



A Guide to the Perplexed - Israeli Elections 2006

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- Haredi (Ultra-Orthodox) Parties
- Arab / Non-Zionist Parties

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Right-Wing Parties

In the 2003 elections, these parties won a total of 53 Knesset seats. With the defection of many Likud members to Kadima, these parties - especially the Likud- took a severe beating at the polls and dropped to 32 seats.

The right-wing parties are primarily distinguished by their opposition to any significant concessions of land to the Palestinians. All of the smaller parties that had initially been part of Prime Minister Sharon's 2003 coalition government dropped out of the government in opposition to the Gaza withdrawal in August, 2005. Many voters who previously supported right-wing parties followed Sharon to Kadima at the center of the political spectrum.

Party	Party Leader	Seats	More Party Leaders	Peace Process	Economic and Social Policies	Demographic Base
Likud	Former PM & Finance Minister Benjamin Netanyahu	2003 – 40 seats 2006 – 12 seats	Former Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom; Former Education Minister Limor Livnat; MK Natan Sharansky	Opposes any negotiations unless PA fights terrorism; opposes further unilateral withdrawals; in practice, opposes a Palestinian state.	Neo-liberal economic policies – tax cuts, cuts in social programs, privatization of state-owned companies	Secular nationalist party – strong base in Mizrahi community
National Union – National Religious Party	Benny Elon	2003 – 7 seats (and NRP 6 seats) 2006 – 9 seats	Zevulun Orlev Ephraim Eitam Yitzhak Levy Tzvi Hendel	Rejects any Palestinian state; supports voluntary transfer of Palestinians		Close to Settlers movement; factions include Moledet, Tkuma, Religious Zionism; merged with National Religious Party, which has strong support from religious Jews
Yisrael Beitenu	Avigdor Lieberman	2003 – part of National Union 2006 – 11 seats	Yuri Shtern, Yisrael Hasson Yosef Shegal Esterina Tratman	Proposed trading Parts of Galilee containing Israeli Arabs for Israeli settlement blocs in West Bank	Improving status of new immigrants – especially from Former Soviet Union	New Immigrants from Former Soviet Union

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Centrist Parties

In 2003, Shinui – the only centrist party at the time – polled 15 seats. In the new Knesset, Kadima and the Pensioner's Party will have 36 seats. While Kadima will be the largest party in the Knesset and will be asked to form the next Israeli government, its showing was a disappointment for them. The polls a few months ago, before and after Sharon's stroke, suggested that they would garner 40 seats or more and pre-election polls suggested that they would poll in the mid-30s.

The shift of Ariel Sharon (and how his successor, Ehud Olmert) to the political center has transformed the Israeli political landscape over the past year, with the center gaining greatly, mostly at the expense of the Likud and Shinui. Shinui, which garnered 15 seats in the last Knesset election in 2003, disappeared during this election cycle. The success of the Pensioners' party was a great surprise. After the election, Gil formed an alliance with Kadima.

Party	Party Leader	Seats	More Party Leaders	Peace Process	Economic and Social Policies	Demographic Base
Kadima ("Forward") *	Ehud Olmert	2003 – didn't exist (created in November, 2005) 2006 – 29 seats	Former Prime Minister Shimon Peres, Justice & Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni, Defense Minister Shual Mofaz, Former Shin Bet Chief Avi Dichter; MK Tzachi Hanegbi; MK Meir Sheetrit; MK Haim Ramon; MK Dalia Itzik	Seems to support further unilateral withdrawals. Olmert has committed to keeping 3 key settlement blocs: Gush Etzion, Ma'aleh Adumim, and Ariel	Not clearly defined	Broad center of the Israeli political spectrum including both Ashkenazi and Mizrahi Jews
Gil (Pensioner's Party) *	Eitan Raphael	2003 – no seats 2006 – 7 seats	Yaakov Ben-Yizri Moshe Sharoni Moshe Sharoni Yitzhak Ziv Avshalom Vilan	No official policies	Protecting rights of Pensioners; Better housing for Pensioners; Better health insurance for the elderly	Elderly Retirees, Young people

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Left-Wing Parties

In 2003, left-wing parties won a total of 27 seats. In 2006, they won hold 24 seats.

The Israeli left represents those parties that advocate some form of negotiated solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as well as parties that advocate left-wing economic policies to the benefit of the Israeli poor.

