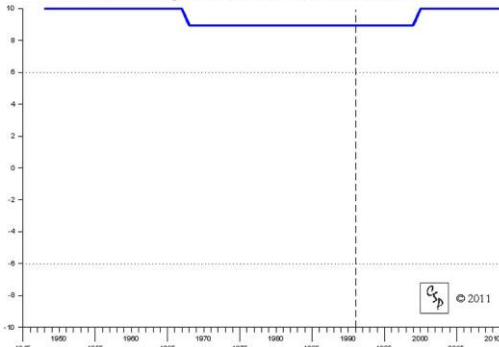


Polity IV Country Report 2010: Israel						
<div>Score: 2009 2010 Change</div> <div>Polity: 10 10 0</div> <div>Democ: 10 10 0</div> <div>Autoc: 0 0 0</div> <div>Durable: 62</div> <div>Tentative: No</div>				<div>Authority Trends, 1948-2010: Israel</div> 		
SCODE	ISR	CCODE	666	Date of Report		1 June 2011
Polity IV Component Variables						
XRREG	XRCOMP	XROPEN	XCONST	PARREG	PARCOMP	
3	3	4	7	5	5	
Date of Most Recent Polity Transition (3 or more point change)						
End Date				Begin Date	14 May 1948 (Ind.)	
Polity Fragmentation: No (contested sovereignty in Occupied Territories)						
Constitution		No formal constitution				
Executive(s)		Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu; nominated by the president and confirmed by the Knesset 31 March 2009				
Legislature		Unicameral: Knesset (120 seats; proportionally elected; most recent elections, 28 March 2006) Kadima: 28 Likud: 27 Our Home Israel (Yisrael Beytenu): 15 Labour: 13 Sephardic Torah Guardians (Shas): 11 Other parties: 26				
Judiciary		Supreme Court				

Narrative Description:¹

Executive Recruitment: Competitive Elections (8)

Competitive free and fair elections are commonly recognized as an institutionalized feature of Israel's polity. Prior to 1996, the prime minister (Israel's most important executive) was elected by the Knesset, meaning that this post was taken by the leader of the majority coalition in parliament. However, in 1992 the law was changed to provide for direct, popular elections of the prime minister. Beginning in 1996, the prime minister has been recruited separately from elections to the Knesset. In the 1996, 1999, and 2001 elections of the prime minister, the opposition challenger has defeated the incumbent.

¹ The research described in this report was sponsored by the Political Instability Task Force (PITF). The PITF is funded by the Central Intelligence Agency. The views expressed herein are the authors' alone and do not represent the views of the US Government.

After months of internal factionalism within the ruling Likud party over Prime Minister Sharon's decision to unilaterally withdraw from the occupied territory of Gaza, in November 2005 Sharon established a new national party, Kadima, and called on parliament to dissolve itself in preparation for new elections scheduled for March 2006. Prior to these elections, in January 2006 Prime Minister Sharon suffered a massive stroke which left him in a coma. After his stroke, Sharon was replaced on an interim basis by Ehud Olmert. In the March 2006 elections Kadima took a plurality of the seats in the Knesset while the former ruling Likud party suffered a major defeat, winning only 11 seats. Kadima established a governing coalition with the Labour party with Olmert as its prime minister.

In September 2008 Prime Minister Olmert, battling allegations that he pocketed money from a US businessman, stepped down from his post as leader of the Kadima Party and was replaced by Tzipi Livni. On 21 September 2008 Olmert formally tendered his resignation and asked Livni to form a new government. Unable to secure the support of a sufficient number of minority parties, Livni dropped her bid to form a new coalition government and asked the President to hold new elections. Prime Minister Olmert was designated with the task of presiding over a transitional administration until a new government can be formed after the elections of February 2009.

Executive Constraints: Executive Parity or Subordination (7)

By virtue of its power to enact the basic laws that serve as the Constitution, the Knesset is the supreme government authority. The prime minister and the Cabinet are responsible to the legislature and must retain its confidence in order to exercise executive power. The Knesset's functions include the ability to pass legislation, to play a role in government policy formation, approve budgets and taxation, and elect a president (the head of state with largely ceremonial functions). It may also pass a vote of no-confidence in the government and require new elections before the end of the four-year term, as it did in December 1998 when Prime Minister Netanyahu lost support of the Knesset majority. Similarly, Prime Minister Barak resigned in December 2000 when his supporting coalition broke down. The judiciary system in Israel is generally considered to be independent and professional.

