



## **Election Guide: How the system works**

Israelis vote according to a system of proportional representation, whereby the number of seats each list is granted is in proportion to the number of votes it receives in the elections.

Israelis do not vote for a specific candidate in a constituency, but for a party list, and the country serves as a single electoral district for the distribution of Knesset seats.

While all members of the Labor Party vote in its primaries to determine its Knesset list, the Likud slate is chosen by the party's 2,900-strong central committee. The lists for the ultra-Orthodox parties, such as Shas and United Torah Judaism, are determined by leading rabbis who make up a kind of political rabbinical council.

**The threshold** is now 1.5 percent; until the early 1990s it was one percent. As a result of the magnified power of the smaller parties in a political system based on coalition building, in the early 1990s, the Knesset voted to change the electoral system and introduced direct elections for prime minister.

**How often do elections take place?** The law stipulates that elections must be held every four years, but the Knesset can decide to call early elections. This has often been the case in Israel's political history due to the instability of the political system; the January 28 election is the fourth in less than seven years.

**Who can vote?** The legal voting age is 18, and anyone with Israeli citizenship can vote. There is no absentee ballot, and only diplomatic staff working abroad and those serving in the navy can cast their ballot through a postal vote.

**Excess vote agreements** The party lists that pass the electoral threshold receive a number of Knesset seats proportional to their electoral strength. This is done by dividing the valid votes for each list that passes the electoral threshold by 120 (the number of MKs), in order to determine how many votes are needed for a single seat. The excess votes are distributed among those parties who cross the electoral threshold according to a mathematical formula that favors the big parties - known in the world as the Hagenbach Bischoff (or D'Hondt) method. In Israel, it is known as the Bader-Ofer method - named for MKs Yohanan Bader (Gahal) and Avraham Ofer (Alignment) who proposed its adoption.

**From a seminar by Neil Lazarus  
Source Haaretz**