

Israel's 24th Knesset



BREIFING DOCUMENT

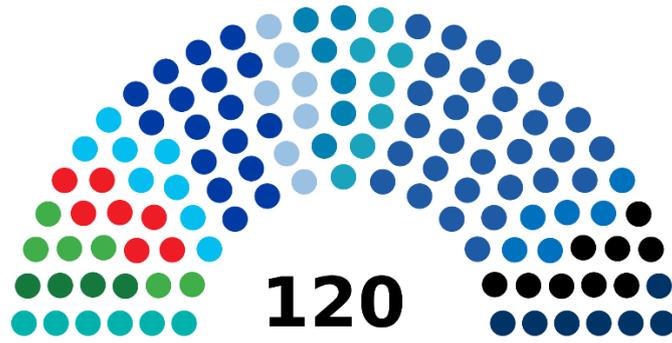
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Israel's new Government

Israel's 24th Knesset in detail



■ HaReshima HaMeshufetef: 6 seats
 ■ Ra'am: 4 seats
 ■ Meretz: 6 seats
 ■ HaAvodá: 7 seats
 ■ KajoI Laván: 8 seats
 ■ Yesh Atid: 17 seats
 ■ Yisrael Beiteinu: 7 seats
 ■ Tikkvá Jadashá: 6 seats
 ■ Yamina: 7 seats
 ■ Likud: 30 seats
 ■ HaTzionut HaDatit: 6 seats
 ■ Shas: 9 seats
 ■ Yahadut HaTorah: 7 seats

On Sunday 13th June, 2021, a new Israeli government was sworn in.

This government will be a significant change in the nature of the leadership in Israel. Read on to find out more about what the differences are with this government, what is unique, and what challenges they may face down the road.

Policy:

In terms of policy, there are not expected to be dramatic changes in national security, the economy and foreign policy.

In an attempt to avoid disagreements within the most [heterogeneous coalition](#) in Israel's history, the leaders of the new government have announced that their goal is to "get Israel back on track and to get the politicians to work for the public".

They are expected to focus more on consensus issues such as:

- building new hospitals in the Negev and Galilee regions.
- Another airport and a university in the Galilee
- Push forward a national project for strengthening and developing northern Israel.
- The status quo on state and religion will be maintained. However, the government will create competition in the field of kosher food certification.
- It will also move to alter the election process for the chief rabbinate to allow for a religious Zionist rabbi to be elected, which in turn could allow city rabbis to oversee conversions to Judaism.

Historic Changes:

- For the first time, the Israeli Prime Minister is a Kippah wearing religious man.
- For the first time since the establishment of the state, an Arab-Muslim party is an integral part of the coalition.
- For the first time in over 20 years, the 'Meretz' party is in a coalition, including Cabinet Ministers.
- For the first time in more than 12 years, Benjamin Netanyahu is not the Prime Minister.
- The number of women in the cabinet is the largest in history. Nine women will sit around the Cabinet table.
- The second Arab minister in the history of the State of Israel will be Issawi Frej from the Meretz party (The first was Raleb Majadele from the Israeli Labor Party).
- Karine Elharrar from Yesh Atid will be the first Israeli Minister with a physical disability, and the first woman to hold the Ministry of Energy.

The coalition will be very diverse and include right-wingers, settlers, hardcore leftists, and religious Muslims.

A little background:

Israel has been in an ongoing political crisis since the early dissolution of the 20th Knesset. (December 2018). In the 21st (April 2019) and 22nd (September 2019) Knesset elections, no one succeeds to form a coalition, and the transitional government continued to serve.

After the elections to the 23rd Knesset (March 2020) and following the global pandemic crisis, Benjamin Netanyahu and Benny Gantz decided to form a Parity Government - a government in which both parties have the right to veto decisions, and has the same number of Ministers. Both Netanyahu and Gantz would serve as Prime Ministers, Netanyahu for the first two years and Gantz for the latter two. To execute the plan, a special legislative amendment was made to the "Basic Law: The Government", which automatically put into practice the change of Prime Ministers on the set date. The only hole in the plan eventually led to the dissolution of the Knesset. After the formation of the government, there were heated debates over a biennial state budget.

