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Story Coalitions: Applying Narrative Theory to the Study of Coalition Formation

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This article explores the potential of incorporating narrative theory into the study of coalition formation. Following a discussion of the role of narratives in group-formation processes in a coalition-driven dynamic, we offer a theoretical framework to examine the ways political stories espoused by people are mirrored by the partisan system. We integrate theoretical assumptions of narrative studies with coalition-formation theories in an attempt to frame coalition-formation models in terms of voters' political stories. We test our theoretical framework by simulating various possible coalitions in the Israeli 2009 elections and assess the results based upon data from an exit poll survey.

Recent decades have been marked by a growing interest in the concept of narrative among social science scholars. A major reason for this "narrative turn" (Czarniawska, 2010) is the recognition of the role of narratives in the construction, formation, and maintenance of collectives. Scholars have emphasized the importance of shared stories in the formation of a sense of collectiveness and in the shaping of common ideals and values (Patterson & Monroe, 1998). Narratives encompass a community's collective experiences, which are embodied in its belief system and represent the collective's symbolically constructed shared identity (Bar-Tal & Salomon, 2006). Hajer (1995), for example, sees the role of narratives as "discursive cement" as a tool to construct "discourse coalitions," a term that the author uses to designate "the ensemble of a set of story lines, the actors that utter these story lines, and the practices that conform to these story lines, all organized around a discourse" (Hajer, 1993, p. 47). Exploring narratives in light of their social role can offer a new

perspective on the traditional challenge faced by students of politics when striving to understand motivations behind the formation of alliances between parties within a government.

This article offers theoretical and empirical paths through which narrative approaches can open up new directions in dealing with classical issues relating to coalition formation. We appeal to three different kinds of literature on narrative, for three different purposes. First, the study relies on an extensive body of literature centering on the importance of narratives for individuals, especially in forming interpersonal alliances. Second, it builds upon a minimalistic conception of narrative which would allow conducting an empirical narrative analysis with a large sample. And finally, relying on the existing work on narratives in the social domain, we advance and empirically test three hypotheses regarding possible configurations of story coalitions.

The aim of this study is to understand the logic behind the ways government coalitions reflect the perceptions of the Israeli national story by individual voters. The understanding of possible patterns in this regard may benefit the study of narratives in the social sciences on the one hand and of coalition-formation processes on the other. This kind of interdisciplinary approach is embodied in the concept of *story coalitions*, introduced and developed in the article. It is assumed that coalitions are not only about partisan ideology and interests but also about bringing together a variety of political stories conceived of by individual voters. The empirical demonstration of this concept is built upon data from an exit poll of the 2009 Israeli elections and an analysis of the actual coalition-formation processes following these elections.

The Story of Our Nation: National Stories in the Political Domain

The concept of narrative has been defined in a variety of ways, both in the field of narratology and in other, discipline-oriented, contexts. A stipulation common to most definitions, however, is that a narrative involves a temporal framework, in the sense of a succession of events (Rimmon-Kenan, 1983/2002; see also Franzosi, 2010; Genette, 1980), or "*at least* two real or fictive events in a time sequence" (Prince, 1980, p. 50, author's emphasis; see also Shenhav, 2005). Although most narratives involve much more than is stipulated by this requirement, a succession of two events that encompass the past and the future can be regarded as the condition minimally necessary to represent the flow of time.

Rimmon-Kenan (1983/2002) identifies three main aspects of narrative: the "story," which "designates the narrated events, abstracted from their disposition in the text and reconstructed in their chronological order, together with the participants in these events"; the "text," defined as "spoken or written discourse" which relays the narrated events; and the "narration," which refers to the "communication process in which the narrative as message is transmitted by addresser to addressee" (Rimmon-Kenan, 1983/2002, pp. 2–3). As elaborated below, of these three components, our analysis focuses on the "story," which is centered upon narrated events (Rimmon-Kenan, 1983/2002, p. 3; see also, Herman, 2009). Relying on Patterson and Monroe's (1998) premise that "[s]tories about the origin and development of a nation provide a shared sense of who we are, where we came from, and how we fit together" (p. 322), we shall regard them as building blocks of coalition formation and thus an appropriate focus for a narrative study of this subject.

Understanding the role of personal narratives in coalition building involves a move from the individual, or microlevel analysis, to the macrolevel, and this, in turn requires the development of empirical and theoretical models. For example, Andrews (2006) studied political changes via the stories relayed by individuals. Auerbach (2009), Bar-Tal (2007), and Hammack (2011) use narratives as a means for understanding the psychology of national political conflicts. Shenhav, Sheafer, and Gabay (2010) apply the complication-resolution narrative structure to the analysis of public diplomacy. Roe (1994) and Fischer (2003) employ narratives in policy analysis, while Linde (2001) is concerned with the investigation of institutions. Other studies focus on narratives as a rhetorical device

in both the national and the international sphere (Ish Shalom, 2010; Krebs, 2004). This interest in the role of narrative in the political domain has, in turn, yielded a body of theoretical, methodological and review literature on this subject (e.g., Hammack & Pilecki, 2012; Patterson & Monroe, 1998).

As is evident from the above discussion, it has been widely acknowledged that narratives can be a source of important information about collectives. Nevertheless, to the best of our knowledge, no study of the formation of political coalitions has so far relied on a narrative approach. A study offering a model that incorporates the concept of narrative into traditional explanations of voting behavior has been carried out by Sheafer, Shenhav, and Goldstein (2011). The authors show that electoral behavior can be understood—and predicted—based on the proximity between the narratives embraced by voters and a political party. The current research endeavors to apply narrative approaches to the study of electoral behavior, with the focus on coalition formation.

Translating Individual Preferences into Collective Preferences: The Formation of Coalitions

While the literature on the role of social narratives offers a theoretical perspective on how people group themselves in communities, it does not account for the institutional aspect of coalition formation, which arguably plays an important role in setting up the dynamic of this process. Indeed, democratic elections were designed to express voters' choices and to provide a mechanism for translating individual preferences into collective preferences (Rawls, 1971). The pertinence of voters' preferences for coalition formation is especially prominent in proportional-representation electoral arrangements, which yield multiparty parliamentary systems (Duverger, 1955).

