



The Jewish Federations®  
OF NORTH AMERICA  
Israel Office

### Israel and Overseas: Israeli Election Primer 2015

(As of, January 27, 2015)

#### **Elections**

- In Israel, elections for the Knesset are held at least every four years.
- As is frequently the case, the outgoing government coalition collapsed due to disagreements between the parties. As a result, the Knesset fell significantly short of seeing out its full four year term.
- Knesset elections in Israel will now be held on **March 17, 2015**, slightly over two years since the last time that this occurred.

#### **The Basics of the Israeli Electoral System**

- All Israeli citizens above the age of 18 and currently in the country are eligible to vote. Voters simply select one political party.
- Votes are tallied and each party is then basically awarded the same percentage of Knesset seats as the percentage of votes that it received. So a party that wins 10% of total votes, receives 10% of the seats in the Knesset (In other words, they would win 12, out of a total of 120 seats).
- To discourage small parties, the law was recently amended and now the votes of any party that does not win at least 3.25% of the total (probably around 130,000 votes) are completely discarded and that party will not receive any seats. (Until recently, the “electoral threshold,” as it is known, was only 2%).
- For the upcoming elections, by January 29, each party must submit a numbered list of its candidates, which cannot later be altered. So a party that receives 10 seats will send to the Knesset the top 10 people listed on its pre-submitted list. Should a member of

Knesset resign or pass away during the Knesset's term, then the next person on the list takes their place. The not-finalized party lists are presented at the end of this document.

- Each party is free to choose the way it creates its list of candidates. Some parties (such as Labor, Likud and The Jewish Home) have primaries where the entire membership of the party votes to create the list. The lists of other parties are made in different ways, in most cases chosen by the party's leader.
- In Israel's entire history, no single party has ever won a majority of Knesset seats (at least 61 out of the 120 total seats). Therefore, coalitions have to be formed in order to govern.
- Once election results are final, attempts and negotiations are therefore made to form a coalition of at least 61 seats. The successful party leader can then become the prime minister, with the backing of the majority of the Knesset.
- Further details about the electoral system can be seen here:  
[http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/AboutIsrael/State/Democracy/Pages/FAQ\\_Elections\\_Israel.aspx](http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/AboutIsrael/State/Democracy/Pages/FAQ_Elections_Israel.aspx)

## **2015: The Main Issues**

- For almost Israel's entire existence, virtually the only issue on the agenda of every election was security and diplomacy. People voted for the party that they felt would best provide the combination of peace and security that aligned with their ideology and outlook.
- However, in the last election, for perhaps the first time, the election focused less on security and diplomacy and was more about socio-economic issues including income gaps and the economy.
- In 2015, it looks likely that social issues will once again be at the forefront, with security taking second place. In any event, a combination of both of these issues will be the major deciding points for most of the population.
- Other issues do play a part, especially those concerning religion. However, for the majority of voters, these are not deciding factors.

## **Polls, Parties and Possible Outcomes**

- Opinion polls in Israel are remarkably unreliable. While they do paint a picture and suggest trends and directions, every set of official results invariably brings a number of surprises that the pollsters did not predict.
- Further, six weeks is a very long time in Israeli politics, and much can change.
- Nonetheless, the following gives some indications as to where things now stand, according to most opinion polls:

- Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is clearly the preferred prime minister, but as mentioned above, voters elect parties, and not individuals. So, while Netanyahu is the most likely person to be the next prime minister (see below), nothing is certain. His party, the **Likud**, has elected a list that many describe as “uninspiring,” and large segments of the population (including many former Netanyahu colleagues) feel that it is time for the PM to go. (Currently polling around 23 seats).
- The new alliance between **Labor** leader Isaac Herzog and former **Kadima / Hatnua** leader Tzippi Livni, known as “**The Zionist Camp**,” is gaining in popularity and many if not most polls now show it beating the Likud in terms of number of seats.
  - Herzog was criticized for signing a “rotation agreement” with Livni, whereby, if they win, Herzog would be the prime minister for the first two years, and Livni for the remainder of the term. Many Labor members said that the deal gave Livni too much.
  - However, polls and commentary indicate that the merger has been successful and is popular in the public’s eyes. (Currently polling around 24 seats).
  - Former UJC Israel Director Nahman Shai has won a “safe” spot on the party list (number 20).
  - Lacking a senior military personality in the party, Herzog recently announced that Major General Amos Yadlin, a former director of military intelligence, was joining Labor. In the end, however, Yadlin will not be on the Knesset list and will not serve as an MK. However, Herzog has said that he will appoint Yadlin as defense minister, should he win the elections.
- The right-wing **Jewish Home Party** (Habayit Hayehudi) – led by Naftali Bennett - is also surging in the polls, although some have commented that he is “peaking too early,” as he did last time. (Currently polling 16 seats).
  - The results of the Bayit HaYehudi primaries showed that the more religiously conservative forces remain very strong within the party. These members of Knesset could block any liberalization moves on matters of religion and state.
- Yair Lapid’s **Yesh Atid Party**, the star of the last elections, has dropped dramatically, likely due to his unpopularity as finance minister as well as a perception that he has not lived up to his many promises. (Currently polling 9 seats, down from 19 last time).
  - A close friend of Federations, Elazar Stern who is a former member of Livni’s Hatnua Party and a strong supporter of religious liberalization, is now on the Yesh Atid list (number 12), which is quite likely an unrealistic spot.
  - American-born MK Dov Lipman is also on the list (once again at number 17), but that is not considered to be a realistic slot this time around.

