



المركز العربي للأبحاث ودراسة السياسات  
Arab Center for Research & Policy Studies

situation Assessment | 6 August 2026

# The 2026 Knesset Elections: The Contours of Israel's Political Landscape

Unit for Political Studies

## The 2026 Knesset Elections: The Contours of Israel's Political Landscape

Series: **situation Assessment**

6 August 2026

### Unit for Political Studies

The Unit for Political Studies is the Center's department dedicated to the study of the region's most pressing current affairs. An integral and vital part of the ACRPS' activities, it offers academically rigorous analysis on issues that are relevant and useful to the public, academics and policy-makers of the Arab region and beyond. The Unit for Policy Studies draws on the collaborative efforts of a number of scholars based within and outside the ACRPS. It produces three of the Center's publication series: Situation Assessment, Policy Analysis, and Case Analysis reports.

Copyright © 2026 Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies. All Rights Reserved.

The Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies is an independent research institute and think tank for the study of history and social sciences, with particular emphasis on the applied social sciences.

The Center's paramount concern is the advancement of Arab societies and states, their cooperation with one another and issues concerning the Arab nation in general. To that end, it seeks to examine and diagnose the situation in the Arab world - states and communities- to analyze social, economic and cultural policies and to provide political analysis, from an Arab perspective.

The Center publishes in both Arabic and English in order to make its work accessible to both Arab and non-Arab researchers.

The Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies

Al-Tarfa Street, Wadi Al Banat

Al-Dayeen, Qatar

PO Box 10277, Doha

+974 4035 4111

[www.dohainstitute.org](http://www.dohainstitute.org)

# Table of Contents

- Party Alignments Ahead of the Elections . . . . .1
  - 1. The Yashar Party . . . . .2
  - 2. The Zionist Left . . . . .2
  - 3. Other Parties . . . . .3
  - 4. The Netanyahu Coalition’s Camp . . . . .3
  - 5. Arab Parties . . . . .4
- Public Opinion Polls . . . . .5
- Conclusion . . . . .5

On 17 July 2026, the Israeli Knesset voted to dissolve itself, paving the way for the holding of general elections on the legally mandated date. This will mark the first time since 1988 that the Israeli parliament has completed its full term, and that a government led by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has served its entire mandate. Despite the challenges facing Netanyahu's current coalition – including opposition parties holding him responsible for the blunders surrounding Operation Al Aqsa Flood, Israel's failure to achieve its objectives of the war against Iran, and widespread public opposition to the judicial overhaul initiated by his government upon its formation in late December 2022 – the opposition has failed to topple the government or bring the elections forward. Consequently, the vote is slated for its default scheduled date.

## Party Alignments Ahead of the Elections

Although the map of party alignments and alliances for the elections is still taking shape, with political parties expected to submit their finalized electoral lists to the Central Elections Committee by 8 September, most parties and political forces had already begun to set out their stalls prior to the announcement, anticipating that the election would be brought forward due to the difficulties confronting the Netanyahu government. In this context, Yesh Atid leader Yair Lapid faced and saw off a challenge from his second-in-command Ram Ben-Barak for the leadership of the party, which Lapid founded in 2012.<sup>1</sup> In April 2025, former prime minister Naftali Bennett founded a new party named Bennett 2026, and opinion polls projected it would win more Knesset seats than any other party.<sup>2</sup>

As the election date approaches, contacts have intensified between Bennett and Lapid – former allies in ousting Netanyahu to lead the 2021–2022 “change government” – with a view to establishing a new coalition for the polls. These discussions culminated on 26 April, in an agreement to run on a joint list named “Beyachad” (Together), led by Bennett, with Lapid as his deputy.<sup>3</sup> The Beyachad alliance has not yet presented a comprehensive electoral platform. Despite their different starting points and various points of divergence, they agree on several domestic issues, most notably their hostility toward Netanyahu and their drive to oust him; their opposition to the judicial overhaul (though Lapid's opposition is more intense); their insistence on establishing an official commission of inquiry into what happened on 7 October 2023; and their shared insistence on mandatory military service for the Haredim. Both parties reject Palestinian rights: Bennett shares the far right's stance on the Palestinian issue, and has called for the annexation of more than 60 percent of the occupied West Bank and the expansion of settlements there with the aim of Judaizing the territory. Both parties

<sup>1</sup> Michael Hauser Tov, “Yair Lapid defeated Ram Ben-Barak in the election for the leadership of Yesh Atid, securing 52% of the vote,” *Haaretz*, 28/3/2024 (in Hebrew).

