



[Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu's Corruption Trial Begins](#)

Earlier this week, embattled Benjamin Netanyahu became the first sitting Israeli prime minister to go on trial. His predecessor, Ehud Olmert, went to prison for corruption but resigned long before his respective trial so he was not in office at the time. Netanyahu is facing criminal charges of fraud, bribery, and breach of trust in a series of cases. He is accused, among other things, of accepting lavish gifts and offering to grant favors to media moguls in exchange for favorable coverage of him and his family. The trial, which was delayed for two months because of the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, begins a week after Netanyahu was sworn in for another term as part of a power-sharing government deal with his political rival Benny Gantz.

Netanyahu, who was officially criminally-indicted back in November of last year, appeared at the Jerusalem District Court with a handful of cabinet ministers from his right-wing Likud party. The hearing lasted for approximately one hour, and the court concluded by stating that Netanyahu did not have to appear in person at the next hearing, which is slated for July 19th. Legal analysts forecast that the trial will last months, if not multiple years. While the hearing was taking place, anti-Netanyahu demonstrators gathered outside his residence in central Jerusalem holding up a banner that read "Crime Minister" and calling for his resignation. Meanwhile, outside the courthouse, supporters rallied in his defense and denounced what they called a "corrupt prosecution seeking to topple a leader of historic proportion."

The sitting prime minister faces criminal charges in multiple cases against him: Case 1000, Case 2000, and Case 4000. Case 1000 centers on allegations that Netanyahu and his wife received gifts in exchange for political favors. In Case 2000, he is accused of seeking a deal with a newspaper publisher to advance legislation which would weaken one of the latter's rivals in return for positive coverage of the former. Case 4000, perhaps the most serious of the bunch, alleges that Netanyahu eased business regulations for the country's largest telecommunications company – Bezeq – in exchange for favorable coverage of the prime minister and his wife on a popular news website.

The beginning of the trial culminated from four years of police investigations and judicial probes into the prime minister's behavior and takes place at a time when the political environment in Israel is particularly contentious. During the past year, three inconclusive elections were held before Netanyahu and his political rival Benny Gantz finally agreed to terms on a rotating power-sharing government which was sworn in last week. The coalition agreement allows Netanyahu to present legislation in support of annexing parts of the occupied West Bank as soon as July 1st, a move that has drawn widespread international condemnation and opposition. Regional and international organizations have stated that any unilateral Israeli action to annex illegal settlements in the occupied West Bank would be viewed as a grave violation of international law, with the European Union threatening to sanction Israel if Netanyahu pushes forward with the plans.