

# **POLITICS AND SOCIETY IN ISRAEL**

**IRE215**

**SPRING 2019**

**Session 7**



**Maya Hadar**

# On The Agenda



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- **Government and Politics in Israel**
  - Executive branch
  - Legislating branch
  - Political parties
- **Is Israel a Democracy?**
- **The upcoming elections (next week!)**



# Israeli Politics

- **Independence** => 14 May 1948, on the day in which the British Mandate (from the League of Nations) over Palestine expired
  - The Jewish People's Council gathered at the Tel Aviv Museum, and declared the establishment of the State of Israel
- **Political Institutions:** (non) Constitution, Courts, Parliament
- Cabinets in Israel were dominated by **Ashkenaz Jews (80%)**



# Israeli Politics



- **Constitution** => Israel does not have a formal constitution. The constitutional system is based on:
    - The declaration of Establishment (1948) e.g. individual liberties
    - Basic laws (e.g., “the Law of Return”)
    - Regular laws, bureaucratic decisions and court rulings
- } Developing incrementally
- **Amendments to the constitution** => proposed by the government/ Knesset
    - Passage requires a **majority vote** of Knesset members and subject to Supreme Court judicial review
    - 11 of the 13 Basic Laws have been amended at least once, latest in 2018



# Israeli Government

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- **Government type** => \***Parliamentary Democracy**
  - **Executive functions** are exercised by members of the parliament appointed by the prime minister to the cabinet
  - The **prime minister may be removed** from power whenever he loses the **confidence** of a majority of the ruling party or of the parliament
  - **Next elections:** April 9, 2019 (next week)

A democratic form of government in which the **party** with the greatest representation in the parliament (or a **coalition**), forms the government and its leader becomes prime minister



# Is Israel a Democracy?

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- **Is Israel an ethnic democracy?**

*A political system that combines a structured **ethnic** dominance with **democratic**, political and civil rights for all. Both **dominant & minority ethnic** groups have citizenship and are able to fully participate in the political process*

- **Is Israel an ethnocracy?**

*A type of political structure in which the state apparatus is **controlled by a dominant ethnic group/s** to further its interests, power and resources*

- **Is Israel a contested liberal democracy?**

*Liberal democracy is a liberal political ideology & a form of government in which representative democracy operates under the principles of classical liberalism*



