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The 2026 Knesset Elections: Parties, Political Camps, and the Race to Power

Unit for Political Studies

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The Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies

Al-Tarfa Street, Wadi Al Banat

Al-Dayaen, Qatar

PO Box 10277, Doha

+974 4035 4111

www.dohainstitute.org

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On 7 and 8 September 2026, Israeli parties submitted their electoral lists for the 26th Knesset elections, scheduled to take place on 27 October 2026. Some 38 electoral lists are competing to attract 7,337,000 eligible voters – an increase of approximately 548,000 compared with the previous Knesset elections, held in 2022.¹ Only 12 electoral lists are expected to cross the electoral threshold of 3.25 per cent of the total votes cast and secure parliamentary representation. Israel's proportional representation system means the entire country constitutes a single electoral constituency. Each electoral list that crosses the threshold is allocated a number of seats corresponding to its share of the total votes cast. Of all the Jewish parties, only three held primary elections to select their electoral lists: Likud, the Democrats, and the Religious Zionist party. The leaders of the remaining parties selected their electoral lists themselves. By contrast, all the Arab parties elected their candidate lists.

The Likud List and Efforts to Consolidate the Governing Parties

Likud held its primary elections for the Knesset electoral list on 17 August 2026. Party leader, Benjamin Netanyahu, sought to place his allies, specifically those who support his policies concerning the judicial reforms initiated by his government in 2023, in prominent positions on the electoral list, while pushing many Likud leaders with ambitions to lead the party down the list, thereby reducing their chances of being elected.² The Likud Party Conference authorized Netanyahu to appoint eight candidates to the party's list for the Knesset elections. However, Netanyahu failed to attract figures with significant electoral appeal, leading him to appoint figures who are unpopular among Likud grassroots, including Defence Minister Israel Katz, Foreign Minister Gideon Sa'ar, far-right populist commentator Yaakov Bardugo, and candidates from the families of those killed and wounded in Israel's genocidal war on the Gaza Strip.³ He has subsequently tightened his control over the candidate list, enabling him to retain his leadership of the opposition should he lose the election. Opinion polls project that Likud will win between 20 and 23 seats in the Knesset, significantly down from the 32 seats it currently holds.

Netanyahu is also facing some dissent in his camp, including difficulties in persuading some of the far-right parties in his governing coalition not to risk running independently. Doing so could fragment the vote and jeopardize their chances of crossing the electoral threshold. Netanyahu failed to convince the Religious Zionist Party, led by Bezalel Smotrich, and Otzma Yehudit, led by Itamar Ben-Gvir, to run on a joint electoral list.⁴ He also failed to persuade Ofer Winter, a retired Israel Defense Forces brigadier general with fascist leanings who currently leads the Amcha Yisrael (People of Israel) party, to run on a joint list with the Religious Zionist Party, which he previously belonged to. He did, however, succeed in persuading Smotrich and Moshe Feiglin, leader of Zehut, to form a joint list for the Knesset elections.

¹ "Information for Voters," Central Elections Committee for the Knesset, accessed 14/9/2026, <https://acr.ps/hBy2shp> [Hebrew].

² Ravit Hecht, "The Removal of the Official Fig Leaf and the Rise of Judicial-Overhaul Supporters More Clearly Revealed Likud's True Face," *Haaretz*, 18/8/2026, accessed on 14/9/2026, at: <https://acr.ps/hBy2sy0> [Hebrew].

³ Noa Spiegel and Michael Hauser Tov, "Likud Submits Its Knesset List: Bardugo in Eleventh Place, Tally Gotliv in Ninth," *Haaretz*, 8/9/2026, accessed on 14/9/2026, at: <https://acr.ps/hBy2sOB> [Hebrew].

⁴ Yehonatan Lis and Michael Hauser Tov, "Netanyahu Invited Ben-Gvir and Smotrich to a Meeting; Jewish Power: We Will Not Run Together in the Knesset Elections," *Haaretz*, 28/8/2026, at: <https://acr.ps/hBy2t5c> [Hebrew].

Far-Right Lists

Four fascist parties are contesting the Knesset elections on three electoral lists. Their campaign manifestos all call for the forced expulsion of Palestinians from the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including occupied Jerusalem, territories they seek to annex to Israel. These parties support Netanyahu's judicial reforms and the establishment of an authoritarian system of government free from checks and balances, particularly judicial constraints, that limit the arbitrary exercise of governmental power. The lists comprise Ben-Gvir's Otzma Yehudit; a joint list of the Religious Zionist Party and Zehut, led by Smotrich and Feiglin respectively; and the Amcha Yisrael party list. Ben-Gvir leads a number of hard-line extremists, most notably Knesset member Tally Gotliv, who defected from Likud following a dispute with Netanyahu and her accusation that he had intervened against her in the Likud Knesset list elections.⁵ Opinion polls project that Otzma Yehudit will win between 7 and 8 seats in the Knesset.

