

Israelis Head to Elections

APRIL 8, 2019

On April 9, Israel will hold its 21st parliamentary election. On this day, Israel will achieve a tremendous feat: Only 22 other nations have similarly conducted uninterrupted free and fair elections since 1949. Israel is an island of stability and democracy in a sea of chaos and authoritarianism. While the election will take place on April 9, it could take weeks for a new government to ultimately be formed. Regardless of the new government, the relationship between the United States and Israel must remain strong and continue to transcend partisan politics, for the benefit of both nations.

How do elections in Israel work?

- Israelis—ages 18 and older, regardless of race or religion—elect their parliament, the Knesset, for a four-year term. However, Israeli governments generally go to early elections for political reasons, prior to their full four years.
- Israelis cast their votes for a political party, rather than individual candidates. Each party that receives more than 3.25% of the vote gains seats in the 120-member Knesset based on the proportion of votes it gains from the national electorate.
- Each party submits a ranked list of prospective candidates for voters to choose from. If a party wins 10 seats in the election, the top 10 candidates on the party list will become Members of Knesset (MKs).

What happens after the elections?

- A new government must be approved by a majority of the Knesset.
- In order to achieve a majority vote, a coalition of political parties must be formed since no single party has ever had enough seats to rule on its own.
- The Israeli president will consult with party leaders to determine which individual has the best chance of forming a coalition.
- Ordinarily, the president chooses the MK whose party won the most seats, but this is not always the case (for example, in 2009, the *Kadima* party won the most seats but was not chosen to form the government because smaller parties representing a Knesset majority refused to join a coalition with it).
- The chosen individual has up to four weeks to assemble a majority coalition of at least 61 MKs. If he or she fails, the president can turn to another MK or allot two more weeks to the original MK. If a government cannot be formed, a new election can be called.



Israel's Knesset, or parliament, will hold elections on April 9, marking the start of a new government-forming process.

Israeli elections have particularly high turnout rates: 72% of Israelis voted in the previous election.

Israelis Head to Elections (CONTINUED)

What is the composition of the current Knesset?

- There are currently 15 parties in the Knesset, representing the full spectrum of Israeli society.
- There are 35 female Knesset members—the largest number in history. The Leader of the Opposition, the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, and the Ministers of Social Equality, Justice, Culture and Sport, and Construction and Housing are all women.
- There are 13 Israeli Arabs and four Druze who hold seats in the Knesset. MK Ayoob Kara—the current Minister of Communications and former Deputy Knesset Speaker—is Druze.
- The Arab Joint List has the third largest number of seats in the Knesset.
- There are two openly LGBTQ Knesset members—one in Labor and one in Likud. The Knesset has its own Gay Pride Lobby, an alliance of MKs from multiple parties to promote LGBTQ equality.

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THE WAY FORWARD

The U.S.-Israel alliance transcends the political parties that hold power in either country.

- The U.S.-Israel relationship transcends politics and is based on a long-standing friendship and strategic partnership between Americans and Israelis, who face common threats and share a common bond.
- The strong alliance between the U.S. and Israel will continue to thrive regardless of which government is in place in Israel.
- Israel is a thriving pluralistic democracy. Israel's national elections reflect the diversity of its society, with active participation by minorities like Israeli Arab and ultra-Orthodox Jewish parties. Israel's political spectrum ranges from the hard-left to the hard-right, with most of the population concentrated around parties from the center-left to the center-right.
- As the Middle East continues to undergo dramatic changes, Israel remains a stable democracy and an ally upon which America can consistently depend.