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EVALUATION NOTE

ISRAEL'S POST-ELECTION COALITION LANDSCAPE

On October 27, 2026, Israel held its first general election since the attacks of October 7, 2023, against the backdrop of the conflicts in Gaza, Lebanon, and Iran. The election results indicate that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has largely maintained his political standing but failed to regain the parliamentary majority he secured in 2022. Meanwhile, the parties opposing Netanyahu also lack the majority they need to form a government without the support of Arab parties.

The election reshaped Israel's political blocs without producing a clear change of government. As was the case during the electoral deadlock of 2019–2021, the formation of a government will depend not only on the balance between the right and the left, but also on Netanyahu's personal political standing, the demands of ultra-Orthodox parties, and whether Arab parties will be included in the coalition-building process.

Election Results and Coalition Scenarios

According to the official results, Likud emerged as the largest party, securing 27 seats with 20.51% of the vote. Yashar, led by Gadi Eisenkot, won 21 seats with 16.05%, while the B'Yachad alliance of Naftali Bennett and Yair Lapid secured 12 seats with 9.35%. Among the Arab parties, the Joint List won 11 seats with 8.80% of the vote, while Ra'am secured 8 seats with 5.93%. The Democrats won 8 seats. Yisrael Beiteinu, United Torah Judaism (UTJ), and Otzma Yehudit secured 7 seats each, and Shas and the Religious Zionism–Zehut alliance won 6 seats each (Knesset, 2026).

[1] https://www.tepav.org.tr/en/ekibimiz/s/1505
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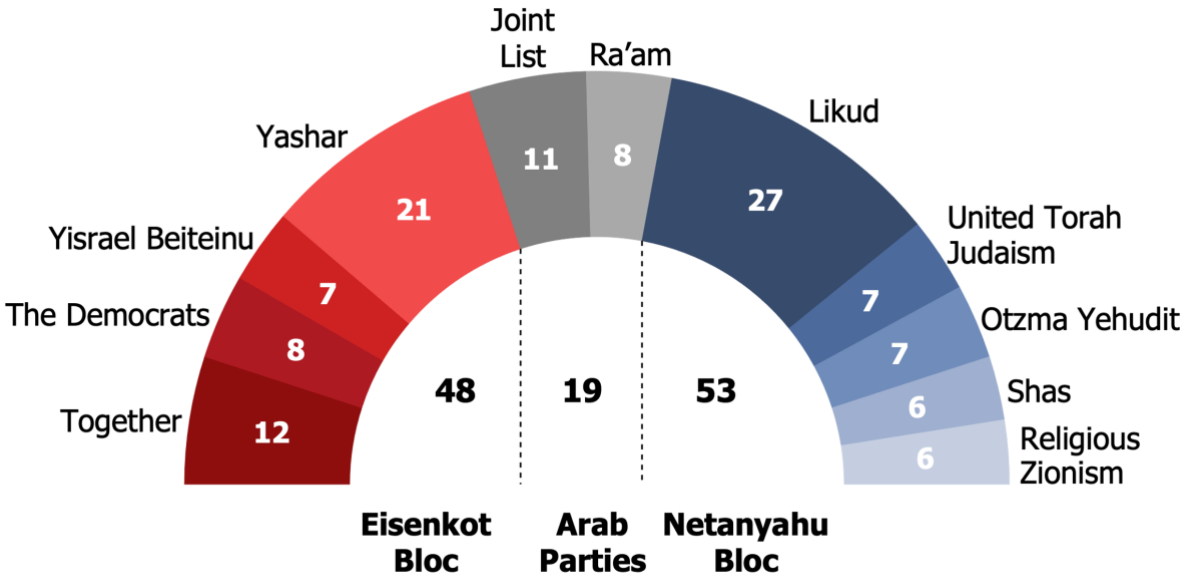
Figure 1. Israeli Election Results and Political Blocs



Sources: Israel's Central Elections Committee and Middle East Eye. Visualization by TEPAV.

These results gave the bloc of right-wing and religious parties in Netanyahu's government 53 seats, the Zionist parties opposing Netanyahu 48 seats, and the Arab parties a combined 19 seats. For Netanyahu, this represents a significant decline compared with the 2022 elections. Likud's seat count fell from 32 to 27, while the Netanyahu bloc declined from 64 to 53 seats. Thus, while Netanyahu has largely retained his political support, his existing coalition has failed to secure a parliamentary majority.

