



Israeli Opposition Figures Agree to Form a Coalition Government in an Effort to Oust Embattled and Criminally-Indicted Netanyahu

Several Israeli opposition parties have formally agreed to create a coalition government that would oust embattled and criminally-indicted Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu after twelve years in power. Members of the Knesset will vote to ratify the new government in the coming days, and if the vote succeeds, then Israel will have a new prime minister for the first time in over a decade. Israel has been at a political deadlock for the better part of the last two years, with four separate elections failing to resolve the crisis. A coalition with Netanyahu and defense minister Benny Gantz recently fell apart after Netanyahu broke several agreements, which resulted in Israel's most recent election. In that March 2021 election, Netanyahu's Likud party secured the most votes, however the tally was short of the threshold required to form a government. Due to his polarizing governing style and a serious ongoing criminal case against him, Netanyahu failed to recruit partners to form a coalition, which resulted in Israel's President Reuven Rivlin giving opposition parties a mandate to do so. Now, Yair Lapid of the Yesh Atid party has formed an eight-member coalition government which includes Arab-Israeli and right-wing members, among others. The key to this coalition is Naftali Bennett and his right-wing Yamina party. Bennett is a former ally of Netanyahu, and would become Israel's next prime minister under the agreement before handing power to Lapid as part of the terms to rotate the position.

Benjamin Netanyahu is expected to aggressively lobby right-wing Knesset members to defect from the Bennett-Lapid coalition before the Knesset officially votes to ratify the government. Netanyahu has called the prospective government dangerously left-wing, despite the fact that it is comprised of parties from the center, left, and nationalist right. Indeed, Naftali Bennett is widely considered a member of Israel's far-right, and has declared himself more conservative than Netanyahu. Bennett's Yamina party only won a handful of Knesset seats in the most recent election, but he was able to be the kingmaker between the two parties who won the most seats because they both needed his support. In the end, Bennett elected to side with Yair Lapid despite their ideological differences because they both shared a motivation to dethrone Netanyahu.

For the first time ever, an Israeli coalition government will include members of an Arab-Israeli party. Mansour Abbas of the Arab Raam party said that joining the coalition would be beneficial for Arabs in Israeli society, although other Arab parties refused to enter the coalition with right-wing Israeli nationalists. Naftali Bennett has said that he is opposed to a Palestinian state, which alienated him to most of the Arab-Israeli parties that represent up to 20% of the electorate. However, all of the parties in the coalition are united in their desire to bring 12 years of Netanyahu rule to an end, despite having few agreements on policy.

Now that the opposition forces have come to terms on a coalition government, a vote of confidence is required from the Israeli Knesset. Netanyahu and his allies will attempt to sway members to defect from the arrangement. If a successful vote on the coalition government does not go through in the Knesset, Israel will be headed towards yet another election to try and break the longstanding political gridlock.