<sup>2</sup> Yuval Karni, “Returning to politics: Naftali Bennett has founded a new party,” *Ynet*, 2/4/2025, accessed 5/8/2026 (in Hebrew), at: <https://acr.ps/hBybH8W>.

<sup>3</sup> Moran Azulay, “Bennett: I am right-wing; I will not rely on Arab parties. Lapid: The Israeli center must rally behind him,” *Ynet*, 26/4/2026, accessed 5/8/2026 (in Hebrew), at: <https://acr.ps/hBybGvB>.

seek to form a government composed exclusively of Zionist parties, and share their opposition to relying on Arab parties to form a government.

## 1. The Yashar Party

On 16 September 2025, Gadi Eisenkot, a former Chief of Staff of the Israeli army, announced the founding of a new party called “Yashar” (“straight” or “honest”),<sup>4</sup> in preparation for the Knesset elections. Eisenkot focused on recruiting leaders and figures with experience in state institutions – particularly the military and security establishments – alongside figures from the economic and technology sectors, business executives, and activists from civil society and protest movements.<sup>5</sup> Among his most prominent military and security recruits are Lieutenant Colonel and Member of the Knesset (MK) Matan Kahana, reservist Major General Tal Russo, former Shin Bet chief Yoram Cohen, economics professor Manuel Trajtenberg, the Netanyahu’s former chief of staff Yoav Horowitz, the former head of the Ministry of Finance’s budget division Shaul Meridor, and tech entrepreneur Nir Zohar.

Eisenkot has positioned his party at the centre of the Israeli political map, aiming to serve as an alternative to the Netanyahu government in addressing the pressing issues facing Israel, particularly on the domestic front. In his manifesto, Eisenkot has outlined 12 goals for his party, chief among them: ensuring Israel’s existence as the national home of the Jewish people and preserving it as a strong, democratic Jewish state; rebuilding Israel following the events of 7 October 2023; bolstering its national security, formulating a new security vision, and strengthening the Israeli military; fortifying Israel’s borders; and transforming the country into a regional power – all while ensuring a stable Jewish majority in preparation for the centennial of the founding of the state, in 2048.<sup>6</sup> However, he has not presented a clear platform regarding the occupied territories or the Palestinian issue, instead talking in general terms about achieving peace. Given the dominance of the far-right in Israeli society, Eisenkot has avoided going into details regarding the Palestinian issue for fear of jeopardizing his electoral prospects, although he will likely be compelled to clarify his stance as the election date approaches.

## 2. The Zionist Left

The Zionist Left has fallen into decline in recent years, nearly vanishing from the Israeli political landscape. Yet it is attempting to reorganize and regroup in preparation for the Knesset elections. On 28 May 2024, leadership elections were held for the Labor Party, resulting in a victory for Yair

---

<sup>4</sup> Michael Hauser Tov and Noa Shpigel, “Eisenkot established a party with Netanyahu’s former chief of staff and Matan Kahana,” *Haaretz*, 16/7/2025, accessed 5/8/2026, (in Hebrew), at: <https://acr.ps/hBybGWk>.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Official website of the Yashar party, “Party Goals,” accessed 5/8/2026 (in Hebrew) at: <https://acr.ps/hBybHn3>.