Netanyahu asked for the first opportunity to form a government because he leads the largest party and the largest bloc. Neither gives him a legal right to go first. Under Israel's Basic Law, the President may, following consultations with political parties, assign the task of forming a government to the member of the Knesset considered most likely to succeed. Netanyahu, meanwhile, will remain in office as caretaker prime minister until a new government is formed (Kenig & Blander, 2026).

President Isaac Herzog tasked Gadi Eisenkot with forming a government on November 8, giving him an initial 28-day mandate. Eisenkot has used his parliamentary majority to secure key Knesset posts. He has the backing of 67 lawmakers, 48 from his opposition bloc and 19 from the two Arab lists. On November 11, the opposition bloc and the Arab parties jointly elected Yashar lawmaker Roy Folkman to chair the Arrangements Committee, which sets the parliamentary agenda and allocates committee seats. On November 16, Yisrael Beiteinu leader Avigdor Liberman was appointed temporary chair of the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee. The following day, Yashar lawmaker Matan Kahana was elected Speaker of the Knesset by 66 votes to 52. These developments indicate that while Netanyahu retains executive authority as caretaker prime minister, the Eisenkot-led bloc has strengthened its control over the legislature. This could enable parliamentary initiatives concerning judicial reforms and an independent commission of inquiry into October 7, even before a new government is formed (Keinon, 2026; Reuters, 2026).

Coalition talks are ongoing. Eisenkot's first option is for his 48-seat Zionist opposition bloc to form a government with Arab parties either joining the coalition or supporting it from outside.

However, the reservations expressed by Liberman, Bennett, and Eisenkot about a government dependent on Arab parties complicate this option. Nevertheless, Ra'am's participation in the 2021–2022 Bennett-Lapid government with four lawmakers provides an important precedent, particularly as the party secured eight seats in the 2026 elections. Moreover, under Israel's parliamentary system, a government can win a confidence vote if the number of votes in favor exceeds those against. Therefore, not all Arab parties would necessarily need to become formal coalition partners (Kenig & Blander, 2026).

Miller (2026) of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace suggests that various political maneuvers could also come into play. These include Netanyahu attempting to persuade lawmakers from Eisenkot's bloc to join his side, or Eisenkot seeking cooperation with disaffected Likud members. Another possibility is that Eisenkot could propose a national unity government under his own leadership and use a possible refusal by Netanyahu to justify forming a government with the external support of Arab parties. Miller cites the precedent of Yitzhak Rabin, who relied on external support from Arab parties after losing his parliamentary majority in 1992–1993. However, objections among Eisenkot's center-right partners to cooperation with Arab parties, together with differences over security policies, would make a similar arrangement difficult to implement.

The second option involves the ultra-Orthodox parties. Adding the 13 seats held by United Torah Judaism (UTJ) and Shas to Eisenkot's 48-seat bloc would produce a 61-seat parliamentary majority. However, the principal obstacle to this formula is disagreement over military service obligations for ultra-Orthodox men. Eisenkot, and particularly Liberman, advocate restricting military service exemptions, whereas the Haredi parties consider preserving these exemptions a core political demand. Nevertheless, UTJ's decision not to recommend Netanyahu for prime minister, along with reports that Liberman has softened his position on forming a coalition with ultra-Orthodox parties, suggests that this option is also under consideration (Levaton & The Times of Israel Staff, 2026).

By November 12, Arab and ultra-Orthodox parties had also been in contact as part of the coalition talks. According to Israeli public broadcaster KAN, representatives of Ra'am and the Joint List have been holding discussions with UTJ representatives concerning negotiations over ultra-Orthodox military service obligations and planning regulations affecting Arab communities. Although UTJ has not confirmed that these contacts constitute political negotiations, the developments suggest that Arab and ultra-Orthodox parties may not necessarily represent mutually exclusive coalition options. An agreement based on reciprocal concessions concerning military service and planning policies, which affect different segments of Israeli society, could expand Eisenkot's coalition-building options (Levaton, 2026).

