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# Minority Groups and Success in Election Primaries

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## ABSTRACT

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# Minority Groups and Success in Election Primaries

In this paper, we focus on the effect of belonging to one or more minority groups on the probability of success in primary elections. Using a unique dataset of candidates in Israeli primaries, we find that while being a new immigrant, a woman or a Muslim decreases the chances of electoral success, candidates who belong to two minority groups have an advantage in the race. In some cases of candidates belonging to two minority groups, their chances of success are not only higher than for a candidate from one minority group, but also than for a candidate from the majority.

**JEL Classification:** J15, D72

**Keywords:** primary elections, success, minority groups, majority groups

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## 1. Introduction

There are many factors that can improve a candidate's likelihood of winning primaries and elections. They include campaign contributions and endorsements (see for example Potters, Sloof, and van Winden, 1997), the candidate's invested effort (see Epstein, 2000)<sup>1</sup> and his/her belonging to one or more minority groups. It is not enough for candidates to have a political platform; they have to convince the public to vote for them.<sup>2</sup>

In elections, campaign spending matters through its effect on voter turnout. Abrams and Settle (1976) and Matsusaka and Palda (1999) showed that campaign spending seems to successfully raise voters' awareness of the election and their willingness to bear the costs associated with voting. Campaign spending also matters in that it affects election outcomes. With very few exceptions, empirical studies indicate that, all else being equal, the more a candidate spends, the more votes he or she receives (Abrams and Settle, 1976; Banaian and Luksetich, 1991; Nagler and Leighley, 1992; Gerber, 1998). Of course, all else is rarely equal and even the richest candidates have been defeated on Election Day. Money matters, but it is not the only thing that matters.

Epstein and Franck (2007) examined the factors that improve a candidate's likelihood of winning an election by drawing on information from campaign resources used by candidates running in the 2002 French parliamentary election. They found that the contributions received by the candidates and their political affiliations determine their success in reaching the second round of the elections. However, surprisingly, once they make it to the second round, the contributions cease to be relevant; only the candidate's gender, incumbency and actual spending—rather than contribution

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<sup>1</sup> Uncertainty can be reduced in the models of probabilistic voting developed by Austen-Smith (1987) and Mayer and Li (1994).

<sup>2</sup> For example, Paldam and Nannestad (2000) asked Danish voters about the (macro) economy and showed that in polls prior to and immediately after elections, there was an increase in economic knowledge. Moreover, Blais and Young (1999) presented an experiment during the 1993 elections in Canada where students at two universities were exposed to a 10-minute presentation on the rational model of voting under which so many people vote when it is irrational on a cost-benefit basis. They showed that the presentation decreases turnout in the elections. This suggests that campaign effort has the important task of educating the public in order to influence them in favor of a candidate. An economic policy platform has a small effect on the probability of a particular candidate winning the election if the public is not aware of the problems facing the country and the suggested solutions.

amounts—matter. Epstein (2000) investigated the relationship between individual productivity and the likelihood of electoral success by taking the campaign expenditures of a political party as a given and focusing on the personal effort invested by candidates seeking election.

Ondercin and Welch (2009) examined all congressional races in the United States from 1992 through 2000. They explored why, over time, some districts are more likely to have women candidates and to elect women than others. They showed that women's election success is a product of three key stages of the election process: their running, their success in the primaries and their success in the general election. They showed that different factors predict success at each stage and that the predictors of women's candidacy and success in open-seat races differ from those in other races.

A wide range of research in political science and economics has discussed the effect of the race on voting behavior. This research offers several explanations for why Whites use a candidate's race as an information cue and are thus less likely to vote for a Black candidate in biracial contests (see Matsubayashi and Ueda, 2011). The first explanation focuses on belief and character stereotypes. Voters tend to perceive minority candidates as more liberal than White candidates (the belief stereotype), and this causes White voters to believe that minority candidates do not represent their policy preferences. The second explanation is drawn from the racial threat and White backlash thesis. Whites show more of a hostile attitude toward Blacks when Blacks pose a threat to Whites' privileged position. This latter explanation is related to racial prejudice. Some White voters have discriminatory attitudes toward African Americans. Such racial prejudice or symbolic racism may lead White voters to cast doubt on the competence and qualifications of minority candidates, or it may simply preclude them from voting for those candidates.

Gerber, Morton and Rietz (1998) presented a model of voting in double-member district elections with two majority candidates and one minority candidate, and considered the voting equilibria under straight and cumulative voting. In straight voting, while an equilibrium always exists in which the two majority candidates are expected to win the two seats, minority candidates may be elected. In cumulative voting, minority candidate wins are also possible in equilibrium but are less likely when minority voters prefer one majority candidate over the other. They presented

experimental evidence showing that minority candidates win significantly more seats in cumulative vs. straight voting elections. When minority voters perceive a substantial difference between the majority candidates, however, they are more likely to split their votes between the minority and majority candidates, each winning fewer seats. Shachar and Nalebuff (1999) found that political leaders expend effort according to their chance of being pivotal, which depends on the expected closeness of the electoral race (at both state and national levels). Greenwald, Smith, Sriram, Bar-Ana, and Nosek (2009) found that attitude toward race predicts voter choice (John McCain and Barack Obama) using data from the 2008 United States presidential election.

In this paper, we focus on the effect of belonging to one or more minority groups on the probability of success in primary elections. We use a unique dataset from Israel consisting of 262 candidates in the primaries of the 2013 and 2015 elections from the following major Israeli parties: *Likud* ("Unity" in Hebrew), *Bayit Yehudi* ("The Jewish Home" in Hebrew) and *Labor*.

## **2. Empirical Evidence**

### **2.1. Background**

The electoral system in Israel is based on proportional representation. The whole country serves as a single electoral district in which all 120 members are elected, based on a closed-list system. The legal threshold increased from 2% in the 2013 election to 3.25% in the 2015 election (Diskin and Hazan, 2014). The Israeli Parliament (the Knesset) included 14 parties in 2015 (before the election), with the two main parties being Likud and Labor. Likud is traditionally the most important party of the right-wing bloc while Labor leads the left-wing bloc. In principle, elections are held every 4 years, but in December 2014, less than 2 years after the government was sworn in, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu decided to dissolve the Parliament and hold early elections in March 2015.

In Israel, many of the parties represent particular ethnic and religious minority groups. Hadash, Balad, and Ra'am/Ta'al are Arab-supported parties, and Israel Beiteinu ("Israel Our Home" in Hebrew) is heavily supported by immigrants from the former Soviet Union. Bayit Yehudi is a religious party. United Torah Judaism and Shas are ultra-religious (Orthodox - Haredim) parties distinguished mainly by ethnic

backgrounds (Diskin and Hazan, 2014): while the former applies to the ultra-religious Jews from Europe, Shas applies to the old immigrants from Asia–Africa and their second and third generations (Mizrahim) who feel wronged. Nevertheless, the biggest parties also appeal to voters who belong to religious and ethnic minority groups (Hazan and Rahat, 2000).

Until the 1990s, most of the candidates for the Parliament (Knesset) were chosen by a small group of party leaders (central committee). Today the two main parties, Likud and Labor, and two additional parties, Bayit Yehudi and Meretz ("Energy" in Hebrew) choose their candidates for Parliament via primaries. Party primaries, in their broadest form, allow a party's membership at large to participate in the process of selecting its representatives. In Israel, only dues-paying party members are allowed to vote in their party primaries, as opposed to open primaries where any voter can participate in the selection of nominees of any party. Israel has no laws pertaining to primaries, apart from their financing, leaving each party free to adopt primaries if it wishes, and to use whichever form of primary it sees fit (Hazan, 1997). The number of party members in the Likud is about 100,000, and about 70,000 each in Labor and Bayit Yehudi. In Meretz, the number of party members is only about 1,000 and their method of choosing representatives is different from the other parties; Meretz is therefore not investigated in this paper.

The primaries for Likud, Labor and the Bayit Yehudi include a “reserved place” mechanism which guarantees minimal positions to distinct sectors or social groups on the party’s Parliament list. The candidates running for these reserved positions compete against all other candidates; the reserved representation mechanism is implemented only if the candidates do not attain the reserved position, or a higher one, on their own. For example, if 1 in every 10 positions on the party list is reserved for a woman but none of the top 10 candidates in the party primary are women, the highest positioned woman candidate will be “bumped” into one of the first 10 positions on the party’s list. This mechanism is used to ensure the representation of women (in all of these parties), non-Jews and new immigrants (Likud and Labor) and one young candidate (Likud). The Labor also ensures that there will be candidates from different districts, while in the Likud the candidates from the different districts are elected in a separate list and those places are only open to non-incumbent candidates. Usually the “reserved place” of the part districts are located at the back of the list with a low probability of getting into parliament. A candidate who wins a high place in the primaries will win a seat in



the Parliament based on the proportional votes received by his or her party in the national election (Hazan, 1997). Note that sometimes, parties run together or merge, for example, Likud and Israel Beiteinu in the 2013 election and Labor and Hatnuah ("The Movement" in Hebrew) in the 2015 election. In this situation, the position of the candidates in the united party differs from their position in their original party.

In the 2015 election, the parties rules enabled the leaders to join the party candidates who did not gain a place or succeed in the primaries, but can contribute to the party. This provides a way of fixing the results of insufficiently represented minority groups in the primaries. It is interesting to see that the leaders prefer candidates who belong to double minority groups. The Likud's leader, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, joined a candidate who is female and second generation to immigrants from Asia. The Labor leader joined a woman who is also a new immigrant. The leader of the religious party Bayit Yehudi tried to join a candidate who is not religious and second generation to immigrants from North Africa, but strong objection from the party's members caused him to reconsider.

## 2.2. Summary statistics

Our dataset contains 262 candidates in the primaries of the 2013 and 2015 elections from the following major Israeli parties: *Likud*, *Bayit Yehudi* and *Labor*. Our data sources are listed in Appendix 1. Table 1 presents descriptive statistics of the explanatory variables by party. Women make up about half of the Israeli population.<sup>3</sup> We refer to women as a minority group because of their under-representation in the political parties. Some countries have gender quota laws which require all political parties to ensure that women fill a certain percentage of candidate slots (Baldez, 2007). In our dataset, women's weight among the candidates is about a quarter.

About 32% of the Israeli population is old immigrants from Asia–Africa (Mizrahi) and their second and third generations, but their weight among the candidates is about a quarter. About 13% of the Israeli population is new immigrants.<sup>4</sup> However, representation of immigrants among the candidates in the primaries ranges from 4.25%

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<sup>3</sup> The source for the weights of females and new immigrants is the Statistical Abstract of Israel, Central Bureau of Statistics, 2013).

<sup>4</sup> 1990 marks the beginning of the massive immigration wave from the former USSR to Israel. Hence, we define "new immigrants" as those who have immigrated since 1990. Pre-1990 immigrants are defined as "old immigrants".

(Labor) to 13.5% (Likud). These immigrants came to Israel from the former USSR, Ethiopia, the US and France.<sup>5</sup> The largest minority group is immigrants from the former Soviet Union, with about 930,000 people. Note that we define a candidate as an (a new) immigrant, an old immigrant from Asia–Africa or religious if he/she can be discerned by the party members according to name, accent, behavior or other external signs (for example, the kippah traditionally worn by religious men) or he/she makes a point of mentioning it during the campaign.

About 10% of the population defines itself as religious<sup>6</sup>; more than 13% of the Likud's candidates are religious, in contrast to only about 4% of the Labor's candidates. In the religious party Bayit Yehudi, we refer to the non-religious people as belonging to a minority group. The weight of those candidates in Bayit Yehudi is about 8.5%. More than 20% of Israel's population is not Jewish, mainly Arab. Most of them vote for Arab parties. In the investigated Jewish parties, the weight of the non-Jewish candidates ranges from about 4% (Bayit Yehudi) to about 10% (Labor).

Some of the candidates belong to two (or more) minority groups, for example: female and Mizrahi/new immigrant/religious/Arab, or female religious.<sup>7</sup> The weight of the candidates in the primaries who belong to two minority groups ranges between 8.5% (Labor) and 23% (Likud). Between 6% (Labor) and 7% (Likud and Bayit Yehudi) of the candidates served in the army as senior officers or have a military background, whereas between 2% (Likud) and 6% (Labor and Bayit Yehudi) served as publicists or journalists in the national media. More than half of the Likud's candidates in the primaries served as members of Parliament, but only about 20% in the additional other two parties had experience as Parliament members. About 4% of the Likud's candidates and 3% of Labor's candidates served in the previous term as Parliament members on behalf of another party.

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<sup>5</sup> Because of the small number of candidates from each country of origin, we join all of the new immigrants into one group.

<sup>6</sup> This does not include the ultra-Orthodox. The Israel Social Survey questionnaire uses "religious" as a distinct category, meaning "religious but not haredim". We estimate the weight of the religious group according to the Israel Social Survey.

<sup>7</sup> The number of candidates belonging to three minority groups was extremely small, and we therefore combined these candidate with those belonging to two minority groups.

### 2.3. Results

We examined the effect of belonging to a minority group on success in the primaries in two ways. In the first, the independent variable was the candidate's relative success. For the percentile, we used of the position of the candidate relative to the other candidates in his/her party in the same election: the candidates were arranged according to their relative number of votes in the primaries and this was transformed into a percentile.<sup>8</sup> In the second approach, the independent variable was the probability of being elected to a real place based on surveys conducted close to the time of the primaries. In the Likud, about 35% of the candidates were elected to real places, as opposed to less than 25% of the Labor's candidates. This means that candidates with the same relative position, but from different parties, have different probabilities of becoming members of Parliament.

The estimation results from the first approach are presented in Table 2, and those from the second approach in Table 3. Note that the essential results for both approaches were similar. We examined the different effects of age on each gender. In all of the regressions, age had a negative and significant effect on women's success in the primaries (for both approaches), whereas age had a positive and significant effect on the men's success (second specification only). We also found a significant and positive direct effect of being female in almost all regressions. When we investigated whether men or women had more success in the primaries, we found that until almost 40 years of age, the woman has a better probability of succeeding in the primaries; after that, the man has a higher probability. This might be because young women are perceived as more attractive than older women and this affects the voters. However, an older man is perceived by voters as having more experience than a younger one. The result for women is supported by many studies which have shown a positive relationship between beauty and electoral success (see for example, Berggren, Jordahl, and Poutvaara, 2010).

New immigrants had a significantly lower relative place and a lower probability of being elected to a real place. From regressions (1)–(5) in both tables, being an old immigrant from Asia–Africa (Mizrahi) did not have a significant effect on success in

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<sup>8</sup> Each party has a different number of voters and the voters choose a different number of candidates. Thus the number of votes and the share of the votes cannot be used as independent variables.

the primaries. From regression (6) in Table 2, old immigrants from Asia–Africa were more successful in the primaries in the Labor party than natives. However, some of those candidates had been elected to Parliament for the first time via a "reserved place". Non-Jewish candidates had both a lower relative place and lower probability of being elected to a real place. We did not examine the effect of being religious on the candidates' success in the primaries because most of the religious candidates belong to an additional minority group and this variable is highly correlated with the parties.

Let us now discuss the effect of belonging to two minority groups. Look at regressions (1)–(3) in Table 2 and regressions (1)–(5) in Table 3. Belonging to two minority groups significantly and positively affected a candidate's success in the primaries. In some cases of a candidate belonging to two minority groups, he/she was not only more successful than candidates from one minority group, but also than candidates from the majority. For example, a candidate who is a male, religious and a new immigrant is more successful in the primaries than a male candidate who is non-religious and native. Religious and female candidates will be elected to a higher relative place than a non-religious, male candidate until the age 54 years (by specification (2) in Table 2. A female candidate who is also a new immigrant will be elected to a higher relative place than a native male candidate until age 44. She will be more successful than a new immigrant male candidate until age 54.

The 2015 election was announced suddenly, and the primaries were held soon after. Thus, new candidates did not have enough time to get organized for the primaries and advertise themselves, whereas the candidates serving as Parliament members had a great advantage. It is easy to see that the variable of having experience as a member of Parliament significantly and positively affects the candidate's success in the primaries. Adding this variable decreased the significance of the variable "belonging to two minority groups" in the first approach. We also examined the effect of serving as a member of Parliament in the previous term on behalf of another party. However, we did not find any significant effect, probably because of the small number of observations.

Israel is a country with complex security problems and many enemies, and therefore candidates with impressive military backgrounds are sought by all parties. We found that senior officers have a higher relative place than others. We also found that

experience as a journalist contributes to the candidate's success in the primaries. This is probably because the candidate is already known when he/she reaches the primaries.

### **3. Discussion**

A candidate who belongs to two minority groups can attract party members from the two different groups. In addition, if he (or she) is elected to a position that has a high chance of getting into Parliament, the party can "kill two birds with one stone" by being attractive to two different minority groups whose voting rate is usually higher than that of the majority group (see Herron and Sekhon, 2005). Candidates who belong to double minority groups might be supported by the party leaders, who foresee their electoral potential. However, the weight of minority groups, mainly new immigrants, Muslims and religious individuals (or non-religious ones in a religious party) among party members is relatively low, and therefore the support that a candidate can receive from them is limited. Candidates from minority groups, mainly new immigrants and Muslims, lack language skills, the networks of the more established party members and resources. A party member who belongs to the majority does not necessarily consider which candidate can bring more votes in the general election. Thus, the effect of belonging to two minority groups is ambiguous.

In this paper, we found robust evidence for a positive effect of belonging to two minority groups on the candidate's success in the primaries. In some cases in which the candidate belonged to two minority groups, he/she was more successful not only than a candidate from one minority group, but also than a candidate from the majority. For example, a candidate who is a male, religious and a new immigrant will be more successful in the primaries than a male candidate who is non-religious and native. A religious female candidate will be elected to a higher relative place than the non-religious male candidate.

However, candidates who belong to one minority group, such as new immigrants or non-Jews, have a lower probability of winning. In all of the regressions, age had a negative and significant effect on women's success in the primaries while it had a positive and significant effect on a man's success. We also found that the direct effect of being female is significant and positive in almost all regressions. When we

investigated whether men or women have more success in the primaries, we found that until age 40, the woman has a higher probability of success in the primaries and after that age, the man does. Incumbency had a significant and positive effect. We also examined the effect of serving as a Parliament member in the previous term on behalf of another party. However, we did not find any significant effect, probably because of the small number of observations.

It would be interesting, in a future study, to examine whether the representation of minority groups in political parties affects the election outcome, or if minority group members vote for sectoral parties anyway. It would also be interesting to investigate whether the effect of one candidate belonging to two minority groups is similar to that of two candidates from two different minority groups.

**Table 1. Explanatory variables and descriptive statistics**

	Likud	Bayit Yehudi	Labor	Share of Jewish population
Age (std. dev.)	50.72 (11.81)	48.60 (10.34)	50.55 (11.07)	-
Female (%)	26.04	25.00	27.12	50.45
Old immigrants from Asia– Africa (Mizrahi) (%)	26.04	29.17	23.73	31.7
New immigrant (%)	13.54	8.33	4.25	12.68
Religious (or non-religious in a religious party) (%)	19.79	8.33	1.67	9.42
Non-Jewish (%)	6.25	4.17	10.17	21.10
Belonging to two or more minority groups (%)	22.92	12.5	8.47	-
Senior (military) officer (%)	8.33	8.33	6.78	-
Publicist (%)	2.08	6.25	5.93	-
Real place (%)	36.46	29.17	24.58	-
Experience as member of Parliament (%)	51.04	18.75	20.51	-
Served as member of Parliament on behalf of another party (%)	4.17%	3.39%	0%	
Number of observations	96	48	118	-

