

MEMMO

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Election Showcases Israel's Vibrant Democracy

On Tuesday, January 22, 66.6 percent of eligible voters took part in Israeli elections for the 19th Knesset—Israel's parliament. Final results were announced on January 24. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's party won the most votes, and holds 31 of the 120 seats in the Knesset. President Shimon Peres will ask a Knesset member, usually the leader of the largest party, to form a new coalition government. The United States has affirmed that it is eager to work with Israel's new government.

Israel ensures a democratic transition of power.

- President Peres will consult with party leaders and select the Knesset member that he determines is best able to form a coalition—a majority voting bloc of Knesset members. The person the president selects will become prime minister if he/she is successful in forming a coalition.
- President Peres will most likely task Prime Minister Netanyahu with forming a new government because his party appears to have the best chance of achieving a majority coalition.
- Once officially asked by Peres to establish a coalition, Netanyahu will have 28 days—with a possible two-week extension—to form a government. If Netanyahu cannot form a coalition following the extension, Peres will turn to another Knesset member.
- Netanyahu has said that he seeks the broadest possible coalition, and called on leaders from the left, right, and center parties to join his government.



Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's party won the most seats in the recent election.

The new Knesset represents Israel's diversity.

- Israel elected more women to its Knesset than ever before, including the first woman of Ethiopian origin.
- Fifty-three new members of the Knesset, of whom 47 are serving for the first time, include all 19 members of the new Yesh Atid party. The new members are comprised of journalists, former military officials, religious leaders, and social activists.
- Arab party representation held steady at 11 seats, and two additional Arabs will represent Zionist parties.

The U.S.-Israel relationship transcends any particular election.

- Like America, Israel is a strong and vibrant democracy governed by law protecting free speech, religious freedom, and minority rights.
- The U.S.-Israel relationship transcends the politics of the moment, and is based on shared values, strategic interests, and a long-standing friendship.
- American leaders reaffirmed their commitment to the U.S.-Israeli alliance following Israel's elections. "We recognize that Israelis should be congratulated on their election, on their democracy," said White House Press Secretary Jay Carney on Jan. 23. He added: "Our relationship with Israel and our unshakable commitment to Israel's security will continue regardless. And our position on the peace process and our pursuit of peace will not change no matter the result of the government-formation process."
- The United States further indicated it would work to restart direct peace negotiations between the Israelis and the Palestinians. "We hope and expect that once the new government is formed we'll be able to get back into the business of encouraging direct dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians because that's really the only way forward here," State Department Spokesperson Victoria Nuland said on Jan. 22.

Composition of Israel's Knesset:

