

**The Personalization(s) of Politics: Israel 1949-2003**

Gideon Rahat\*

msgrah@mscc.huji.ac.il

Department of Political Science

The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

Tamir Sheafer

msstamir@mscc.huji.ac.il

Department of Political Science

Department of Communication

The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

Mailing Address

Tamir Sheafer, Dep. of Political Science, the Hebrew University, Mount Scopus, Jerusalem

91905 Israel

\* The names of the authors appear in an alphabetical order and are not intend to denote seniority in authorship.

## **Abstract**

This study addresses one central problem and two major controversies in the study of political personalization. The central problem is that of mixing different types of political personalization. This research suggests a typology that distinguishes between various types of political personalization: institutional, media and behavioral. The first controversy concerns the very occurrence of the process of personalization. This study identifies personalization(s) in Israel in all three realms: institutional personalization, expressed in the democratization of candidate selection methods; personalization in the media, expressed in an increase in the focus of media coverage on individual politicians and a decrease in focusing on political parties; and personalization in the behavior of politicians, expressed in an increase in the share of legislation that is initiated through private member bills. The second controversy concerns the causal relationship between the different types of personalization. This study shows that political personalization develops according to the Politics-Media-Politics (PMP) model: institutional personalization leads to personalization in the media, which, in turn, leads to personalization in the behavior of politicians.

## **The Personalization(s) of Politics: Israel 1949-2003**

In the era of *The Rise of Candidate-Centered Politics* (the title of an influential study by Wattenberg 1995), political personalization has become a central theme in political science literature in general and in the research of political behavior and political communication in particular. Political personalization is defined here in general as a dynamic process (Brettschneider and Gabriel 2002; Kaase 1994) that is expressed in an increase in the weight of the individual political actor and a decline in the weight of the group (i.e., political party) in politics over time.

In parliamentary systems it is the party, not the candidate, who stands at the center of the political process. Therefore, a process of political personalization directly challenges the basic logic of such political systems. On more normative and theoretical grounds, personalization of politics challenges one of the very basic features of the modern liberal-democratic order: the depersonalization of politics. Modern democracy developed when the rule of law, based on legal-rational grounds, replaced the rule of man, which is based on traditional and especially personal-charismatic grounds (Weber 1947, 1958). The personalization of politics set a challenge in putting more emphasis on the charismatic skills of the elected representatives and particularly on the leaders (Sheafer 2001).

Do developments at the end of the second millennium signal a comeback of the rule of man? If so, what are the origins of this phenomenon? Is there a way to control personalization so it would be integrated into modern democratic politics?

## **The Research of Political Personalization: Problems and Controversies**

This study aims at addressing one central problem and two major controversies in the study of political personalization. The central problem is that the existing research mixes different types of political personalization. This problem impairs the dialogue between scholars because it is impossible to manage a fruitful dialogue on the very occurrence of the phenomenon, on its causes and consequences, and on the causal relationship between the different kinds of personalization, when different scholars refer to different types of personalization without explicitly recognizing it. In this research we aim to address this problem through suggesting a typology of the various types of political personalization: institutional personalization, media personalization (in both paid and unpaid media), and behavioral personalization (of politicians and in the electoral behavior of voters).

The first major controversy concerns the very occurrence of the process of political personalization. Although the occurrence of such a process is taken many times as a given fact, some empirical analyses that were conducted in the US, Germany and other Western democracies, failed to find evidence of personalization. As we shall discuss below, apart from the differences between political systems, one of the main reasons for this controversy is the differences in the nominal and operational definitions of personalization.

The second major controversy concerns the reasons for political personalization, and specifically the causal relationship between the different types of personalization. Does personalization of political institutions ignite personalization(s) in other realms? That is, do different institutions supply different incentives that significantly influence the behavior of media personnel, politicians and voters? Or maybe political personalization starts with changes in political communication – the upsurge of private media and the changes in patterns of media

coverage of politics that resulted from this change? Some scholars see institutional changes as the cause for political personalization, while others “blame” the media for igniting this process. Indeed, one reason for this controversy may be the different focus of each study and of the general expertise of the specific scholar. Therefore, a comprehensive approach that includes a compendium of analyses of several processes of political personalization is required.

### **Political Personalization(s): A Typology**

The typology suggested here distinguishes between three general types of political personalization: institutional, media, and behavioral.

#### *Institutional Personalization*

Institutional personalization is defined as the adoption of rules, mechanisms and institutions that put more emphasis on the individual politician and less on political groups and parties. An example for such a change is the replacement of a closed-list electoral system with an open list system or with other types of electoral systems that enable intra-party personal competition to be part of the general elections (Shugart 2001). The introduction of primaries in some of the Israeli parties can be seen as an additional example of institutional personalization (Caspi 1996; Galnoor 1998; Rahat and Hazan 2001).

#### *Media Personalization*

Media personalization refers to a change in the presentation of politics in the media that is expressed in an increase in the focus on individual politicians and a decrease in the focus on parties, organizations and institutions. A further distinction is that between political personalization in the unpaid media (i.e., media coverage of politics) and that in the paid media (i.e., political advertisement) or the conduct of political campaigns. Some scholars also

distinguish between media personalization and media privatization. While the first refers to the focus of the media on the political activities of individual politicians, the latter, which is considered a specific form of personalization, refers to a media focus on the personal life of individual candidates (Holtz-Bacha 2004).

#### *Personalization in media coverage of campaigns*

Political personalization in the unpaid media refers to a change in the media coverage of politics in general, and of political campaigns in particular, which is expressed in an increase in the focus of journalists on the activities of individual politicians at the expense of such abstract collective entities such as parties, organizations and institutions.

