

Israel's 34th government and the new political landscape of its Parliament

The Israeli Parliament (Knesset) voted on Thursday 14 May 2015 61-59 in favour of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's cabinet, which has become Israel's 34th government. Prime Minister Netanyahu's fourth government, predominantly made up of right wing and religious parties, faces many different challenges ranging from socioeconomic issues, which topped the election campaign, to the diplomatic stalemate with the Palestinians. Much scepticism has been expressed regarding the government's ability to rule with only a one-seat majority.

Background

In early December 2014, Prime Minister [Benjamin Netanyahu](#), from the centre-right [Likud](#) party, dissolved the coalition arrangement which had formed the foundation for his government and called for early national elections, which took place on [17 March 2015](#). Differences between Netanyahu and centrist parties in the outgoing coalition on Palestinian issues and budgetary matters had reportedly contributed to the decision to dissolve Parliament. Domestic debate had largely focused on a Netanyahu-supported, [quasi-constitutional Basic Law](#) that would define Israel as the 'nation-state of the Jewish people', with opponents asserting that such a bill could undermine Israel's commitment to democratic principles vis-à-vis its Israeli-Arab population. [According to final results](#) of the Knesset election, published on 25 March by the [Central Elections Committee](#), none of the parties won an overall majority, but Likud remained the biggest party. Voter turnout was recorded at 72.3%.

How is a government formed in Israel following elections?

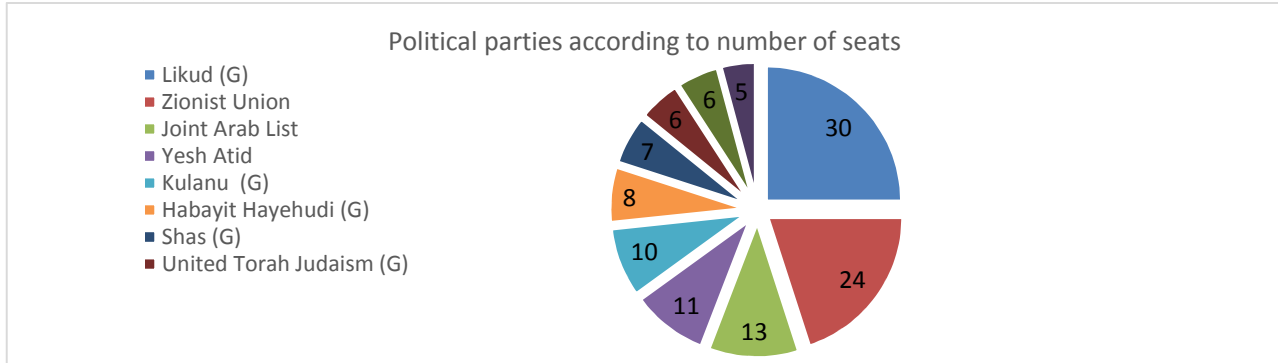
According to the [Basic Laws of Israel](#), the President of the State – after consulting with representatives of the parties elected to the Knesset – assigns the task of forming the government to the Knesset member (MK) who is either the leader of the largest party in the Knesset or the head of the party that leads a coalition of more than 60 members. A new government coalition administration is [formed within 42 days](#). If this period has passed unsuccessfully, the President may then assign the task of forming a government to another MK. This MK would have a period of 28 days for the fulfilment of the task without any further extensions. If a government still has not been formed, an absolute majority of Knesset members (61) has the option of applying in writing to the President, asking him to assign the task to a particular Knesset member. Such a situation has yet to occur.

Israel's 34th government

The [Knesset voted on 14 May 2015](#) 61-59 in favour of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's cabinet, paving the way for the swearing in of [Israel's 34th government](#). The new government coalition is composed of four political parties: [Likud](#), [Kulanu](#), [Jewish Home](#) (Habayit Hayehudi) and [United Torah Judaism](#) (Yahadut Hatorah).