The third option is the formation of a broad national unity government. However, some parties' refusal to govern with Netanyahu and mutual distrust among the parties limit the prospects for such an arrangement. Nevertheless, this option became more concrete when representatives of Likud and Yashar began formal talks on November 15. Although the initial discussions produced no agreement, by November 18 a rotation arrangement under which Eisenkot would serve as prime minister first, followed by Netanyahu, had also emerged as a possibility. However, differing positions within Eisenkot's bloc regarding a governing partnership with Netanyahu, along with disagreements over who would hold the premiership, remain major obstacles to this scenario.

If these options fail to produce a government, another election remains possible. Israel's experience of holding four elections in less than two years between 2019 and 2021 provides a

historical parallel to the current coalition deadlock. During that period, Liberman's opposition to military service exemptions for the ultra-Orthodox, disagreements among anti-Netanyahu parties over cooperation with Arab parties, and mutual vetoes among political leaders complicated successive attempts to form a government (Israel Democracy Institute [IDI], 2019, 2021).

Liberman's position also reflects a longstanding divide within the Israeli right. Yisrael Beiteinu, which has played an important role in representing immigrants from the former Soviet Union, adopts a nationalist stance on security policy while maintaining a secular approach to relations between religion and the state. As a result, the party can complicate both Netanyahu's efforts to form a government and the establishment of an alternative coalition dependent on Arab parties (Galili, 2020).

Increased Arab Voter Turnout and Its Impact on the Election Results

One of the most notable features of the 2026 elections was the high voter turnout. Nationwide turnout reached approximately 78%, the highest level since 1999. The increase in participation among Arab voters was even more pronounced. According to an IDI analysis of polling station data, voter turnout in Arab and Druze localities rose from 53.2% in 2022 to approximately 77% in 2026. A significant increase in participation was also recorded among the Bedouin population in the Negev. As a result of this mobilization, the combined number of seats held by Arab parties increased from 10 in 2022 to 19 in 2026 (Knesset Channel, 2026; Rudnitzky, 2026).

The high turnout among Arab voters can undoubtedly be attributed primarily to the Netanyahu government's rhetoric and actions toward Arabs, particularly those of the far-right parties within the governing coalition. It is reasonable to argue that the government's hardline policies on the Palestinian issue, severe enough to draw international criticism and sanctions, encouraged Arab voters to participate in the elections. Arab citizens of Israel also appear to have faced similar treatment. One example is a statement made in 2016 by Bezalel Smotrich, a member of Netanyahu's governing coalition, who called for separate maternity wards for Jewish and Arab women in hospitals on the grounds that Arabs were enemies (J Street Policy Center, 2023).

The Gaza war and the Palestinian issue, however, may explain only part of the rise in Arab turnout. In a pre-election survey conducted by IDI, 44% of Arab respondents identified voting for a party capable of addressing the cost of living as a priority. Organized crime, housing and planning issues, and the need for greater resources for local governments were also among the key concerns. Rudnitzky (2026) associates the high turnout with a desire to replace the incumbent government and strengthen political representation.

The Impact of October 7 and the Wars with Iran on Netanyahu's Electoral Support

Any assessment of Netanyahu's electoral performance in 2026 must also consider the period before October 7, 2023. His government was already losing support before the attacks. Throughout 2023, the government's judicial reforms triggered widespread public protests, while Netanyahu's ongoing corruption trials, involving charges of bribery, fraud, and breach of trust, further intensified criticism of his government. This political erosion was reflected in public opinion polls. In a September 2023 survey, Benny Gantz's National Unity party was projected to win 29 seats, compared with 26 for Likud, while Netanyahu's coalition was projected to fall to 52 seats (*The Times of Israel*, 2023a).

Rather than reversing this trend, the immediate political impact of the October 7 attacks was to deepen it. In a November 2023 Channel 12 poll, National Unity rose to 36 projected seats, while Likud fell to 17 and Netanyahu's coalition was projected to secure only 45 seats (*The Times of Israel*, 2023b). The scale of the attacks and the fact that Israel's security institutions were caught unprepared undermined Netanyahu's long-established image as a leader capable of ensuring national security. The perception of his responsibility for these failures did not entirely disappear in subsequent years. In an October 2026 Channel 12/N12 survey, 65% of respondents held Netanyahu personally responsible to a large extent for the failures of October 7, while another 22% held him personally responsible to a limited extent (Segal et al., 2026).