With Netanyahu's assistance, Smotrich and Feiglin reached an agreement on 1 September 2026 to contest the election on a joint list in order to ensure that they cross the electoral threshold. Smotrich heads the list, followed by Feiglin, whose party occupies the tenth and eleventh positions on the list.⁶ Feiglin is a match for Smotrich in his extremism and racism. He has called for the expulsion of every last Palestinian from Gaza and for Gaza City to be transformed into a Jewish city. He also called for the occupation of southern Lebanon as far as the Zaharani River, the expulsion of its Lebanese population, and its annexation to Israel.⁷ Opinion polls project that the list will win between 4 and 5 seats in the Knesset.

The Amcha Yisrael party, which was established in late August 2026 to contest the Knesset elections, announced in its founding statement its categorical opposition to the establishment of a Palestinian state, declaring that "the solution in Gaza is emigration". Its leader, Winter, is seeking to attract support from Israel's hard-line extremists, both religious and secular.⁸ Opinion polls project that the list will win 4 seats in the Knesset.

The traditional religious parties, meanwhile, are organized into two electoral lists, represented by Shas and United Torah Judaism. Aryeh Deri heads the Shas electoral list, which has recently experienced a decline in electoral strength amid the crisis over the conscription of Haredi Jews into the Israeli army, as well as the dispute between Deri and Rabbi Yitzhak Yosef, son of Shas founder and spiritual leader Rabbi Ovadia Yosef. Shas won 11 seats in the 2022 Knesset elections. Opinion polls project that it will win 7 seats in the upcoming October elections. Shas draws support from two distinct constituencies among Mizrahi Jews: the traditionalist constituency, a substantial proportion of whose members perform military service, and the Haredi constituency, which rejects military service. The imposition of

⁵ Yehoshua Breiner et al., "Jewish Power List: Dorfman in Seventh Place and Activist with a Kach Tattoo in Eighth," *Haaretz*, 7/9/2026, accessed on 14/9/2026, at: <https://acr.ps/hBy2shJ> [Hebrew].

⁶ "Feiglin and Smotrich to Run Together in a 'Technical' List," *Ynet*, 1/9/2026, accessed on 14/9/2026, at: <https://acr.ps/hBy2syk> [Hebrew].

⁷ Tzion Benjo, "Without Preconceptions or Rounds: Feiglin's Guide to Changing the Security Establishment," *Aghashav*, 2/6/2026, accessed on 14/9/2026, at: <https://acr.ps/hBy2sOV> [Hebrew].

⁸ Yehonatan Lis, "Winter at the Launch of His Party: 'The Solution in Gaza Is One – Emigration'," *Haaretz*, 25/8/2026, accessed on 14/9/2026, at: <https://acr.ps/hBy2t5w> [Hebrew].

sanctions on Haredim who evade military service has fuelled discontent among Haredi Jews of Mizrahi background with the Shas leadership, both because of its inability to prevent the measures and because the party leadership's hard-line opposition to Haredi conscription has alienated the Haredi constituency whose sons serve in the army. In an attempt to ease the crisis, Deri recognized Rabbi Yosef as the spiritual leader of the Shas movement, while retaining his position as its political leader.⁹

United Torah Judaism, which combines Degel HaTorah and Agudat Yisrael and represents the Ashkenazi Haredim, is expected to maintain its electoral strength, with opinion polls projecting that it will win around 8 seats in the Knesset.

Lists Opposed to Netanyahu

Four party lists belonging to the camp opposed to Netanyahu are contesting the parliamentary elections: Yashar, led by former IDF Chief of Staff Gadi Eisenkot; Beyachad, led by Naftali Bennett and Yair Lapid; the Democrats, led by former Deputy Chief of Staff Yair Golan; and Yisrael Beiteinu, led by Avigdor Lieberman. While the parties in the far-right camp are united behind Netanyahu, the leaders of the opposing camp are competing among themselves for leadership. Nevertheless, the continued lead of Eisenkot's Yashar over its rivals in opinion polls makes him the strongest candidate for prime minister should this camp win the election.

