



Cosmetics.

In one word we can summarize the current session of the Knesset relating to issues of religion and state: **Cosmetics**. The Knesset absolved itself from reaching critical and substantive decisions, and instead, laid them at the doorstep of the Supreme Court.

The Knesset Winter Session has concluded. During the months of the Winter Session, the Knesset frequently dealt with issues of religion and state. In this report, we outline the wealth of data that reflects the deliberations of the committees, the bills as well as the various issues that occupied our elected officials. As an organization that keeps a knowledgeable tab on Knesset affairs, we feel that during these past months the Knesset legislated amendments and enacted regulations and bills that invested in cosmetic changes to the field of religion and state, but for the most part **do not touch the core of Israel's religion and state challenges**. Some of these cosmetic efforts are important, at times even helpful. But they are not the most critical. As usual the legislators are waiting for the Supreme Court of Justice to do the dirty work for them and for the public and deal with the controversial issues of religion and state, specifically with regards to the issues of Shabbat, Kashrut, and the Western Wall agreement.

Chapter 1 – What were the Issues that Appeared on the Agenda of the Knesset Winter Session?

The following were the main topics from the agenda of the Knesset Winter Session--the second session of the 20th Knesset (October 31st, 2016 to March 25th, 2017).

1. Shabbat:

A plethora of bills concerning Shabbat were presented during the Knesset Winter Session. Among these were bills concerning the regulation of work and rest hours, the possibility of turning Sunday into an alternative weekly day of rest instead of Friday, and the issue of public transportation on Shabbat itself. Meanwhile, both the government and the Supreme Court are grappling with the issue of Shabbat, from the soccer field to the operation of

convenience stores in the city of Tel Aviv. The latter issue is one that the court has not yet ruled upon, and the Minister of the Interior, Aryeh Deri (Shas) has had difficulty arriving at a decision on the matter.

According to the information that we have, the extensive bill by four MKs from a variety of Knesset factions (MKs Manuel Trajtenberg, Mickey Zohar, Rachel Azariah and Elazar Stern), a bill whose main principles consist of anchoring the understandings of the Gavison-Meidan

Convention in legislation, **continues to be advanced consensually**. As deliberations still exist between the bill's proponents and other Knesset members from a variety of factions, the bill has not yet been submitted to the Knesset. Take note that this is a proposal aimed at regulating Shabbat in the public sphere in Israel, through **permitting cultural activities and public transportation to a certain extent, while reducing commerce**. Let us hope that the bill not deviate from the original Gavison-Meidan outline, and that it will mature and be submitted in the upcoming summer session.

2. Religious Services

Religious services - this general title serves to define several main groups of topics that were discussed quite a bit during the winter session. Following an investigative report by the public broadcasting corporation "Kahn", which revealed racist behavior such as using Ethiopian and other African Jewish infants as "guinea pigs" for inexperienced *mohels*. Special emphasis should be placed on the issue of regulation of *mohels* (men authorized to perform circumcisions), The bills of the opposition members (Elazar Stern, Ksenia Svetlova) concerning the supervision of the *mohels* were blocked. We hope that, at the very least, the bill of the coalition members (Rachel Azariah and Avraham Nagusa) will be advanced and bring an end to this painful and embarrassing affair.

3. Marriage and Divorce

To our satisfaction, marriage and divorce remained on the Knesset's agenda. Less to our satisfaction, it is evident that the 20th Knesset will not bring a significant breakthrough in this critical issue that directly affects the lives of half a million or more Israelis that currently cannot legally marry. The Civil Union bill, by MK Aliza Lavie, that seeks to provide an alternative solution to the monopoly on registration for marriage and divorce (even though it does not propose the introduction of civil marriage) and even more specific bills, such as travel refunds for couples who were forced to marry abroad, were not welcomed by the coalition. As to the issue of divorce, small steps have been taken, such as the bill proposed by MK Shuli Mualem (Jewish Home), which seeks to prevent those who have refused to grant divorce decrees and are serving prison time (a small minority of the recalcitrant husbands) from receiving religious "perks" such as *kosher l'mehadrin* food or prison residence relocation to the "religious section" of the prison. On the opposite end of the scale, members of United Torah Judaism are working to define the Rabbinical Courts as an arbitration authority in the State of

Israel, and the coalition has supported this direction of reinforcing the authority of the Rabbinical Courts. We hope that Knesset members will continue to deal with the lack of freedom in marriage and divorce in a thorough manner with the political tools available to them, while the public continues to "vote with the ring" and chooses from a variety of Jewish alternatives for marriage outside of the Chief Rabbinate.