Nevertheless, Netanyahu managed to regain some of the support he had lost as the conflicts progressed. The confrontation with Iran, which began at a relatively low intensity in April 2024 following the October 7, 2023 attacks and escalated into a war in February 2026, enabled Netanyahu to refocus his political narrative on national security. Netanyahu also repeatedly secured postponements or cancellations of his court appearances and testimony in his corruption trials on charges of bribery, fraud, and breach of trust, citing national security concerns, covert intelligence operations, and regional military conflicts (Sharon, 2025). The proceedings continued, and Netanyahu still faced potential legal liability. By halting the decline in his electoral support after the attacks, however, he arguably safeguarded his premiership and even his personal freedom, both of which had been at risk because of domestic investigations before the October 7 attacks by Hamas.

Therefore, although the October 7 attacks initially appeared to accelerate Netanyahu's political decline and damage his reputation as a leader capable of ensuring security, the subsequent wars with Iran, which can be viewed as a continuation of the broader conflict, created political conditions that enabled him to recover part of the support he might otherwise have continued to lose. However, rather than generating a new parliamentary majority for Netanyahu, the wars primarily contributed to right-wing voters rallying around Likud again. Indeed, Likud's 27 seats in the October 27 elections represented a significant recovery from the 17–18 seats projected in polls conducted in late 2023.

What Does the Rise of Eisenkot and Yashar Signify?

Gadi Eisenkot's performance in the 2026 elections is significant for understanding the changing nature of the political opposition to Netanyahu. As a former Chief of Staff of the Israel Defense Forces, Eisenkot presented himself as an alternative to Netanyahu without adopting a center-left agenda on security issues. This positioned him as a strong alternative for voters dissatisfied with Netanyahu's style of governance but still in favor of a hardline approach to security policy.

Yashar's political platform emphasizes the establishment of an independent state commission of inquiry into the October 7 attacks, the development of a new national security doctrine, the protection of judicial independence, the professionalization of public administration, and the extension of military or national service obligations to broader segments of society (Yashar, 2026). Eisenkot's differences with Netanyahu therefore concern both how Israel defines its security threats and which institutions should guide government and security policy.

In other words, there is considerable strategic continuity between the two leaders in their assessment of security threats such as Iran, Hamas, and Hezbollah. Their differences lie primarily in the objectives and conduct of military operations and the relationship between military action and diplomatic instruments.

Consequently, a potential government led by Eisenkot would not be expected to depart fundamentally from Netanyahu's government in either foreign or security policy. More significant differences could emerge from the reduced influence of far-right figures such as Ben-Gvir and Smotrich on the government, a more institutionalized relationship with the security establishment, and a different approach to the judiciary and state institutions.

Nevertheless, Brown and Ritz-Jack of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace emphasize that, although the parties opposing Netanyahu agree on the need to replace the current government, they have yet to develop a common political program setting out their vision of the state and society they seek to build in the post-Netanyahu era (Brown et al., 2026). Therefore, should Eisenkot succeed in forming a government, the sustainability of the coalition would depend less on agreement over security policy than on its ability to reach compromises on religion–state relations, the political representation of Arab citizens, and reforms concerning state institutions.

Regional Implications and Potential Effects on Türkiye

The regional implications of Israel's elections depend on more than who becomes prime minister. As discussed above, Netanyahu and the main opposition leaders broadly agree on Israel's core security priorities. Their shared priorities include limiting Iran's nuclear capabilities, weakening Hezbollah's military capacity, preventing Hamas from reestablishing its rule in Gaza, and opposing the establishment of a Palestinian state under current conditions.

Therefore, a change of government would not immediately transform Israel's regional strategy. Nevertheless, the reduced influence of far-right parties within the government could lead to changes in settlement policies in the West Bank, humanitarian and administrative arrangements in Gaza, and diplomatic engagement with countries in the region. However, a change in leadership alone is unlikely to address Jordan's concerns over the future of the West Bank, Egypt's concerns about displacement in Gaza, or Saudi Arabia's concerns about Palestinian statehood (Brown et al., 2026).

A similar assessment applies to Türkiye. A potential change of government in Israel would not automatically lead to the normalization of relations between Türkiye and Israel. In recent years, tensions between the two countries have extended beyond the political disagreements between Netanyahu and President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Diverging interests regarding Gaza, Syria, and the regional security order constitute structural challenges in bilateral relations.