#### *Personalization in campaign strategies*

Political personalization in the paid media refers to a change in the management of political campaigns, which is expressed in an increase in the emphasis on individual candidates in political advertising and in campaign strategies, and a decrease in the prominence of political parties and organizations in these advertisements and strategies (Bennett and Manheim, 2001; Brettschneider and Gabriel 2002; Diamond and Bates 1992; Holtz-Bacha 2002, 2004; Swanson and Mancini 1996). Privatization refers here to campaign strategies that emphasize the personal traits of candidates over their and their parties' political suitability, achievements and goals (Holtz-Bacha 2004; for such strategies see also, for example, Diamond and Bates 1992; Kahn and Kenney 1999).

#### *Personalization in Political Behavior*

Here we should further distinguish between personalization of the political behavior of politicians and that of the public, especially in its role as the electorate.

#### *Personalization in the political behavior of politicians*

This type of political personalization is expressed in an increase in individual political behavior and a decline in collective partisan activity. An increase in the submission of private member bills and in the share of these bills would all be considered as indicating personalization in the behavior of politicians (Rahat and Hazan 2001).

#### *Personalization in the electoral behavior of voters*

This type of personalization originates from a change in the public's perception of politics. According to this type of personalization, when forming their electoral decision voters put a greater emphasis on the candidates at the expense of taking into considerations collective group-identity variables, such as social group and political parties. For example, Kaase (1994, 221) explains that "the slowly but consistently ongoing process of weakening partisanship as a result of political dealignment is creating a growing feeling that when there are non-aligned electorates, political leaders even in parliamentary party government systems may become more prominent" (see also, for example, Wattenberg 1995, 1998). The distinction made above between personalization and privatization is also relevant here. Personalization refers more generally to a greater focus of voters on the candidates, and especially on their political characteristics and performance, while privatization is expressed in an increase in the attention of voters to the non-political personal traits (Brettschneider and Gabriel 2002).<sup>i</sup>

### **The Controversy over the Occurrence of Political Personalization**

The main controversy in research in this field is on the very occurrence of the process of political personalization. Some of the controversy results from differences in the nominal and operational definitions of personalization, from differences in findings of quantitative empirical analyses, or simply because of relating to different countries.

### *Institutional Personalization*

On the level of the electoral system, Shugart and Wattenberg (2001) claim that the trend is towards the adoption of mixed member electoral systems that balance personal and party aspects and not towards personalization (see also Dunleavy and Margetts 1995). Regarding intra-party candidate selection methods, Bille (2001), Scarrow, Webb, and Farrel (2002), and Wattenberg (1998) identified a trend of democratization of candidate selection methods in established democracies during the period between 1960 and 1990. But these studies fell short of seeing this trend as an expression of the personalization of politics. In this study we see democratization of intra-party candidate selection methods, the adoption of more inclusive selectorates (i.e., the bodies that select the candidates), as an expression of institutional personalization. Candidate selection is transformed from being an intra-party matter that is determined by a few leaders and senior apparatchiks in to being a major aspect of the exposure of the group members, the candidates, to larger and less committed audiences (Rahat and Hazan 2001).

### *Media Personalization*

#### *Personalization in media coverage of campaigns*

One factor that may have influenced the findings concerning personalization in media coverage of political campaigns is whether the study is based on a quantitative analysis of the products of the media or on more impressionistic accounts. For example, almost all contributors to Swanson and Mancini's (1996) book regarding modern campaigns, who did not conduct quantitative content analyses of the media, claim that political personalization occurs in their countries.<sup>ii</sup>

We know of only a handful of quantitative analyses of the media that focused on the question of media personalization. Two empirical analyses conducted in Germany found no evidence for personalization (Kaase 1994; Wilke and Reinemann 2001). But in an analysis conducted following the 2002 elections in that country, Wilke and Reinemann (2003) did find evidence for what might be a beginning of a personalization trend.

Wattenberg (1998), who studied personalization in the US through conducting a content analysis, is the only one that did identify personalization: “Throughout the whole 1952-1980 period, mentions of candidates outnumbered those of parties, but ... the ratio increased from about two to one in the 1950s to roughly five to one by 1980” (p. 93). In contrast, Sigelman and Bullock’s (1991) content analysis found no evidence for personalization in the 1888-1988 period. How did two analyses of the same country reach an opposing conclusion? The main reason is different operational definitions of the phenomenon. Wattenberg (1998) focused on the media coverage of candidates versus parties, while Sigelman and Bullock (1991) focused on the number of references to candidate traits. Following the typology suggested here, Wattenberg indeed identify personalization, while Sigelman and Bullock studied only a sub-type, privatization.

#### *Personalization in campaign strategies*

One may distinguish here between analyses of campaign strategies in general, and a more specific analysis of political ads. The vast majority of the studies that focus on strategies recognize a process of personalization. Among these are Schoenbach (1996), who studied Germany, Kahn and Kenney (1999) and Wattenberg (1995, 1998) who studied the US, Caspi (1996) who studied Israel, and Swanson and Mancini (1996), who refer to multi-country

analyses in their book. The Swedish case appears to be different, because “unlike expectations, candidate-centered politics did not take place” (Asp and Asaiasson 1996, 76).

When turning the focus to political ads, Holtz-Bacha (2004, 7), who conducted an empirical analysis of German television political spots, found “no overall trend towards personalization, even for the large parties.” However, Boiney and Paletz (1991, 12), who conducted a review of the political advertising literature in the US, concluded that “Image appeals have become increasingly prominent, made either directly in the form of candidate qualities or conveyed indirectly using issues.”

#### *Personalization in Political Behavior*

##### *Personalization in the political behavior of politicians*

We know of no studies that focus directly on this category of personalization. Nevertheless, in focusing on the theme of party decline (Medding 1999) or the political consequences of the adoption of party primaries (Rahat and Hazan 2001), students of Israeli politics clearly noticed that while parties were weakening there was an increase in the personalized behavior of Israeli politicians in the 1990s. These were expressed in a decline in the cohesion of parties, and especially in the blooming of private legislation.