The theoretical study of government formation can be classified into two main branches: *office-seeking* and *policy-seeking* models. The theories lay out conditions and criteria for predicting which parties, out of the totality of parties in parliament, are included in a coalition.

Office-seeking theories are based on the assumption that the main goal of political parties is to win cabinet portfolios. This line of thought is represented in the "size principle" stipulated by Riker (1962), which states that only those parties that are necessary to form a winning coalition will compose the *minimal winning coalition* (see also Diermeier, Eraslan, & Merlo, 2003).

Policy-seeking theories assume that the fundamental concern of political parties is to influence government policy. On this approach, cooperation is more likely to occur between parties with similar policy preferences and less so among parties that are far from each other in their ideological or policy placement (Adams & Merrill, 2009; Axelrod, 1970; Benoit & Laver, 2006; de Swaan, 1973).

Spatial *policy-seeking* models locate parties on multidimensional policy positions. A party strives to become member of a winning coalition that is as close as possible to its own position in a multidimensional ideology or policy space. An example is Grofman's protocoalition model (Grofman, 1996), which sees coalition formation as a dynamic process in which parties that are close to one another in their policy dimensions successively fuse together into protocoalitions.

Story Coalitions: Bringing Narrative Analysis to the Study of Coalition Formation

While studies of coalition formation and research on narratives in the political domain rest on very different assumptions, methods, and scholarly traditions, they share a common interest—to understand the principles behind the "flocking together" of individuals and groups. Accordingly, to generate hypotheses regarding this issue, we shall apply coalition-formation models in conjunction with theoretical premises drawn from the narrative approach. We address two key questions: (1) Which party in parliament becomes the *formateur*? (2) Which parties are expected to participate in a coalition?

To this end, we propose the concept of story coalition as a way to bridge narrative approaches and coalition-formation theories. This concept emphasizes the importance of narratives in group

formation, on the one hand, while encapsulating the political logic of coalition formation on the other. It can therefore be seen as a link between national stories embraced by voters and the possible behavior of political parties in forming coalitions.

In an attempt to capture the transition from the microlevel of individuals' stories to the macrolevel of political stories, we define political parties by the stories of their voters. Accordingly, we operationalize each party by the aggregation of its voters' story preferences and term the outcome a *story-party*. Thus, a story-party is defined here as the sum of national stories of the party's voters. This microlevel aggregation is then weighted against the relative power of parties in parliament, thus integrating into the model a macrolevel perspective whereby a party is taken to be a political unit of analysis.

We believe that this approach is important from a democratic point of view. As, by and large, theories of government formation do not regard voters as a potential key explanation for the formation of governments, the incorporation of the story-coalition approach, which brings voters preferences to the fore, adds an important facet to the study of coalition formation. According to this rationale, the bargaining process by which governments are formed does not take place in a self-contained universe of politicians and parties, as is portrayed by most theories of coalition formation. While we do not attempt to point to a specific mechanism that translates individual stories into a conglomeration of parties into coalitions, we can still gain important insights regarding the pertinence of voters' story preferences in the formation of the government in a political system.

Three Hypotheses of Story Coalitions

Based on office-seeking and policy-seeking approaches to the study of coalition formation, as well as on the concepts of story-parties and story coalitions, we set forth three hypotheses regarding the formation of story-based coalitions: the *dominant-story* hypothesis, the *competing-stories* hypothesis and the *story-proximity* hypothesis. These hypotheses will guide our attempts to understand the ways political parties in multiparty systems convey story preferences when establishing coalitions.

Two comments are in order at this point. First, in linking narrative approaches to the study of coalition formation, we assume that the meanings individuals construct through narrative are not personal but rather political in nature—a presupposition that is dictated by our focus on national stories. Second, in exploring the concept of story coalition, we do not aim to reveal causal directionality between the elements but rather to understand the complex political meaning making that stems from the interplay between the micro (individual) level and the macro (party system) level. In that respect, it is of no consequence whether parties adopt the stories of their voters or the other way around. This research deals with the patterns in which the macrolevel reflects the microlevel; therefore, discussing mechanisms by which voters may have crystallized their stories is clearly beyond the scope of this article. The main question of this research is the following: What is the rationale behind the formation of coalitions in parliament in terms of the parties' story profiles?

Dominant-Story Hypothesis

The concept of dominant story usually refers to a collective story which is considered normal or desirable or which group members perceive as compulsory (Goddard, Lehr, & Lapadat, 2000). In this sense, as pointed out by Bamberg (2004), it overlaps with such equivalent concepts as master narratives and metanarratives which typically reflect a sociocultural perspective (Bamberg, 2005). Dominant stories are deployed not just to further personal goals and interests of individuals. They are

also used by social actors (e.g., the media, political parties, or social groups) in discourse and for persuasion (Bamberg, 2004), thereby sustaining and perpetuating their status in society (Bruner, 1990; McAdams, 1997).

Based on the theoretical writings on the societal role of the dominant story, it is expected that, in the process of coalition formation, parties will ally along the dominant-story dimension. Thus, the *dominant-story coalition* will be composed of parties that are adjacent in terms of their narrative, while parties that enter the coalition are the ones that contribute the most to the perpetuation of the dominant story.

The idea of the dominant story aligns with both the *policy-seeking* and the *office-seeking* models of coalition formation. On the one hand, the ordering of parties along a *dominant-story dimension* resonates with the ordering of parties along a unidimensional policy scale in *policy-seeking* models. However, instead of focusing on the mechanisms by which parties promote a common policy, this hypothesis emphasizes their *contribution* to the perpetuation of a common dominant story. According to the *office-seeking* principle, coalitions will include only the minimal number of parties that are necessary for a majority in parliament, so as to maintain political power solely on the basis of adherence to the dominant story; this prevents political power from being "wasted" on parties that espouse other narratives.

Thus, the criterion for inclusion in the dominant-story coalition is the extent of a party's contribution to the preservation of the dominant story in the political system. This contribution is a function of the party's relative share of the dominant story on the one hand and its relative size in parliament on the other. It is these two components of power that are analyzed in the present study: story power—each party's contribution to the story and political power—each party's relative size in parliament.