4. The Muezzin Law

This Bill was put on the agenda and subsequently taken off the agenda of the Ministerial Committee for Legislation several times, and following a stormy debate in the plenum, the Knesset approved the preliminary reading of the laws. This law allows for the prevention of noise from public address systems in houses of worship, also known as the muezzin laws, which has been pushed forward by MKs Robert Ilatov and Oded Forer, as well as MKs Moti Yogev and David Bitan. **The bills passed by a small majority** of 6-7 votes. We may recall that **noise regulations already exist**, and perhaps there is actually no need to enact such a law, but rather a need to enforce existing regulations. MK Yehuda Glick (Likud), as usual, voted in accordance with his conscience and contrary to the position of the coalition. MK Glick stated, "There are alternative solutions that do not require restraint and coercion through legislation. I regret that political factors add fuel to the flames of mistrust between the Muslim and Jewish public in Israel to gain votes in the ballot box. None of the people are going to disappear from this country." The House Committee will determine in which committee these bills will be discussed for the continuation of the legislative process.

5. The Western Wall

Within just the first weeks of the current Knesset session, a large prayer service took place at the Western Wall to celebrate Rosh Chodesh Cheshvan. The prayer was led by leaders of the Masorti and Reform movements in Israel, as well as Conservative and Reform movements in the diaspora. Leaders of the movements attempted to carry in Torah scrolls, which led to confrontations with security forces at the wall. Subsequently, the Interior Committee held a tour of the area, at the end of which the chairman, David Amsalem (Likud), declared: "With all due respect to the American Jews, they shouldn't be influencing us here. **Even if they are offended it's okay. It's no big deal. They aren't doing us any favors.** I call on the Prime Minister to re-examine the agreement, cancel it, and return things to the way they were beforehand." In the same spirit, the Shas faction, with the help of Knesset members

from the Likud (Hazan, Amsalem and Zohar) submitted a bill concerning the Western Wall. This bill proposes to forbid “acts that are liable to disturb the worshipers in their prayer, and mixed prayer of men and women, in any area of the Western Wall plaza” and also prohibit “any ritual in the women’s section that includes carrying and reading from a Torah scroll, shofar blowing, wearing prayer shawls or tefillin, and the ‘accepted customs’ will be those that are according to *Din Torah*, the religious law of the Torah”. **“Any person disobeying the regulations as detailed in the proposed bill shall be liable to imprisonment for a period of six months or a fine of 10,000 shekels.”**

Along with harsh remarks about Conservative and Reform Judaism by Minister Deri, Minister Ariel, rabbis and other MKs, the month of Cheshvan concluded with an **ugly hate crime** against the Reform community in Ra’anana. There is no doubt that **this type of action does not occur within a vacuum.**

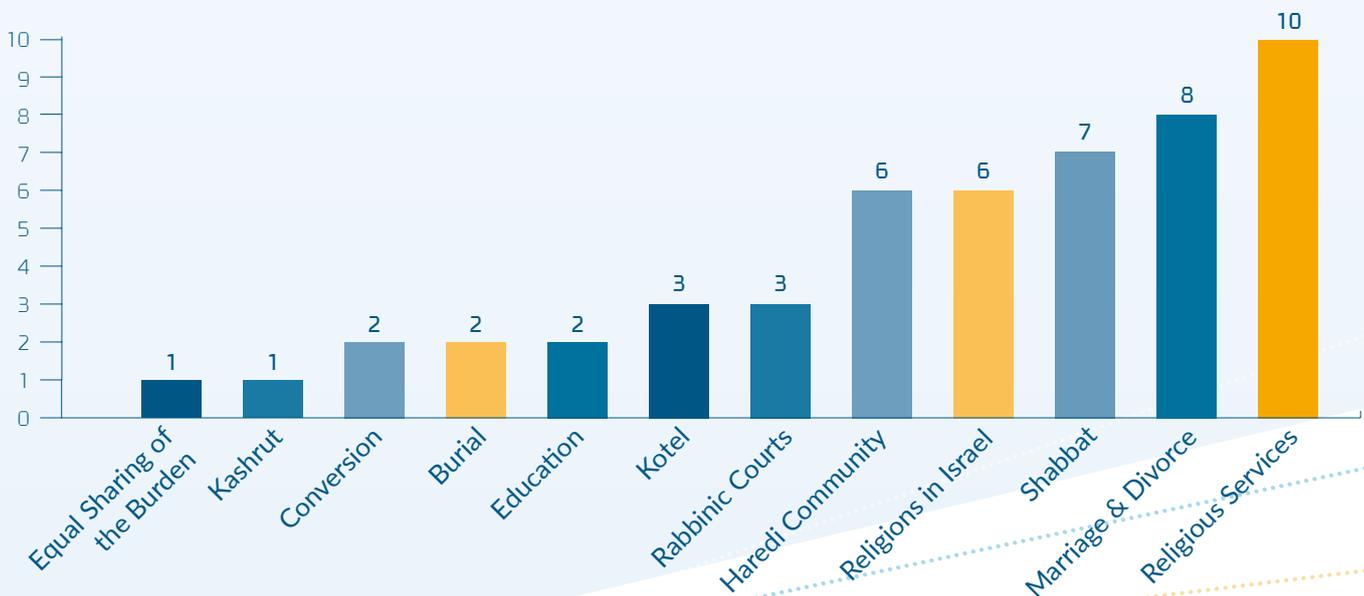
Conversely, the actions of opposition MKs, including Elazar Stern (Yesh Atid), Tamar Zandberg (Meretz) and Nachman Shai (Zionist Camp) to promote the implementation of the Western Wall plan (which was approved by the government in January 2016 by a majority of 15 ministers, with 5 Ministers opposing the agreement) encountered a wall of opposition. We were recently informed that Minister Tzachi Hanegbi (Likud) has been appointed by the Prime Minister to handle the implementation of the agreement. Matters remain pending in both the Knesset and the Supreme Court, and until a solution is reached, the ten-

sion in the Western Wall area and in *Azarat Yisrael* [the section designated for egalitarian prayers per the Western Wall agreement] is likely to continue.

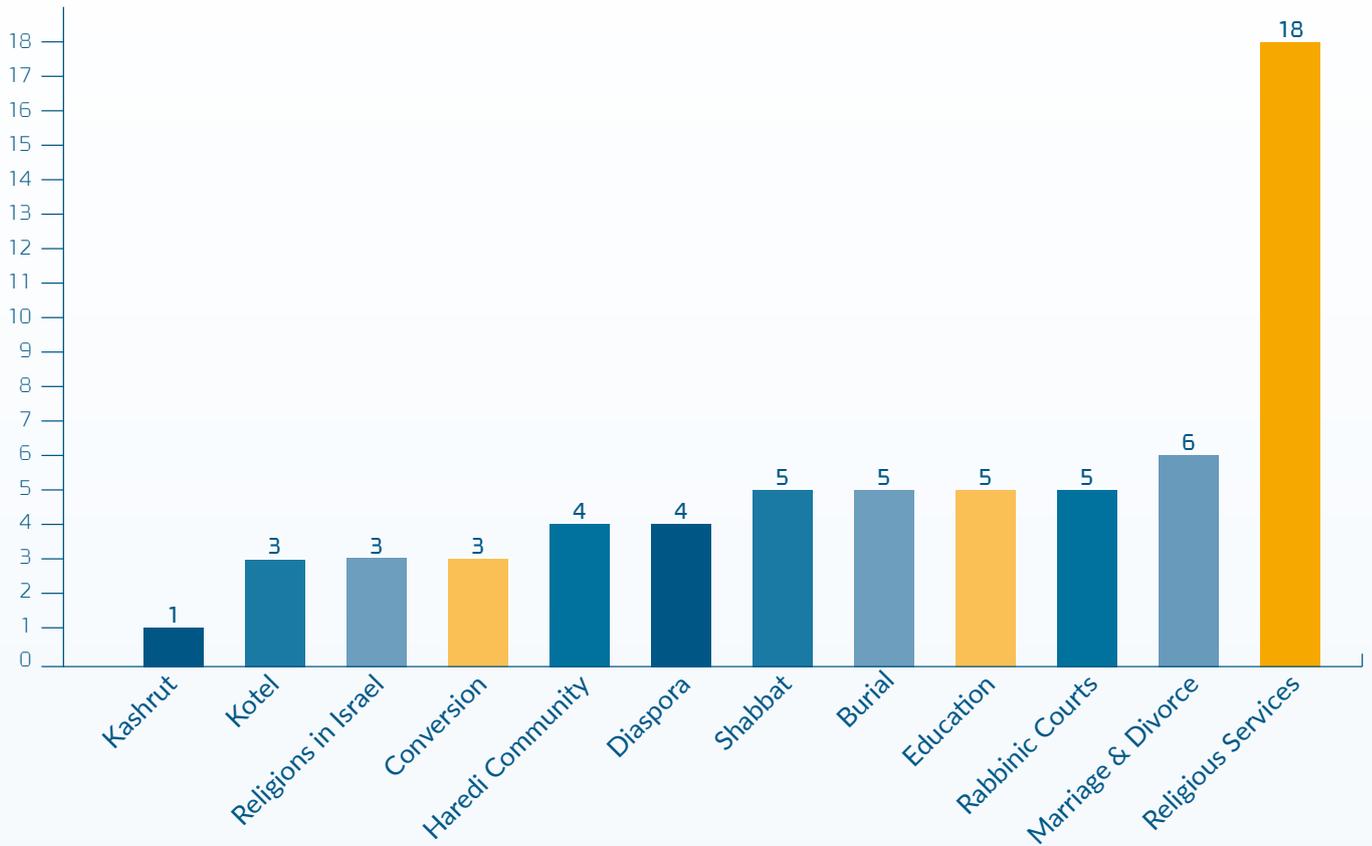
6. Other Issues

Those who followed our weekly announcements during the winter months know about the skirt length of those entering the Knesset gates, the idea of adding a clergyman to the abortion committees and economic assistance to needy Torah scholars (which in principle should apply to secular students as well, but in practice does not). Other issues addressed in the newsletter include the success of MK Merav Michaeli (Zionist Camp) who brought some sort of order to burial practices, but also about existing discrimination regarding the burial of the deceased members of the LGBT community; the work of MK Karin Elharar (Yesh Atid) who examined the details of the Exceptions committees in the conversion system, the exemption of religious seminaries from municipal taxes (MK Moshe Gafni says that this exemption should apply to seminaries of all of the streams of Judaism – we wish!). More issues include the fact that the Rabbinate permits polygamy but refuses to allow a woman in the role of director-general of the Rabbinical courts; the Ministry of Religious Services, which claims that its budgets are egalitarian and even biased in favor of women. Space limits our detailing the many issues at stake and the fingers which must plug the many leaks in the dyke. Read further on in this report to discover who are the “central players” in each “team”.

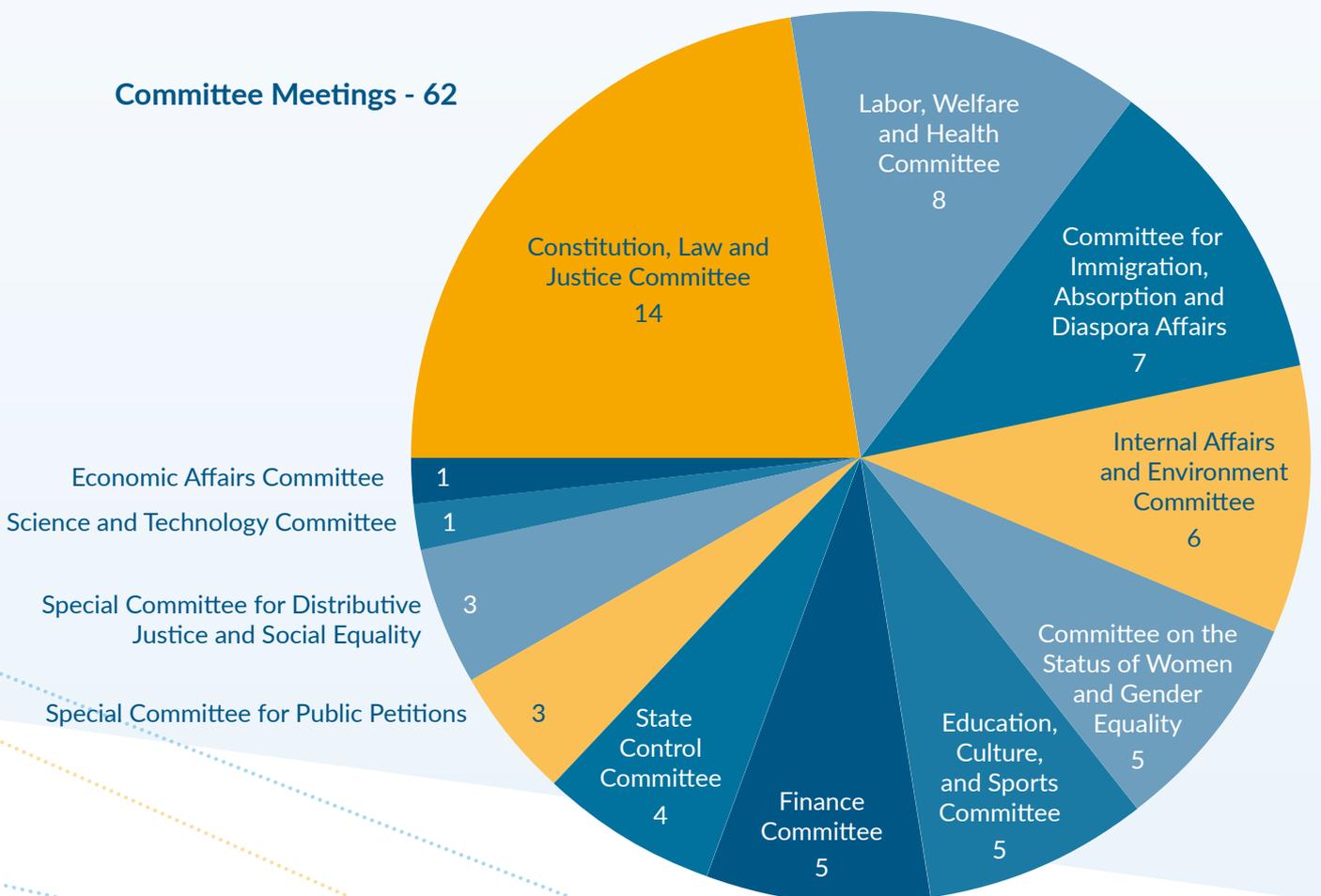
Bills Submitted or Discussed - 52



Committee Meetings by Issue - 62



Committee Meetings - 62



Chapter 2 - What is the activity level of Knesset members on the topic of Religion and State?

Who are the ones that are dedicated to the issue and who leads the way? Who is in the secondary circle and lends their support from time to time? Who is indifferent to the topic? And who strongly opposes pluralistic Judaism and equality?

We divided the Knesset members into four levels of activity on the topic of Religion and State (the names appear in alphabetical order).

1

The Committed Leaders

The MKs at the forefront of activities that advance tolerant and egalitarian Judaism and who are actively promoting a more pluralistic policy concerning Religion and State. MKs that put issues of religion and state at the top of their Knesset agenda.

Aliza Lavie
Avraham Neguise
Elazar Stern
Karin Elharrar
Ksenia Svetlova
Merav Michaeli
Michal Rozin
Nachman Shai
Rachel Azaria
Revital Swid
Shuli Moalem-Refaeli
Tamar Zandberg
Yael Cohen Paran
Yael German
Yehuda Glick

2

The Supporters

MKs that support a more pluralistic policy in the areas of religion and state, however the topic is not a top priority of their parliamentary agenda. These MKs will join as supporters and will vote for policy that promotes pluralistic and egalitarian Judaism.

Aida Touma-Sliman
Akram Hasoon
Amir Ohana
Anat Berko
Benny Begin
Dov Khenin
Eitan Cabel
Elie Elalouf
Esawi Frej
Gilad Erdan
Haim Jelin
Isaac Herzog
Manuel Trajtenberg
Meir Cohen
Merav Ben Ari
Michael Oren
Michal Biran
Mickey Levy
Naftali Bennett

3

The Indifferent

MKs that do not usually concern themselves with issues of religion and state. The topic is not on their agenda, and usually they will not join in on supporting the activities of their colleagues in this area.

Abdullah Abu Maaruf
Ahmad Tibi
Amir Peretz
Avi Dichter
Ayelet Nahmias-Verbin
Ayelet Shaked
Ayman Odeh
Ayoob Kara
Basel Ghattas
David Bitan
Eitan Broshi
Eli Ben Dahan
Eli Cohen
Erel Margalit
Eyal Ben Reuven
Gila Gamliel
Haim Katz
Hamad Amar
Hanin Zoabi

4

The Opponents

MKs that do not support advancing the cause of freedom of religion and pluralism, but on the contrary, wish to reinforce the status of the orthodox monopoly and the Rabbinical establishment, and oppose any move towards gender equality or recognition of a multi-faceted Judaism.

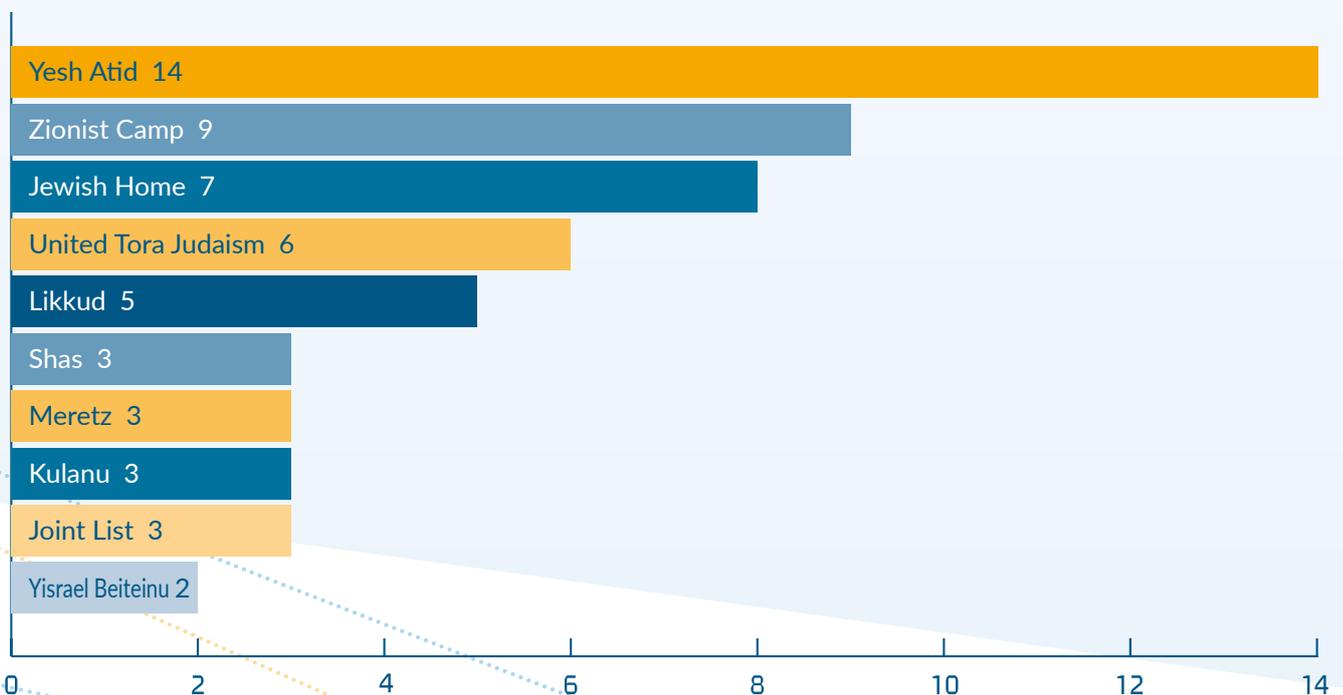
Abd Al Hakeem Haj
Yahya
Bezalel Smotrich
David Amsalem
David Azoulay
Israel Eichler
Menachem Moses
Michael Malchieli
Miki Zohar
Moshe Gafni
moti yogev
Oren Hazan
Uri Ariel
Uri Maklev
Yakov Asher
Yakov Litzman
Yakov Margi
Yariv Levin
Yigal Guetta

Ofer Shelah
Osama Sa`adi
Robert Ilatov
Stav Shafrir
Tzipi Livni
Yair Lapid
Yoav Kisch
Yoel Edelstein
Yoel Razvozov
Zehava Galon

Hilik Bar
Ilan Gilon
Itzik Shmuli
Jackie Levy
Jamal Zahalka
Masud Ganaim
Micky Rosenthal
Miri Regev
Nava Boker
Nissan Slomiansky
Nurit Koren
Oded Forer
Ofir Akunis
Omer Barlev
Orly Levi-Abekasis
Roy Folkman
Sharren Haskel
Shelly Yachimovich
Sofa Landver
Talab Abu Arar
Tali Ploskov
Tzachi Hanegbi
Tzipi Hotovely
Yaakov Perry
Yaron Mazuz
Yifat Shasha-Biton
Yoav Gallant
Yoel Hasson
Yosi Yonah
Yousef Jabareen
Yulia Malinovsky
Yuval Steinitz
Zouheir Bahloul

Yisrael Katz
Yitzhak Cohen
Yitzhak Vaknin
Yoav Ben Tzur
Zeev Elkin

Bills by Party



Chapter 3 - The Knesset Caucuses

Most of the Beauties are Sleeping

The caucus, while not a formal Knesset body, is a group of Knesset members who wish to engage in interest and enlist support for a topic that is close to their hearts. A caucus may hold its meetings in the Knesset building. The caucuses **provide an opportunity for members of the Knesset to put burning issues on both the parliamentary and public agenda**, issues that they believe should be promoted. **In the 20th Knesset there are about 180 registered caucuses. About 10% of the caucuses in the current (Twentieth) Knesset deal with issues of religion and state.** The Jewish Pluralism Watch regularly participates in caucusing sessions and reports on them in the weekly "Religion and State - The Week in the Knesset" bulletin.

