

MEMO

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Israel Heads to Elections

On April 9, Israel will hold parliamentary elections and potentially choose a new prime minister. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu will lead his Likud party against a wide array of challengers representing the wide diversity of Israeli society.

How elections in Israel work:

- Israelis elect their parliament, the Knesset, for a four-year term. However, governments in Israel frequently do not serve out their full four years.
- Israelis cast their votes for a party list, and each party receives seats in the 120-member Knesset based on the proportion of votes it gains from the national electorate.
- Several Israeli parties determine their lists following primary elections; other parties form their lists through internal consultation. If a party wins 10 seats in the election, the top 10 candidates on the party list will become Members of Knesset (MKs).
- Following the election, Israeli President Reuven Rivlin will determine which individual he thinks has the best chance to form a coalition, since no single party is likely to have enough seats to rule on its own. Ordinarily, the president chooses the MK whose party won the most seats. That individual has several weeks to assemble a majority coalition of at least 61 MKs. If he or she fails, the president can turn to another MK.
- Once the prime-minister-designate assembles a coalition and chooses ministers, a majority of the Knesset must support the new government in a vote of confidence.
- Israel is a thriving pluralistic democracy. Israel's national elections reflect the diversity of Israeli society, with active participation of minorities like Israel's Arab and ultra-orthodox Jewish parties. Israel's political spectrum ranges from the hard-left to the hard-right, with most of the population clustering around parties from the center-right to the center-left.
- As the Middle East continues undergo dramatic changes, Israel will remain the one stable, democratic ally upon which America can consistently depend.



Major prime ministerial candidates:

- **Benjamin Netanyahu:** Leader of the *Likud* party and prime minister since 2009. He previously served as prime minister from 1996-1999.
- **Benny Gantz:** Leader of the newly formed *Hosen LeYisrael* (Resilience for Israel) party and former Israel Defense Forces (IDF) Chief of General Staff. He is seen by many as the main contender to Netanyahu.
- **Yair Lapid:** Leader of the center-right *Yesh Atid* (There Is a Future) party. He previously served as Minister of Finance
- **Naftali Bennett:** Leader of the new *HaYemin HeHadash* (the New Right) party. He has served as Education Minister since 2015 and Minister of Diaspora Affairs since 2013.

Other prominent political leaders who may be leading parties include:

- **Avigdor Lieberman:** Leader of *Yisrael Beiteinu* (Israel Is Our Home), a right-of-center party that represents many Israelis from the former Soviet Union. He recently served as Minister of Defense.
- **Ehud Barak:** Former prime minister (1999-2001) and IDF Chief of Staff. He has not announced his candidacy but has spoken about a return to politics with a center-left bloc.
- **Avi Gabbay:** Leader of the center-left *Avoda* (Labor) party. He is a former executive of the *Bezeq* communications company.
- **Tzipi Livni:** Party leader of *HaTnua* (the Movement). She previously served in several ministerial positions including Minister of Justice and Minister of Foreign Affairs.
- **Bougie Ya'alon:** Leader of the newly formed *Telem* (Movement for National Renewal) party and former IDF Chief of General Staff and Defense Minister.
- **Ayman Odeh:** Leader of the *Joint List*, an alliance of three Arab-dominated parties. The alliance reflects the wide spectrum of its constituent parties—from Communism to Socialism to Islamism.
- Additional key players include *Kulanu* leader and Finance Minister **Moshe Kahlon**, *Shas* leader **Aryeh Deri**, *United Torah Judaism* leaders **Yaakov Litzman** and **Moshe Gafni**, *Gesher* leader **Orly Levy-Abekasis**, and *Meretz* leader **Tamar Zandberg**.