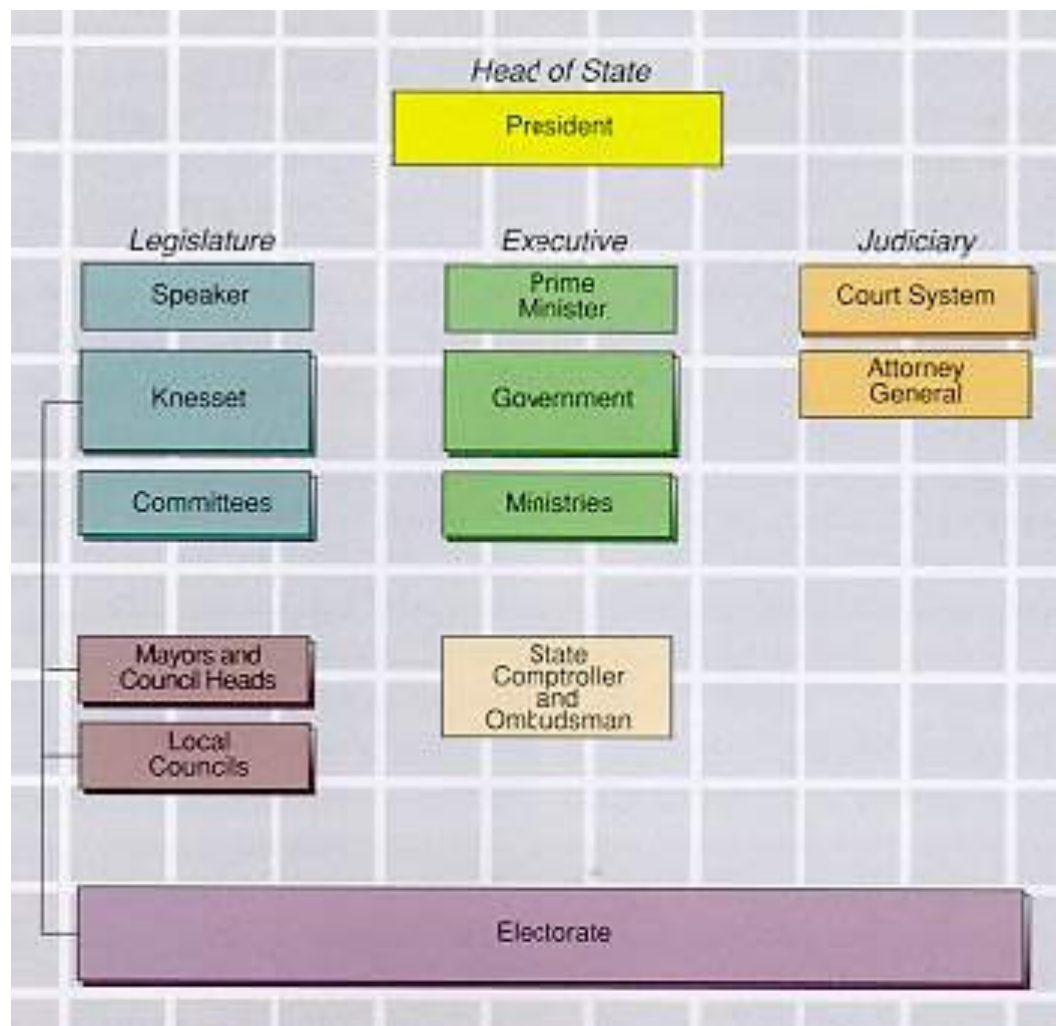
# Executive Branch

- **Chief of state** => President Reuven Rivlin (since 2014)
- **Head of government** => Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu (since 2009, reelected in 2015)
  - Netanyahu formed the current center-right coalition
  - The **'Likud'** (centre-right to right-wing) political party currently dominates
  - **Minor parties** play an **important role** in Israeli politics





# Executive Branch



- **Cabinet** => selected by the prime minister and approved by the Knesset
- **President elect** => the president is indirectly elected by the Knesset for a 7 year term (max 1); elections last held on 10 June 2014
- Following **Parliamentary elections**, the president (in consultation with party leaders) tasks a **Knesset member** (usually the head of the largest party) with the task of **forming a government**



# Legislative Branch



- **\*Unicameral Knesset** => 120 seats, members directly elected in a single nationwide constituency by proportional representation vote
  - Members serve 4-year terms



\*Some governments are split into two houses => **bicameral legislatures** (e.g., the US Congress is made up of two chambers: the Senate + the House of Representatives)

When there is **only one house** => **unicameral** (*uni* "one," *camera* "chamber")





# Israeli Political System

## Parliamentary Elections =>

- The country is a **single electoral district** which elects pre-determined party lists to the Knesset (parliament)
- Citizens above 18 years of age can vote (including Arab Israelis, not Palestinians in The West Bank/Gaza Strip)
- “Grading” of politicians within the **party lists** is determined by **parties’ internal election**
- In order to enter the 120 seats Knesset, a party need to pass a **2% votes’ threshold**
- **Beyond the threshold**, lists receive seats based on their **votes’ share**



# Israeli Political System



Elections =>



# Political Parties



## Right wing



Yisrael Beiteinu



Likud



Hayamin Hehadash

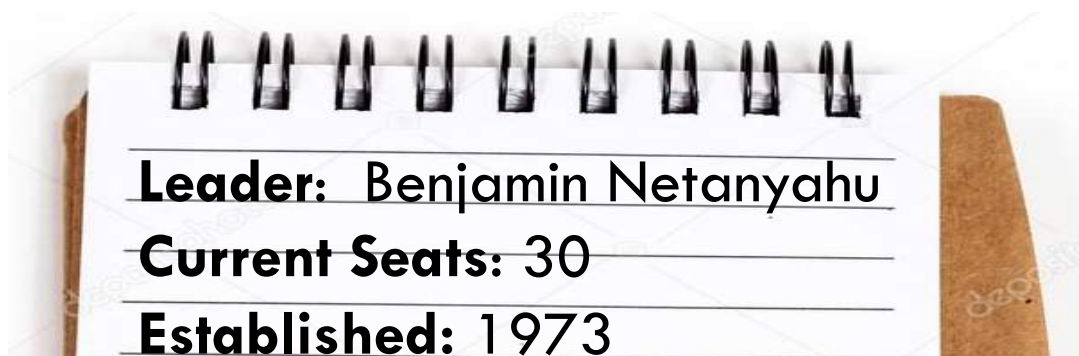


Habayit Hayehudi

# Political Parties



## The 'Likud'



הליכוד



- Israel's **largest right-wing party**
- In 1977, the party broke the three-decade electoral monopoly of the Labor Party and its antecedents. Since then, it has been a dominant force in Israeli politics
- Was part of the **government** in the last Knesset
- **Opposes** the Two-State Solution