Our operationalization of a dominant story is straightforward and parsimonious: It is the national story adopted by most citizens of a country. The party's relative share of the dominant story is the percentage of voters in each party (recall that, for our purposes, a party is defined as a story-party, i.e., as the aggregation of its voters' stories) that embrace the dominant national story. Our operationalization of political power is equally straightforward: It is the party's relative size in parliament.

The party with the largest *contribution* to the dominant story will be the *formateur* party, that is, the party that is assigned to form the coalition. The order of adding parties to the coalition is contingent on their relative contribution to the dominant story. This process stops when the point of a minimal winning coalition has been reached. Note that big parties have an advantage over small ones in both forming and joining the coalition, since when a party's contribution to the dominant story is calculated, its relative size comes into play.

The idea of the dominant story coalition is formalized as follows:

NS = $\{NS_i \ldots NS_n\}$ A set of national stories in the society

P = $\{p_1 \ldots p_n\}$ Parties in parliament

V_{NS} = $\{V_{NSi} \ldots V_{NSn}\}$ Number of voters identified with each national story

VP_{NSi} = $\{VP_{NSi1} \ldots VP_{NSin}\}$ Number of voters identified with a national story NS_i for each party in the parliament

TV = Total voters

WP = $\{wp_1 \ldots wp_n\}$ party's share of seats in parliament

A story (NS_i) is dominant if it is the most common story among voters: if $\dfrac{V_{NSi}}{TV} > \left\{\dfrac{V_{NSj}}{TV} \ldots \ldots \dfrac{V_{NSn}}{TV}\right\}$.

As stated above, the contribution of each party to the dominant story is a function of both the support given to the story by a party's voters and the relative power of that party in parliament: $\dfrac{VP_{NSi1}}{V_{NSi}} * wp_1$. This contribution is calculated as the number of voters identified with story NS_i in party

p_1 divided by the total number of voters who identify with the same story. The quotient is multiplied by the respective relative seats of the party in the parliament, wp_1.

Competing-Stories Hypothesis

According to the *competing-stories* hypothesis, national stories and political ideas are constantly vying for hegemony in the political domains. In the process of coalition formation, the repudiation of the various competing national stories plays a central role. From a theoretical point of view, the dominant story has an important part in this framework as well, but the focus is on the struggle between stories over hegemony or control, an idea that is occasionally framed in terms of *counternarratives* (Andrews, 2002). In the context of the present study, *competing stories* are conceived of as the flip-side of the dominant story (Bamberg, 2004), creating—at least in the partisan arena—a competition between equals or nearly equals.

If the political system espouses more than one central story (NS_i and NS_j), that is, the share of one story among voters equals or almost equals the share of a competing story, such that $\frac{V_{NSi}}{TV} \cong \frac{V_{NSj}}{TV}$, the coalition-formation phase will be marked by intensive competition between dominant stories. The outcome of this struggle is assumed to be determined by two factors: (1) parties that have the highest share of story NS_i will get into the coalition; and (2) parties that have the smallest share of the competing story NS_j will get into the coalition.

The operationalization of these assumptions proceeds as follows: Each party's net contribution to the dominant story NS_i is calculated by subtracting the party's contribution to the competing story NS_j from its contribution to the dominant story NS_i. As was done for the dominant-story hypothesis, the quotient is multiplied by the relative size of the respective party in parliament. Each party's net contribution is calculated as follows:

$$C_{NSi} = \{c_{NSi1} \ldots c_{NSin}\} \text{The set of contributions to story } NSi \text{ for all parties}$$

The contribution is calculated as the number of voters identified with story NSi in party p_1, divided by the total number of voters who identify with the same story. The quotient is multiplied by the respective party's number of parliamentary seats.

If $(c_{NSi1} - c_{NSj1}) * wp_1 > \{(c_{NSi2} - c_{NSj2}) * wp_2 \ldots (c_{NSin} - c_{NSjn}) * wp_n\}$, party p_1 will be the first to enter the coalition (thus becoming the coalition's *formateur)*, since it offers the highest net contribution to the dominant story NSi. The second party to be included in the coalition will be one with the second greatest net contribution to the dominant story NS_i, and the third party to get in will be the one that net-contributes to a lesser degree than the second party in coalition, but more than any of the remaining parties in parliament.

Similar to the dominant-story hypothesis, the competing-stories hypothesis combines the logic of the office-seeking principle with that of the policy-seeking principle. As in the dominant-story hypothesis, parties are ordered according to the degree of their net contribution to the dominant story. In addition, in the competing-stories hypothesis, we not only refrain from "wasting" political power on "unnecessary" parties (the ones that offer a relatively small support for the dominant story) but also add an exclusion criterion for parties that are net-contributors to the competing story. The process of adding parties to the coalition stops when a minimum-winning coalition is formed (in line with office-seeking theories).

Story-Proximity Hypothesis

Similar to policy-seeking logic, the premise of the *story-proximity* hypothesis developed here is that, when forming coalitions, parties prefer other parties that are closer to them on the various

Table 1. Proximity Hypothesis: Example

1a. Relative Frequencies of Stories within Parties

	Party X	Party Y	Party Z
Story A	80	50	30
Story B	20	50	70

1b. Distances between the Parties' Stories in Three Hypothetical Coalitions

	Coalition XY	Coalition XZ	Coalition YZ
Story A	30	50	20
Story B	30	50	20
Total Distance	60	100	40

dimensions of national stories. Similar to the multi-issue dimensions in the spatial coalition theories, the story-proximity model locates parties on metric positions within various story dimensions. According to this hypothesis, the greater the proximity between story-parties, the greater the likelihood that they will cooperate to form a coalition. This hypothesis stems from the understanding that similarities or dissimilarities in the stories people hold about their nationality should influence a wider set of political behaviors (Sheafer, Shenhav, & Goldstein, 2011).