Golan,<sup>7</sup> the former Deputy Chief of Staff of the Israeli military. During his leadership campaign, Golan announced plans to establish a unified political entity comprising both the Labor and Meretz parties – the latter having failed to secure a single Knesset seat in the previous election after falling short of the electoral threshold. On 30 June 2024, Labor and Meretz reached an agreement to merge and form a new party named “The Democrats.” They each party retained their organizational structures, and agreed to reserve spots for Meretz in the electoral list; they selected this list on 20 July 2026, in a process involving 97,000 party members, representing 86 percent of the party’s total membership.<sup>8</sup>

The foundational principles of the Labor-Meretz unity agreement stated that Israel is the national homeland of the Jewish people and a Jewish, democratic state that guarantees full equality of social and political rights for all its citizens. These principles also affirmed that preserving Israel’s Jewish and democratic character requires reaching a political solution with the Palestinians, based on the two-state solution and the establishment of a Palestinian state alongside Israel.

### 3. Other Parties

The Yisrael Beiteinu party led by Avigdor Lieberman, whose is primarily made up of Jewish voters who immigrated to Israel from the former Soviet Union, has yet to form its electoral list. The party is likely to run in the Knesset elections independently, separate from the Beyachad or Yashar parties.

New electoral lists are expected to emerge, led by activists who have left Netanyahu’s Likud party (or intend to do so) due to disagreements with the premier, or by activists from the Blue and White party (led by former opposition leader Benny Gantz) or other parties, all attempting to position themselves between Netanyahu’s camp and the opposition. In July, MK Hili Tropper, a former minister who defected from Blue and White, founded a new political party named Bayit Tzioni – HaMiluimnikim (Zionist Home – The Reservists) in collaboration with Yoaz Hendel, head of the Miluimnikim (Reservists) party, which had championed the cause of IDF reservists.<sup>9</sup>

### 4. The Netanyahu Coalition’s Camp

In preparation for the Knesset elections, Netanyahu has sought to consolidate his control over his Likud party and its electoral list. To this end, he has insisted that the party convention grant him the authority to appoint eight candidates to the top 30 spots on the Likud list. The convention approved Netanyahu’s request, granting him the right to appoint two figures within the first 10 slots, three

7 Moran Azulay, “With over 95 percent of the vote, Yair Golan elected to lead the Labor Party,” *Ynet*, 28 May 2024, accessed 5/8/2026 (in Hebrew), at: <https://acr.ps/hBybGJI>.

8 Anna Barsky, “The Democrats’ party elections concluded: Those elected to the top of the list,” *Maariv*, 20/7/2026, accessed 5/8/2026 (in Hebrew), at: <https://acr.ps/hBybHar>.

9 Moran Azulay, “Moving past the split: Here are the founders of the Tropper / Hendel party,” *Ynet*, 7/7/2026, accessed 5/8/2026 (in Hebrew), at: <https://acr.ps/hBybGx6>.

more within the second 10, and another three within the third.<sup>10</sup> Netanyahu is hoping this will strengthen his grip on the party, enabling him to retain the leadership even if it loses in the elections. The Likud party is scheduled to select its Knesset electoral list on 17 August; this is likely to trigger fierce competition among party leaders as they grapple for top positions.

The Religious Zionism Party – led by Bezalel Smotrich, a hardline minister in Netanyahu’s government – on 26 July selected its Knesset electoral list, in which its most extremist figures won the top spots.<sup>11</sup> Neither the Jewish Power (Otzma Yehudit) party – led by Itamar Ben-Gvir, another far-right minister in Netanyahu’s government – nor the Shas or United Torah Judaism parties, hold internal elections to determine their electoral lists; Ben-Gvir appoints his list directly, while the religious leaderships of Shas and United Torah Judaism appoint their respective lists.