# Political Parties



## Center



Kulanu



Kachol Lavan



Gesher

# Political Parties



## Kahol Lavan



- **New party**, built from a **merger** between two **centrist parties** (Benny Gantz's 'Hosen Leyisrael' and Yair Lapid's 'Yesh Atid')
- **Gantz retains the number one slot on the list** (rotation with Lapid every 2.5 years if the party is selected to lead a government after the elections)
- Supports a Two-State Solution

# Political Parties



## Left wing

**מרצ**

Meretz

**העבודה** 

Labor



# Political Parties

## Labor 'Ha'avoda'



העבודה

- Currently Israel's biggest center-left party
- After the establishment of the state, the party **governed Israel uninterrupted** for almost **thirty years**. Labor has not held the premiership since 2001
- **Labour's domination** of the government (1948-1977) was reflected in its prominence in two other major Israeli institutions: the *Histadrut* and the **IDF**
- **Supports** the Two-State Solution

# Political Parties



## Sectorial Parties

יהדות התורה

United Torah Judaism



United Arab List-  
Balad



Shas



العربية للتغيير  
برئاسة احمد الطيبي

Hadash-Ta'al

# Political Parties



## United Arab List 'Balad'



قوتنا في  
تحالفنا

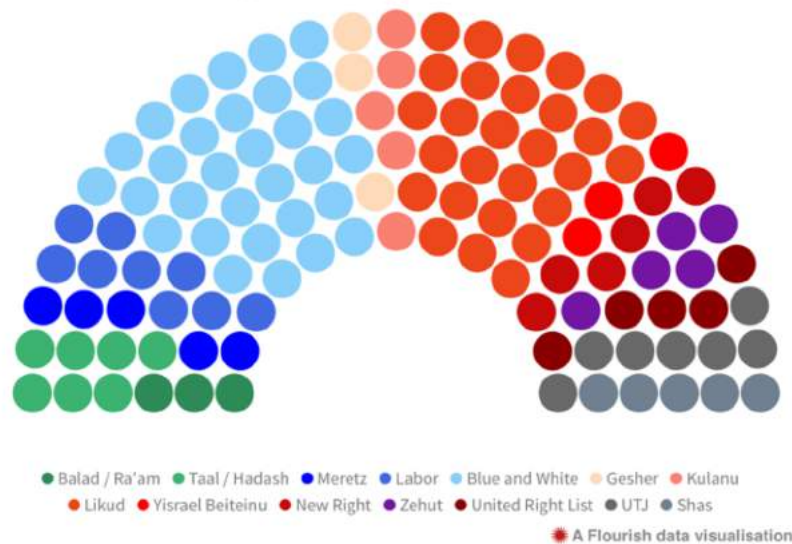
الوطني الديمقراطي  
التجمع  
هوية قومية مواطنة كاملة

- The **United Arab List** is a **conservative Islamist party** and **Balad** is a **pan-Arab nationalist party**. The two factions previously ran in the predominantly Palestinian Joint List in 2015
- **Opposition in Last Knesset**
- **Opposes the Two-State Solution**