Political Participation: Institutionalized Open Electoral Competition (10)

The party system in Israel is highly fragmented, complex, and volatile; new parties emerge with each election and splinter parties are common. However, historically there have been two stable and enduring alliance structures that have provided considerable cohesion, coherence, and balance within the general cacophony of political views: the conservative Likud bloc and the more moderate Labour Party. Since the creation of the Israeli state in 1948, there has been a regular rotation of power between those two coalitions. In March 2001, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon had formed a "National Unity" coalition that linked the two major parties; the coalition collapsed in November 2002 in a dispute over the budget, necessitating new elections. In January 2003, Sharon's Likud party out-distanced its Labour party rival, gaining 38 seats to Labour's 19 seats. However, even with such a large margin over its nearest competitor, Likud still fell far short of the 61 seats needed for a legislative majority. Prime Minister Sharon in March 2003 formed a governing coalition with the secularist Shinui (Centre Party), the orthodox National Religious Party (NRP), and the right-wing National Union (NU).

The traditional two block structure of the Israeli political system began to fracture in 2005 after Prime Minister Sharon announced his plan to unilaterally withdraw all 8,000 Israeli settlers from Gaza. This decision angered the far-right in the Likud party and other members of his ruling coalition and led to the resignation of former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu from the government. After the pull-out from Gaza was completed in September 2005, Sharon quit the Likud party and established his own political party which he called Kadima. While Sharon suffered a debilitating stroke in January 2006, nonetheless, his new party, under the leadership of Ehud Olmert, won a plurality of seats in the March 2006 legislative elections and entered into a grand coalition with Labour.

Israel's proportional system provides an opportunity for social and ethnic minorities (e.g. European immigrants and the Arab minority) to be represented in the Knesset where the relatively small party factions can play an important role in constructing or breaking up governing coalitions. In February 2002, the Supreme Court ruled that Israelis converted to Judaism through the Conservative or Reform movements should be listed as Jews in the official population registry; this decision affected as many as 300,000 immigrants from the former Soviet Union who had previously been denied recognition. The government generally respects the political rights of its citizens, and the electoral process is free from coercion.

The continual high state of political tensions in Israel stem from the “partition” of Palestine as a result of Israel’s war for independence in 1948 and are focused on its continuing, since 1967, military occupation of the Arab-majority (“Palestinian”) territories of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Several Palestinian groups have waged a terrorist campaign against the Israeli state since the mid-1960s and have gained considerable support from Islamic and Arab states opposed to Israel. In 1989, a largely “non-armed” struggle known as the “Intifada” has been waged by the Arab-majority in the occupied territories; this struggle has been characterized by mass demonstrations, civil disobedience, and riotous confrontations between mobs of rock-throwing youths and Israeli authorities. The 1998 Wye River accords provided an opportunity for defusing the long-standing dispute between Palestinians and Israelis concerning territorial sovereignty. Tensions continued to simmer over delays in implementation of the accords, with the Palestine Liberation Organization threatening to declare independence for Palestine since May 2000. Tensions flared once again over the future of East Jerusalem and ignited with a high profile, symbolic gesture by Ariel Sharon on 29 September 2000, to assert Israeli sovereignty over Temple Mount. Subsequent riots combined widespread incidents of rock-throwing mobs and sporadic fire-fights in the Occupied Territories and spilled over to include demonstrations by Israeli Arabs within Israel proper and high-profile suicide bombings by Islamic militants. In 2005 Prime Minister Sharon oversaw a unilateral withdrawal of Israeli settlers from the Gaza Strip while continuing to redraw the map of the West Bank through the construction of a wall that will by 2010 permanently separate Palestinian lands from the large Jewish settlement blocks within the region. Palestinians have complained that the security wall being constructed by Israel would effectively leave them with only 22% of the area that was originally allocated to them under the terms outlined in the 1947 UN partition plan. As a response to the permanent annexation of land by Israel within the West Bank, in January 2006 the anti-Zionist Hamas party won parliamentary elections held in the occupied Palestinian territories and formed a government in the Palestine National Authority that ruled the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The Israeli Government refused to recognize the Hamas government and imposed an immediate blockade of the Palestinian territories. The blockade increased tensions in the territories and triggered armed clashes between Hamas and Fatah supporters. President Abbas and his Fatah movement were forcibly expelled from the Gaza Strip by the Islamist Hamas movement in June 2007 and the president had formed a new emergency government headed by Salam Khalid Abdallah Fayyad in the West Bank, which received the immediate support of Israel, the EU, and the USA. Hamas retained control of the Gaza Strip, but remained isolated from Israel and the West. Israel lifted its blockade of the West Bank on 1 July 2007 but continued to pressure the Hamas enclave in the Gaza Strip.