



Written by [James Murphy](#) on May 31, 2021

## Netanyahu's Time as Prime Minister May End Soon as Rivals Offer New Unity Government

Benjamin Netanyahu, the longest-serving prime minister in Israel's history, may soon be on the way out as a disparate group of parties led by the centrist Yesh Atid ("There Is a Future") Party is reportedly close to finalizing a new government.

Netanyahu, the head of Israel's Likud ("Consolidation") Party, has served as the Israeli prime minister since 2009 and previously served a stint as prime minister from 1996-1999. Although Likud won the most seats in the March 23 election, Netanyahu was unable to form a new government in the 28-day window allowed.



This opened an opportunity for his nearest rival, Yair Lapid of the centrist Yesh Atid Party, to attempt to form a government with the assistance of anti-Netanyahu parties from both the left and right wings.

AP Images

Naftali Bennett, the leader of the far-right party Yamina ("Rightward"), announced on Sunday that he was working toward an agreement with Lapid to form a new government. Bennett, despite being the head of a small party — Yamina only won seven seats in the last election — would become the next prime minister in the new unity government.

Emerging details of the new unity government say that the prime minister's seat will be a rotating position, with Bennett acting as prime minister until September of 2023, at which point Lapid would take over.

Bennett announced in prime time on Sunday in Israel that he is joining the Yesh Atid coalition to spare Israel an unprecedented fifth general election in less than three years.

"It is my intention to do my utmost in order to form a national unity government along with my friend Yair Lapid, so that, God willing, together we can save the country from a tailspin and return Israel to its course," Bennett announced.

Bennett, Lapid, and the other parties have until Wednesday to hammer out an agreement that would remove Netanyahu from office.

"After four elections and a further two months, it has been proven to all of us that there is simply no right-wing government possible that is headed by Netanyahu. It is either a fifth election or a unity government," Bennett said.

Bennett dismissed allegations that the new coalition government would be a left-wing government, even though some left-wing elements have indeed joined the coalition. Bennett claimed that the left-wing



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parties had made concessions to allow him to take the top spot in the new government.

“The left is making difficult compromises to allow me ... to become prime minister,” Bennett said, before promising not to trade land for peace. “This government will not do disengagement nor will it hand over territories, nor will it be afraid to launch a military operation if required.”

As proof of Bennett’s claim, [the Times of Israel](#) reported late on Sunday that the new government’s security council would have a decidedly right-wing majority.

“A government like this will succeed only if we work together as a group,” Bennett said, adding that all parties “will need to postpone fulfilling all of their dreams. We will focus on what can be done, instead of fighting all day on what’s impossible.”

The anti-Netanyahu coalition seems to have little in common other than a desire to oust Netanyahu from the prime minister’s seat. Netanyahu is currently embroiled in three criminal cases in which he is accused of bribery, fraud, and breach of trust. Netanyahu has denied all of the charges and has called them a political “witch hunt.”

Netanyahu responded to the reports of a new unity government by accusing Bennett — a former Netanyahu aide — of a betrayal of the Israeli right-wing by joining a “leftist government.”

“A government like this is a danger to the security of Israel, and is also a danger to the future of the state.” Netanyahu declared.

One major sticking point that remains for the anti-Netanyahu coalition is that they still appear to be short of the 61 seats needed to reach a governing majority. That additional support may have to come from an unlikely source — one of Israel’s Arab parties. The most likely party to side with the new coalition would appear to be the United Arab List, also known by the Hebrew acronym Ra’am. Ra’am won just four seats in the last election and is led by Mansour Abbas, who has advocated working with Zionist parties in the past.

This potential new government seems to be an extremely fragile coalition, possibly too fragile to actually come to fruition. The last government formed in Israel was also a unity government, which ultimately collapsed in December of 2020 after the Knesset failed to approve a national budget.



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