Party	Party Leader	Seats	More Party Leaders	Peace Process	Economic and Social Policies	Demographic Base
Labor-Meimad *	Amir Peretz	2003 – 19 seats 2006 – 19 seats	Former PM Ehud Barak; Former Shin Bet Chief Ami Ayalon; Ben-Gurion University President Avishai Braverman; MK Yuli Tamir; MK Matan Vilna'I; Rabbi Michael Melchoir; MK Ophir Paz-Pines; MK Isaac Herzog; MK Benjamin Ben-Eliezer	Supports a negotiated two-state solution based on Land for Peace; opposes settlement expansion; supported Gaza withdrawal and may be open to future unilateral actions	Raising minimum wage; helping the poor	Secular Ashkenazi Jews; Kibbutzniks; Israeli Arabs; includes Memaid (religious Zionist faction led by Rabbi Melchoir); trying to reach out to Mizrahi voters
Meretz	Yossi Beilin	2003– 6 seats 2006-5 seats	Haim Oron Ran Cohen Zahava Gal-On	A negotiated two-state solution along the lines of the Geneva Accord	Supports social justice, social democracy; gay rights; separation of religion and state	Secular Ashkenazi

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Haredi (Ultra-Orthodox) Parties

In 2003, these parties had 17 seats; they gained slightly up to 18 seats.

These parties are fairly stable in that they represent the *haredi* (ultra-Orthodox Jewish) community, and their voters are generally highly consistent and loyal in their support and turnout.

Party	Party Leader	Seats	More Party leaders	Peace Process	Economic and Social Policies	Demographic Base
Shas *	Eliyahu Yishai	2003 – 12 seats 2006 – 12 seats	Spiritual leader Rabbi Ovadia Yosef	Ideologically flexible	Money for its religious and educational institutions; opposes separation of religion and state; generous social payments for poor Mizrahi Jews	Mizrahi Jews (particularly Moroccan Jews) – mostly Ultra-Orthodox, but also some traditional religious Mizrahi Jews
Torah and Shabbat Judaism	Ya'acov Litzman	2003 – 5 seats 2006 – 6 seats	Avraham Ravitz	Ideologically flexible	Opposes separation of religion and state; seeks money to support its religious and educational institutions	Ashkenazi Haredi (ultra-Orthodox) Jews. Two factions: Agudat Ha Torah (Union of Israel) for Hasidic Jews; Degel Ha Torah (Flag of Torah) for Mitnagdim or Lithuanian anti-Hasidic Jews

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Arab / Non-Zionist Parties

In 2003, these parties had a total of 8 seats; they gained slightly to a total of 10 seats

This is a fairly stable political constituency that is polling at about the same level as in the past. While there was concern before the election that these parties wouldn't be able to pass the 2% threshold, all of them managed to do so.

Party	Party Leader	Seats	More Party Leaders	Peace Process	Economic and Social Policies	Demographic Base
Democratic Front for Peace and Equality (Hadash)	Mohammad Barakh	2003 - 3 seats 2006 - 3 seats	Hanna Swaid	Removal of all settlements and establishment of a Palestinian state	Workers' and social rights; support of Israel as a bi-national state, not a Jewish state	Israeli Arabs; formerly Israeli Communist Party
National Democratic Assembly (Balad)	Azmi Bishara	2003 - 3 seats 2006 - 3 seats	Jamal Zahalka	Removal of all settlements and establishment of a Palestinian state	Seeks to transform Israel from a Jewish state into a secular democratic state	Israeli Arabs; secular
United Arab List (Ra'am - Ta'al - Mada)	Sheikh Ibrahim Sarsur	2003 - 2 seats 2006 - 4 seats	MK Ahmad Tibi	Removal of all settlements and establishment of a Palestinian state	More Islamic in its orientation than other Arab Parties	Israeli Arabs; Islamic; Bedouins

A * next to the party name above means that the party has joined Prime Minister Olmert's center-left coalition which currently holds 67 seats and contains Kadima (29 seats), Gil (7 seats), Labor-Meimad (19 seats) and Shas (12 seats).

Sources: Jewish Virtual Library, Jerusalem Post, Ha'aretz, Wikipedia, Israeli Foreign Ministry, Israeli Knesset.

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