In the face of [scepticism](#), President [Reuven Rivlin](#) came to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's defence. This government starts out facing huge challenges on substance too. Israel is under [tremendous international pressure](#) that will demand strength and wise decision-making to avoid isolating Israel. Domestically, the government is faced with the central task of presenting a [comprehensive budget](#) that meets Israel's defence, economic and social needs, from housing through jobs and welfare.

Political parties in Israel's 20th Knesset (in decreasing order of magnitude)



(G) = Party in 34th Government coalition

Likud (centre-right/right): Founded in 1973. It emphasises a national security policy based on a strong military response when Israel is threatened. Likud's willingness to enter into mutually accepted agreements with the Arabs is related to the policies of other right-wing parties. Likud's leader is [Benjamin Netanyahu](#).

Zionist Camp (centre-left and the main opposition party): An electoral pact since 2014, between the [Labour Party](#), led by [Isaac Herzog](#), and [Hatnuah](#), led by [Tzipi Livni](#). They accuse the right of extremism which polarises and isolates Israel. It combines a socioeconomic agenda with calls to advance diplomacy and improve Israel's standing. The Chairman is [Eitan Cabel](#).

Joint Arab List: Also referred to as United Arab list, it took its [current form](#) on 23 January 2015 when Israel's Arab political parties [Balad](#), [Ra'am-Ta'al](#), [Hadash](#) and the [Islamic Movement](#) banded together for the first time ever due to the higher election threshold (it went up from [2% to 3.25%](#)). The list is ideologically diverse and includes communists, socialists, feminists, Islamists, and Palestinian nationalists. It is led by [Ayman Udeh](#).

Yesh Atid (centre): Founded in 2012 with a diverse list, it is led by former Finance Minister [Yair Lapid](#). Yesh Atid seeks to represent the secular middle class, and to push economic and social reforms, e.g. on housing and living costs.

Kulanu (centre-right): Founded in 2014, this party is led by former Likud Communications Minister [Moshe Kahlon](#) who is known for his support for egalitarian economics and for issues affecting the middle classes, in particular 'monopolies'.

Jewish Home (Habayit Hayehudi) (right-wing): Founded in 2008 and led by [Naftali Bennett](#), the party represents religious Zionists and territorial nationalists, including settlers. It believes that Jews are divinely commanded to retain control over the [Land of Israel](#) and the party is opposed to a Palestinian state.

Shas (right-wing): Founded in 1984 and led by [Aryeh Deri](#), is a Sephardi ultra-Orthodox party weakened by the death of its spiritual leader [Rabbi Ovadia Yosef](#), and internal splits.

United Torah Judaism (Yahadut Hatorah) (right): An alliance of [Degel HaTorah](#) and [Agudat Israel](#), two small Israeli [Haredi](#) (Ultra-Orthodox) parties, founded in 1992. It is led by [Menachem Eliezer Moses](#).

Yisrael Beitenu (centre-right): A Jewish nationalist party, founded in 1999, led by [Robert Ilatov](#). The party's base is secular, Russian-speaking Israelis, although it aims to expand to a broader Israeli public.

Meretz (left-wing): Founded in 1992 and led by [Ilan Gilon](#), it is the only self-identifying left-wing Zionist party.

Israel-EU relations

The EU's and Israel's positions on the [Middle East Peace Process](#) (MEPP) [remain largely discordant](#). Israel's continued settlement activity in East Jerusalem and the West Bank, and its military presence in the presumed territories of a future Palestinian state, have led many Europeans to lose confidence in finding a peace deal. A number of [political resolutions](#) have been adopted by the European Parliament and [several Member State legislatures](#) across Europe. Israel's new government could find itself on a [diplomatic collision](#) course with Europe [if it fails to find a way](#) to relaunch credible talks with the Palestinian Authority (PA). EU foreign ministers issued [a stern warning](#) to Israel last November that future relations would depend on 'engagement toward a lasting peace based on a two state solution'. On 7 May 2015, VP/HR Federica Mogherini stated that the European Union [will continue](#) to work together with Israel on a mutually beneficial bilateral relationship as well as on important regional and global issues of joint interest.