

Israel Votes 2026

Netanyahu, Eisenkot, Bennett
and the battle for 61 seats



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On 27 October 2026, Israelis vote in the first national election since 2022. Israel's elections are a genuine test of a functioning democracy, drawing in voters across every segment of society: Jewish and Arab, Christian and Muslim, Druze, observant and secular alike and are always fiercely contested till the very last day of campaigning.

CAN NETANYAHU REMAIN PRIME MINISTER?

Only if his bloc reaches 61 seats, Israel's system hands the premiership to whoever can build a majority coalition, not necessarily the largest party. As of the latest polling, the pro-Netanyahu bloc sits at roughly 52 of the 120 seats, still short.

WHO CAN REPLACE HIM?

Recent polling has Netanyahu's Likud falling behind Yashar, the party built around former IDF Chief of Staff Gadi Eisenkot, whose rapidly growing support has pulled ahead of Beyachad (Together), the alliance of former prime ministers Naftali Bennett and Yair Lapid, to lead the opposition bloc.

Israel's Political Parties 2026

From left-wing to right-wing

This left-to-right spectrum is based on a range of factors, including stances on the Palestinian issue, Israel's character as Jewish and democratic, and Netanyahu's future as prime minister.



Balad

Anti-Zionist Arab nationalist party
Leader: Sami Abu Shehadeh



Hadash-Ta'al

Alliance of secular Arab parties
Constituent factions: Hadash, Ta'al
Leader: Youssef Jabareen



Ra'am

Israeli Arab communal interests,
Islamism
Leader: Mansour Abbas



The Democrats

Social democracy, liberal Zionism
Constituent factions: Labor, Meretz
Leader: Yair Golan



Yashar

Centrism, security-focused Zionism
Leader: Gadi Eisenkot



Together

Centrism, separation of religion and state,
security-focused Zionism
Constituent factions: Bennett 2026, Yesh Atid
Leader: Naftali Bennett



Yisrael Beiteinu

Secular nationalist party catering to
immigrants from the former Soviet Union
Leader: Avigdor Lieberman



Zionist Home

Center-right, nationalism, separation
of religion and state
Leader: Chilli Tropper



Blue and White

Center-right, statesmanship
Leader: Benny Gantz



United Torah Judaism

Ashkenazi Haredi party
Constituent factions: Agudat Yisrael, Degel HaTorah
Leader: Yitzhak Goldknopf



Shas

Mizrahi Haredi party
Leader: Aryeh Deri



Likud

Dominant right-wing party,
majoritarian nationalist,
hawkish on Palestinian issue
Leader: Benjamin Netanyahu



Religious Zionism

Far-right religious Zionism, settler
interests
Leader: Bezalel Smotrich



Otzma Yehudit

Kahanism, far-right, ultranationalism
Leader: Itamar Ben Gvir

Source: Israel Policy Forum

WHAT COMBINATIONS CAN GET TO 61?

Yisrael Beiteinu under Avigdor Lieberman and the Democrats under Yair Golan are both tipped to clear the threshold, while Shas, United Torah Judaism, Otzma Yehudit and Religious Zionism round out the current governing bloc. Neither bloc currently polls above the 61-seat mark. The contours of the next government are not yet clear, and the balance of power could ultimately rest with a relatively small number of voters and parties. For those watching Israel's political trajectory, this is an election in which every seat, and every coalition partner, could matter.

What combinations can get to 61? Neither bloc currently reaches it alone. The anti-Netanyahu parties, Yashar, Beyachad, Yisrael Beiteinu, the Democrats, sit around 57 seats while the pro-Netanyahu bloc, Likud, Shas, United Torah Judaism, Otzma Yehudit, Religious Zionism, sits around 52. The remaining seats belong to Ra'am and the Reservists-Economy, sitting outside both camps for now.

HOW ISRAELI ELECTIONS WORK

PARTY-BASED SYSTEM

Israelis don't vote for individual candidates, they vote for parties, and the party with the strongest showing usually leads coalition talks and produces the prime minister.

AUTOMATIC REGISTRATION

Every citizen over 18 is registered without applying. Voting day is a public holiday.

