



2015 OLIM GUIDE TO ISRAELI ELECTIONS

We don't care who you decide to support. Just get educated, get active & vote!

"This is your Home, come build it. We already have a country, now we need a Nation."

Note that this document will continue to be updated as the parties release new information and the election season progresses.

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In the past decade, Tel Aviv has become the premiere destination for Olim-By-Choice; young Jews from around the globe that move to the White City and call it 'home.' TLV Internationals is the lighthouse that attracts and welcomes the newcomer. TLV Internationals coalesces these global voices into a unified community and platform for action within and for the benefit of Tel Aviv and greater Israel. Our nonprofit organization also serves as an advocate for this community's needs with the local and national government. With a following of over 50,000 young men and women from a multitude of nations, backgrounds, religious practices, and professional fields, TLV Internationals has built the largest Olim community in Israel.

One crucial mission of TLV Internationals has been to coalesce and champion our young Olim-By-Choice community to become modern-day pioneers, living in Israel as roll-up-your-sleeves activists, creating new positive realities. An important step towards bringing our 50,000 member community to the national stage and making the impact we dream of, is substantively connecting to our government and its leadership.

You saw the incredible work we did during the Tel Aviv municipal elections with our Irya partnership as Project A., bringing the local leadership to debate, while helping to Rock The Vote, informing our community about the electoral process. For these national elections we are taking things one step further.

Volunteer for a National Political Party

TLV Internationals is offering young Olim official volunteer positions within each national political party, helping with their campaigns, specifically to be the main liaisons for our Western Olim community. These TLV Internationals volunteers will be responsible for a lot of the English (& French) content that the parties put out. You will often be working from the party's campaign headquarters, or at the local Tel Aviv branch. What better way to network with the real power-base of our country for your

own personal experience, while representing our community, and making us all proud. We believe when there are more quality young Olim invested and involved in each party on all sides, everyone wins.

Young Olim are a valuable treasure that deserve to be invested in and leveraged for the good of the country. If you are one of these young activist pioneers interested in observing your Zionism, let us know. We want to put you in touch with the party that speaks to you, so do your research. Note in the coming months we will be releasing plenty of educational materials better informing you about the parties, while our sister organization, the Tel Aviv International Salon, will be hosting nonpartisan talks from the party leadership, as well as, Knesset Member debate panels that get into the hard issues.



www.facebook.com/TelAvivInternationalSalon

Which political party would you like to plug in and volunteer with?

Register to volunteer [here : https://OlimVolunteeringInPolitics.eventbrite.com](https://OlimVolunteeringInPolitics.eventbrite.com)

Avoda + Hatnua "Hamachane HaTzioni" (Herzog/Livni - Center Left)
Bayit Yehudi + Tkuma (Bennett - National Religious Right)
Hadash/Raam-Taal/Balad (Arab Parties)
Kulanu (Kachlon - Center)
Likud (Netanyahu - Center Right)
Meretz (Gal-On - Left)
Shas (Deri - Sephardi Religious)
United Torah Judaism "UTJ" (Haredi Ashkenazi)
Yesh Atid (Lapid - Center)
Yisrael Beiteinu (Lieberman - Right)

Note: The parties listed in this document are what most consider to be the main parties that will likely have representation in Knesset after the elections. In reality, there are over 30 fringe political parties all of which will probably not obtain enough votes to sit in Knesset.

The Elections

On March 17th, 2015 Israelis will cast their votes for the 20th Knesset – Parliament. For Americans and other many European countries that are used to a two or three party system, the multiplicity of Israeli political parties can sometimes be difficult to decipher. This guide aims to help our community better understand the Israeli electoral system and provide the context to help make educated and informed decisions on whom to vote for.

The Israeli Electoral System

The Israeli electoral system is based on proportional representation. Rather than casting a ballot for a specific candidate, Israelis vote for a party, or a list. The number of seats that each party receives in the Knesset is proportional to the percentage of votes it receives. Seats are distributed among the parties by dividing the number of valid votes for the parties that pass the 3.25% qualifying threshold by 120, the number of seats in the Knesset. This determines how many votes entitle a party or list to one seat. Each party places its members in a particular order on their list and candidates win a seat based on their placement on the list. For example, if a party receives sufficient votes for 10 seats, the first 10 candidates on its list will become Knesset members.

