



Written by [James Murphy](#) on June 13, 2021

Naftali Bennett New Israeli Prime Minister; Netanyahu Out

On Sunday, Israel's 36th government was sworn in when a disparate group of right-wing, left-wing, and centrist parties — along with one Arab Islamist party — came together to forge a new unity government. For the first time in 12 years, Benjamin Netanyahu will not be in the government's top chair, as Naftali Bennett, the leader of the small right-wing Yamina Party, was sworn in as prime minister.



AP Images

Members of Israel's parliament, the Knesset, voted the new government in by the slimmest of margins in 60-59 vote on Sunday. One member of the United Arab List, otherwise known as Ra'am (the Arab party that aligned itself with the governing coalition), abstained rather than vote for the new government.

The new government hopes to end more than two years of political turmoil in the Jewish state, which has seen four general elections in that time span. However, the hopes for governmental stability in Israel rest with an extremely fragile coalition, one that Netanyahu himself says he hopes to unseat as soon as possible.

The outgoing prime minister used his last speech in office to tell supporters that he wasn't going anywhere and planned to stay on as the leader of the opposition.

"We will continue to work together," the former prime minister said. "I will lead you in a daily struggle against this dangerous left-wing government to topple it, and with God's help, it will happen much faster than you think."

"This is a holiday for the press but a difficult day for millions of citizens of Israel," Netanyahu said in remarks after the vote. "I ask you not to lose your spirits. We will come back."

Bennett, a former Netanyahu aide who some believe is further to the right than the outgoing prime minister, was sworn in first, followed by his colleagues. Bennett's ascension to the prime minister's office marks the first time that a religiously observant, kippah-wearing Jew will lead the government. Bennett is also the leader of the smallest faction ever to appoint a prime minister, as his Yamina Party only holds seven seats in the Knesset, and one of those seven, Amichai Chikli, voted against the new government.

In his [speech](#) to the Knesset, which was vigorously and loudly heckled by opposition members, Bennett laid out his vision for Israel going forward:

The State of Israel is not "just another country." It is the dream of generations of Jews —



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from Marrakesh to Budapest, from Baghdad to San Francisco — a dream we merited to see realized every day before our very eyes. Each generation has its own challenges, and out of each generation comes the leaders that can overcome them.

The external challenges we face are great: the Iranian nuclear project, which is moving towards a crucial point; the ongoing war on terror; Israel's image in the world and the unfair treatment it receives in international institutions — these are all sizable and complex tasks.

Bennett laid out a comprehensive to-do list for his new government, including not allowing Iran to obtain nuclear weapons and a reminder to Hamas that just because the government was changing, their reaction to riots and rocket fire against Israeli citizens would not.

"I hope the cease fire in the south is maintained," Bennett said. "But if Hamas again chooses the path of violence against Israeli civilians, it will encounter a wall of iron."

According to the plan, Bennett will assume the duties of prime minister for the next two years, at which point Yair Lapid, a former news anchor and the leader of the Yesh Atid Party — one of the main architects of the new government — will take over. Until then, Lapid will serve as minister of foreign affairs as well as alternate prime minister.

Lapid was given the chance to form a new government when Netanyahu, the leader of the Likud Party, was unable to do so despite Likud winning the most seats in the Knesset.

Lapid was also scheduled to speak to the full Knesset on Sunday, but cancelled the speech due to the amount of heckling from opposition Knesset members. Lapid was able to let the opposition know just how unhappy he was with their behavior.

"I'm skipping the speech I planned to deliver today because I'm here to say one thing — to ask forgiveness from my mother. My mother is 86-years-old and we did not easily ask her to make her way to Jerusalem. We did it because I assumed that you [opposition members] would be able to get a grip and act respectfully at this moment," Lapid said.

"Instead, she and every other Israeli citizen is ashamed of you and has again remembered why it's time to replace you."

So, Israel begins a new experiment. Can a coalition of left-wing, right-wing, and centrists, along with an Arab party — whose only agreement seems to be that none of them want Netanyahu in power any more — long endure? The answer should be known fairly soon.



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