The empirical test of the hypothesis includes two phases: (1) producing all possible winning coalitions (i.e., all possible combinations of coalitions that result in a parliamentary majority) and (2) rating each combination according to the cohesiveness level in the set of its national stories. Table 1 presents an example. Suppose that a political system encompasses three parties, X, Y, and Z, but only two stories: story A and story B. Suppose also that no single party can form a coalition by itself, but any two-party coalition is a winning coalition and thus any combination of the three is possible (XY, XZ, YZ). The relative frequency of stories in each party is presented in Table 1a. For instance, story A is adopted by 80% of party X's voters but only by 30% of party Z's voters. The more similar any two parties are with respect of the prevalence of a certain story, the more proximate they are and the more they are likely to form a coalition. The cohesiveness, or proximity, of every possible coalition is calculated as the sum of distances (in absolute terms) between the relative frequencies of similar stories in all parties. The greater the proximity (or the smaller the distance) between two parties, the greater the likelihood that they will form a coalition. Take, for example, coalition XY (Table 1b). The distance between party X and party Y in respect of story A is 30 (80–50) and in respect of story B is also 30, resulting in a total distance of 60.

The results displayed in Table 1b show that the minimum-distance coalition is YZ (40), and the maximum-distance coalition is XZ (100). The story-proximity hypothesis predicts that coalition YZ is the most likely to be formed because it involves the minimum distance and is, narratively speaking, the most cohesive coalition possible. The *formateur* party in this model is the one that exhibits the minimum total distances from all other parties in parliament. In our example, the total distance of party X from all other parties stands on 160 (100+60) points, while the total distance of party Z from all other parties in parliament stands on 140 points (100+40), and party Y's total distance is 100 (60+40). Hence, the party that is assigned to build the coalition is party Y, which is the closest party, narratively speaking, to all other parties in parliament.

Story Coalitions in the 2009 Israeli Elections

The empirical examination of the idea of story coalitions is based on the case of the 2009 elections for the Israeli parliament (the Knesset). Our first goal was to compile a list of substantial national stories. Second, we identified the national stories of the voters and aggregated the voters of

each party to find the relative distribution of stories within each story-party. Third, we examined possible coalitions based on the three hypotheses stated in the preceding sections.

Compiling a List of Substantial National Stories

A fundamental empirical challenge in this study was to operationalize national stories so as to make it possible to measure voters' stories and their distribution within each party. Based on the minimal definition of narrative, we measured national stories held by voters as a succession of two events that span a past and a future time period. Although, as discussed above, a narrative usually involves more than these two elements, we assumed that this crude and rather simplistic way to account for the national narratives adopted by voters is sufficient for the purposes of this pilot investigation of their role in coalition formation.

To compile a list of substantial national stories, we utilized the *Israeli Declaration of Independence*, a constitutive document which expresses the principles of Israeli statehood. The declaration was written, edited, and reedited (Shachar, 2002) in a process that eventually captured the Israeli-Zionist collectiveness, encompassing the differences among main political groups in Israel.[1]

We identified four major past and future events either implicitly or explicitly referred to in the *Israeli Declaration of Independence* (detailed and quoted below). This involved analyzing and interpreting the text of the Declaration, in light of its major storylines.[2] While any text lends itself to a variety of interpretations, our conclusions are validated by independent evidence: other scholars who have analyzed open-ended responses to survey questions on the most important historical events in Israel have come up with a similar list of events (Schuman, Vinitzky-Seroussi, & Vinokur, 2003).

The events that were gleaned from the text of the Declaration pertain to several different national stories of Israeli Zionist statehood:

Past events: (1) Revelation on Mt. Sinai (the Jewish people "gave the world the eternal Book of Books . . .")[3]; (2) The Holocaust (". . . 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 . . . , to be known as the State of Israel"); and (4) The peace agreement with Egypt ("We extend our hand to all neighboring states and their peoples in an offer of peace and good neighborliness").

Aspirations for the future: (1) A strong state that will know how to defend its people (". . . knowing how to defend itself . . ."; "Placing our trust in the 'rock of Israel' "); (2) A state which lives in peace with its neighbors (The State of Israel "will be based on freedom, justice and peace"); (3) A state that will ensure complete equality ("it will ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex"); and (4) A state that will be a spiritual, cultural and national center of the Jewish nation ("spiritual, religious and political identity was shaped" in Israel; "re-establish" in the "ancient homeland").

Identifying the National Stories of Voters and Parties

We identified voters' national story preferences by conducting a representative exit poll in Israel on February 10, 2009, during the Election Day for the 18th Knesset. A random sample of 75 polling stations was drawn from Israeli polling stations nationwide. The sampling universe included precincts with more than 25 voters, stratifying on the *Kadima* (the incumbent prime minister's party) vote from the previous election (n = 2,058). Respondents were broadly representative of Israel's

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[1] We excluded the *United Arab List* from our analysis due to a very low number of cases.

[2] For instance, we concretized the description of the peace aspirations of Jewish settlement in Israel by referring to the peace agreement with Egypt, an event that took place some 30 years after the Declaration was written.

[3] Quotes are taken from the *Israeli Declaration of Independence* (1948).

Table 2. Degree of Support for Seven Most Popular National Stories

National Stories	Percentage of Voters
Israel Strong	17%
Israel Peace	17%
Religious Spirit	13%
Religious Strong	9%
Israel Equal	8%
Holocaust Peace	5%
Holocaust Strong	5%

(N = 1240)

demographic profile: the proportion of females in the sample was only slightly less than in the general population (48% versus 51%)[4]; 8% of respondents were older than 65 compared with 10% in the general population; and 52% of respondents held an academic degree compared with 48% in the general population (note that voters are usually more educated than nonvoters). A further indication of the accuracy of the sample derives from a comparison of poll reports on party vote with actual election results (Diskin, 2009). For example, 23.4% of exit-poll respondents reported voting for *Kadima* compared with *Kadima's* vote share of 22.5% as per official results of the elections; *Likud* received 20.8% in the poll compared with the actual 21.6% vote share; and Shas received 7.8% in the poll compared with 8.5% in their actual result. The average difference between the party vote in the exit poll and the party vote share in the elections was 1.46%.