##### *Personalization in the electoral behavior of voters*

Since the concept of personalization is a dynamic one, it requires a study of electoral behavior of individuals over time. And although numerous studies analyze the voting behavior of individuals in Western democracies, most of them do not include long-term analyses that are directly relevant to the study of personalization in electoral behavior. Brettschneider and Gabriel (2002), who studied Germany concluded that, “there is simply no convincing empirical evidence that, so far as the voters are concerned, the country’s electoral politics have become

progressively more personalized, whatever meaning is given to the notion of personalization” (p. 152). Similar findings regarding Germany are reported in Kasse (1994).

Bartels’ (2002) recent study of the US did not directly focus on the dynamic changes over time, but nevertheless aimed “to provide a systematic test of the conventional wisdom that ... ‘personality is key’ in contemporary American electoral politics” (p. 46). Using survey data from the six most recent presidential elections he found that first, “the net effects of candidate trait assessments are generally quite modest in magnitude” (p. 65), and second, that the net electoral impact of candidate traits is not increasing over time (see Table 2.6 on p. 65). Miller and Shanks (1996) present quite similar findings. But Boiney and Paletz (1991, 10) reviewed findings of many US political science models of voter choice from the 1940s to 1988 and concluded that “Candidate image has grown in significance as party has declined.” And Jacobson (1989), who conducted an empirical aggregate analysis of House elections, concluded that the contribution of candidate quality to a party’s electoral performance has increased over time.

Previous analyses by Shamir and Arian (1999) and by Arian and Shamir (2001) do recognize a small, but quite steady, increase in the impact of performance evaluations of the leading candidates on the vote in Israel in the period 1988-1999. One of the plausible explanations for detecting evidence of this type of personalization in Israel, but not in Germany, for example, is that Israel changed its electoral law in the 1990s, while Germany did not. This speculation naturally leads us to the controversy regarding the causes of personalization.

### **What Causes Political Personalization?**

The second main controversy centers on the causal relationship between the different types of personalization. Does personalization of political institutions ignite media and behavioral

personalization(s)? That is, do different institutions supply different incentives that significantly influence the behavior of both media personnel and the politicians? Or maybe political personalization starts with changes in political communication – the upsurge of private media and TV and the changes in patterns of coverage that occur as a result of them? And what were the factors that started the process of personalization(s)? A comprehensive answer to this last question is beyond the scope of this study. Nevertheless, we did go one step further, checking whether the ignition of the process of personalization was the outcome of the decline of the institution that represented the most impersonal collective expression of politics – the political party.

#### *The Causes of Institutional Personalization*

In studies of the democratization of candidate selection methods it is argued that this process of democratization (which we defined as institutional personalization) was initially caused by a decline in party membership. In an attempt to bring their members back, parties opened their selecting bodies (selectorates) and gave members a greater control over the selection of candidates (Scarrow 1999; Hazan and Pennings 2001).<sup>iii</sup>

#### *The Causes of Media Personalization*

Most scholars see the personalization in media coverage of politics as resulting mainly from the values embedded in television and in the privately owned media organizations (see, for example, Blumler and Kavanagh 1999 ; Blumler, Kavanagh and Nossister 1996; Mazzoleni and Schulz 1999; Swanson and Mancini 1996). Television, because of its visual nature, tends to focus on personalities rather than on abstract entities such as parties and groups.

Regarding the personalization of electoral campaigns, some scholars see institutional changes (i.e., institutional personalization) as the leading factors of political personalization. For

example, Mazzoleni (1996) claims that personalization of political campaigns in Italy was heavily influenced by institutional reforms. Mockiewicz and Richter (1996) relate Russia's personalized campaigns to the absence of genuine political parties in the 1989 electoral competition, while Asp and Asaiasson (1996) see institutional stability as explaining the lack of personalization in Swedish campaigns. Others see the media – in particular the rise of TV – as the major cause for the personalization of politics (Blumer and Kavangah 1999; Blumer, Kavanagh and Nossister 1996; Schoenbach 1996; Puhle 2002). Yet others see personalization of electoral campaigns as a result of an interaction between personalization in media coverage and institutional personalization (Campus 2002; Caspi 1996; Galnoor 1998; Swanson and Mancini 1996; Wattenberg 1998).

#### *The Causes of Personalization in Voters' Behavior*

Kasse (1994, 226) and Brettschneider and Gabriel (2002, 153) used (the lack of) institutional personalization to explain why they did not find personalization in electoral behavior in Germany. Arian and Shamir (2001, 26) presented changes in the electoral laws in Israel to explain why they did find an increase in the impact of candidate evaluations on the vote.

#### *Research Hypothesis*

Our hypothesis suggests the following causal process of personalization(s): Societal changes such as “new politics” (Dalton 2002; Inglehart 1997) and the consequent decline in membership of political parties started an institutional change – democratization of candidate selection methods (institutional personalization). Democratization of candidate selection methods changed the ways that media covered politics, making it more and more interested in individuals and less interested in parties (personalization in media coverage), and also changed the conduct of campaigns (personalization in campaign strategies). Consequently, politicians

changed their behavior in response to the change in media coverage, putting more efforts in working to promote their personal image and working less as team members (personalization in the behavior of politicians). Lastly, the public became more focused on political leaders and less on parties when casting its vote (personalization in the electoral behavior of voters).

This sequence of personalization(s) is quite similar to a model presented by Wolfsfeld (2004), which focuses on political communication and specifically on the role of the media in peace processes. The model can be summed up as follows: (Society) – Politics – Media – Politics, or the (S)PMP sequence.<sup>iv</sup> That is, Societal changes ignite the causal process of personalization(s) by causing Political (i.e., institutional) personalization. Institutional personalization is causing Media personalization, which affects Political personalization(s) (i.e., in the behavior of politicians and voters).

The model of personalization(s) suggested here combines and bridges the often competing institutional vs. behavioral approaches. That is, institutional and behavioral factors are integrated into a single sequential model. Furthermore, the behavior and role of political communication has a meditative role in this model, that is, institutional changes are influencing media coverage, and only then do we witness behavioral changes.