Netanyahu's insistence on not passing the biennial state budget at the end of 2020 that would apply to 2020 and 2021 but only an annual budget for a few months at the end of 2020 resulted in no state budget being passed.

In such a case, the Knesset dissipates automatically. Israel went to the polls for the fourth time in two years. After the elections to the 24th Knesset (March 2021), there was once again, no clear decision.

But this time it brought a change in the Israeli political map.

Who is in and who is out?

For a quick guide to the parties, their numbers, and cabinet ministers, see the [“Who’s Who in the 24th Knesset of Israel”](#)

Coalition Parties:

- Yesh Atid
- Blue and White
- Yamina
- Labor
- Yisrael Beiteinu
- New Hope
- Meretz
- United Arab List

Opposition Parties:

- Likud
- Shas
- United Torah Judaism
- Religious Zionist
- Joint List

Israel’s coalition came together largely on the back of attempting to remove Bibi Netanyahu, and must now find common ground beyond that, in order to survive!

Who are the key players in this diverse coalition:

Naftali Bennett and the "Yamina" Party -

Naftali Bennett was a successful businessman and entrepreneur before joining the public service. From 2005-2008, he worked with his political partner Ayelet Shaked as the chief of staff of Benjamin Netanyahu. Bennett was previously the Director-General of the Yesha Council - an umbrella organization that unites the Jewish municipal councils in the West Bank. He was the chairman of the Jewish Home Party from 2012 to 2018.

In the run-up to the April 2019 elections, he and Ayelet Shaked formed a new right-wing party that was a few thousand votes short to get elected to the Knesset. In the next elections, he succeeded in returning to the Knesset. Before the last election, he declared that he did not discount anyone as a potential partner for coalition, and would do everything in his power to prevent the fifth election.

During the crisis with Gaza last month, he announced that "the unity government is off the table", but after that, he got back to the negotiation table with Yair Lapid on the formation of a Government.

Naftali Bennett and members of his party were subjected to abusive language and loud protests near their homes for weeks. The Knesset Guard had to provide security to Yamina's MKs.

One party member, Amichai Shikli, announced that he would vote against the government, and until the last minute, efforts were made to get one of the coalition members to "defect."

There were questions as to whether this government would indeed be formed, however Naftali Bennett has officially become the 13th Prime Minister of the State of Israel.

Yair Lapid and the Yesh Atid party:

Lapid, a former Minister of Finance in the third Netanyahu government, served in the position for less than two years until Netanyahu fired him. Since 2015, he has been a prominent member of the opposition. Lapid has spoken extensively about the need to replace Benjamin Netanyahu. In recent years, he has been very conscious of controversy. He has worked hard to make deals with other parties to form a new coalition, including with Benny Gantz, for whom he gave up his nomination for Prime Minister. Now he let Naftali Bennett be the first in a rotation for Prime Minister.

Avigdor Lieberman and the Yisrael Beiteinu party:

Avigdor Lieberman was a longtime partner of Netanyahu, since Netanyahu's first term as Prime Minister in 1996, when Lieberman served as director of the Prime Minister's Office.

He even joined his party with the Likud party into one list ahead of the 19th Knesset elections. In November 2018, he left the Netanyahu government and the coalition. After the elections to the 21st Knesset in April 2019, he refused to join Netanyahu's government without a promise of passing the Yeshivot Student Recruitment Law (making it law for those studying in Yeshiva to join the army). As a result, Netanyahu failed to form a government, and the political crisis continued.

Lieberman has previously launched an anti-Haredi campaign that included harsh and controversial statements about his former partners.

Lieberman's party member, MK Eli Avidar, split from the "Israel Beiteinu" party in the Knesset a few hours before the big vote, causing a last-minute drama.

Avidar became a single MK faction, following disagreements with Avigdor Lieberman about his role in the new government. Despite this, he voted in favour of the new government and is expected to be part of the coalition.

