

Story-cleavages: toward a competing-narrative model to evaluate social diversion in multi-cleavage societies - the case of Israel

Shaul Shenhav, Yael R. Kaplan, Guy Mor, Gal Ron, Tamir Sheaffer,

The concept of cleavages refers to the fundamental divisions between groups within society, each of which holds conflicting values and goals. In this work-in-progress, we argue that previously studied political cleavages do not account for an important symbolic element: citizens' perceptions of their nations. We suggest that citizens' perceptions of national stories are not simply a result of cleavages, but an independent dimension of society. This dimension can also have important implications for macro-level questions, such as the symbolic characteristics of political rifts, and micro-level questions, such as how individuals feel about their political representation. In this work-in-progress, we demonstrate the potential use of open-ended narrative surveys and a set of statistical analyses designed for studying the potential implications of story cleavages. We first develop the idea of story cleavage and then demonstrate this approach with the case study of Israel – a well-known and well-studied case of a multi-cleavage society, in which cleavages play a major role in the political arena.

We utilize data from the April 2019 Israel National Election Study (INES) post-election survey in which three open-ended questions were designed to capture proxies of respondents' national stories based on three story elements (main past event, main future event and main national character).¹ Respondents were asked to choose a past event they deem most important in the history of the state and people of Israel, a future occurrence they would most wish to see happen, and a historical figure they consider most significant in the history of the Israeli people. Open-ended responses to each of the three questions were then inductively grouped into coarser categories (details on the process of coding will be provided in the paper).

This exploratory analysis focuses on three main questions: (1) identifying story cleavages; (2) examining how story cleavages relate to known social cleavages and (3) locating stories with

¹ Questions were: *Past*: When you think about the history of the State of Israel and of the people of Israel ("Am" Israel), what past event seems to you to be the most important? *Future* or *Prospect*: When you think about the future of the state of Israel and the people of Israel ("Am" Israel), what event or occurrence would you like to see happen; *Character*: If you have to name one person who is most significant for Israel and the Israeli people from early history until today, who would that person be. For Arab citizens, questions referred to the State of Israel and of the *Arab-Israeli citizens*, instead of *the people of Israel* ("Am" Israel).

strategic potential - demonstrated by the search for story elements that contain shared types of responses and can bridge different and competing stories.