Despite the fundamental ideological differences between these parties and variations in their political and social manifestos, they share hostility towards Netanyahu and a determination to remove him from office, and, to varying degrees, oppose the judicial reforms. They also share a commitment to the assertion that Israel is a Jewish and democratic state, a determination to establish a formal judicial inquiry into security failures on 7 October 2023, and a commitment to conscripting Haredim.

On the Palestine question, the parties in this camp generally agree that, under any final settlement with the Palestinians, Jewish settlements in the settlement blocs in the West Bank and occupied Jerusalem should remain under Israeli rule. They also seek to marginalize the issue and deny the Palestinian people's right to self-determination and an independent state. These parties seek to form a government of exclusively Jewish Zionist parties. With the exception of the Democrats, they not only oppose the inclusion of an Arab party in the governing coalition but also reject any reliance on the support of Arab parties to sustain the government. Thus, they insist on relying on a Jewish majority in the Knesset, which they do not appear capable of securing at present.

Yashar founder Eisenkot took care to ensure that his party's Knesset electoral list represented different segments of Israeli society. It is composed equally of men and women and includes figures with experience in state institutions, particularly the military and security establishment; business figures; tech sector figures; economists; local-government leaders; representatives of protest movements; candidates from the families of those killed and taken hostage during Israel's genocide in Gaza; and Knesset members who previously belonged to Yesh Atid and Blue and White. Among them is Hili Tropper,

⁹ Aharon Rabinovitch, "After Being Appointed Spiritual Leader, Rabbi Yitzhak Yosef Again Aligns with Shas Positions," *Haaretz*, 10/9/2026, accessed on 14/9/2026, at: <https://acr.ps/hBy2si3> [Hebrew].

who recently broke away from Blue and White and established Zionist Home – The Reservists, but opted to join Yashar's list in a prominent position, fearing that his party would fail to cross the electoral threshold.¹⁰ Eisenkot has positioned his party at the centre of Israel's political spectrum, presenting it as an alternative to Netanyahu's government, particularly in addressing pressing domestic issues. Opinion polls project that the Yashar list will win between 23 and 25 seats in the Knesset.

Bennett and Lapid lead the Beyachad list, which they established on 26 April 2026 through an alliance between their respective parties, Bennett 2026 and Yesh Atid, at a time when opinion polls suggested that together they could win around 26 Knesset seats. However, support for the list in these polls soon declined, eventually settling at between 12 and 14 Knesset seats in recent weeks.

Golan meanwhile leads the Democrats, which was formed through the merger of the Labor and Meretz parties in June 2024 in an effort to halt the decline of the traditional Zionist left and prevent it from losing its Knesset representation altogether. The party elected its electoral list on 20 July 2026, and opinion polls project that it will win between 10 and 11 Knesset seats. Lieberman heads the Yisrael Beiteinu electoral list, whose core electoral base remains Russian Jewish immigrants who arrived in Israel during the mass immigration from the former Soviet Union in the 1990s. Opinion polls project that the list will win between 9 and 10 Knesset seats.

Arab Party Lists

The Arab parties are contesting the elections on two lists: the Joint Arab List and the United Arab List – Ra'am. The Joint Arab List comprises three parties: Hadash, Balad, and Ta'al. Islamist party Ra'am, meanwhile, has formed an alliance with Yoav Segalovich, a retired Israel Police brigadier general, who occupies second place on its electoral list. Despite popular pressure and extensive efforts to form a single electoral list encompassing all the Arab parties, Ra'am rejected this proposal and insisted on contesting the elections in alliance with Segalovich, as part of its persistent efforts to join the governing coalition following the election results. Opinion polls project that the Joint Arab List will win between 8 and 9 Knesset seats, while Ra'am is expected to win between 4 and 5 seats.

Conclusion

The forthcoming Knesset elections are set to be among the most consequential in Israel's history, as they could bring down one of the country's longest-serving and most hardline prime ministers. Polls suggest that the camp opposed to Netanyahu is likely to outperform his own camp in seat count, although it remains to be seen whether they will secure the 61 seats required to form a government. Given the widespread racism in Israeli society, however, and the refusal of most parties in the anti-Netanyahu camp to rely on an Arab party, forming a government without changing their position will be difficult, if not impossible.

¹⁰ Noa Spiegel, "Eisenkot's List Is Full of Candidates Without Parliamentary Experience and with Unclear Positions," *Haaretz*, 9/9/2026, accessed on 14/9/2026, at: <https://acr.ps/hBy2syE> [Hebrew].