- The sefardi ultra-Orthodox party **Shas** has been rocked by divisions and infighting. The party has now officially split into two. Shas itself is led by Aryeh Deri, who previously spent a number of years in prison for corruption. (Shas is currently polling around 8 seats). Former Shas leader Eli Yishai has formed the **Ha'am Itanu** Party. Most polls show that they will not reach the electoral threshold.
  - The Ashkenazi ultra-Orthodox party, **Yahadut Hatorah** (UTJ) is holding steady at around 8 seats. Interestingly, following an unsuccessful petition by haredi women to be included in their parties' lists, a group of ultra-Orthodox women have started their own party, but they are unlikely to make the electoral threshold.
  - Every Israeli election, for some thirty years, has had a new "star," and it has usually been a centrist party. Historically, these parties skyrocket to fame but then plummet within a few years (Kadima, Yesh Atid and The Center Party are some recent examples). This year, it is a party called **Kulanu**, led by popular former-Likud Minister Moshe Kahlon. (Currently polling around 8 seats).
    - Former Israeli ambassador to the U.S., American-born Michael Oren, has been placed in a realistic position on the Kulanu list.
  - Avigdor Lieberman's **Yisrael Beiteinu Party** is also polling badly. The party has been damaged by a number of corruption scandals and all of the party's outgoing senior members of Knesset have left (or been pushed out). (Currently polling 6 seats).
  - The left-wing **Meretz Party** is currently polling around 5 seats, and will likely maintain its current strength in the new Knesset.
  - In recent years, three different Arab parties (**Raam, Taal** and **Hadash**) have all won seats. With the new electoral threshold limits, these parties have announced that they will run on a combined, united list. Together they are polling around 11 seats.
  - Polls show that other parties including Kadima, further right parties and Green Leaf- the pro-marijuana party, will not pass the electoral threshold.
- But under the Israeli system, the most important thing is coalition building, and not necessarily, which party emerges with the most seats. Therefore, it is critical to examine ideological blocs.
    - So Labor may "win" by securing the greatest number of seats, but if several medium-sized parties (such as Bayit Hayehudi, Kulanu and Yisrael Beiteinu) say that they support Netanyahu, it will be the current prime minister who forms the government again.
    - Looking at the latest numbers, around 70 seats are likely to support Netanyahu and around 50 for Herzog.

- In other words, we could conceivably see a situation whereby Netanyahu's Likud comes in third place (behind Herzog-Livni and Bennett), yet Netanyahu still becomes the prime minister.

JFNA's Israel and Overseas Department will be holding a series of conference calls on elections as Election Day approaches, and we will keep you apprised of major developments.

### **Additional Information**

Below, please find a number of links to examples of campaign video from some of the parties, as well as the lists of some of the parties' candidates.

### **Videos (the majority are in Hebrew)**

Labor:

- <https://www.facebook.com/video.php?v=862068007169498>
- <https://www.facebook.com/video.php?v=779786468737622>
- <https://www.facebook.com/video.php?v=777744365608499>

Likud:

- <https://www.facebook.com/video.php?v=10152657014237076> and
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YRWFVE2RRq4>

Yesh Atid:

- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_embedded&v=R4IVBydqJZo&x-yt-ts=1421828030&x-yt-cl=84411374](https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=R4IVBydqJZo&x-yt-ts=1421828030&x-yt-cl=84411374)

Bayit Hayehudi:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PBN0nqQX5xo&feature=youtu.be>

Shas

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L4PyeR1YsD8>

**Select Party Lists** –As announced by parties. Official lists to be submitted on January 29.

### **“Zionist Camp” List (Joint List of Labor-Hatnuah)**

1. Isaac Herzog
2. Tzipi Livni
3. Shelly Yachimovich

4. Stav Shafir
5. Itzik Shmuli
6. Omer Bar-Lev
7. Hilik Bar (reserved slot, party secretary-general)
8. Amir Peretz (Reserved Hatnua slot)
9. Merav Michaeli
10. Eitan Cabel
11. Manuel Trachtenberg (Reserved Herzog appointee)
12. Erel Margalit
13. Micky Rosenthal
14. Revital Sweid
15. Danny Atar
16. Yoel Hasson (Hatnuah)
17. Zouheir Bahloul
18. Eitan Broshi
19. Michal Biran
20. Nachman Shai
21. Ksenia Svetlova (Hatnuah)
22. Ayelet Nachmias-Verbin
23. Yossi Yona
24. Yael Cohen- Paran (Reserved Hatnua slot)
25. Reserved Hatnua slot