But why this sequence (S/PMP) and not any other? This sequence is well explained by Wolfsfeld (2004). For instance, he nicely demonstrates that politics usually come before the media, but that consequential changes in media coverage affect the political standing and legitimacy of various political actors. Bennett's (1990) rationale is similar. In addition, this sequence is also partially supported by the studies of personalization(s) mentioned above. For example, many scholars believe that media personalization was at least partially a result of

institutional personalization, and most scholars see personalization in the electoral behavior of voters as a result, and not a cause, of other processes of personalization.

Finally, it should be noted that we do not assume that technological developments – such as the appearance of TV and its penetration – have no impact on media and behavioral personalization(s). We rather expect that institutional reforms would lead to much more significant and immediate changes than technological developments, that are likely to affect personalization incrementally over the longer run.

### **Israel as a Case Study**

This study examines the occurrence of personalization(s) in the Israeli political system since Independence (1948) and up to the 2003 elections. While scholars (Caspi 1996; Galnoor 1998) argue that political personalization indeed occurred in Israel, there is still no systematic quantitative empirical analysis of the phenomenon itself, except for the analyses of the impact of voters' evaluations of the leading candidates on their vote (Arian and Shamir 2002; Shamir and Arian 1999).

Israel supplies an ideal setting for examining the occurrence of political personalization and the relationships between the various types of personalization. Unlike the US, Israel witnessed the hey-days of the mass political party. Parties were the dominant political actors in the Israeli polity in the first decades after Independence (Galnoor 1982; Horowitz and Lissak 1989). Thus, Israel supplies a clearly non-personalized and party-dominated starting point for measuring the possible development of personalization. The decline of political parties (Galnoor 1996; Korn 1998), and their role in politics (Medding 1999), the central role of television and the growth of commercial media (Caspi and Limor 1999), and the accounts suggested by Caspi

(1996) and Galnoor (1998) supply a rather firm foundation for the hypothesis that a process of personalization took place in Israel.

On the other hand, except for the 1996-2001 short experiment with direct elections for the Prime Minister, the structure of the Israeli regime is clearly a non-personalized one (Shugart 2001; Rahat 2001). It is a parliamentary system, which makes it less likely to demonstrate personalized patterns of politics (Brettschneider and Gabriel 2002; Kasse 1994). Especially prominent is the rigid closed list electoral system that lacks even a symbolic personal element. That is, candidates' names do not even appear on the ballot paper.<sup>v</sup> At the same time, Israel witnessed ongoing changes in the intra-party candidate selection methods. This makes it possible to examine the connection between the institutional setting and the other types of personalization. If it would be found that institutional change played an important role in starting other types of personalization, then it might help explaining why personalization was identified in only certain democracies and not in others.

## **Methodology**

This section presents the indices that were used to measure the three types of personalization that are empirically analyzed in this study: institutional, (unpaid) media, and behavioral (of politicians).<sup>vi</sup>

### *Institutional Personalization*

Except for the 1996-2001 short-lived adoption of direct election for the PM, the relevant changes in institutions occurred in the intra-party arena.<sup>vii</sup> These were changes in the nature of candidate selection methods, in particular in the level of inclusiveness of the selectorates – the

bodies that select the candidates (Gallagher and marsh 1988; Rahat and Hazan 2001; Ranny 1981).<sup>viii</sup> The inclusiveness of each selectorate was estimated on the basis of a 13-point scale.<sup>ix</sup>

#### *Personalization in Media Coverage of Campaigns*

This type of personalization was measured through conducting a content analysis of the media coverage of all 16 election campaigns for the Knesset (the Israeli parliament) that took place in Israel between 1949 (the first elections) and 2003 (the last elections).<sup>x</sup> For a period of six months before each election we first sampled every third day, and then selected for analysis all election-related articles that covered the two largest parties (Alignment/Labor and Gahal/Likud or their components before the establishment of electoral alliances and later unified parties) in two of the leading Israeli daily newspapers, *Yediot Aharonot* and *Ha'aretz*.<sup>xi</sup> Overall, 4,711 items were analyzed.

A coding system was devised to measure various alternative definitions of media personalization and privatization.<sup>xii</sup> Two trained MA students conducted the content analysis. The inter-coder reliability (using Scott's pi), tested in a session in which the two coders participated for 100 coding items was no lower than .81 (for the coding category with the lowest reliability).

#### *Personalization in Political Behavior of Politicians*

The measurement used for identifying personalization in the behavior of politicians was the percentage of the laws that were passed in each Knesset (there are 15 Knessets in the analysis) that originated in private member bills out of the overall population of bills passed at a specific term. For example, if a Knesset passes 500 new laws and 200 of them originated in private member bills, then the index would stand on 40.0%.

### *Societal Changes: The Decline in Party Membership*

The operationalization of societal changes is represented here in the decline in party membership. We used data on Mapai/Labor membership between the years 1949-2003 because this is the only data on party membership that is available for the whole period of 1949-2003.<sup>xiii</sup>

## **Findings: Political Personalization in Israel**

### *The Occurrence of Political Personalization(s)*

Are the claims about political personalization in Israel just another nostalgic myth about the “good old days” when “a party was a party” or do they relate to a real development? The analyses (Figures 1-3) indicate that a process of political personalization occurred in Israel in all three areas: institutional, the media and behavioral.

### *Institutional personalization*

Figure 1 presents developments in candidate selection methods on the basis of the 13 points scale described above. Each point presents the sum of the measure of inclusiveness of the selectorates that selected the candidate lists of Mapai (1949-1973) or Labor (1977-2003) and Herut (1949-1988) or Likud (1992-2003) at the eve of each election. As can be seen, until 1973 not much had changed in candidate selection methods, but since 1977 there is a clear and almost ongoing trend of democratization, that reached its peak in 1996. It should also be noted that all changes in the candidate selection methods of Mapai/Labor and all but one in Herut/Likud implied democratization of the selectorate – that is, the adoption of a more personalized system.