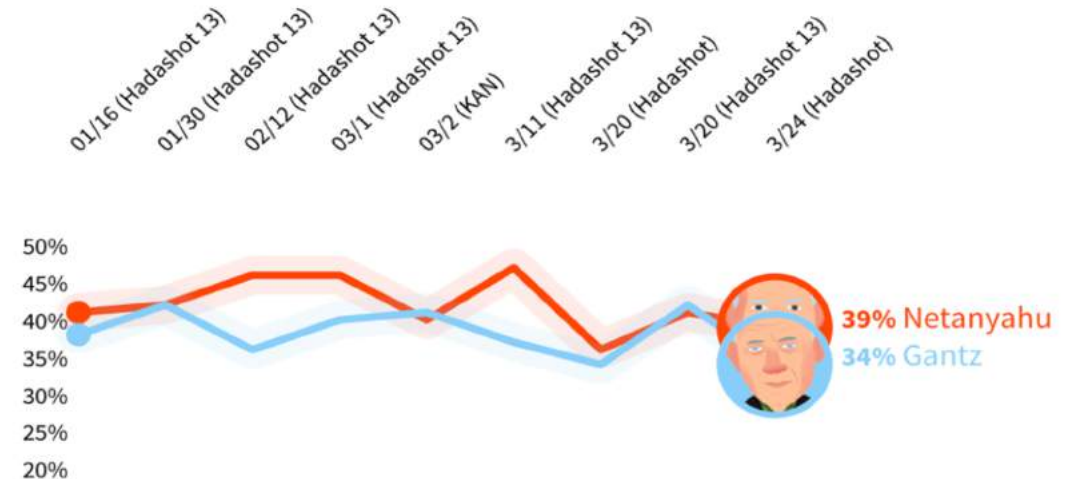


# Elections 2019

- Number of **eligible voters**: 5.8 Million (total population 8.97M)
  - 79% Jewish, 16% Arab, 5% miscellaneous
  - Group of voters by age => 40-59 (32%), 25-39 (30%), 60 or older (25%), and 18-24 (14%)
- **Number of parties**: 43

