

MEMMO

March 19, 2015

Election Showcases Israel's Vibrant Democracy

Last Tuesday, more than 4 million Israelis went to the polls to choose Israel's 20th Knesset. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's Likud party won the most votes, and will hold 30 of the Israeli parliament's 120 seats. Over the coming weeks, Israel's political leaders will work to assemble a new coalition government. The Obama administration has affirmed its desire to work closely with that government.

Israel's election ensures a democratic transition of power.

- With the vote count completed, Israeli President Reuven Rivlin will consult with party leaders and select the prospective Prime Minister – the Member of Knesset (MK) he determines is best able to gain a majority of Knesset votes for his or her coalition.
- President Rivlin will almost certainly task Prime Minister Netanyahu with forming a new government because his Likud party appears to have the best chance of achieving a majority coalition.
- President Rivlin has said he will try to persuade party leaders to form a "national unity" government, including both the Likud and Zionist Union, but the choice of partners lies in the hands of the individual given the mandate to build a coalition.
- Once officially asked by Rivlin 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, Rivlin may turn to another Knesset member.
- In his victory speech, Netanyahu stated that he seeks to form "a strong, stable government" that will provide security and social welfare to "all citizens of Israel, Jews and non-Jews alike."



Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and the Likud party received the most votes in Tuesday's election.

The new Knesset reflects Israel's diversity.

- The new Knesset will feature 29 female members- a record number.
- The new Knesset will have 14 Arab MKs and 2 Druze MKs – more than any previous Knesset and 23 percent more than in the outgoing Knesset. A joint list of predominantly Arab parties finished third in the elections with 13 seats. Jewish-majority parties also increased the number of Arab and Druze MKs on their lists.
- Voter turnout climbed to 72 percent – the highest since 1999.

- Israeli voters elected 40 new MKs to a first term. These include: American-born Michael Oren, Israel's former ambassador to the U.S.; Avraham Nagosa, an Ethiopian activist; Zouheir Bahloul, an Israeli-Arab sports broadcaster; Tali Ploskov, an immigrant who worked as a cleaner when she first arrived in Israel and later became the first woman from the former Soviet Union to serve as an Israeli mayor; and Manuel Trajtenberg, an Argentinean-born economist.

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

- Like America, Israel is a strong and vibrant democracy governed by laws 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. White House Press Secretary Josh Earnest said that President Obama remains “committed to working very closely with the winner of the ongoing elections to cement and further deepen the strong relationship between the United States and Israel, and the president is confident that he can do that with whomever the Israeli people choose.”

Composition of the new Knesset:

