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INSIGHT

Israel: 2026 Elections and Government Formation

October 30, 2026

Amid a number of overlapping, open-ended conflicts in the Middle East, changes to the composition of Israel's government resulting from the October 27, 2026, Knesset (parliament) elections could have major implications for the country's future direction, global standing, and relations with the United States.

Initial Results and Possible Outcomes

The right-of-center Likud party of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu garnered the highest number of Knesset seats (27 out of 120 total; see **Figure 1**). While Likud and the bloc of parties purportedly aligned with it won more seats (53) than the rival bloc (48) led by the centrist Yashar party headed by Gadi Eisenkot, neither bloc has clear Knesset majority support to form a government. Arab-led parties who oppose Netanyahu won the other seats (a record-high 19) and could possibly play a role in the outcome. Netanyahu has raised allegations of election fraud related to Arab-led parties; some Israeli authorities have opened an investigation, while others have indicated the allegations lack evidence.

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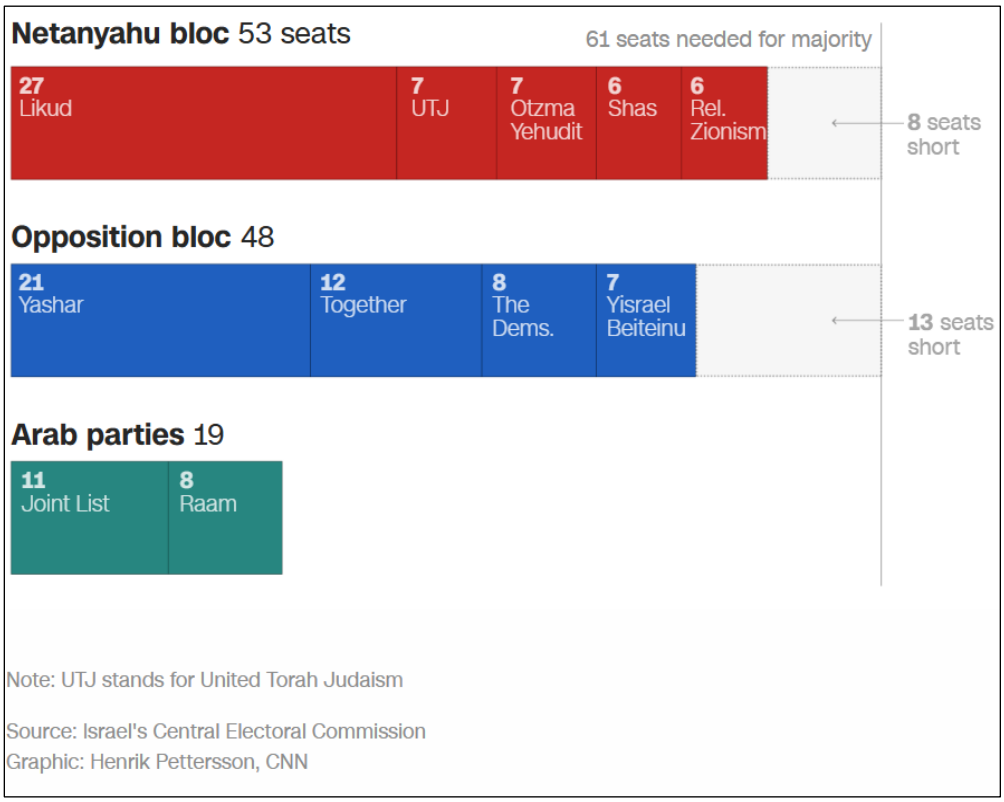
Figure 1. Unofficial Israeli Knesset Election Results

(October 2026)



Under Israeli law, within seven days of the election results' publication on November 4, President Isaac Herzog will assign the task of forming a government over the next 28 days (with the possibility of a 14-day extension), presumably to the Knesset member he deems is best positioned to succeed in its formation. If that member cannot organize a government, other figures may be given the opportunity to form a government.

In the event of a post-election stalemate, Netanyahu's current government would remain in power on a caretaker basis until another election, probably occurring in early 2027. Netanyahu is Israel's longest-tenured leader (1996-1999, 2009-2021, and 2022-present), and he has been on trial for various corruption-related criminal charges since 2020. He led successive caretaker governments for over a year amid inconclusive elections in April 2019 and September 2019, shortly after Israel's police recommended in 2018 that he be indicted.