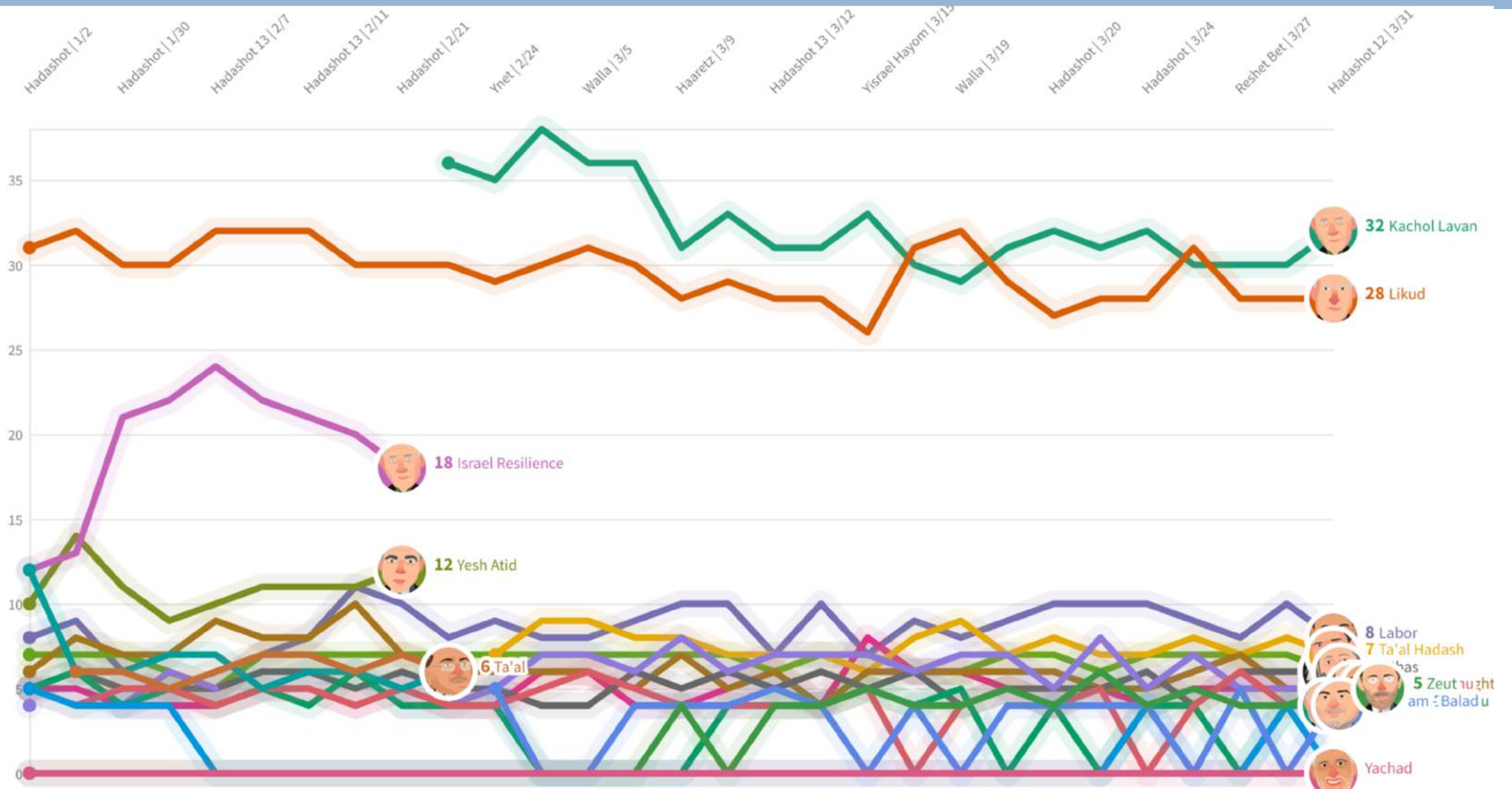


**Gantz vs. Netanyahu**  
Preferred Prime Minister





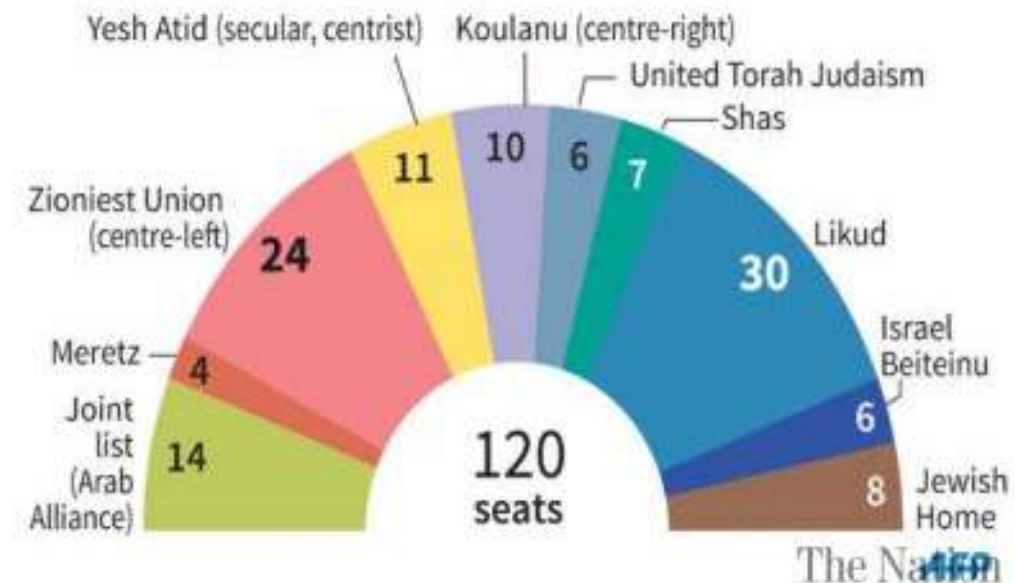
# Elections 2019





# The Political System: Coalitions

- The **public** decided who sits in the **Knesset** (parliament)
- The **Knesset** elects the **government**
- The **government** is formed by the **leader of one of the large factions** who received an approval by the state's President (a symbolic actions) to **negotiate** other factions for forming a **coalition**
- If he can't form a coalition, permission is given to the next faction with the highest likelihood to try its best
- If these attempts fail => **new elections**



# The Political System: Coalitions



- The logic of **coalition formation** in **multiparty parliaments** is based on **ideological compromises** => membership and leadership of Knesset committees, government portfolios and pre-commitments to budget specific policies
- Parties which have a credible threat power to switch between coalitions can maximize their payoffs from the bargaining process
- Parties which are more **cohesive** as factions, can **maneuver collectively** and receive **higher payoffs** (e.g., The German Bundestag)
- **Non cohesive parties** dismantle and cannot enforce coalitional agreements on their members (e.g., Italian Parliament, British Parliament at the moment)

# The Government



- After the coalition is formed, it needs to receive the **Knesset's approval** (vote of **investiture**) to start its reign
- Once elected by the Knesset, as long as the government **does not lose the confidence of 61 members of Knesset** (MK's)- it survives
- When at least **61 MK's votes no-confidence against the government**, it needs to appoint one of its members as the potential head of a new coalition => coalition formation process starts again
- If the **Prime Minister resigns** (or is declared unfit to rule due to **illness**) => same process is initiated



# Policy Making



- The **Prime Minister** leads the **policy making processes** in the government
  - These processes are based on the **coalition formation policy guidelines**
- **Policy making is restricted** by:
  - The government's **budget** (decided by the **government + Knesset** and enforced by the **Treasury**)
  - Knesset's approval
  - Bureaucratic implementation
  - Judicial review
- Increasing influence of civil society on policy making processes but the main locus of power is in the hands of the government/treasury

# A Comparative Perspective



- **US Presidential system** => full division of powers, usually complete terms in office (rare- impeachment), bargaining between the White House and Congress (two chambers), two large parties
- **Westminster model** => A decisive PM leading her party and government, two strong parties, one effective chamber, no inter-party coalitions

# Next Session...

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- Israeli foreign policy & international relations



**Thank You For Your Attention!**

**Questions???**