## **Likud**

1. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.
2. Interior Minister Gilad Erdan.
3. Knesset Speaker Yuli Edelstein.
4. Transportation Minister Yisrael Katz.
5. MK Miri Regev.
6. Energy and Water Resources Minister Silvan Shalom.
7. Defense Minister Moshe Ya'alon.
8. MK Zeev Elkin.
9. MK Tzachi Hanegbi.
10. MK Danny Danon.
11. Still unannounced, slot reserved for a candidate of Netanyahu's choosing.
12. MK Yariv Levin.
13. Intelligence and Strategic Affairs Minister Yuval Steinitz.
14. MK Gila Gamliel.
15. MK Ofir Akunis.
16. Rishon LeZion City Councilman David Bitan (slot reserved for a candidate from the Shfela coastal district).
17. MK Haim Katz.
18. Jackie Levy, son of former Foreign Minister David Levy (slot reserved for a candidate from the Galilee district).

19. Businessman Yoav Kisch (slot reserved for a candidate from the greater Tel Aviv area).
20. Former MK Avi Dichter. (pending court review)
21. MK Tzipi Hotovely. (pending court review)
22. Likud activist David Amsalem (slot reserved for a candidate from greater Jerusalem area).
23. Kiryat Gat Deputy Mayor Miki Zohar (slot reserved for a candidate from the Negev district).
24. Still unannounced, slot reserved for a candidate of Netanyahu's choosing.
25. Former MK Ayoob Kara.

### **Habayit Hayehudi**

1. Naftali Bennett,
2. Uri Ariel (Tekuma)
3. Ayelet Shaked
4. Eli Ben-Dahan
5. Nissan Slomiansky
6. Uri Orbach
7. Yinon Magal (designated by the party chair)
8. Shuli Mualem Rafaeli
9. Bezalel Smotrich (Tekuma)
10. Eli Ohana (former soccer star)
11. Moti Yogev
12. Avi Wortzman
13. Anat Roth (former left wing activist)
14. Nir Orbach
15. Avichai Ronitsky
16. Yehudit Shilat
17. Orit Struck (Tekuma)
18. Ronen Shoval
19. Sarah Eliash
20. Zvulun Kalfa
21. Avichai Boron
22. Moshe Solomon

### **Yesh Atid List**

1. Yair Lapid
2. Shai Piron
3. Yael German
4. Meir Cohen
5. Yaakov Peri
6. Ofer Shelach
7. Haim Yalin
8. Karin Elharrar
9. Yoel Razvozov

10. Aliza Lavie
11. Micky Levy
12. Elazar Stern
13. Pnina Tamano-Shata
14. Boaz Toporovsky
15. Ruth Calderon
16. Yifat Kariv
17. Dov Lipman

#### **Koolanu list**

1. Moshe Kahlon
2. Yoav Galant (retired IDF general, former head of the Southern Command)
3. Michael Oren (former Ambassador to the US)
4. Rachel Azaria (Deputy Mayor of Jerusalem, head of the Yerushalmim Party)
5. Eli Alaluf (Chairman of the committee for fighting poverty, Israel prize winner)
6. Yifat Sasa-Biton (former Deputy Mayor of Kiryat Shmona)
7. Eli Cohen (VP of the Israel Land Development Company)
8. Roi Fulkman (one of the founders of New Spirit in Jerusalem)
9. Merav Ben-Ari (Tel Aviv City Council member)
10. Shai Babad (former CEO of the Second Television and Radio Authority)

#### **Meretz**

1. Zehava Gal-on
2. Ilan Gilon
3. Issawi Freij
4. Michal Rozin
5. Tamar Zandberg
6. Mossi Raz
7. Gabi Lasko
8. Avi Dabush
9. Avshalom Vilan
10. Uri Zachi

#### **Yisrael Beteinu**

1. Min. Avigdor Lieberman (party chairman)
2. MK Orli Levi-Abukasis
3. Min. Sofa Landver
4. Ilan Shochat (past mayor of Tsfat)
5. Sharon Gal (former journalist)
6. MK Hamad Amar
7. MK Robert Ilatov (party faction chair)

8. Oded Forer (Director-Gen of Ministry of Immigration and Absorption)
9. Yulia Milinovsky (Holon city councilwoman)
10. Shira Mistril (chairwoman of Ariel University students' association)