the army (except for the Druze), they are deprived of all social benefits provided for veterans and of full access to the Israeli system. (They, of course, also enjoy the benefit of avoiding many years of hard military service.) Since the overall reproduction rate for Arabs (statistically called non-Jews) is higher than for Jews (2.62 in 1980 compared with 1.34 for Jews), the Arab share of Israel's population is increasing. Arabs are now more than 17 percent of the citizens of Israel. This is the demographic dilemma of the Jewish state of Israel.

Israel – an Ashkenazi State

Among the Jews in Israel, a main dividing line goes between those born in Europe and America, called the *Askhenazim*, and the Asian- or African-born, the *Sefardim*. Until 1948, most Jewish immigrants came from Europe and its oppressive regimes. During the 1950s and 1960s, however, the immigrants were predominantly Jews from Western Asia and North Africa. The State of Israel, proclaimed in 1948, was entirely a creation by European Jews. The political elite of Israel has always been *Ashkenazi*. This is also the overwhelming tendency among the second generation of Israelis, born in Israel. Of 37 signatories to Israel's declaration of independence, the 'founding fathers', 35 came from Europe, one from Yemen, and one was born in Palestine. Of Israel's 14 Presidents and Prime Ministers, 11 were born in Eastern Europe, one in Ireland and two in Jerusalem (Rabin and Navon) – only Navon is born of a *Sefardi* family. The same dominance of an Eastern European elite is evident in the army, in the judiciary, and in the mass media. The standard of living of *Sefardim* is lower than that of the *Ashkenazim*. But the *Sefardim* are steadily increasing their share of Israel's total population and today they make up about 55 percent of Israel's Jews. Israel in the 1980s is witness to the *Sefardi* advance across the board to take over power from the European Jews.

A Secularized State – with Powerful Religious Forces

Israel is a secularized country where religion was always important. The State of Israel was created on religious fundaments. Religious parties have always been a third, important, political force. Since 1949, the religious camp has always won

some 12 to 15 percent of the vote in Israeli elections. As no Israeli party ever received an absolute majority in the elections, religious parties were necessary as coalition partners for almost all Israeli governments between 1949 and 1984. This ideal bargaining position was optimized by the religious parties of Israel up until the great coalition of 1984. The national election of 1988 was a great success for the religious camp in Israel. Of 120 seats in Israel's Parliament, the *Knesset*, religious parties now hold 18.

Israeli Politics is Party Politics . . .

In the Israeli elections, votes are counted on a nationwide basis, and the parties are allocated seats in the Parliament, the *Knesset*, in direct proportion to the strength of the list at the polls (provided that the list received 1 percent or more of the vote). The result of this electoral system has been a myriad of parties. In the national elections of 1988, 27 lists competed (another list, *Kach*, was declared racist and not allowed to take part), and 15 parties succeeded in entering the *Knesset*. The electorate votes for party lists, not for candidates. The nominations for candidates to the party lists are made within the parties and the Israeli voter has almost no say in the selection of candidates. Inside the parties, small elite groups have tended to appoint the candidates. (In 1988, the Labour Party democratized its nomination procedure, but the result was not considered beneficial by everybody. Old party servants, like Abba Eban, did not receive renewed approval from the party members.) Party politics is now dominated by two large blocs, almost identical in size. One bloc centres around the Israeli Labour Party (39 seats in 1988 plus 10 other left-wing and liberal allies), another one around the *Likud* (40 seats in 1988 plus 7 natural allies to the right). Since neither of the two blocs by themselves can muster an absolute majority in the *Knesset* (61 seats), the formation of government has become a problem hard to solve. The third political force, the small religious parties, has achieved the position of balancer in the system. The solution in 1984, and again in 1988, was the formation of the grand coalition government between the two arch enemies, the Labour Party and the *Likud*!

. . . and Party Politics is Elite Politics!

Israeli political parties are led by small elites. Party discipline is the rule. Strong personalities, like Ben-Gurion and Begin, have overwhelming popularity. The ruling Israeli elite is, in short, Jewish, Ashkenazi, male and professional. No Arab has achieved a top-level position in Israeli politics. (In the 1988 elections, Arab lists took only two seats in the 120-seat *Knesset*; the Arab-dominated Communist Party, *Hadash*, won another 4 seats.) *Sefardim* has so far not reached commanding heights in politics (Prime Minister Shamir and Prime Minister Peres were both born in Poland, President Herzog was born in Ireland). Of 120 *Knesset* members, 8 to 10 are women. One woman, Golda Meir, reached the top as Prime Minister of Israel – in the present Israeli government there is not one woman! Most Israeli politicians are *apparatchiki* of the Soviet model: most spent their lives in bureaucracies, especially those politicians within the labour movement.

The Israeli Labour Party – An Ageing Party on the Retreat

When the State of Israel was founded in 1948, the country was totally dominated by the Labour Party, the *Mapai*. It was the largest vote-getter and closely aligned with an enormously strong labour union movement, the *Histadrut*. The *Mapai* also controlled the major economic and human resources of the country. Nationalized

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land comprised more than 90 percent of the State of Israel. The government directly influences 90 percent of the country's economy and controls 40 percent of it. *Mapai*, then, was also the bearer of the Israeli society's goals and aspirations. But during Israel's 40 years of statehood, the dominance of the Israeli Labour Party has broken down and it is a party in decline. In the 1988 elections, only 30 percent of voters supported the Labour Party. The communal elections in February and March 1989 produced another set-back for Labour and confirmed that the *Likud* and the Right has become the predominant political force in Israel.

The Labour alignment was notably supported by the earlier immigrants to Palestine/Israel and by those born in Europe and America. The Labour Party is now widely perceived as a conservative, *Ashkenazi* party, and as the party of the Israeli 'establishment'. Labour now does best in the group that is oldest and is shrinking rapidly.

The *Likud* – a Rightist Party on the Offensive

The largest political party in Israel today, the *Likud*, has three major components. The most important is the *Herut* ('Freedom') movement founded in 1948 by Menachem Begin. (Begin at that time led the *Irgun*, regarded as a terrorist organization by the British.) The *Herut* Party was held in tight reins by its 'Commander' Begin until 1983. The *Likud* has a rightist-nationalist ideology, hawkish on foreign policy. It has the broad support of growing sections of Israel's population, the young and the *Sefardim*. It is supported by those with lower education and income levels. When comparing the images of the main blocs, workers have tended to support the *Likud* and not the Labour Alignment.

Provocations and Protests

Arian found Israeli politics highly oligarchical and hierarchical. The importance of party membership is slipping: in 1969, 18 percent of Israelis reported that they were party members, in 1980 the reported share was only 8 percent. Compared with other countries (USA and Western European), Israel was the only one in which the citizens choose demonstrations as their first course of political action. Few Israelis have faith in the formal political channels of access, says Wolfsfeld. In 1977, 81 percent of Israelis were dissatisfied with the Labour Party government performance; in 1984, 56 percent of the population expressed a negative attitude towards politics.

As a reaction, by 1979 protests in Israel had risen to a level five times greater than that of 1960. The best known protest groups of the 1970s are the *Peace Now* and the settlers' movement *Gush Emunim*. Thirty percent of all acts of protest were found illegal and 15 percent included some act of violence.

Since the Israeli protesters have had an extremely high rate of success, it is no wonder that many Israelis prefer this route to political influence. Wolfsfeld's recipe for an optimal strategy is to use a medium level of intensity. '[A] completely peaceful protest will probably be ignored whereas too much violence is likely to be counter-productive.'

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