A voter's national story was based on responses to two survey questions regarding past events and future aspirations for the State of Israel. The questions were multiple choice, with four answer options for each: respondents were instructed to select the item which they considered the most important. The question regarding past events was phrased as follows: "Below is a list of events from the history of the Jewish people and of the State of Israel. Which one do you consider to be the most important?" The question pertaining to the future listed four aspirations for the future of the State of Israel. The answers to these questions were taken to be an adequate indicator of a voter's preferred national story. For example, if a voter chose the establishment of Israel as a past event, while as an aspiration for the future—Israel as a strong state—we can broadly see him or her as an adherent of the *Israel-Strong* national story. If a voter chose the same past event but preferred a future prospect of peace with Arab nations, we see him or her as an adherent of a different story, which can be summarized as the *Israel-Peace* story. There are seven main stories that were chosen by at least 5% of the respondents (Table 2).

Since voters were asked to report their preferences for the past and the future (which are presumed to constitute their national stories), as well as their voting choice, two alternative ways of presenting the results were available. First, the results could be plotted for each party in parliament, depending on the respondents' voting choices. For example, *Kadima*'s voters could be mapped according to their stories. In the case examined, the dominant story among *Kadima*'s voters was *Israel-Peace*, with 32% of *Kadima*'s voters identifying with that story. Alternatively, we could display the distribution of parties within each story by mapping the parties chosen by voters who espouse, say, the *Israel-Strong* story. We utilize both methods when testing our three hypotheses on the Israeli case.

Aligning with Security Stories: The 2009 Israeli Elections

In the 2009 National Elections for the 18th Knesset, 12 parties entered the parliament. A group of five leading parties emerged: the centrist party *Kadima* won 28 seats (22.5% of the vote); the

[4] Data on the national population is based on the 2009 report of the Israel Central Statistics Bureau.
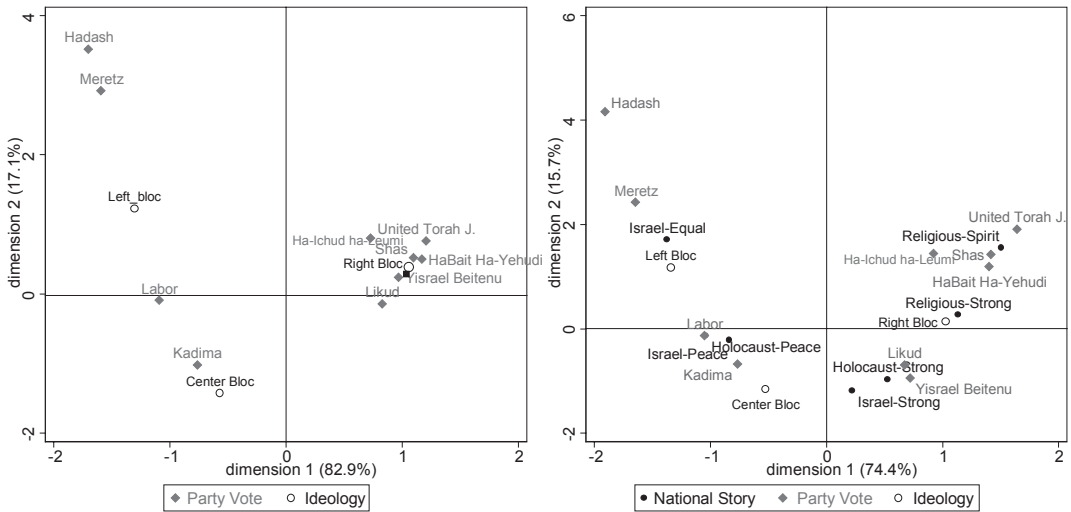
Figure 1. Correspondence analysis maps. Correspondence analysis was conducted on a set of variables. The left-hand graph includes the party vote and ideology variables, and the right-hand graph includes these and also the national-story variable. Based on the geometric proximity (chi square distances) between the parties and the quadrants in which they are located, groups of variables can be identified. The closer the variables, the more interrelated they are, and those separated by quadrants fall into groups with opposite profiles.

center-right *Likud* party won 27 seats (21.6%); the nationalist party *Yisrael Beitenu* won 15 seats (11.7%); the *Labor* Party *Avoda* won 13 seats (9.9%); and the religious party *Shas* won 11 seats (8.5%). Lagging considerably behind were *United Torah Judaism*, *HaBait Ha-Yehudi* (both religious parties), *Ha-Ichud ha-Leumi* (right-wing), *Raam-Taal*, *Hadash*, and *Balad* (the latter three, Arab parties), and *Meretz* (left-wing). These parties won between three and five seats each. Although *Kadima* won most of the seats, it was the chairperson of the *Likud* Benjamin Netanyahu that was assigned by the President to form the government—which came to include the *Likud*, *Yisrael Beitenu*, *Shas*, *HaBait Ha-Yehudi*, *United Torah Judaism*, and the *Labor* party.

 Predicting the components of a coalition in an extreme multiparty and multidimensional political system, as is the case in Israel, is never easy. Coalition theories can predict a stable coalition with a reasonable degree of accuracy if there is a core party or given any other equilibrium solution (Schofield, 1986). Yet in cases where a core party does not exist and more than one party has the potential to become a coalition's *formateur*, the situation is fraught with uncertainties (Austen-Smith & Banks, 1988; Laver & Shepsle, 1996). This scenario evolved in the wake of the 2009 Israeli elections, when the *Likud* party, and not *Kadima*, was given the opportunity to form the coalition. Indeed, according to coalition theories, neither *Kadima* nor the *Likud* met the criteria for the core party: each of them could defeat the other.

 The premise of the present study is that integrating national stories into models of coalition formation imparts narrative identity to the traditional left-right ideological dimension. The validity of this claim was examined first via two sets of correspondence analysis (Figure 1). This procedure yielded a graphical summary of categorical variables and demonstrated the potency of national stories in accounting for coalition formation in a multiparty system that does not lend itself to an explanation in terms of ideological blocs. Thus, it has allowed a descriptive evaluation of proximity between voters based on their choice of a party, their ideology (left, center, right), and their story.

