

Israel Studies

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Israel's 2026 Elections

Jewish Power Hopes to Lead the Populist and Extremist Right

Mohanad Mustafa

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Analytical paper

Mohanad Mustafa

Research Fellow at Mada Al-Carmel

Editors: Mtanes Shihadeh; Areen Hawari

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Mada al-Carmel- Arab Center for Applied Social Research

90 Hamiginim st. Haifa

Tel: +972 4 8552035, Fax: +972 4 8525973

www.mada-research.org

mada@mada-research.org

Introduction

In Israel's 25th Knesset election (held in 2022), the electoral strength of Itamar Ben-Gvir's Jewish Power (Otzma Yehudit) party increased when it won six seats as part of the Religious Zionism list. But Ben-Gvir decided to run independently in this year's 26th Knesset election, relying on the party's growing popularity in the years following October 7, 2023, due to its explicit hate speech against Palestinians in general and Palestinians in Israel in particular. The party also benefited from Ben-Gvir's support for violent policies against Palestinians while serving as Minister of National Security. Such policies have included: the [abuse of prisoners](#) regardless of their political standing or citizenship status; repression of protests and freedom of expression among Palestinians in Israel; the demolition of Palestinian homes; deepening police complicity in crime and violence in Palestinian society; and the enactment of a law allowing for the execution of Palestinian prisoners. Ben-Gvir has also staunchly [opposed](#) any agreement on the various war fronts that Israel is fighting. Finally, he has supported the displacement of Palestinians and the expansion of Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Today, most serious opinion polls show that Jewish Power is the only party in the governing coalition whose political strength has increased since October 7, 2023, and that it is likely to win eight to nine Knesset seats in the elections scheduled for October 27, 2026. Support for the other parties in the coalition (Likud, Religious Zionism, and Shas) has declined while remaining steady for United Torah Judaism. The increase in electoral and political support for Jewish Power is paradoxical for two reasons. First, many of the policies Ben-Gvir and his party have supported were also those that motivated Hamas's Al-Aqsa Flood operation on October 7, 2023, as [revealed](#) in a letter reportedly sent by Hamas's leadership to Hezbollah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah on the morning of the operation. The letter claimed that the operation came in response to the continuous Israeli violations at Al-Aqsa, the abuse of Palestinian prisoners, and the expansion of settlement activity in the occupied West Bank—all policies supported by Ben-Gvir. Furthermore, even as Ben-Gvir has [failed](#) to secure the personal safety and security of Jewish Israelis and to [halt](#) the spread of crime in Jewish communities, his party's popularity has increased in the last three years. The second paradox is therefore that Jewish Power is the only party within the current governing coalition that has failed to fulfill most of its electoral promises, especially when compared to others in the Religious Zionism list that brought about a settler-colonial "revolution" in the West Bank.

Jewish Power's continued popularity, despite its failures, can be attributed to its appeal to the inherent prejudices against Palestinians among extremist Jewish groups within Israel, which condemn Palestinians' progress and view their individual or collective achievements—including the successes of what these Israeli groups view as "criminal organizations" in Palestinian society—as a challenge to Jewish supremacy. Ben-Gvir has [given](#) the Jews in Israel a renewed sense of superiority, even if only rhetorically. His words resonate with segments of the Jewish community who have lost this feeling,

particularly in relation to Palestinians in Israel.

Ben-Gvir's rise is also [linked](#) to the fusion of the various fringe Jewish parties that voted for Likud and Shas with the "Kahanist" ideology (named after the late Meir Kahane) in a sensitive political climate—a fusion that began in response to the so-called [Dignity Uprising](#) in May 2021. In other words, Ben-Gvir has combined a growing sense of marginalization among certain Jewish communities in Israel, who have increasingly directed their hatred toward Palestinians, with Kahane's ideology providing them with the ammunition they need to turn racism into a populist political platform.

Jewish Power: From Opposition to Power

Jewish Power in its current form participated for the first time in the elections held in September 2019 for the 22nd Knesset. However, it [did not pass](#) the electoral threshold at the time, as it received 83,609 votes, representing 1.8 percent of all votes cast. In the 23rd Knesset elections, held in 2020, the party's strength [declined](#) and it received only 19,402 votes, a mere 0.4 percent of the total.