A FULL FOUR-YEAR TERM

The Knesset's term runs four years, though early dissolution is common (so common that this is the first government since 1988 to actually see out its full term).

3.25% THRESHOLD

Parties need at least 3.25% of the national vote to claim any of the Knesset's 120 seats, awarded proportionally.

RANKED PARTY LISTS

Parties submit ordered candidate lists in advance, how many seats they win determines how far down that list gets a Knesset seat.

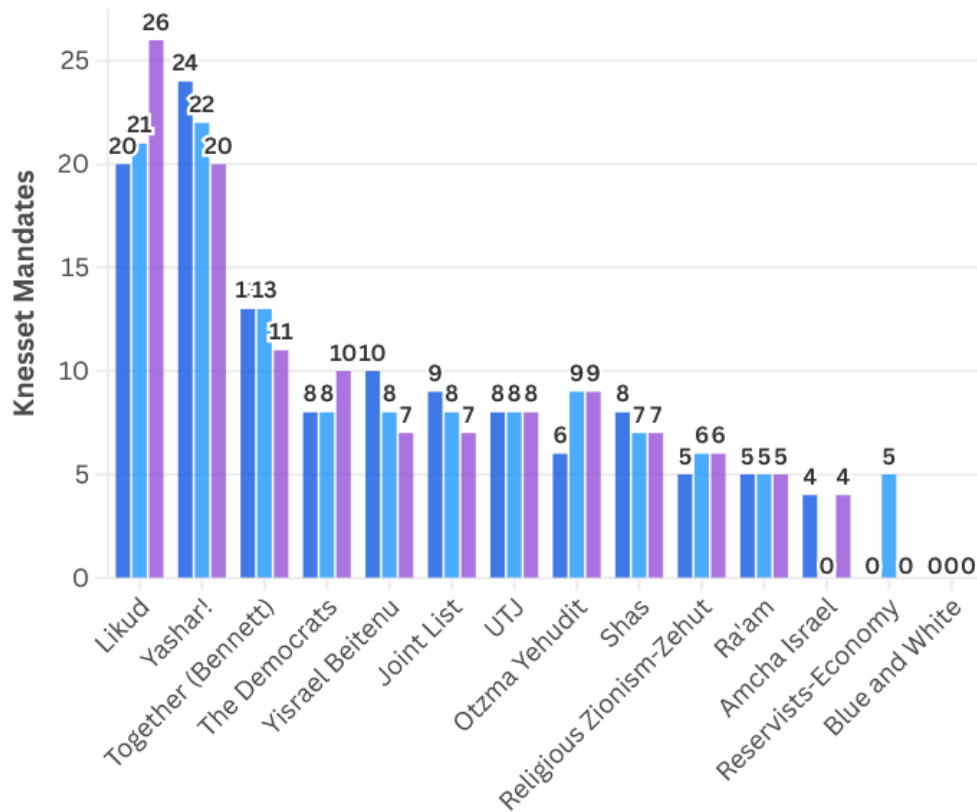
BUILT FOR TURNOUT

Public transport is free on election day and special arrangements exist for hospitals, care homes, prisons and military bases, helping drive turnout to around 70%.



Recent Knesset Polls

■ Zman Israel (10/8) ■ Israel Hayom (10/8) ■ i24 News (10/8)



Source: Israel Policy Forum

FORMING A GOVERNMENT

No party has ever swept the 61 seats needed to govern outright, which makes coalition-building unavoidable after every election. President Isaac Herzog hands the task to a Knesset member, usually, but not always, the head of the biggest party, who then gets up to four weeks, extendable, with as many as three separate attempts, to lock in 61 votes. If none succeed, the country goes back to the polls; that happened five times between April 2019 and November 2022, with the sitting government staying in office throughout.

THE WAY FORWARD

Whoever leads Israel's next government, South African media, parliamentarians and civil society owe the public an accurate account of how Israel's vibrant democracy actually works. The SAZF will keep holding them to that standard and continue its work in building the Israel-South Africa relationship and strengthening the partnership between our nations and the people who live in them.



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