 The left-hand graph presents the associations between ideology and party preferences. The upper left-hand pole contains categories that relate to the left bloc of the Israeli political map, including *Hadash* and *Meretz*—the two Israeli left-bloc parties par excellence. In the lower left-hand

pole are *Labor* and *Kadima*, which comprise the center-left bloc. The position occupied on the graph by the religious-parties cluster, the *Likud* and *Yisrael Beitenu*, relegates all these parties to the right bloc.

The right-hand graph adds voters' stories to their party and ideology preferences. The most noticeable change is in the right-wing bloc. Adding national stories differentiates between *Likud* and *Yisrael Beitenu* on the one hand and the religious parties on the other, placing the former two closer to the center bloc and thus to *Kadima* and *Labor*.

In correspondence analysis, the separation of dimensions by quadrants uncovers the existence of groups of variables. The closer the variables, the more interrelated they are, and therefore those that fall into different quadrants comprise groups with opposite profiles. The bottom quadrants are the most important as they represent opposite profiles in the central dimension (Dimension 1), which explains 74.4% of the variance. The examination of these central quadrants reveals that the main story dimension in Israeli politics pivots on security: on the right side are the narratives of a strong state (*Israel-Strong* and *Holocaust-Strong*), while on the opposite side are the stories of a peaceful country (*Israel-Peace* and *Holocaust-Peace*). In Israeli politics, strength and peace are, in essence, opposing strategies for dealing with security issues (Shamir & Arian, 1999): Those who envision Israel as a strong state believe that security can be achieved through military supremacy, while those who strive for peace perceive security as harmonious coexistence, mutual trust, and full reconciliation with the neighboring countries. The predominance of the security dimension in voters' national stories is also evident in that the parties associated with these stories (*Likud, Yisrael Beitenu, Kadima*, and *Labor*) are the four biggest parties in the Knesset, holding almost 70% of parliament seats.

Testing the Story-Coalitions Hypotheses

Following the 2009 elections, the *Likud* party was selected by the Israeli President to be the *formateur* of the coalition. The right-wing religious coalition formed by the *Likud* included *Yisrael Beitenu, HaBait Ha-Yehudi, Shas, Labor*, and *United Torah Judaism*. Below we test the three hypotheses, comparing their outcomes to the actual Israeli coalition.

The Dominant-Story Hypothesis

To examine and apply the dominant-story hypothesis, we must first identify the most popular story among voters. As seen in Table 2, there are two such stories, *Israel-Strong* and *Israel-Peace*, in line with the two main conceptions of security discussed above.

The assumption underlying the dominant-story hypothesis is that a political system will normally promote one dominant story. In the context analyzed, two dominant stories emerged, and therefore, in line with the above rationale, two alternative story-based coalitions could have been formed.

Furthermore, according to the dominant-story hypothesis, the more a party contributes to the dominant story, the more likely it is to enter the coalition. In regard to the *Israel-Strong* story, the first party to enter the coalition would have been *Likud*, since it contributes to that story the most (see Table 3a). In order to account for both the political and the narrative power of a party, this contribution is measured by multiplying the party's share of the dominant story by its relative size in parliament. The *Likud* won 27 mandates and was the second largest party in the Knesset, following *Kadima*, which had 28 mandates. Importantly, although the *Likud* was the second largest party in numerical terms, its share in the *Israel-Strong* story was the largest, 35%. Hence, the contribution of the *Likud* to the establishment of the dominant story of *Israel-Strong* was the highest. Thus, we were able to simulate the formation of this particular coalition by adding parties based on their relative contribution to the *Israel-Strong* story, until a minimal winning coalition was reached. Table 3a

Table 3. The Dominant-Story Hypothesis

3a. A Coalition Based on the *Israel-Strong* Dominant Story

Party	Number of Mandates	Share of the Dominant Story	Contribution
Likud	27	0.35	9.43
Kadima	28	0.31	8.70
Yisrael Beitenu	15	0.15	2.22
Total	70	0.81	

Note. Contribution to the dominant story is calculated by multiplying the party's share of the dominant story by the party's relative size in parliament.

3b. A Coalition Based on the *Israel-Peace* Dominant Story

Party	Number of Mandates	Share of the Dominant Story	Contribution
Kadima	28	0.42	11.75
Likud	27	0.17	4.58
Labor	13	0.23	3.02
Total	68	0.82	

shows that the *Israel-Strong* coalition is a three-party coalition with 70 mandates, which constitute 58% of the total 120 seats in the Knesset. This coalition accounts for 81% of voters who hold that story. In the same vein, Table 3b exhibits results for the coalition based on the story *Israel-Peace*. The *Israel-Peace* coalition also includes three parties, all in all with 68 mandates, which constitute 57% of parliament seats and account for 82% of voters who hold this story.

Thus, the implementation of the dominant-story hypothesis has yielded two very similar coalitions with respect of their power in parliament as well as to each coalition's contribution to its respective dominant story. According to this hypothesis, therefore, it is impossible to decide which of these two coalitions is more probable.

The Competing-Stories Hypothesis

According to the competing-stories hypothesis, two dominant stories (*Israel-Strong* and *Israel-Peace*), which lead to two different paths to security, compete for hegemony in the Israeli political system. The empirical test of this hypothesis takes into account a party's net contribution to the construction of dominant story A (in our example, *Israel-Strong*). The measure of net-contribution subtracts a party's contribution to story B (*Israel-Peace*) from its contribution to story A, and vice versa. A coalition is formed when the majority in the parliament is achieved (minimal winning coalition).

Table 4 shows each party's net contribution to the dominant story of *Israel-Strong* plus its net contribution weighted by the party's relative size in parliament. For example, *Kadima's* contribution to the *Israel-Strong* story is .31, while its contribution to the competing story of *Israel-Peace* is .42. As discussed above, these values represent the percentages of *Kadima's* voters holding these stories in relation to all voters that hold these stories. Hence, *Kadima*'s net contribution to the story *Israel-Strong* is negative and stands at −.11 (.31–.42). Another example is the *Likud's* contribution to the story *Israel-Strong*, which stands on .35, while its contribution to the competing story *Israel-Peace* is .17. Hence, *Likud*'s net contribution to the story *Israel Strong* is positive and stands at .18 (.35–.17). Next, the net contribution is weighted by a party's relative size in the Knesset. This is done by multiplying the net contribution of the party by its share of the Knesset's seats. For example, *Kadima's* weighted contribution to the story *Israel-Strong* is −2.57, which is the product of its net contribution (−.11) and its share of the Knesset's seats ((28/120)*100).

