**The People’s Parliament?   
On Chaos, the Knesset, and How the Israeli Government Works  
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Parlimentary democracy is fundamentally different than anything we are used to in this country- and the Israeli system of democracy has some challenges and features which are uniquely its own. The structure of its political system has a direct impact on some of the deepest and most important policy issues facing the country. Come explore the basic elements of how the system works, and, depending on the interest of participants, the potential impact of some recent Israeli court cases and constitutional developments relevant to what it means to be a “Jewish and democratic” state.

**How the Israeli Government Works**

The **Knesset** is the [legislature](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Legislature) of [Israel](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Israel). It is located in [Jerusalem](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jerusalem), its capital. The [legislative branch](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Legislative_branch) of the [Israeli government](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Government_of_Israel), the Knesset enacts [laws](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Law), elects the prime minister (although ceremonially appointed by the President), supervises the work of the [government](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Government), reserves the power to remove the [President of the State](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/President_of_Israel) and the [State Comptroller](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comptroller_of_Israel) from office and to dissolve itself and call new elections.

The Knesset first convened on [February 14](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/February_14), [1949](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1949). Every 4 years (or less if early elections are held, as is often the case), 120 members of the Knesset (MK) are elected by Israeli citizens who must be 18 years old to vote. The [Government of Israel](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Government_of_Israel) must be approved by a majority vote of the Knesset.

The Knesset has [de jure](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/De_jure) [parliamentary supremacy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parliamentary_supremacy) and can pass any laws by a simple majority, even those that conflict with the [Basic Laws of Israel](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Basic_Laws_of_Israel), as it is also a [Constituent Assembly](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constituent_Assembly). Nonetheless, the Knesset's right to function effectively has been greatly curtailed due to the inherent flaws of the low threshold [party list proportional representation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/D%27Hondt_method) that usually results in a fractious government dependent on unstable coalitions.

From the online encyclopedia “Wikipedia”

**Central points about the Israeli Government:**Models of democracy: European vrs. American  
Differences: France, Germany, Britain  
Unicameral chamber; executive emerges from the legislature  
Party-based voting; national slate (not district based);  
120 seats; 61 as “the magic number”  
no party has ever “won” an election.

**A “Jewish and Democratic” State**

The core concept  
The European model  
  
Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel

The Basic Law on Human Dignity and Freedom (1992)  
Relevant court cases since then:  
The Bar Ilan Boulevard Case (1997)  
Rishon L’Tziyon Burial Society (1999)  
Kaadan v. Israel Lands Authority et. al (2000?)  
The Jerusalem Gay Pride Parade (2008)  
Adallah Legal Center/Arabic Street Sign Case (2009)