[Figure 1 about here]

### *Personalization in media coverage of campaigns*

Figure 2 presents the percentage of news items that focused mainly on the parties, or on the candidates or equally on both for the period of six months before each election. Two phases in the development of the process of personalization in media coverage can be identified: The first phase (1949-1977) witnessed a continued process of decline in the exclusive focus of coverage of parties, from 65% to 22%, and at the same time an increase in the combined focus on both parties and candidates, from 13% to 55%. It can be seen as a phase in which the coverage of candidates incrementally gained an equal status to the coverage of political parties. The second phase started in 1981 with an upsurge in the share of media coverage that focused mainly on candidates (from 22% in 1977 to 55% in 1981). Since then the percentage of news items that focused on candidates was generally kept at the same high level while the percentage of news items that focused on parties or both parties and candidates stayed low. In short, an incremental process of personalization occurred in 1949-1977; a dramatic upsurge of personalization, roughly equal in size to the change that occurred in the nine previous elections, happened before the 1981 elections.

Regarding the issue of privatization, the analysis found no significant trend in media coverage of candidates' personal traits, with the focus on personal traits never exceeding 15% of the news items (results not shown). Some scholars interpreted such findings as evidence for the lack of personalization (Sigelman and Bullock 1991). However, this study adopts the stand according to which focusing on the personal characteristics of candidates should be interpreted as the privatization of politics rather than personalization. This distinction might explain why Wattenberg (1998), who used the same operational definition of personalization as we do, found

a trend of personalization in the US, while Sigelman and Bullock (1991) – looking actually for privatization – concluded that no such trend occurred in the US.

[Figure 2 about here]

### *Personalization in the political behavior of politicians*

Figure 3 presents the percentage of legislation in each Knesset term that originated in private member bills. Here we can also identify two phases: In the first one, that includes the terms of the first 10 Knessets (1949-1984), save for two minor and temporary declines (1951-1955, 1965-1969), there is an almost continued incremental increase in the share of legislation that originated in private member bills, from 2% in the 1<sup>st</sup> Knesset (1949-1951) to 21% in the 9<sup>th</sup> Knesset (1977- 1981). The 1984-1988 period signifies the beginning of the peaking of the process of personalization, with a sharp upsurge of legislation originating in private member bills from 16.2% in the 11<sup>th</sup> Knesset to 59.3% in the 15<sup>th</sup> Knesset (1999- 2003).

[Figure 3 about here]

In sum, all three figures testify to the occurrence of all three personalization(s). Yet, the fact that the process of personalization occurred in Israel does not prove that political personalization is a universal phenomenon. The puzzle that remains to be solved in order to suggest a generalization is the nature of the causal relationship between the different types of personalization.

### *The Causal Chain of Personalization(s)*

Figure 4 that presents the three types of personalization reveals that the PMP hypothesis (i.e., a sequence of causation of politics-media-politics, as suggested by Wolfsfeld 2004) is validated. Small incremental media and behavioral personalization(s) occurred since the 1950s; but only later on, after the personalization of candidate selection methods started to peak, did the

trends upsurge and accelerated. First, the parties significantly reformed their candidate selection methods, as can be seen in the radical changes of 1977; this political reform indicates the first “P” of the model.

Second, in the following election campaign (1981), the media recognized this change and reacted to it with an upsurge in personalizing news coverage. This change in media coverage is indicated by the “M” of the model. An overall look at the lines that describe institutional personalization and personalization in media coverage of elections indeed shows that the media tends to cover “the previous war”. This is also evident in the case of the adoption of direct elections for the prime minister, when an increase in personalization in coverage appeared only in the second time that this system was practiced (1999 elections).

Third, after the media changed its pattern of coverage, politicians made a significant effort to demonstrate personal activism. The overall incremental increase in the percentages of legislation that originated in private member bills started to peak since the 11<sup>th</sup> Knesset (1984-1988). This change in the political behavior of politicians is indicated by the last “P” of the model.

[Figure 4 about here]

To further validate the hypothesis and the graphical findings in Table 2 we conducted regression analyses based on time series data. The results of the time series analyses support the PMP hypothesis. First, the impact of institutional personalization on media personalization stands on a high  $R^2 = .82$  ( $b = .60$ ;  $se = .08$ ;  $p = .000$ ). Second, the impact of media personalization on personalization in political behavior is also quite high, with  $R^2 = .67$  ( $b = .85$ ;  $se = .17$ ;  $p = .000$ ).<sup>xiv</sup> We therefore concluded that the regressions support the hypothesis.

What still deserves attention is the cause for political personalization as a whole, that is, what were the factors that started the process of personalization(s)? We have already discussed above, to some extent, whether the whole personalization process was not the outcome of the decline of political parties. A decline in party membership was expected to be followed by a response by the parties – the opening of the candidate selection method. In order to examine this hypothesis we used data on Mapai/Labor membership for the years 1949-2003. It is evident that until 1965 Labor membership was quite stable, but that since 1973 (save for a temporary increase in 1996 that followed the assassination of its chairman, prime minister Yitzchak Rabin), Labor membership continuously declined. So it seems that indeed, the personalization process was started by a societal change – the decreasing willingness of citizens to join parties. A time series analysis found a high negative impact of the decline in party membership on the personalization in the parties' candidate selection methods ( $R^2 = .81$ ;  $b = -1.41$ ;  $se = .18$ ;  $p = .000$ ;  $d = .77$ ). However, the Durbin-Watson value is a little bit lower than the  $R^2$ , a sign that the regression might be spurious (see endnote 14). This finding, therefore, does not provide a clear support for the remaining part of the hypothesis, according to which the societal changes (the “S” in the S/PMP sequence) start the process of personalization (S/PMP).

An alternative (yet not mutually exclusive) explanation for the ignition of the process of personalization is the introduction of television in Israel in 1969. Yet, it should be remembered that personalization was not identified in Germany during the period of TV penetration. This study suggests then, that the introduction and penetration of TV may facilitate personalization, but the cause of an upsurge in personalization is expected to be institutional.