The whole country is considered one voting district. This year in Israel there are over 5.5 million eligible voters, and over ten-thousand polling stations. In the last decade, there has been an average 65% voter turnout for elections. By comparison, in the 2012 US presidential election, voter turnout was around 50%.

The Party & List System

There are three types of political parties in Israel; democratic, semi-democratic and non-democratic. Democratic parties are ones that have primary elections where all party members are entitled to vote for candidates on the list. Semi-democratic parties are ones where only central committee members of that party may vote for the candidate list. Non-democratic parties are ones that either the head of party decides who is on the list or at what number they will be, or as with some religious parties, the list is decided by their rabbis.

Democratic parties: Avoda, Bayit Yehudi, & Likud

Semi-Democratic parties: Tkuma & Meretz

Non-Democratic: Kulanu, Hatnua, Shas, UTJ, Yesh Atid, Yisrael Beiteinu

Why Elections Now?

Israel's elections should be held once every four years, however no government has ever lasted a full term. In 2013, Prime Minister Netanyahu's government came very close to its four year mandate but ultimately dissolved when the coalition partners failed to agree on a budget. In accordance with Israeli law, elections must be called if the government fails to pass the budget. This time around, the circumstances were slightly different as the main coalition partners could not ultimately agree on many crucial government policies. There was a lot of mistrust and undermining between the various party partners. Ultimately, Prime Minister Netanyahu decided to fire both Yesh Atid and Hatnua from his coalition, and by doing so dissolving the government, bringing us to elections again.

Elections for the 20th Knesset

34 parties registered for the 2013 elections and we can expect a similar number this time as well. That said, generally speaking only around 13 parties are expected to win seats. With so many parties taking part in the elections, it is unlikely that one single party will get an overwhelming majority of the votes. In fact, no party has ever received enough seats (a minimum of 61 seats) to be able to form a government on its own without building a coalition. Without a coalition in place, the Knesset would not be able to pass any laws or perform the duties and functions of the government. Therefore, multiple parties with intersecting platforms will join together either prior to or just after the elections, promising to vote as a bloc on important issues and laws. Except in rare circumstances, the leader of the party with the largest number of Knesset seats will form a coalition with at least 61 members of Knesset and serve as the Prime Minister. The more seats a party controls, the more stable the coalition they build will be. The 61 or more members of Knesset in the coalition are called the Government; the rest are known as the Opposition.

Voting & Election Day

In Israel you do not need to register to vote. As a citizen you are automatically registered and all citizens ages 18 and over are eligible to vote in general elections. That said, unlike many other countries, Israel does not have internet, postal, or overseas voting unless you work for the Israeli Government abroad.

Prior to the election you should receive a voting card in the post. This card will inform you where your voting station is. If you do not receive one do not worry, at a date closer to the elections the government will establish an online service for you to check where your voting station is based on your Teudat Zehut national identification number. Your voting station will be in the city of residence that is stated on your Teudat Zehut.

Remember that Election Day in Israel is a national holiday. Most businesses are closed for the day in order to enable more citizens to utilize their vote. So go vote and then enjoy the rest of the day hanging with friends, and probably attending our TLV Internationals Rock The Vote event later that night.

What Voters Care About

In past years, the threats coming from Iran/Hezbollah and the continued conflict with the Palestinians/Hamas has been considered the most pressing matters for Israelis. However more recently, many Israelis have stated that their main focus of concern are on domestic issues, such as the cost of living, economy, social reform, equal burdens, and the breaking of monopolies/unions. That said, the parties will still try to paint a picture of Left against Right in an attempt to create two voting blocs, bringing about a return of traditional political divides. As usual, these Israeli elections will get interesting.

The Major Parties & Their Platforms

- Note that this section will continue to be updated as the 2015 election season progresses. We are constantly working to force the parties to put out their complete platforms in English. And yes, we realize that our synopses are wholly incomplete and many will complain about their insufficient or imperfect content. We did leave out explanations of the Arab and Haredi parties as neither consider themselves Zionist. Know that we have done our very best to give our community a relatively nonpartisan overview, understanding that there are endless nuances which we could never adequately convey here in this limited format. Well, at the very least we tried!