Nitzan Horowitz and the Meretz Party -

Horowitz is a former journalist and the head of the Meretz party since 2019. In the last elections, he led Meretz alone to achieve six seats at the Knesset after the previous elections, when Meretz gain only three seats as part of a joint list with the Israeli Labor party.

Merav Michaeli and the Israeli Labor Party -

Michaeli has been a Member of Knesset for the Israeli Labor Party since 2013. She is a Social Democrat and an outspoken feminist.

She pioneered gender equality in the Hebrew language.

In light of the previous Labor Party leader, Amir Peretz, entry into the Netanyahu-Gantz government, the Israeli Labor Party dropped below the electoral threshold in the polls. Michaeli breathed new life and managed to bring the party to 7 seats in the Knesset.

Mansour Abbas and United Arab List -

Mansour Abbas is a dentist by profession and a Member of Knesset since 2019. In the last election, he split his party from the Joint List, and it was the first time UAL ran independently for the Knesset. He has taken a pragmatic approach to the relationship between the Arab society and the State of Israel.

He explained that his goal was to promote the needs of Arab society and especially the treatment of the growing rate of crime and homicide in Arab cities.

He did not rule out either the right or the left and met with Netanyahu a few times. Now, after much negotiation, an Arab list has become part of the coalition for the first time in history. Abbas's party member, MK Said al-Harumi, was the only one from the new coalition to abstain from the vote for the government, which made it pass by 60-59 instead of 61-59.

Gideon Sa'ar and the Tikva Hadasha -

Gideon Saar was the Cabinet Secretary of the first Netanyahu government in 1999 and the chairman of the Likud faction led by Netanyahu in 2006. He also served as Minister of Education and Minister of the Interior in previous Netanyahu governments.

At the end of 2020, he announced he was leaving the Likud and established a new party. The party was joined by Likud MKs Sharren Haskel and Ze'ev Elkin (who was considered close to Netanyahu).

Among the Knesset members of "Tikva Hadasha" are Benny Begin, a past Likud MK and the son of the late Prime Minister Menachem Begin and Yoaz Handel, a former spokesman for Benjamin Netanyahu.

Gideon Saar was a significant tie-breaker in the last election when Likud voters decided to vote for his party while pledging not to join Netanyahu's government. Together with his friend, a former Likud member, Ze'ev Elkin, he was a significant factor in building the current unprecedented coalition and joining Naftali Bennett to the Block of Change.

Benny Gantz and the Blue and White party -

Gantz was the IDF Chief of Staff during the Gaza war in 2014 when he worked extensively under Netanyahu. At the end of 2018, he announced a new party in the run-up to the Knesset elections in April 2019. Later, he and Yair Lapid joined forces for a single list called "Blue and White."

During the first three election campaigns, Gantz failed to get 61 MKs to form a government until after the third election and during the corona crisis. Then, he split from Yair Lapid and Yesh Atid and entered as an "alternate prime minister" to a rotating government with Netanyahu. The formation of the government with Netanyahu caused many voters to protest against the move and declare that they would not vote for him again.

Despite Netanyahu's promises to vacate his chair to Gantz in due course, Netanyahu took advantage of the loophole in the agreement and prevented passing the state budget in the Knesset assembly. As a result, Israel went to the fourth election within two years. Gantz was perceived as an honest man who tried to do the right thing and was cheated by Netanyahu. This clean image got him eight seats in the Knesset, despite polls predicting he would not pass the electoral threshold.

In the weeks before the current government's formation, Netanyahu offered Gantz to be the first in a rotating government, but he refused.

What happens next?

Benjamin Netanyahu becomes the opposition leader; he shook Bennett's hand after swearing in the new government and even met with him to transfer his role in an orderly fashion. He refused to perform a ministerial exchange ceremony as is customary in various government ministries. In his speech in the Knesset, he sharply attacked Naftali Bennett and his dangerous government. As it has been in the past, he is expected to be a militant opposition leader who will try to attack the government at every opportunity.

Naftali Bennett and Yair Lapid will need a lot of talent and luck to maintain this narrow and heterogeneous coalition for the next four years.