## Conclusion

While political personalization has become a central theme in political science literature in general and in the research of political behavior and political communication in particular, the concept needed clarification. The goal of this study was, therefore, to address one central problem and two major controversies in the study of political personalization. The problem was that researchers mixed different types of political personalization. This problem impaired the dialogue between scholars. Our research addressed this problem through suggesting a typology of the various types of political personalization: institutional personalization, media personalization (in media coverage of elections and in campaign strategies), and behavioral personalization (of politicians and of the electoral behavior of voters). This clear typology should enable a dialogue between scholars from various countries and different disciplinary backgrounds, and therefore would facilitate the conduction of a cross-national comparative analysis of personalization, which is, we believe, the next essential step in the study of political personalization.

The first major controversy we discussed concerned the very occurrence of the process of political personalization. Although the occurrence of such a process is taken many times as a given fact, some empirical analyses, in the US and in Germany in particular, failed to find evidence of personalization, while at least one major US study (Wattenberg 1998) did recognize a process of personalization. We showed that this controversy might result from differences among the countries, but mainly from the use of different theoretical and operational definitions of personalization. As demonstrated, processes of political personalization took place in Israel, especially since the end of the 1970s. Regarding the US, we argue that Wattenberg's (1998) study did analyze media personalization (and indeed find such a trend), while Sigelman and

Bullock (1991) focused on media privatization and not on personalization (and did not find any trend). We should also point out that Bartels (2002) and Miller and Shanks (1996) did not find personalization in the electoral behavior of voters in the US regarding Presidential elections, while Jacobson (1989), who conducted an aggregate analysis of House elections, found that the contribution of candidate quality to a party's electoral success has increased over time. Indeed, further research regarding this type of personalization is needed.

The second major controversy centers on the reasons for political personalization, and specifically on the causal relationship between the different types of personalization. Working with a clearly differentiated menu of political personalization(s) enabled this study to identify the causal process of political personalization in Israel. As was shown, incremental personalization(s) of media coverage and in the behavior of politicians were replaced with upsurges when institutional personalization had started. The findings support Wolfsfeld's (2004) PMP model, that a political change (democratizing candidate selection methods) initiates a change in the way the media covers political campaigns. The media adapt to the more personalized candidate selection methods by increasing their focus on politicians at the expense of covering political parties. Finally, recognizing that the rules of the game have changed, and understanding that they need the media to communicate with their voters, the politicians responded by increasing their personal activity.

We added an additional "S" to the PMP model. This represents socio-political changes; in this case the decline in party membership, which, we believe, ignites the whole process of personalization. This part of the hypothesis, however, is not fully supported by the results of the time-series analysis.

Our findings may also explain why personalization in media coverage was identified in the American case (Wattenberg 1998) and in the Israeli case, but not in the German one (Brettschneider and Gabriel 2002; Kaase 1994; Wilke and Reinemann 2001). Like Israel, the US witnessed institutional personalization (the spread of primaries for the selection of the president) while in Germany there were no significant changes in candidate selection methods until the 1990s. Following this conclusion, intra-party institutional reforms that were adopted in Germany in the 1990s (Scarrow 1999) are likely to cause personalization in media coverage and, later on, to have an impact on the behavior of politicians and voters. Indeed, in an analysis conducted following the 2002 Germany elections, Wilke and Reinemann (2003) found evidence for what might be the beginning of a trend of media personalization.

Our findings mean that at least partially, modern democracies can control the levels of political personalization through designing proper institutions. The lesson from the Israeli case is that simply freezing a non-personalized national institutional setting will do no good. Personalized politics is here to stay, as we can see from the incremental personalization in the media and in the behavior of politicians that occurred up to the 1970s. Institutions cannot be expected to function as checks and balances on personalization if they are designed in a way that totally ignores this reality. In order to have an impact, institutions must adapt to their environment, they must be designed so they can internalize personalized politics. But the Israeli case also teaches us that if a national institutional setting is frozen and does not adapt to changing circumstances, we can expect that sooner or later we would witness an institutional reform by bypass – from above (direct election of the prime minister) and from below (party primaries) the electoral system. The consequences of these bypasses were worse than the problems that they were intended to solve. The key to controlling personalization in Israel is in

electoral reform, in the adoption of a more personalized system that would nevertheless be partisan – an open list electoral system that would institute personal politics within parties but not between them. That is, each voter would be allowed to express his personal preferences only with regard to a single party. We follow Shugart and Wattenberg's (2001) conclusions in believing that a proper mix between the personal and the partisan would enable the creation of an optimal balance between the party's general program and personal accountability.

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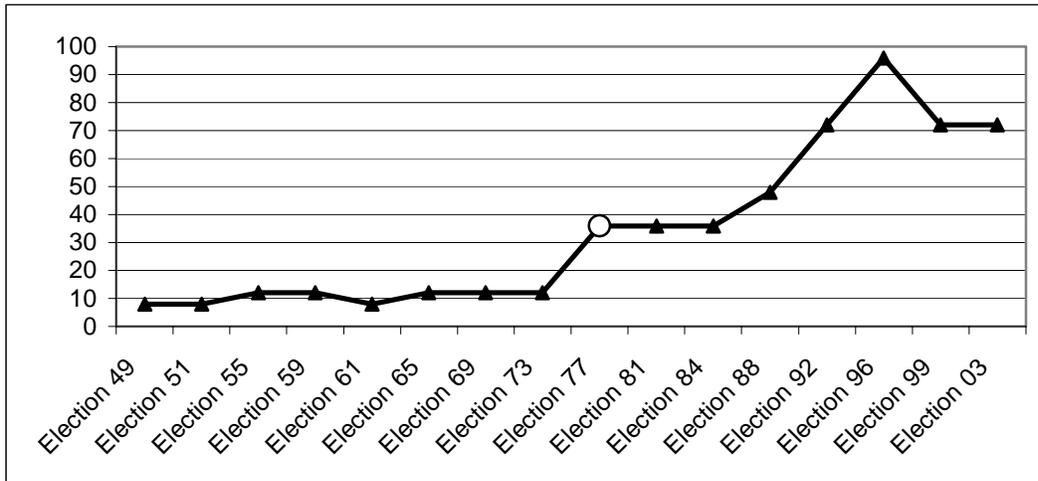


Figure 1. Institutional personalization. Each point presents the sum of the inclusiveness measure of the selectorates that selected the candidate lists of Mapai (1949-1973) or Labor (1977-2003) and Herut (1949-1988) or Likud (1992-2003) at the eve of each election, multiplied by four for the sake of standardizing it with the other measures of personalization. The circle on the 1977 value represents the time we recognize as the beginning of the trend of this type of personalization.