Table 4. The Competing-Story Hypothesis: The Parties' Net Contribution to the *Israel-Strong* Story

	Party										
	Kadima	Ha-Ichud ha-Leumi	Likud	Labor	Shas	HaBait Ha-Yehudi	Meretz	Yisrael Beitenu	Balad	Hadash	United Torah J.
Israel-Strong	0.31	0.02	0.35	0.12	0.02	0.02	0.00	0.15	0.00	0.00	0.00
Israel-Peace	0.42	0.01	0.17	0.23	0.01	0.00	0.10	0.04	0.01	0.00	0.00
Net Contribution	−0.11	0.01	0.18	−0.11	0.01	0.01	−0.10	0.11	0.00	0.00	0.00
Party Size	28	4	27	13	11	3	3	15	3	3	5
Net Contribution Relative Party Size	−2.57	0.03	4.05	−1.19	0.09	0.05	−0.20	1.38	−0.03	0.00	0.01

Note. Relative Party Size is calculated as the relative share of a party's seats in parliament.
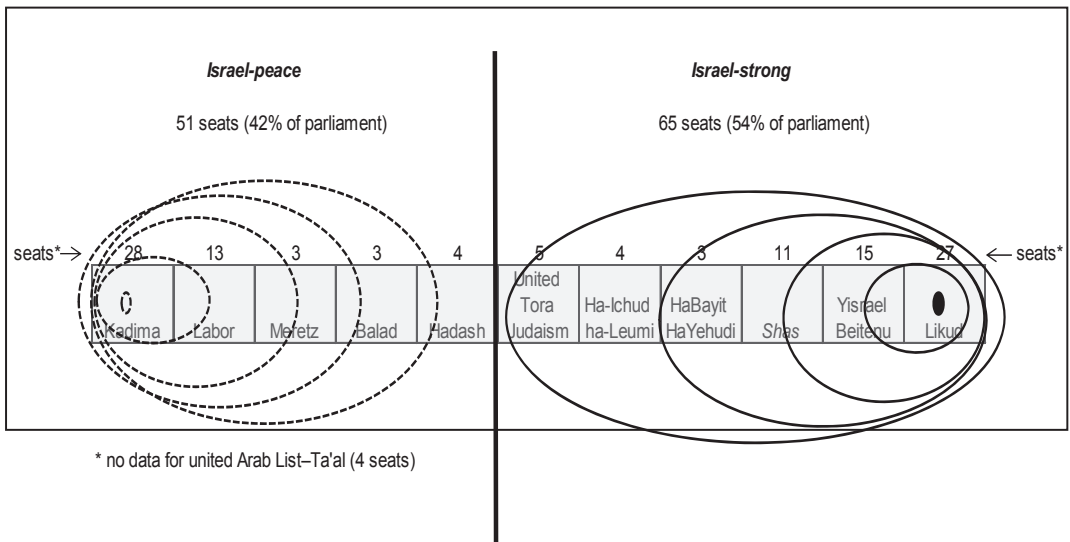

Figure 2. Party location on a scale plotting weighted net contributions to the *Israel-strong* story. The net contribution to the Israel-strong story is positive for the parties on the right side of the scale and negative for the parties on its left side. A winning coalition is possible only based on the *Israel-strong* story (54% of parliament). The circles graphically denote the process by which story-based coalitions are formed: Parties that contribute to the story substantially are enclosed in smaller circles, while those who contribute to the story to a lesser degree are enclosed in larger circles.

Each party's net contribution weighted by its relative size in parliament is utilized to build the competing-story scale (Figure 2). All the parties that are positive net contributors to the *Israel-Strong* story are located on the positive side, while parties with a negative net contribution are on the negative side. This scale ranges from a minimum value of −2.57 (*Kadima*, the greatest negative contributor) to the highest value of 4.05 (*Likud*, the greatest positive contributor).

According to the competing-stories hypothesis, only parties with a positive net weighted contribution can be a part of a story coalition. Since each party is either in the positive or in the negative zone, the result is a zero-sum competition between the competing stories. Therefore, unlike the dominant-story hypothesis, the competing-story hypothesis will allow only one possible coalition. As can be seen in Figure 2, the only possible winning coalition is the *Israel-Strong* story-based coalition, with 65 seats in the Knesset (54% of parliament). This coalition bears similarities to the

one that was actually formed by the *Likud* following the 2009 elections. However, the actual coalition included the *Labor* party and excluded a small, four-seat party *Ha-Ichud ha-Leumi*. The inclusion of the *Labor* party strongly contravenes the rationale of the competing-stories hypothesis, since the *Labor* Party is a net contributor to the competing story. In line with the hypothesis, however, the *Labor* party subsequently left the government, with the exception of a minority group led by its chairperson, which split off and stayed in the government.

The Story-Proximity Hypothesis

According to the story-proximity hypothesis, parties with a similar set of national stories will cooperate to form a coalition. In the two hypotheses discussed above, the unit of analysis is the national story, and the central issue is how this story maintains its dominance in the political sphere. In the story-proximity hypothesis, on the other hand, the unit of analysis is the party. The focus is on which parties will form the most cohesive coalition, that is, a coalition characterized by the smallest distance between the parties' respective sets of national stories.

We begin by indentifying all possible winning coalitions (all coalitions with over 50% seats in parliament). Next (and as shown in the example in Table 1), the dyadic distances between every two parties (in absolute terms) are calculated, based on the frequency with which each story was mentioned by each party's voters (see Table 2). According to the story-proximity hypothesis, the coalition that is most likely to be formed is the one with the minimal sum of such dyadic distances.

Table 5 presents the first 20 minimal-distance coalitions. A value of 1 indicates that a party is a member of the respective coalition. For example, the members in the first coalition are *Kadima*, *Likud*, and *Yisrael Beitenu*; the total story-distance between the three parties is 180.94.

