

## How to win the Knesset elections and save Israel's future

by

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In a recent interview on Israeli television, newly minted Nobel laureate in economics Prof. Yoel Mokyr paid tribute to Israel's spirit of innovation: "Israelis are creative ... Israelis don't think outside the box – there is no box. ... It's not just in high-tech. It is, for example, also in cooking, in music, in theater and in literature. ... And what is also very, very important is that everyone has an open mind, that there is no dogma, no conventions that one must not transgress."

This is the distinctiveness that gave birth to, and sustains, the Israeli miracle in every field – except in the field that will determine, in the coming years, whether Israel will exist a few decades from now: politics. Half of Israel's children (Jews and Arabs in the geographic and social peripheries, as well as the Haredim) receive a third-world education, and they belong to the fastest-growing segments of the population. In a few decades, as adults, they will not be able to sustain a first-world economy – without which Israel will not have the first-world army it will need to defend itself from those who threaten to destroy it.

But the political consultants of the opposition parties are unable to let go of their outdated worldviews and hollow slogans from the past. In the shallow and superficial world in which they live and advise, the people that Yoel Mokyr speaks of do not exist. When these consultants talk about creating an opposition political bloc, they are still of the mindset that each opposition party must grab as many seats as possible at the expense of the other parties in that same bloc. They hope that the bloc as a whole will somehow get the minimum 61 mandates required for a majority in the Knesset.

### What about strategy?

Only afterward are they planning to rack their brains over formulation of a joint strategic plan, one that, in parts, will run counter to the distinct party platforms on which they ran separately in the elections. The inevitable consequences will be to furnish pretexts for potential Trojan horses to topple their thin majorities. Been there (Idit Silmon), done that (Amichai Shikli). These political consultants epitomize one of Israeli society's most self-defeating traits, the *yehiye beseder* ("everything will be fine") syndrome, rooted in nothing more than wishful thinking. These guys have learned nothing and remember nothing.

There is another way. Israel's impending future troubles more than a few voters of the current coalition parties. Instead of fearing that a temporary union spanning from Bennett and Liberman to Lapid and Golan will only push the right-wing/religious fringes to the other bloc, the opposition parties need to set aside – for the upcoming, fateful, elections only – the differences between them. Together, they need to show the nation that they understand the existential danger ahead if the upcoming elections do not lead to a profound change in the public agenda. A joint focus on these issues, and only on them, is the first step. The second step is to present core solutions that will persuade voters from both blocs that the disastrous trajectory that Israel is on is not etched in stone and can still be changed – though not for much longer.

The first cornerstone of this "Israel 2.0" framework is for Israel, the country with the worst **education system** in the developed world, to completely overhaul the system. This should include: a significant upgrade in the level of core studies for all children and making them mandatory for

everyone, including the Haredim; and a major change in the way teachers are selected, trained, and compensated, and in the way the entire system is run.

The second cornerstone is an overhaul of **budgetary priorities** – shifting from sectoral and personal budgetary preferences to ones that serve the general public. This is especially true when tens, if not hundreds, of additional billions will be needed to rehabilitate the South, the North, the army, and the lives that were destroyed. There simply won't be money left over. Therefore, it will be straightforward to justify – from an economic perspective, and not just from a social one – the complete and immediate cessation of all funding of (for example) schools that do not teach a fully upgraded core curriculum, or that incentivize lifestyles of non-work.

The third cornerstone is changing the **system of government**, with one of the objectives being the prevention of extremist groups from being able to rule and destroy our shared future.

The fourth cornerstone is **a constitution** to set in stone Israel's new direction. Changing the system of government and adopting a constitution are not ends in and of themselves but critical means to buy time for the new education system to do its work, so that the future generations will not want to return Israel to the terrible three years that we just experienced.

### **For those who think we still have time**

The rapid demographic changes of the Haredim – combined with the fact that the boys are deprived of the knowledge to succeed in a modern economy or to understand the foundations of a liberal democracy – are particularly exceptional. There are relatively few adult Haredim, which creates a misleading perception that there is time. Haredim aged 50-54 constitute only 6% of their age cohort. But this is a society that doubles its share in the population every 25 years. That is, the Haredi grandchildren aged 0-4 of those 6% already account for 26% of Israel's toddlers.

If nothing changes in the next two to three years, when these Haredi toddlers begin school, it will be too late to give them the knowledge – as attested to by the huge dropout rates of the small number of Haredim who attempt the academic track (according to the State Comptroller). If that isn't enough, Haredi growth rates are leading the country to a point where half of all Israel's toddlers will be Haredi in just 25 years. The socioeconomic free-fall of municipalities undergoing Haredization illustrates where the entire country is headed once it begins to resemble those towns.

In conclusion, a personal appeal to the opposition leaders: join the Israelis about whom Prof. Mokyr speaks – the creative Israelis who think outside the box. We need you to have the open minds that the rest of society has, so that you free yourselves from your advisers' outmoded conceptions. They do not understand the problems in depth and, as a result, have no clue as to how to convey the gravity of those challenges or the root solutions to them.

In my experience, these issues interest audiences far more than your advisers think. I see the reactions across the religious-secular and right-left spectrums in talks and briefings that I give (details on the socioeconomic threat facing Israel appear in [graphs on the Shoresh Institution website](#) and [via video](#)).

If I can galvanize an audience on these topics, surely real leaders and professional marketing people can no doubt do it much better. Form a joint focus group and I will show you how shocked the public is when it grasps that it has thus far only been familiar with the tip of this massive iceberg, and how hungry it is for leaders to stop fighting over deck chairs on the Titanic and espouse policies that can steer the ship to safety for our children and grandchildren.

In the dwindling time remaining until the next elections, set up joint professional teams that include Israel's best minds in each of the four cornerstone fields, prepare a joint action plan,

and present it to the public with all the tools and means at your disposal. Begin now to compile a list of prospective MKs for your joint list, people who are committed to the plan and will support it from the get-go, who are not throwbacks to the corrupt political blackmailing era of the past. Focus not only on getting your collective bloc to the voting booths, but also persuade a critical mass from the other bloc of the need to take a temporary time-out from the traditional right-left, religious-secular discourse, and focus on the mutual national interest.

Take advantage of the national trauma (which will recede in the future, taking with it the possibility for such major changes) to obtain the majority needed to carry out the necessary significant changes. The pre-election period ahead is your money time to organize and prepare for the fateful post-election period in which the plan will be implemented. After you return Israel to a sustainable trajectory, you can dissolve the Knesset and return to your separate ways under the new system of government.

Good luck to us all.