Key questions include the following:

- Will the uncertainty surrounding this election's results compel a **power-sharing arrangement**, perhaps featuring a prime ministerial rotation between Netanyahu and Eisenkot? Netanyahu could possibly "leverage the prospect of" renewed U.S.-Israel military action against Iran to pressure rivals into a unity government. At the same time, Eisenkot's bloc might have clout in power-sharing negotiations given the potential for a new Knesset (set to convene on November 10) to legislate limits on Netanyahu's ability to remain prime minister if Israel goes to another round of elections. Before the election, Eisenkot rejected the idea of a deal allowing Netanyahu to serve as prime minister.

- Are the parties in Eisenkot's bloc willing to form a **minority government** by partnering with the Arab-led Ra'am party and receiving passive backing from the Arab-led Joint List, despite open opposition within the bloc during the campaign to accepting Arab support? Ra'am was part of the eight-party coalition that unseated Netanyahu in 2021 and eventually dissolved in 2022. The Hamas-led October 7, 2023, attacks on Israel may have negatively affected some Jewish attitudes toward Arab involvement in Israeli governance. Reportedly, Eisenkot's stated conditions for coalition partners would apparently require Ra'am to recognize Hamas as a terrorist organization that should be destroyed.

Implications for U.S. Policy

Since October 2023, the Netanyahu government has directed Israeli military operations that have meaningfully degraded threats to Israel from Iran and its allies in Gaza and Lebanon, while also resulting in tens of thousands of civilian casualties and impacting regional stability. Within Netanyahu's government, ultra-nationalist cabinet ministers Bezalel Smotrich and Itamar Ben Gvir have helped direct policies regarding Israeli settlements and security forces in the West Bank that appear to have exacerbated tensions and violence with Palestinians.

It is unclear to what extent a new government might or might not modify Israeli policies in light of ongoing debate about the future of U.S.-Israel relations and some sanctions against Israel by other Western countries. Netanyahu's opponents do not appear to have articulated a clear strategic alternative to Israel's post-October 2023 policies of preempting regional threats (including from Iran) and holding territorial buffer zones within Gaza, Lebanon, and Syria. While Eisenkot has pledged that a Palestinian state would not be established under his rule, a change in Israel's government could reportedly reverse or check some Israeli policies regarding the West Bank that arguably embolden extremists and undermine the Palestinian Authority's limited self-rule. Eisenkot also seeks a formal state commission of inquiry into the October 2023 attacks, the repeal of laws passed under the previous government that would increase political involvement in Israel's judicial system, and some form of national service for all Israeli citizens to address a contentious dispute over the military conscription of ultra-Orthodox (Haredi) Jews.

President Donald Trump endorsed Netanyahu near the end of the campaign. Prior to the election, Netanyahu reportedly talked with U.S. and European officials about the idea of a unity government with Eisenkot and without the ultra-nationalists Ben Gvir and Smotrich. According to one media source, such a coalition may be more inclined to support U.S.-backed policies in the region and could increase the prospects of bolstering the Abraham Accords. Such an arrangement could conceivably involve a presidential pardon by Herzog for Netanyahu.

Assessment and Issues for Congress

While the Trump Administration continues to engage in close security cooperation with Israel, some Members of the 119th Congress—including some who have expressed criticism of the impact Israeli actions have had on Palestinian or Lebanese civilians—have opposed or have proposed conditions on certain military sales to Israel (S.J.Res. 32 and H.R. 3565). Some Members have proposed West Bank-related sanctions that target either (1) Israeli settlement construction that arguably might impede the viability of a future Palestinian state (S. 5476 and H.R. 10642), or (2) persons threatening "peace, security, or stability of the West Bank" (H.R. 3045 and S. 2667).

Amid ongoing U.S. and international debate regarding Israel's post-October 2023 actions, the extent to which Israel continues or changes the Netanyahu government's policies could affect congressional scrutiny of or opposition to continued U.S. military assistance or defense industrial integration (such as in the FY2027 National Defense Authorization Act, H.R. 8800 and S. 4784). Any Israeli government will

face challenges in balancing domestic national security priorities, resource constraints, and political considerations alongside U.S. and international objectives in the Middle East, which may include overall stability; closer Arab-Israeli political, military, and trade ties; humanitarian and human rights concerns; and proposed transitions or reforms in Gaza, the West Bank, Lebanon, and Syria.

Author Information

Jim Zanotti
Specialist in Middle Eastern Affairs

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