**Table 2. Relative position of the candidate**

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Age	0.20 (0.16)	0.48*** (0.17)	0.29 (1.62)	-0.00 (0.15)	-0.11 (0.15)	-0.15 (0.15)
Age* Female	-	-1.25*** (0.37)	-0.99*** (0.36)	-0.88*** (0.31)	-0.73** (0.31)	-0.73** (0.30)
Female	-8.7 (4.72)	51.48** (2.78)	39.17** (17.95)	37.36** (15.56)	30.08* (15.33)	30.13** (15.17)
Old immigrants from Asia–Africa (Mizrahi)	-1.89 (4.68)	-2.26 (4.59)	-1.28 (4.40)	-1.19 (3.84)	-0.60 (3.76)	-7.72* (4.57)
Mizrahi* Labor	-					15.26*** (5.67)
New immigrant	-12.94* (7.42)	-12.32* (7.27)	-9.07 (7.01)	-11.07* (6.09)	-8.96 (5.98)	-10.24* (5.93)
Non-Jewish	-13.39** (6.77)	-13.73** (6.64)	-12.16* (6.39)	-9.40* (5.58)	-8.55 (5.46)	-8.46 (5.40)
Belonging to two or more minority groups	16.60** (6.71)	16.07** (6.58)	14.80** (6.32)	7.92 (5.58)	7.54 (5.44)	9.38* (5.42)
Experience as member of Parliament				34.37*** (3.28)	32.04*** (3.27)	33.03*** (3.25)
Senior (military) officer			21.21*** (6.53)		15.44*** (5.93)	14.85*** (5.52)
Publicist			30.95*** (7.93)		19.10*** (6.87)	18.94*** (6.79)
	43.78 (8.83)	29.27** (9.67)	35.83** (9.460)	43.09*** (8.23)	46.82 (8.16)	48.94*** (8.08)
F	2.25	3.62	5.71	18.18	16.63	16.15
R-squared	0.05	0.09	0.16	0.36	0.39	0.41
Number of observations	262	262	262	262	262	262

Notes:

1. Standard deviation values are denoted in parentheses.
2. \*\*\*, \*\*, \* denote significance at 1, 5 and 10%, respectively.



**Table 3. Probability of being elected to a real place**

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Age	0.019 (0.012)	0.038*** (0.014)	0.017 (0.016)	-0.005 (0.019)	-0.031 (0.021)
Age* Female		-0.098*** (0.035)	-0.088** (0.04)	-0.090** (0.041)	-0.086* (0.048)
Female	-0.826** (0.411)	3.760** (1.639)	3.106* (1.831)	3.491* (1.944)	3.217 (2.166)
Old immigrants from Asia–Africa (Mizrahi)	-0.118 (0.360)	-0.139 (0.364)	0.008 (0.391)	-0.108 (0.452)	0.052 (0.477)
New immigrant	-1.457** (0.713)	-1.514** (0.734)	-1.169 (0.746)	-2.009** (0.875)	-1.754* (0.904)
Non-Jewish	-2.412** (1.046)	-2.403** (1.04)	-2.806** (1.188)	-2.674** (1.122)	-2.426** (1.110)
Belonging to two or more minority groups	1.385** (0.557)	1.422** (0.577)	1.454** (0.615)	1.126* (0.682)	1.272* (0.737)
Experience as member of Parliament				3.114*** (0.400)	3.327*** (0.461)
Senior (military) officer			2.434*** (0.639)		3.055*** (0.788)
Publicist			3.274*** (0.912)		3.463*** (1.109)
Constant	-1.636** (0.711)	-2.592*** (0.817)	-1.911** (0.859)	-1.552 (0.989)	-0.808 (1.039)
LR chi2	21.87	30.24	65.50	111.16	139.43
Pseudo R-squared	0.068	0.094	0.205	0.348	0.437
Number of observations	262	262	262	262	262

Notes:

1. Standard deviation values are denoted in parentheses.
2. \*\*\*, \*\*, \* denote significance at 1, 5 and 10%, respectively.

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#### **Appendix 1- data resources:**

- The Knesset homepage: <http://knesset.gov.il/main/eng/home.asp>
- Likud's homepage: <https://likud.org.il/>
- Labor's homepage: <http://www.hamahanehazioni.co.il/usorhim/>
- Bayit Yehudi's homepage: <http://www.baityehudi.org.il/>
- <http://www.inn.co.il/Special/Elections/AllCandidate.aspx>
- <https://likud.org.il/likud-youth/%D7%90%D7%95%D7%93%D7%95%D7%AA-%D7%A6%D7%A2%D7%99%D7%A8%D7%99-%D7%94%D7%9C%D7%99%D7%9B%D7%95%D7%93>
- <http://www.kipa.co.il/now/50066.html>
- <https://observpost.wordpress.com/2015/01/07/primary-election-15/>
- <http://www.blacklabor.org/?p=49884>
- The candidates' Facebook and home pages