During the latest Knesset Session, we became aware that few of them were actively working to promote the cause for which they were established, but unfortunately, **most of them are in fact dormant.** For example, during the last session, no meetings at all took place by the Caucus for Jewish Renewal and the Community Kashrut Caucus (chaired by MK Rachel Azaria), the Caucus for the Strengthening the Jewish People (chaired by MK Nachman Shai and MK David Bitan), the Caucus for Pluralism and Civil Equality (chaired by MK Michal Rozin) nor in the Caucus for Job Integration in the Haredi Community (chaired by MK Manuel Trajtenberg). Not even one meeting took place in the caucuses detailed above.

On the other hand, **there is no doubt that the most active caucus in the field today is the "People, Religion, and State"**. During the current session, MK Yehuda Glick (Likud) joined as a third chairman of this caucus alongside the founding chairpersons, MKs Aliza Lavie and Elazar Stern (Yesh Atid). This caucus was particularly active during the session and served as an additional forum for advancing the discourse on religion and state. They held discussions concerning the growing rift between Israel and Diaspora Jewry, the moral aspect of the relations between religion and state, and on the topic of the conduct of the religious councils and improvement of religious services in Israel.

Another active caucus, which held discussions some of which relate to religion and state, especially in the context of relations with diaspora Jewry, is the **Caucus for US-Israel Relations.** This caucus is chaired by

MKs Avraham Naguise (Likud) and Nachman Shai (Zionist Camp). This caucus convened during the latest Knesset session to discuss the influence of the new United States administration on the Jewish communities in the United States.

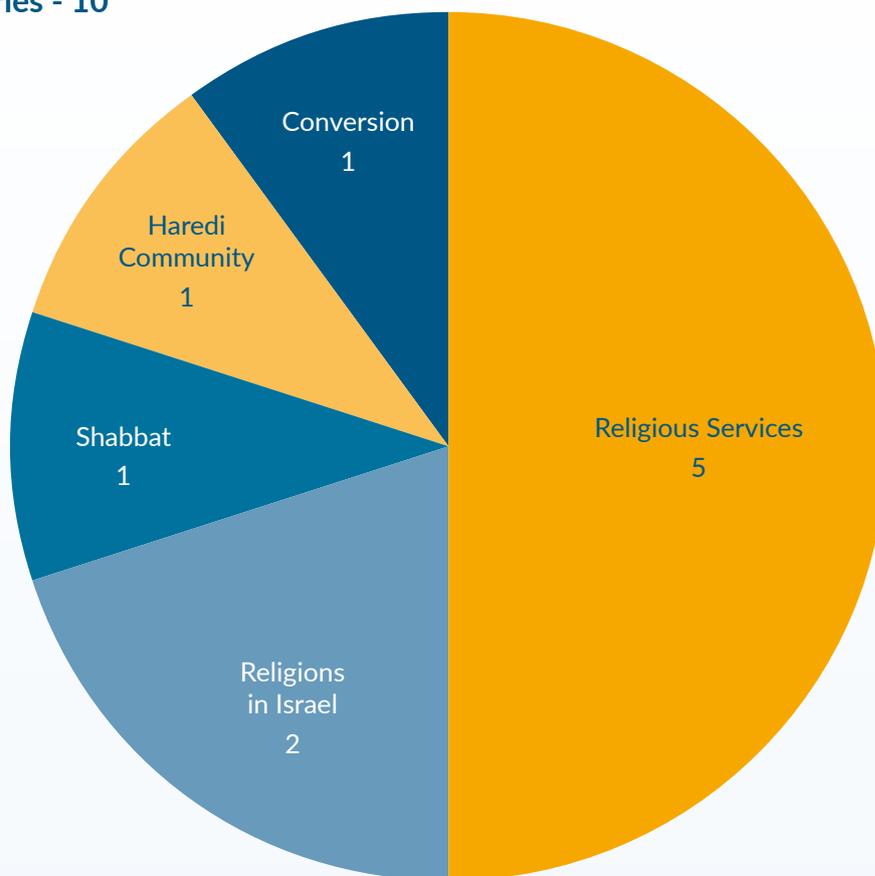
Recently, MK Yehuda Glick established two new caucuses, the Caucus for Strengthening the Jewish Connection to the Temple Mount, together with MK Shuli Mualem (Jewish Home). This was established in conjunction with (and some might say in contrast to) the Caucus for the Promotion of Coexistence Between Arabs and Jews, in cooperation with Zouheir Bahloul (Zionist Camp).

One must wonder about the large number of existing caucuses that remain dormant, and at the parliamentary and public power of caucuses that are often used as a forum for discussion between people of like minds, Perhaps the Knesset members should have avoided the frequent establishment of many new caucuses. Instead, they should have focused their work on one caucus that could act with courage and perseverance to promote a pluralistic Jewish voice within the framework of the current Knesset.