In the 24th Knesset elections held in 2021, there was a major shift in the political landscape: Bezalel Smotrich led the Religious Zionism list, which included an alliance with Jewish Power, and [won](#) six seats (5.1 percent, or 225,641 votes). As a result, Itamar Ben-Gvir became a member of the Knesset for the first time.

Table 1: Jewish Power (JP) Results in Knesset Elections

	Votes	Percentage	Seats (JP Seats)	Notes
September 2019	83,609	1.8%	0	Independent
2020	19,402	0.4%	0	Independent
2021	225,641	5.1%	6 (1)	Part of Religious Zionism List
2022	516,470	10.8%	14 (6)	Part of Religious Zionism List

The Religious Zionism list ran in the 25th Knesset elections held in 2022, with a clearer alliance with Jewish Power, with the party name appearing on the list's election ballot. The coalition [won](#) 14 seats (with 516,470 votes, or 10.8 percent of the total), making it the party with the third highest number of representatives in the Knesset, including six from Jewish Power.

One empirical issue to bear in mind when analyzing these results is that the Jewish Power party ran in the 2022 elections on the Religious Zionism list. However, most of the new voters for the 2022 list [voted](#) in the 2021 elections for the Yamina Party headed by Naftali Bennett, whose list received significant support from towns in southern Israel.

For example, in Beersheba, the list received 15.7 percent of the vote, in Ashkelon 13.3 percent, and in Jerusalem 14.2 percent. The 2022 increase in support for the Religious Zionism list can thus be partly explained by the absence of the Yamina Party in that election, whose supporters wanted to vote to the right of the Likud Party.

A comparative [analysis](#) of the results of the Religious Zionism list in the 2021 and 2022 elections reveals that in several towns in southern Israel where the Mizrahi [Eastern Jews] community makes up the majority of the population, the vote for the Religious Zionism list significantly increased. In some of these southern towns, the list ranked second in terms of voter turnout after Likud—ahead of Shas—especially in Beersheba, Yeruham, and Dimona. In other towns, the list came in third place after Likud and Shas. This increase in support for Religious Zionism can be explained by its alliance with Jewish Power, given that much of the support for the Religious Zionism Party has come primarily from the West Bank settlements and Ashkenazi-majority communities, while Jewish Power has typically attracted more Mizrahi Jewish support.

The data indicates that the Jewish Power party is [competing](#) with Shas for support from conservative Mizrahi voters. With their support, the Jewish Power party may compete with Likud in the future should Netanyahu's political leadership end and Ben-Gvir come out on top of the political right wing.

Jewish Power and the 26th Knesset Elections of 2026

In the upcoming elections, Ben-Gvir hopes that Jewish Power will come in second after Likud in terms of representatives among the parties in the current governing coalition. But he wants such a victory independent of the Religious Zionism list, as he does not want to [link](#) his party to a specific segment of the Israeli population. In this regard, Ben-Gvir insists that the right-wing parties can unite and form a sectoral party, while claiming a broader mantle for Jewish Power, which he describes as “something else entirely. We have (The Jewish power party) to be a big party in order to be a right-wing government. We see this in the polls. We can expand in the south, the north and the center, in the ranks of the conservatives, the secularists, and the ultra-Orthodox. If I form a sectoral party with some friends, we will shrink. Smotrich and some other names have to form a party that speaks to a particular sector. A sectoral party with four or five seats. On the other hand, ‘Jewish Power’ is a party that can expand.”

Ben-Gvir is expected to present his achievements to the Israeli public during his tenure as Minister of National Security in terms of how he mobilized hate speech to support violent policies against the Palestinians. Despite his failure to combat crime and violence, he knows that the high number of Palestinian Arab deaths due to crime and the lack of police response during his tenure will not receive serious criticism from his current and potential supporters. The discourse of Jewish Power [tends](#) to hold Palestinians and their culture responsible for crime in Palestinian communities, rather than attributing it to Israeli policies of discrimination, complicity, and neglect.