Avoda – The Israeli Labor Party

Commonly known in Israel as *Ha'Avoda*, the Labor party was established in 1968 after the merger of the Mapai, Ahdut HaAvoda, and Rafi parties. Avoda is a socialist democratic party and a member of the international socialist labor parties.

The party believes in strong socialist values and welfare programs, which led it to champion the early Kibbutz movement. Avoda is a strong advocate for a two state solution between Israel and the Palestinians, claiming that peace is necessary for Israel to continue to exist as a Jewish and democratic state. One of their core achievements was in 1995 when a national health insurance policy was implemented, making access to health care a right for all Israelis.

Avoda was one of the main movers in building up the settlements in Judea and Samaria in the early 1990s. However when Yitzhak Rabin came to power in 1992, he stopped the government's building in the settlements, and he pursued a peace process with the Palestinians that would become known as the Oslo Process.

Until 1977, all Israeli Prime Ministers were from either Mapai or Avoda. Avoda's "spiritual" leader is David Ben-Gurion, Israel's first Prime Minister. Avoda has some 60,000 party members and its current chairman is Yitzhak "Boujie" Herzog, who is currently the Leader of the Opposition. Recently, Herzog made a merger deal with Tzipi Livni and her Hatuna party, with this joint list being called HaMachane HaTzioni (the Zionist Camp) making it a blend of a democratic & undemocratic party. The two agreed to share the Prime Ministership if they are victorious in March.

Avoda Charter (Hebrew): <http://www.havoda.org.il/Items/01042/Constitution.pdf>

HaBayit Hayehudi - National Religious Party

HaBayit HaYehudi "The Jewish Home" is a religious Zionist political party formed as the successor party to the National Religious Party. It was originally formed by a merger of the National Religious Party, Moledet and Tkuma in November 2008. For the 19th Knesset Elections, The Jewish Home and Tkuma parties merged their lists under the leadership of the chairman of The Jewish Home, Naftali Bennett. In November 2012 the Jewish Home held separate primaries for leadership of the party. "My Israel" leader

Naftali Bennett won over incumbent MK Zevulun Orlev, winning more than two thirds of the vote.

The party primarily represents Modern Orthodox Jews, who tend to be more nationalistic in Israel. For many years, this community has been politically fractured and weak. During 2013 elections, the party's leader appealed to both religious and secular Israelis. The party's pro-settlement message and the appeal of party leader Naftali Bennett, a charismatic, high-tech millionaire, helped it increase popularity among a broader segment of the general population.

HaBayit HaYehudi surged in popularity by promising to end the controversial system of draft exemptions given to ultra-Orthodox Haredi yeshiva students, and to "ease the burden" on middle class Israelis who serve in the military, work and pay taxes. In addition to this, HaBayit HaYehudi has campaigned against illegal immigration from Africa to Israel, saying that it poses a threat to the state and involves severe economic issues. They are also opposed to concessions to the Palestinians and have called for Israel to annex Judea and Samaria. The party wants you to know that it is good to not apologize for being Jewish living in a secure Israel. They wish to proactively "restore the Jewish-Zionist essence to the State of Israel and its People". The party stands for free market capitalism and wishes to protect minorities to the highest standards of a democratic state.

HaBayit HaYehudi is a blend of a democratic & semi-democratic party because although its 55,000 members vote in primaries for the MKs belonging to the National Religious party faction, the Tkuma members are appointed by its own internal committee. Naftali Bennett is the current Chairman of the party and serves as Minister of the Economy/ Religion / & Diaspora.

HaBayit Yehudi Charter (Hebrew): <http://www.baityehudi.org.il/our-principles>

Hatnua- Center Left

The party was formed in 2012 by Tzipi Livni a former Likud and Kadima member, after she lost in the Kadima primaries to Shaul Mofaz. The party was formed by dissidents in Kadima.