Table 5 also shows that *Kadima* and the *Likud* are the core members in each of the first 17 possible coalitions. In fact, the first two coalitions are identical to the ones yielded by the dominant-story hypothesis. The difference between the outcomes of the two hypotheses is in that, according to the story-proximity hypothesis, the *formateur* can only be the *Likud*, since it displays the minimum total distance from all other parties in parliament; and indeed it was the *Likud* that formed the 2009 coalition.

Only in the eighteenth "attempt" does the *Likud* form a coalition without *Kadima*, joining instead with *Labor*, *Shas*, and *Yisrael Beitenu*. Interestingly, it is precisely this coalition (with the addition of a small, three-seat party, *HaBait Ha-Yehudi*) that was formed by PM Netanyahu following the 2009 elections and that endured until the January 2013 elections. In line with the proximity model, however, in May 2012, *Kadima* joined the government, but the coalition that was formed as a result was extremely oversized and does not appear among the options yielded by the proximity model. Unsurprisingly, this coalition lasted only about two months, whereupon *Kadima* left the government.

A survey of the findings obtained for the three story-coalition models (dominant-story, competing-stories, and story-proximity) offers some valuable insights. All three story-coalition models indicate that the *formateur* party should have been the *Likud*, although the *Likud* was only the second-largest party in the Knesset (the only exception is an option produced by the dominant-story hypothesis with *Kadima* as the *formateur* party). This finding can be perceived as an answer—and, arguably, a rather clear and impressive one—to one of the main questions addressed by coalition theories, namely, which party will emerge as the *formateur* in any given case? To the extent that no adequate answer to this question has so far been offered within coalition studies, one cannot help but wonder whether multiple political identities in multiparty, multidimensional political systems can be better captured through narrative theories.

Table 5. Twenty Minimal-Distance Coalitions

	Kadima	Ha-Ichud ha-Leumi	Likud	Labor	Shas	HaBait Ha-Yehudi	Meretz	Yisrael Beitenu	Balad	Hadash	United Torah J.	Total Seats	Distance
1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	70	180.9
2	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	68	183.4
3	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	66	301.2
4	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	83	389.5
5	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	71	459.7
6	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	74	511.4
7	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	73	514.2
8	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	73	527.9
9	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	72	528.9
10	1	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	71	529.4
11	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	81	534.1
12	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	62	536.9
13	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	73	548.0
14	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	70	551.0
15	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	79	555.3
16	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	71	556.4
17	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	69	560.6
18	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	66	577.5
19	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	67	591.8
20	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	72	622.8

Conclusions

This study integrates insights from narrative theory with coalition-formation models described in the literature. While originating from very different scholarly areas, these two approaches address the same question: Why and on what basis do people "flock together"? To shed light on the transition of individual stories to collective stories, and thereby to fill to some extent what we believe to be a normative and empirical lacuna in the study of coalition formation, we have attempted to leverage the theoretical contribution of narrative literature in this regard. In opposition to the bulk of the coalition-formation literature, which makes hardly any reference to the individual, we contend that the partisan system does reflect the identity of voters. The unit of analysis adopted in this study is the political party, conceptualized as an actor that strives to maximize its power or policy preferences under institutional constraints. According to most current models, once the voters cast their ballots on the Election Day, they cease to be participants in the process of coalition building. Our theoretical framework contravenes this premise, which for that matter does not seem to be aligned with democratic thinking, and endeavors to include voters into the game of government formation. To this end, an attempt is made to understand the rationales and uncover the patterns according to which coalitions reflect the national stories of the voters.

We have propounded the idea of story coalition, a concept that links between national stories held by voters and the possible behavior of political parties while forming coalitions. Our first challenge was to apply coalition-formation models in conjunction with the theoretical premises of the narrative approach. Our second challenge was to operationalize this model so as to enable a demonstration—however tentative—of the idea of story coalition. We have addressed these challenges by generating hypotheses anchored in both narrative literature and insights drawn from coalition-formation models. Three hypotheses regarding the formation of story-based coalitions are set forth: the *dominant-story* hypothesis, the *competing-stories* hypothesis, and the *story-proximity* hypothesis. These hypotheses have guided our attempts to model possible story coalitions in an attempt to answer two fundamental questions in the study of coalitions: (1) Which party will become the *formateur* in any given coalition? and (2) Which parties will participate in that coalition? Based on the idea of story coalition, we have identified potential coalitions in the Israeli Knesset in the wake of the 2009 elections and compared the results with real-life coalitions that were formed at that time.

Our findings are of relevance for the study of both coalitions and narratives. As regards the former, we have shown that narrative approaches can be helpful in identifying the *formateur* party in the context of multiparty systems which are difficult to arrange along a unidimensional ideological axis. Indeed, in contrast to other existing approaches, our story-coalition models predicted fairly accurately the party that became the *formateur* in the 2009 Israeli government coalition. To the extent that this party was not the biggest in parliament, the success of our attempt appears to point to the importance in this regard of individual voters' stories. Admittedly, incorporating this parameter in coalition models can make a substantial contribution to the study of coalition formation. It must be admitted that our narrative approach did not yield a single possible coalition but rather pointed at several paths to form one, thereby falling short of predicting an exact configuration of parties. However, this seeming drawback can be viewed in the positive light, in that it has opened an avenue for studying coalition formation by resorting to more flexible and less restricted models than are usually applied in coalition theories. Such a strategy allows for better maneuverability and hence may be better suited for probing the logics of coalitional changes.

As for narrative theory, we empirically approached the question of how and in what circumstances political stories are more likely to ally. We believe that appealing to coalitions of stories as a major factor in the political domain is a promising strategy to address this question, one that opens new theoretical and methodological avenues for future research. For example, the failure of our models to predict accurately the exact make-up of the coalition investigated might be not merely a

matter of limitations unavoidable in any coalition model. Rather, it may stem from the absence of alternative hypotheses in addition to the three explored in the present research. It may also point to a need to develop more sophisticated ways of measuring individuals' narratives, which will fine-tune and enhance our operationalization here.

All in all, we believe that this article provides convincing arguments that such efforts are worthwhile, as it seems that coalitions are not just about policies and offices but also about alliances of political stories.

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