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## Press Release

### ISRAELI ELECTIONS EXPERT PREDICTS NETANYAHU WILL FINISH FIRST

*Prof. Asher Arian says February Election not generating Excitement*

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HARTFORD, Conn. – Asher Arian, a political scientist and one of the world's foremost experts on Israeli elections, this week told an audience in McCook Auditorium that he expects Benjamin Netanyahu, the leader of the right-wing Likud Party, to finish on top in that country's February 10 election.

Even if Netanyahu is the top vote getter, Arian said, the election "will almost certainly result in a coalition government." Indeed, explained Arian, no party has ever won a majority of the vote in 17 previous elections. A major reason for that oddity is that there are 30 political parties on the ballot, although only about 10 will get more than the 2 percent necessary to be a factor in creating a new government.

"If no party gets a majority, they will need to form a coalition," asserted Arian. "Coalition is the key word in Israeli politics."

Arian is the Distinguished Professor of Political Science at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. He established the political science department at Tel Aviv University and was appointed its first head. In 1977, he became dean of Tel Aviv University's Faculty of Social Sciences and held a chair in political science.

On Tuesday, he offered Trinity students and faculty a birds-eye preview of the election for a new prime minister of Israel and members of the 120-seat Parliament, which is known as the Knesset. Unlike the United States – which relies on a winner-take-all system to elect its president and members of Congress – Israel uses a proportional representation system, similar to those in Europe and many countries worldwide.

The Israeli election, which was originally supposed to take place in 2010, was called after Foreign Minister Tzipi Livnis failed in her efforts to form a coalition government in the wake of Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's resignation. Livnis is the leader of the ruling Kadima Party.

But recent polls have shown that the Likud Party has opened a large lead, while the Kadima Party is fading and the Labor Party is disintegrating. "The right is in the ascendancy," said Arian.

He predicted that it will be up to Netanyahu, who previously served a stint as prime minister, to form a coalition government, with Kadima having the most power, followed by Likud and Labor having only "a small piece."

"The right is the future," Arian told his audience. "This is an election that will look more like the past than the future. I don't see any real surprises on the leadership scene."

Despite the deep problems facing Israel, mostly from its hostile neighbors who

refuse to recognize Israel's right to exist, Arian said the election isn't generating much excitement or enthusiasm. "I expect the participation to be lower than ever before," he said.

Arian noted that there seems to be "a general malaise" enveloping the country that has manifested itself as an aversion to politics.

Interestingly, Arian said, most Israelis were hoping that Republican John McCain would win the U.S. presidential election. That was in sharp contrast to American Jews, who supported Democrat Barak Obama by about 75 percent to 25 percent for McCain. The reason for the disparity is because most Israelis associated McCain with President George W. Bush, who is a staunch supporter of Israel. Israelis aren't convinced that Obama will be as strong an ally.

Arian predicted that the results of the Israeli election won't affect efforts to form a lasting peace in the Middle East, though Israel will certainly participate in negotiations if the United States leads the way.

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