In Israel's 2013 elections, Hatnua ran on a joint list with the Green Movement, and incorporated many of its core ideals into the party's platform. Hatnua's platform emphasizes Arab-Israeli peace, social justice, environmental protection, the integration of the Haredi and Arab communities into the military and workforce, and religious pluralism. In early December 2014 Tzipi Livni announced that she, and two other members of her party would be joining Avoda and would be placed in high spots in on the joint list. She also agreed with Avoda leader Yitzhak Herzog that if Avoda won the elections then Herzog would serve as Prime Minister for the first two years and Livni as Prime Minister for the second two years of the government, blending her non-democratic party with Avoda's democratic party with this new list called "HaMachane HaTzioni".

Hatnua Charter (Hebrew): <http://www.hatnua.org.il/#!principle/ca4p>

Kulanu – Centrist Reformist Party

Kulanu was just formed in the recent months by Moshe Kachlon, former Likud Party Communications Minister. Although brand new, still without a full list, polls show Kulanu becoming a major party in the upcoming Knesset. As a minister, Kachlon broke Israel's cellular service provider monopoly that was dominated by three main companies directly leading to drastic decreases in user phone bills. Kulanu considers itself centrist and Zionist, wanting to address the socio-economic problems facing Israel, hoping to continue Kachlon's previous success.

Former Ambassador to the US, Michael Oren, has joined the Kulanu Party, bringing diplomatic experience, with plans to give Western Olim a strong voice in the government. Kulanu does not believe in an imminent possibility for a "two-state solution" and quick peace with the Palestinians. Rather, the goal is to create a stable "Two-State Situation" giving Palestinians autonomy and freedom to create a sustainable society.

Likud – Center-Right Liberal Party

The Likud Party started out as a group of parties that united in 1973 just before the elections to the 8th Knesset, and included Herut, the Liberal Party, the Free Center, the National List, and the Labor Movement for Greater Israel. After some 30 years in opposition, the party headed by Menachem Begin first came to power in 1977, in what would eventually be referred to as "the Upheaval".

The Likud traditionally has focused on bringing Jews to Israel through Aliyah, taking a harder lined stance in regards to Israel's security, and in recent years rallying against a nuclear Iran. Likud has advocated for a strong free-market capitalist economy that included privatizing formerly government-run companies.

The "spiritual" leader of Likud is Ze'ev Jabotinsky. His philosophy contrasted with that of the socialist oriented Labor Zionists, in that it focused its economic and social policy on the ideal of the Jewish Middle class in Europe. He championed the notion of a free press and believed the new Jewish state would protect the rights and interests of minorities. As an economic liberal, he supported a free market with minimal government intervention, but also believed that the elementary necessities of food, shelter, clothing, education, and medical care should be supplied by the state. These principles are what the Likud still believes in to this day.

The Likud is the largest party in Israel with some 120,000 party members. The current Chairman of the Party is Binyamin Netanyahu, who is also the Prime Minister.

Likud Charter (Hebrew): <http://www.likud.org.il/images/huka/huka13122014.pdf>

Meretz - Left Wing

Meretz was formed in 1992 as an alliance of three left-wing political parties; Ratz, Mapam and Shinui, and was initially led by Ratz's chairwoman and long-time Knesset member Shulamit Aloni. Its first electoral test was a success, with the party winning twelve seats, making it the third largest in the Knesset. Meretz became the major coalition partner of Yitzhak Rabin's Avoda Party, helping pave the way for the Oslo Accords.

Meretz defines itself as a Zionist, left-wing, social-democratic party. The party is a member of the Socialist International and an observer member of the Party of European Socialists. It sees itself as the political representative of the Israeli peace movement in the Knesset. The party's touts the ideals of morality and justice. They are focused on promoting human and civil rights, the environment, social-democratic economic policies, and vehemently opposed to the settlements.

Meretz is a semi-democratic party as only its central committee members (about 1000 people) can vote in its primaries. Zahava Gal-On is its Chairman and she is an MK in the Opposition.

Meretz Charter (Hebrew): <http://meretz.org.il/המפלגה-מצע/>

Shas - Sephardi Religious

Shas is a Sephardi/Mizrachi ultra-orthodox Haredi religious political party. Founded in 1984 under the leadership of Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, a former Israeli Sephardi chief rabbi, he remained its spiritual leader until his death in October 2013. Shas primarily represents the interests of Haredi Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews.