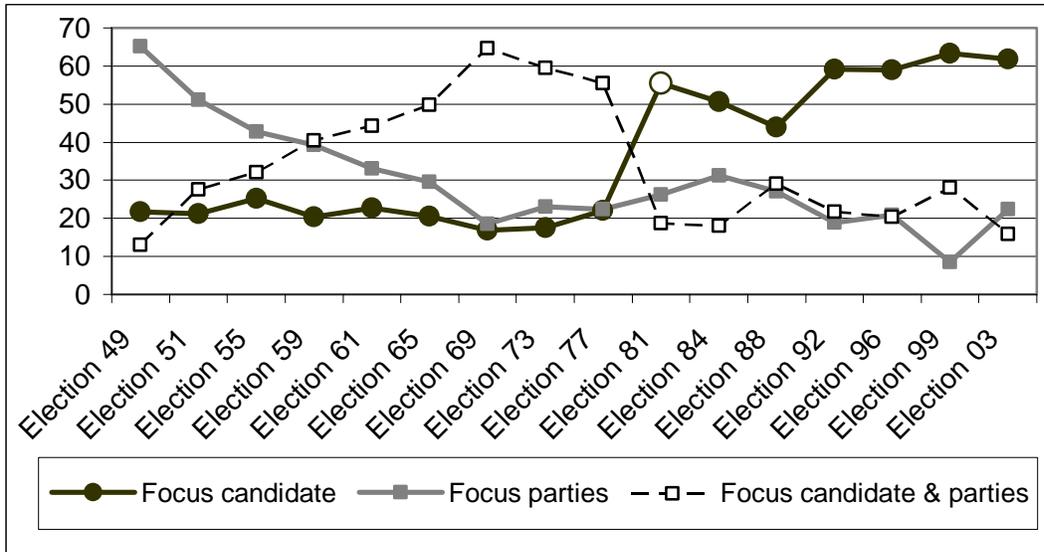


Figure 2. Personalization in media coverage of elections. The percentage of news items that focused mainly on the parties, mainly on the candidates and equally on both. The circle on the 1981 value of the “focus on candidate” line represents the time we recognize as the beginning of the upsurge of this type of personalization.

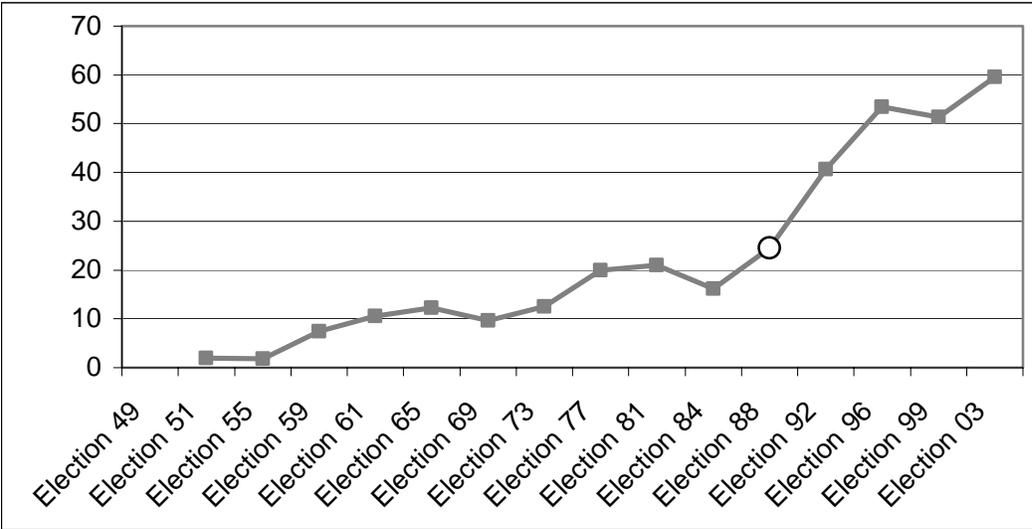


Figure 3. Personalization in the political behavior of politicians. The percentage of legislation in each Knesset term that originated in private member bills. Each point represents the legislation in the outgoing Knesset. Therefore, there is no value for the first elections in 1949. The circle on the 1988 value represents the time we recognize as the beginning of the upsurge of this type of personalization.

