

The Sabra Report

EXPRESS!

Knesset Passes First Reading of Bill to Give Coalition Control Over Choosing Judges

Carrie Keller-Lynn, Times of Israel, February 21st, 2023

Recap:

The Knesset passed a first reading of a bill to overhaul Israel's judiciary. A bill must pass three readings to become law.

The Context:

- ❖ The Knesset vote was 63 in favor and 47 against, with no abstentions, although some lawmakers boycotted the vote [1]. The legislation will see its second and third readings by the end of March. If passed, the bill will allow a simple majority in the Knesset to overturn Supreme Court rulings and redistribute power on the Judicial Selection Committee, giving the ruling coalition control of five out of nine votes.
- ❖ Benjamin Netanyahu's governing coalition, which includes ultranationalist and ultra-Orthodox parties, took office in late December, after the country's fifth election in less than four years. The bill's supporters argue that the High Court's intervention into political decisions is unreasonable [2], and Justice Minister Yariv Levin hailed the vote as a move toward "bringing back democracy."
- ❖ The proposed reforms have faced open criticism at home and abroad [3]. Israel's president, Isaac Herzog, called on Netanyahu to seek dialogue after tens of thousands of Israelis protested outside the Knesset ahead of the vote. Recent weeks have seen the shekel losing over 5% of its value against the dollar, and several Israeli companies and investors have withdrawn their money from the country, citing concerns about the business climate.
- ❖ Most Israelis believe that the Supreme Court should have the authority to strike down laws incompatible with Israel's Basic Laws, and that the current system for picking judges should be maintained [4]. The reforms have faced criticism for changing the longstanding status quo, with part of the criticism directed at Netanyahu and the corruption trials against him [5].

Conversation Points:

- ❖ Can Netanyahu still apply the brakes on his coalition's agenda?
- ❖ How might the widespread opposition affect the second and third readings?
- ❖ What impact will judicial reform have on Israel's international relationships?

Notes:

1. [Protests across Israel as Netanyahu's government introduces bill to weaken courts](#), Hadas Gold, CNN, February 20th, 2023
2. ['Deri Law,' 'Override Law' pass preliminary reading on Knesset floor](#), Jerusalem post, FEBRUARY 22nd, 2023
3. [Israeli PM Netanyahu says 'Let's talk' as heat rises on judicial plan](#), Maya Alleruzzo, Reuters, February 20th, 2023
4. [Israel president urges consensus after judicial changes pass](#), ILAN BEN ZION, AP News, February 21st, 2023
5. [Israel passes several judicial reforms on first reading](#), i24NEWS, February 20th, 2023

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