In other words, the fundamental challenge between the two countries reflects differences in their visions of regional order that go beyond tensions between political leaders. Türkiye prioritizes a stable regional order that preserves the territorial integrity of sovereign states and strengthens regional cooperation, whereas Israel favors a security environment in which it can maintain its freedom of military action.

Against this backdrop, Netanyahu's departure from office could create an opportunity to make diplomatic relations more manageable. However, Eisenkot is expected to share many of Israel's security concerns regarding Türkiye's military and political influence in Syria. Reservations within Israel's security establishment may also persist regarding Türkiye's potential role in Gaza's future governance and security arrangements.

Nevertheless, a more centrist coalition could help restore working-level contacts and revive diplomatic dialogue between the two countries. Limited but concrete opportunities could

emerge, particularly in coordinating military activities in Syria, reducing the risk of mutual miscalculation, and strengthening security communication channels. Therefore, the principal implication of a potential change of government for Türkiye may be not comprehensive normalization, but rather the establishment of a more manageable relationship.

How Could Prolonged Coalition Talks Affect Israel's Policy Toward Iran?

Even if it takes several months to form a government, Israel would retain a functioning executive. Netanyahu and his current government would remain in office until a new government takes over. Although legal principles require caretaker governments to exercise greater restraint when making major decisions, national security and emergencies are among the principal exceptions to these limitations. Given Netanyahu's willingness to pursue further military operations against Iran, the ongoing government formation process would not constitute a direct legal obstacle to launching a new operation.

Nevertheless, decisions regarding a large-scale military operation would not depend solely on Israel's domestic political dynamics. U.S. support, developments concerning Iran's nuclear program, and the regional security environment would be more decisive factors. In this context, the U.S. midterm elections held on November 3, 2026, introduced a new variable. By winning majorities in both the House of Representatives and the Senate, the Democrats have put the Trump administration under new political pressure over its ability to continue the war with Iran and manage military support for Israel. Netanyahu's political opponents have also argued that his close relationship with the Trump administration has undermined bipartisan support for Israel in the United States. Eisenkot has stated his intention to restore relations with Washington on a more balanced and institutional footing under his leadership (Scheer & Cornwell, 2026).

The implications of the U.S. midterm elections for Iran policy, however, are not straightforward. Democratic control of Congress could encourage the Trump administration to pursue a diplomatic solution, thereby raising the political cost of another large-scale military operation. At the same time, a Reuters analysis published on November 4 highlighted the risk that Trump and Netanyahu, both politically weakened at home, might view military escalation as a means of strengthening their domestic political positions (Nakhoul, 2026).

Conclusion

The 2026 election reshaped Israel's political blocs without producing a clear change of government. Netanyahu has regained much of the support he lost after October 7 and restored Likud's position as the largest party. Had the attacks never occurred, the corruption investigations might have cost Likud even more support. Netanyahu has also kept his involvement in the court proceedings to a minimum. Nevertheless, he has failed to regain the parliamentary majority he secured in 2022. Eisenkot's rise, meanwhile, points to growing demand for a political alternative to Netanyahu that maintains a hardline approach to security. The election results can therefore be interpreted not as a shift to the left in Israeli politics, but rather as a reorganization of the anti-Netanyahu center and center-right.

The most important change in the coalition arithmetic is the greater weight of the Arab parties. With the Zionist parties opposing Netanyahu holding only 48 seats, the 19 Arab lawmakers have become central to the government formation process. Eisenkot's endorsement by 67 members of the Knesset on November 5 is a concrete reflection of this new parliamentary balance. Nevertheless, whether this majority can be translated into a stable government will

depend on the ability of the parties to reach compromises on key issues, particularly the role of Arab parties and military service obligations for the ultra-Orthodox.

In foreign policy, a change of government is unlikely to produce an immediate strategic shift on major security issues involving Iran, Gaza, Lebanon, and Syria. Differences may instead emerge primarily in diplomatic approaches, the conduct of military operations, and the management of relations with other countries in the region. For Türkiye, Netanyahu's departure could create a limited diplomatic opening. Fundamental disagreements over Gaza, Syria, and the regional security order would persist.

Ultimately, the domestic political and regional implications of the 2026 elections will depend not simply on who holds power, but on the composition of the coalition that emerges, its ability to forge compromises on domestic political issues, and its capacity to adapt to changing regional conditions.

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