## 5. Arab Parties

Electoral experience over the past few years has demonstrated that Arab parties in Israel achieve greater parliamentary representation when they contest Knesset elections on a joint list. When the Joint Arab List was formed in 2015, it secured 13 Knesset seats; that figure rose to 15 seats in the 2020 elections. Conversely, when these parties ran on two or three separate lists, their representation fell to 10 seats or fewer. This stems from the fact that Arab voter turnout rises significantly when Arab parties run on a joint list; for instance, Arab participation reached 64.8 percent during the 2020 elections, whereas it dropped to 44.6 percent in 2021, when the parties contested Knesset polls on two separate lists.<sup>12</sup>

In response to public pressure, the Arab parties in early 2026 signed a preliminary accord to form a joint list. However, United Arab List (Ra’am) leader Mansour Abbas, who seeks to bring his party into the governing coalition, since reneged on his commitment to run on such a list. He has continued to oppose a joint platform for two primary reasons. Firstly, he believes that running on a joint list with other Arab parties would diminish his party’s chances of being accepted into a government coalition, regardless of the latter’s composition. Secondly, he is seeking to recruit Yesh Atid MK and retired policeman Yoav Segalovitz, who previously served as Deputy Minister of Internal Security in the “Change Government” and specializes in combating organized crime, offering him the second spot and nominating him as Minister of Internal Security in the next government.<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> “Likud conference approves by a large majority granting Netanyahu 8 reserved spots on the Likud list,” *Haaretz*, 27/7/2026, accessed 5/8/2026 (in Hebrew), at: <https://acr.ps/hBybGXP>.

<sup>11</sup> Yael Freidson, “Religious Zionism primary results: Strock and Rothman in the top spots,” *Haaretz*, 26/7/2026.

<sup>12</sup> Assaf Shapira and Gideon Rahat, “Running in Joint Lists: Good for Whom?” Israel Democracy Institute website, 27/4/2026; accessed 5/8/2026 (in Hebrew), at: <https://acr.ps/hBybGLd>.

<sup>13</sup> Jack Khoury, “The United Arab List’s Move Could Change the Rules of the Game; The Question Is Whether Saglovich Seeks to Improve His Standing,” *Haaretz*, 2/8/2026.

Meanwhile, following the refusal of Abbas to form a joint list, the Democratic Front for Peace and Equality (Hadash) and the National Democratic Assembly (Balad) have reached an agreement to run in the Knesset elections on a joint list. This would also include the Arab Movement for Change (Ta'al), if possible, without definitively closing the door on the formation of a four-party joint list.

## Public Opinion Polls

Recent opinion polls project that Netanyahu's camp will win 49–52 of the Knesset's 120 seats, while parties in the Zionist opposition camp are expected to secure a total of 56–60. The Arab parties are projected to win 10 or 11. This implies that the anti-Netanyahu camp cannot form a government without relying on one of the Arab parties.

A public opinion poll conducted on 3 August, projected the distribution of Knesset seats as follows:

- Yashar and Likud: 23 seats each.
- Beyachad: 14 seats.
- The Democrats: 10 seats.
- Yisrael Beiteinu: nine seats.
- United Torah Judaism: eight seats.
- Shas and Jewish Power: seven seats each.
- Religious Zionism: five seats.
- The Arab Front for Change: five seats.
- The Southern Islamic Movement (led by Abbas and running under the banner of the United Arab List): five seats.
- The Jewish Home party: four seats.<sup>14</sup>

## Conclusion

The upcoming Knesset elections are among the most significant in Israel's history, and their outcome is highly unpredictable, particularly at this early stage. Opinion polls in recent months have consistently indicated that the anti-Netanyahu camp should secure the bulk of Knesset seats; should it win more than 60 seats – half the legislature – it could form a coalition government without relying on a single Arab party. However, given the growing prevalence of racism within Israeli society, and the descent of broad segments of the public into extremism, the anti-Netanyahu camp would be hard pressed to resort to an Arab party in forming a new government. Nevertheless, there are alternative arrangements, such as conditional support from outside the coalition, that could prevent a return to new elections – a scenario that in the past paved the way for Netanyahu's return.

---

<sup>14</sup> "Channel 12 Poll: 60 Seats for Jewish Opposition Parties, 23 for Likud and Eisenkot," *Haaretz*, 3/8/2026, accessed 5/8/2026 (in Hebrew), at: <https://acr.ps/hBybHoy>.