

JCJ 2026

Israel Election Guide

Understanding Israel's Parliamentary Democracy

Election Day: October 27, 2026

A practical guide to how Israelis vote, how governments are formed, and the parties competing for seats in the Knesset.

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ISRAEL'S POLITICAL SYSTEM

Understanding Israeli Democracy

Israel is a parliamentary democracy with a 120-member Knesset, the name of Israel's parliament. Unlike the United States, Israel does not have separate legislative chambers, and Israelis do not directly elect a prime minister. Instead, voters cast one vote for a political party.

Seats in the Knesset are distributed roughly according to each party's share of the national vote. A government is then formed from within the Knesset through coalition negotiations.

Seats in the Knesset	Seats needed for a governing majority
120	61

Minimum national vote share to receive representation	Seats needed for a governing majority
3.25%	1

The biggest difference from the United States?

Israelis vote for a political party, not directly for a prime minister or an individual representative from their community.

This system allows a wide range of political, religious, ideological, and ethnic communities to gain representation. It also means smaller parties can become important when larger parties need their support to assemble a governing majority.

FROM VOTE TO GOVERNMENT

How Does an Election Become a Government?

Election Day determines the composition of the Knesset. Coalition negotiations determine which parties ultimately form the government.

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|----|--|
| 01 | ISRAELIS VOTE
Voters cast one vote for a political party/list. |
| 02 | VOTES BECOME SEATS
Parties that clear the 3.25% threshold receive representation in the 120-seat Knesset. |
| 03 | THE PRESIDENT CONSULTS THE PARTIES
After the election, the president consults representatives of the elected parties and assigns a Knesset member the task of trying to form a government. |
| 04 | COALITION NEGOTIATIONS BEGIN
Parties negotiate over whether they can govern together, including policy priorities and ministerial responsibilities. |
| 05 | A GOVERNMENT NEEDS A MAJORITY
A government must secure the confidence of at least 61 members of the Knesset. |

What about the opposition?

Members outside the governing coalition still vote on legislation and budgets, serve on committees, participate in hearings, scrutinize the government, and represent the public.

ELECTION DAY

How Does Voting Work in Israel?

Israelis generally vote in person on Election Day at the polling station assigned to them based on their registered residence. Election Day is a public holiday for most workers.

At the Polling Station

- | | |
|----|--------------------------------------|
| 01 | Receive an envelope |
| 02 | Go behind the privacy screen |
| 03 | Choose a paper slip for a party/list |
| 04 | Place the slip in the envelope |
| 05 | Put the envelope in the box |

One vote, one party. Voters are not directly casting a ballot for Netanyahu, Eisenkot, Bennett, or another candidate for prime minister.

Voting Away From Your Assigned Polling Station

Special arrangements exist for certain voters who cannot use their normal polling station, including soldiers, hospitalized patients, prisoners, some people with mobility limitations, and eligible members of Israel's diplomatic and foreign service.

Ordinary Israeli citizens living or traveling abroad generally cannot vote from overseas and must return to Israel to cast a ballot.

CURRENT GOVERNING PARTIES

Parties in the Current Coalition

Seat projections reflect the polling snapshot used for this guide and are not election results. Projections may change as Election Day approaches.

LIKUD

21 seats

Leader: Benjamin Netanyahu

Political orientation: Right wing

Likud is the party of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and has been the dominant party on Israel's political right for much of the past three decades.

OTZMA YEHUDIT (JEWISH POWER)

6 seats

Leader: Itamar Ben-Gvir

Political orientation: Far right / nationalist

Otzma Yehudit emphasizes settlement expansion and security policy and draws support from several right-wing constituencies.

RELIGIOUS ZIONISM

6 seats

Leader: Bezalel Smotrich

Political orientation: Far right / religious Zionist / nationalist

Religious Zionism supports settlement expansion and draws heavily from observant religious-Zionist voters, including residents of West Bank settlements.

SHAS

8 seats

Leader: Religious council of Torah sages

Political orientation: Ultra-Orthodox / Haredi

Shas primarily represents Mizrahi ultra-Orthodox Jews. Its priorities include preserving draft exemptions for yeshiva students and state support for religious study.

UNITED TORAH JUDAISM

8 seats

Leader: Two parties running on a joint list

Political orientation: Ultra-Orthodox / Haredi

United Torah Judaism primarily represents Ashkenazi Haredi voters and combines Degel HaTorah and Agudat Yisrael on a joint list.

OPPOSITION PARTIES

Major Opposition Parties

Seat projections reflect the polling snapshot used for this guide and are not election results. Projections may change as Election Day approaches.

YASHAR

25 seats

Leader: Gadi Eisenkot

Political orientation: Centrist

Priorities include broader national service, opposition to a Palestinian state, establishing an October 7 investigatory commission, drafting a constitution based on Israel's Declaration of Independence, and prime-ministerial term limits.

BEYACHAD (TOGETHER)

13 seats

Leader: Naftali Bennett

Political orientation: Center-right

Priorities include a state October 7 commission, prime-ministerial term limits, drafting a constitution, and strengthening alliances intended to support Israel's security. Yair Lapid, the founder of Yesh Atid party, merged his party with Bennett's.

THE DEMOCRATS

9 seats

Leader: Yair Golan

Political orientation: Left wing

The Democrats support a negotiated two-state solution, oppose settlement expansion, support equal conscription, and favor establishing a formal constitution.

YISRAEL BEITEINU

11 seats

Leader: Avigdor Lieberman

Political orientation: Right wing / secular

The party supports Haredi conscription, greater separation of religion and state, free-market economics, and a territorial-exchange approach to a two-state agreement.

THE ZIONIST HOME

~3-4 seats

Leader: As listed by the party

Political orientation: Right wing

The party supports universal national service, national unity, and a Zionist governing coalition excluding Arab and Haredi parties.

ARAB-LED PARTIES

Arab Parties in the Election

In the polling snapshot used for this guide, two Arab parties or joint lists are projected to clear the 3.25% electoral threshold.

RA'AM

6 seats

Leader: Mansour Abbas

Political orientation: Arab Islamist

Ra'am prioritizes combating violent crime in Arab communities, narrowing socioeconomic gaps through government investment, and securing state recognition for Bedouin villages in the Negev. In a striking turn of events, Ra'am added Jewish Zionist lawmaker Yoav Segalovitz as second on their list, allowing them to be more approachable for a coalition.

HADASH-TA'AL

6 seats

Leader: Ayman Odeh / Ahmad Tibi

Political orientation: Arab-led left

Hadash-Ta'al supports an independent Palestinian state based on the 1967 lines, opposes West Bank settlements, and prioritizes combating violent crime in Arab communities.

Reading the polls

Seat projections are snapshots, not election results. Support can shift, and parties near the 3.25% threshold may ultimately receive either representation or no seats in the Knesset.

Official Election Information

For official information about the election, voter eligibility, polling locations, and election procedures, consult Israel's Central Elections Committee, Knesset, Ministry of Interior, and Ministry of Foreign Affairs.