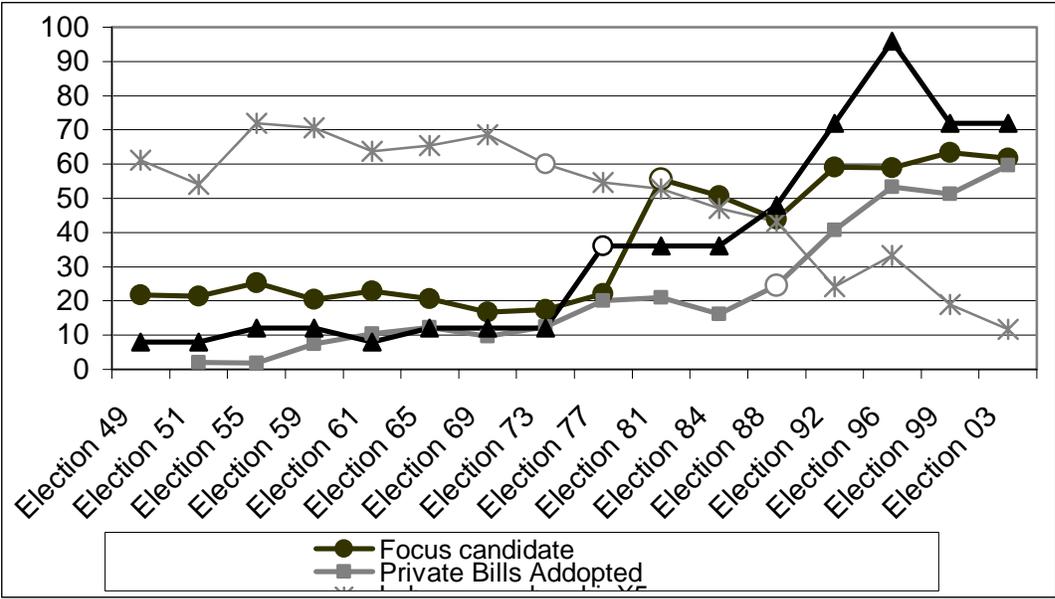


Figure 4. The lines of the personalization types are the same as in Figures 1-3. The Labor membership line represents the percentage of Labor members out the whole electorate, multiplied by five in order to synchronize it with the other measurements.

## Endnotes

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<sup>i</sup> Such a distinction between personal attributes and political performance was first made by Campbell et al. (1960), in *The American Voter*, and it has since appeared in various forms in many studies (see, for example, Bartels 2002; Kinder et al. 1980; Miller and Shanks 1996; Nimmo and Savage 1976).

<sup>ii</sup> For instance, contributors to this volume reported evidence of media personalization in Britain (Blumler, Kavanagh and Nossister 1996) and Russia (Mickiewicz and Richter 1996). Other studies recognize personalization in Israel (Galnoor, 1998), the US (Ranney, 1983), and generally in Western democracies (Blumler and Kavanagh, 1999).

<sup>iii</sup> The reasons for the decline in party membership are beyond the scope of this research. To mention only two reasons, Inglehart (1997) argues that individuals have become disenchanted with the traditional parties that have failed to respond to a changing set of values. Other scholars “blame” the media for taking the place of the parties as the mediator between the public and the politicians.

<sup>iv</sup> Wolfsfeld’s (2004) model includes only the PMP sequence. To that we added the first “S”, which represents societal changes, because we are also looking for the causes of political changes. In addition, when referring to the first “P” Wolfsfeld did not deal with institutional changes, but rather with political events.

<sup>v</sup> Since 1992 the large parties add the name of their leader to the name of the party on the ballot paper. This is an additional sign of personalization, but it cannot be considered a significant institutional change.

<sup>vi</sup> Measurements of personalization of campaign strategies (paid media) were conducted but are not included in this article due to space limitations. However, the findings regarding this type

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of personalization support the other findings presented below. Personalization in the behavior of voters is beyond the scope of this paper, but the analysis of trends in voters' behavior (Arian and Shamir 2002) also supports the suggested hypothesis.

<sup>vii</sup> In 1975, the local government system was reformed. Until then, a municipal council that was elected in a closed list PR (proportional representation) elections was the one that selected the mayor, and his or her rule was dependent upon sustaining majority support. The reform, which was first implemented in 1978, added direct popular election of mayors to the closed list PR elections of the local council and empowered the mayor who is no longer dependent for his or her post on the local council. This reform is clearly an expression of institutional personalization, but this study could not deal with it because it focuses on the national level. The adoption and implementation of this reform took place at the same time as the major reforms in candidate selection and may thus strengthen our claims on the causal processes of personalization(s).

<sup>viii</sup> We considered including democratization in leadership selection methods in our measure. But unlike candidate selection, leadership selection does not occur regularly before each election. In any case, overall trends in leadership selection in Israel are similar to those of candidate selection, so we are not missing much by concentrating on candidate selection.

<sup>ix</sup> Zero meant that an exclusive selectorate of a few – a nominating committee – was completely autonomous to determine the composition and ranking of the candidate list; Six meant that a selected party agency, a wider selectorate, was completely autonomous to determine the composition and ranking of the candidate list; 12 meant that party members, the widest selectorate ever used in Israeli national politics, was completely autonomous to determine the composition and ranking of the candidate list. The space between these pure types enabled us to

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capture the cases in which more than one selectorate was involved in candidate selection, and to capture the relative influence of each.

<sup>x</sup> The 2001 election was not included in the analysis because it was a special election for only electing the Prime Minister. Regardless, adding the personalization values of this election into the statistical analyses below did not affect the conclusions.

<sup>xi</sup> These two newspapers exist since Independence and always enjoyed a significant share of the Israeli readership. The first is a popular newspaper while the second is a broadsheet.

<sup>xii</sup> The most important of these are, first, the focus of the news item on candidates compared with its focus on parties, measured as the percentage of news items that focus mainly on the party, the candidates or both; And second, the focus of the news item on the candidates' personal traits compared with its focus on the candidates' political performance.

<sup>xiii</sup> One may argue that this data is flawed since it reflects Labor decline rather than an overall decline in party membership. However, we compared data on Labor membership with data that Arian (personal correspondent; see also Arian 1998, 161) collected on overall party membership in polls since 1969. The trends are largely similar to our data about Labor.

<sup>xiv</sup> Indeed, such regressions can often give spurious results if the variables are cointegrated over time (that is, if there is a long-running relationship between them). The Durbin-Watson (D-W) test can be used to find out if two or more time series are cointegrated. One suggestion is that "an  $R^2 > d$  [ $d$  is the D-W value] is a good rule of thumb to suspect that the estimated regression suffers from spurious regression" (Gujarati 1995, 724). We therefore conducted D-W tests for both regressions. The D-W value for the first one is  $d = 1.26$  and for the second is  $d = 1.25$ . Both values are higher than the values of  $R^2$  (.82 and .67 respectively).