



[Israeli Court Announces Date for Netanyahu Corruption Trial](#)

This week, court officials announced that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's trial on multiple corruption charges will begin March 17th, two weeks after Israel's upcoming election. Netanyahu was criminally-indicted recently on charges of fraud, breach of trust, and accepting bribes, and is facing a tough re-election campaign against former military chief Benny Gantz. He is accused of accepting lavish gifts and offering regulatory favors to local media moguls in exchange for positive news coverage. The upcoming election on March 2nd will be Israel's third in less than a year, as the previous two have failed to result in the necessary parliamentary majority for a coalition government to be formed. Polls are predicting that yet again, both Netanyahu and Gantz will fall short of securing enough seats and would therefore need to form a unity government, but the prospects for this are unlikely if Netanyahu remains the leader of his Likud party while facing these criminal charges.

Following a multi-year police investigation, Israeli Attorney General Avichai Mandelblit indicted Netanyahu back in November in three different cases against him: Case 1000, Case 2000, and Case 4000. Case 1000 involves lavish gifts that the prime minister allegedly received, while Case 2000 details contacts between Netanyahu and newspaper publisher Arnon Mozes in which the former offered legislation favorable to the latter's newspaper in exchange for positive news coverage. Lastly, Case 4000 involves allegations of beneficial regulatory treatment for the Bezeq telecommunications firm in exchange for favorable news coverage for Netanyahu on their news website.

The criminal indictments against him made Netanyahu the first sitting Israeli prime minister to be formally charged with a crime. He faces up to 10 years in prison if convicted of bribery and a maximum 3-year term for the fraud and breach of trust charges. Netanyahu had filed a request for immunity earlier in the year back in January but later withdrew it after concluding that he did not have enough support in parliament. Netanyahu's upcoming trial is set to be held in the Jerusalem District Court and will consist of a panel of three judges, including Rivka Friedman-Feldman, who was part of the team that convicted former prime minister Ehud Olmert. Back in 2008, Olmert stepped down from his post as prime minister after it appeared that he would be criminally-indicted and later spent time in jail following his conviction.

The impending trial and criminal charges against Netanyahu have further complicated an already murky political atmosphere as Israel prepares for its third election in less than a year. The announcement of the trial date draws renewed attention to Netanyahu's legal troubles and makes it a key issue in the final stretch of the campaign. Additionally, it will have a major effect on political activity after the election, as Gantz has repeatedly said that he is only open to a power-sharing agreement with the Likud party if it is not under Netanyahu's leadership. Therefore, regardless of the election outcome, a necessary compromise between the two major parties in Israel is now less likely due to the ongoing trial and with the incumbent prime minister desperate to hold on to power.