Shas was founded in 1984 prior to the elections to the eleventh Knesset in protest over the small representation of Sephardim in government. Rabbi Ovadia Yosef established a four-member (including himself) Council of Torah. In founding the party, Rabbi Yosef received strategic help and guidance from Rabbi Elazar Shach, the leader of Israel's non-Hasidic Haredi Ashkenazi community. Rabbi Yosef built the party on the platform of a return to religion and as a counter to an establishment dominated by Ashkenazi Jews of European extraction.

The stated purpose of the party is to "return the crown to the former glory", and to repair what it sees as the "continued economic and social discrimination against the Sephardic population of Israel". Focusing on the needs of Sephardic Orthodox Israelis, Shas established its own government-funded education system called MaAyan HaHinuch HaTorani, which became popular in poor Sephardic towns, increasing the party's popular support. Shas advocates a state run according to Halakha, Jewish religious law, and actively engages in the Baal-Teshuva movement, encouraging non-Orthodox Jews to adopt a religious Jewish lifestyle.

Shas is officially a Haredi socialist party, but it has participated in right-wing and left-wing governments, most notably supporting Rabin's Oslo Process.

Yesh Atid – Centrist Reformist Party

Yesh Atid “There is a Future” was founded by former journalist Yair Lapid in 2012. The party seeks to represent what it considers the center of Israeli society, the secular middle class. It focuses primarily on “change” within civic, social, and governance issues. They feel the country is in need of electoral reform, a removal of the religious parties' immense influence on the government, education reform, curtailing the rising cost of living, the inability for young Israelis to purchase homes, and the need to equalize the burden of serving in the IDF. They are free market capitalists, with a goal to make the life of the average Israeli easier. They wish to remove unnecessary bureaucratic practices and break up economic monopolies

In the 2013 election, Yesh Atid won 19 seats, with American Rabbi Dov Lippman as the only Western Oleh in the 19th Knesset. That win was largely due to the promises of mass reforms in Israel. Yesh Atid have lobbied and legislated for the ultra-orthodox Haredim to serve in the IDF and a change to the electoral system in Israel.

According to the party's rules, Yair Lapid would determine the candidates who would run for a seat in the Knesset, as he would be the one to make the final decisions on political issues and is guaranteed the chairman position of the party. Yesh Atid does not hold primary elections and therefore is an undemocratic party. Until fired by Prime Minister Netanyahu, Yair Lapid served as the Minister of Finance.

Yesh Atid Charter (Hebrew): <http://yeshatid.org.il/מאמינים-אנחנו-במה/2-המפלגה-על>

Yisrael Beiteinu – Right Wing Secular Party

Yisrael Beiteinu “Israel Our Home” is a secularist and right-wing nationalist political party. The party's base is secular, Russian-speaking Israelis. The party describes itself as “a national movement with the clear vision to follow in the brave path of Zev Jabotinsky”. Yisrael Beiteinu was formed by Avigdor Lieberman to create a platform for Russian immigrants who support a hard line in negotiations with the Palestinian Authority. Lieberman's actions were motivated by concessions granted by his former boss, Benjamin Netanyahu (when he was director-general of the Likud) to the Palestinian Authority in the 1997 Wye River Memorandum, featuring the division of the West Bank city of Hevron.

The party primarily represents immigrants from the former Soviet Union, and works to increase Jewish immigration. Relative to the rights of minorities in Israel, the party is well known for their slogan “no loyalty no citizenship”. A number of mainstream media sources, within and outside of Israel, have labeled the party, and Lieberman, as “ultra nationalist”. At the same time however, the party does recognize a need for a two-state solution and some of its particular religious policies have been described as “ultra liberal”. These positions are contradictory to the tradition of both nationalistic and religious right wing politics in Israel. Some have called the party and its leader a “hard-line” populist.

Yisrael Beiteinu does have party members, but no primary making it an undemocratic party. Avigdor Lieberman is the Chairman of the party and currently serves as Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Yisrael Beiteinu Charter (Hebrew): www.beytenu.org.il/ביתנו-ישראל-חזון-הזרם-נגד-לשחות



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