MKs who Submitted Parliamentary Inquiries

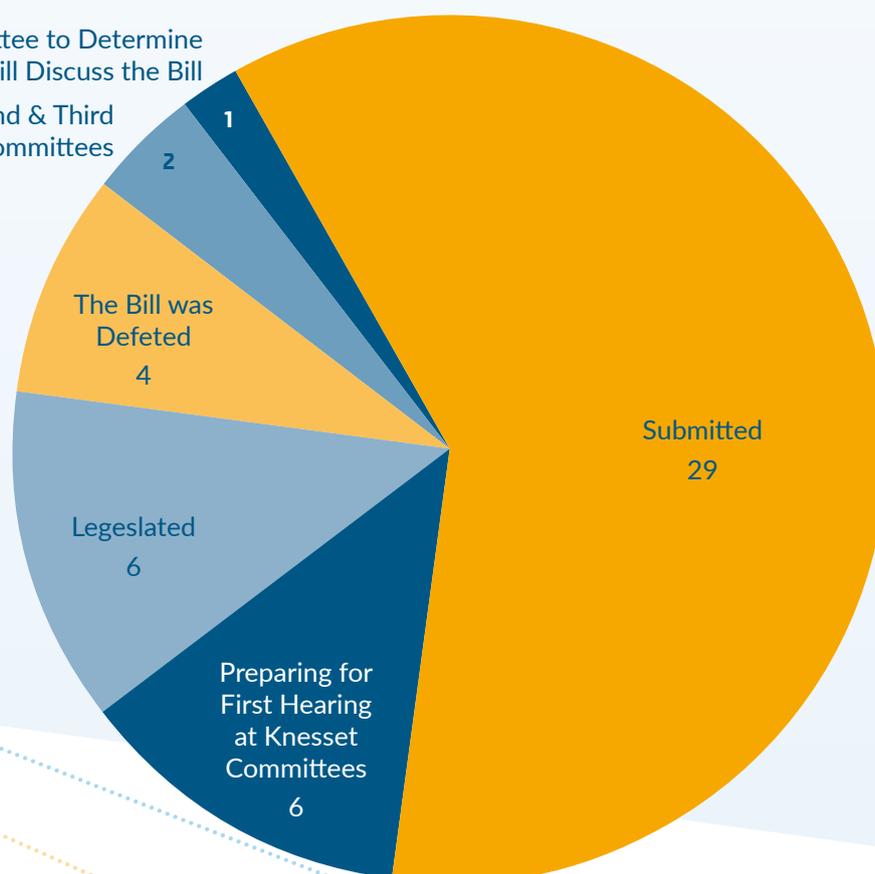
Elazar Stern	3
Jamal Zahalka	1
Yoel Hasson	1
Michael Malchieli	1
Mickey Levy	1
Nachman Shai	1
Aliza Lavie	1
Ksenia Svetlova	1

Parliamentary Inquiries - 10



Bills by Status - 48

House Committee to Determine
Which Committee will Discuss the Bill
Preparing for Second & Third
Hearing at Knesset Committees



Chapter 4 - Anticipating the Summer Session of the Knesset, due to commence May 7th, 2017

Along with continued cosmetic work, the Knesset may have to deal in depth with three issues of religion and state: **Shabbat**, **Kashrut** and the **Western Wall**. As usual, the court and perhaps the government will set the pace, and the Knesset will respond loudly and furiously. In addition to the decision of Interior Minister Deri regarding the opening of convenience stores in Tel Aviv on Shabbat and the court awaiting his decision, it is hoped that the quartet of Knesset members promoting the Sabbath bill (MKs Trajtenberg, Zohar, Stern and Azaria) will succeed in initiating an innovative and creative legislative move. Similarly, all the **Kashrut bills on the Knesset's desk**

are awaiting the Supreme Court ruling, the decisions of the Chief Rabbinate's Kashrut Committee, and the State Comptroller's forthcoming report.

Last, but not least, while the Supreme Court explores the controversial Western Wall issue in depth, what will become of Minister Hanegbi's mission as he struggles with the challenge of implementing the agreement? Will David Amsalem, Chairman of the Interior Committee, prevent any solution, since according to Amsalem "reforms belong to canning plants and not to Judaism"?

We will follow up and report.



Jewish Pluralism Watch - monitors Israeli elected officials' positions, statements, legislative initiatives and voting records in regard to matters of state and religion in Israel.

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Would you like to learn more?

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We will meet groups that wish to deepen their acquaintance with issues of religion and state, at any location and at any time convenient for you.

To coordinate a meeting, please contact Klil Atad, coordinator of the Division for Education and Activism at the JPW, at

mishmar.education@gmail.com