Instead, Ben-Gvir will boast, as he is now, about the policy of demolishing Palestinian homes, especially in the Negev. At the June 2026 Local Government Center conference, while addressing his Palestinian-hating Jewish audience and pontificating about the idea of “Jewish superiority,” he [stated](#) that he would demolish more Palestinian Arab homes in the Negev: “They told me that the Bedouins whose homes were demolished are sleeping in the schools of Arad. [...] They are there because they say Ben-Gvir demolished our houses. So, I call on them to prepare a lot of schools—because I will demolish more of their homes.”

It is no coincidence that Ben-Gvir focused on the Negev in his speech. His audience of [supporters](#) is mainly Mizrahi Jews. Regardless of the accuracy of his [figures](#) on home demolitions, they are specifically aimed at confirming his image as a “crazy” Jewish master who is unafraid of the Palestinian Arabs and who sets out to destroy them for no other reason than that they are not Jewish. The description of him as “crazy” is one he claims is used by the Palestinians and one he displays with great pride.

Ben-Gvir will also present the Israeli public with his repressive policies against Palestinian prisoners, which have led to the death of at least 94 Palestinian prisoners since October 7, 2023. In addition, he has been a proponent of the law to execute Palestinian prisoners and has proposed deploying crocodiles around security prisons. This last proposal exemplifies his approach to dealing with Palestinian prisoners. The District Court in Jerusalem froze the plan due to a petition filed by an association concerned with animal welfare.

Most polls indicate that Jewish Power will win at most eight or nine seats in the upcoming elections, an increase of two or three seats from its current representation in the Knesset. This modest increase shows that the party’s electoral potential is still limited to the traditional conservative voter base, especially from Likud and the Shas movement.

Because Ben-Gvir is trying to compete with Likud and Shas, he is threatening Netanyahu’s efforts to strengthen Likud’s representation in the Knesset. This electoral threat is why journalist Amit Siegel, known for his right-wing ideological positions and support for Netanyahu’s governments, [considers](#) Ben-Gvir a “serious disaster” for Israel. Siegel notes that Ben-Gvir’s danger stems not only from the number of seats he will get in the Knesset but also from his integration into the right-wing camp and his presence within the Likud Party, whose members’ positions are in line with his. He notes that Netanyahu is afraid of Ben-Gvir and that Aryeh Deri [head of the Shas movement] is keen to respect him. Siegel is therefore demanding that Ben-Gvir’s power be reduced to its normal size—in other words, what it was before 2021.

Conclusion

Ben-Gvir's rise, along with that of his party, can be attributed to his leaning heavily into the political rhetoric and policies of racism, not only toward Palestinians in the occupied territories but also within Israel's pre-1967 borders. In this way, Ben-Gvir has turned the politics of hatred into a political platform directed against Palestinian citizens of Israel. The ideas and policies of the Jewish Power Party are no different from those of the populist extreme right in Europe in terms of transforming national and religious supremacy, hate speech, and anti-minority hatred into policy. In Israel, the Jewish Power Party is similarly turning anti-Palestinianism into a political and legal project by pressuring authorities to further formalize hatred against Palestinians.

Ben-Gvir aspires to be the long-term leader of the right in Israel after the Benjamin Netanyahu era ends. Likud has turned into a Kahanist, extreme right-wing party that is not significantly different from the Jewish Power Party, and Ben-Gvir believes that he is replacing the Likud by attracting its traditional bases.

With Netanyahu's help and his policies of hatred toward Palestinians—along with his media prominence—Ben-Gvir has succeeded in becoming mainstream in the Israeli public sphere. In 2021, Netanyahu stated that Ben-Gvir would not be a minister in his government and that he was not qualified to head a Knesset committee or become a minister. In October 2022, on the eve of the elections for the 25th Knesset, Netanyahu [refused](#) to take the microphone at an electoral rally until Ben-Gvir stepped down from the podium. But within four years, Netanyahu's Likud has actually transformed itself into "Jewish Power"!

Policies of direct hatred of Palestinians in Israel have increased incitement even in sectors such as healthcare that were once seen as examples of "coexistence" between Jews and Palestinian Arabs. In recent months, there have been inflammatory campaigns against Arab doctors involving media professionals and politicians from the ruling right. However, the spread of hate politics within Likud currently keeps a large proportion of voters from moving to Jewish Power. Likud provides them with hate speech against Palestinians in Israel. The similarity in the two parties' positions sometimes plays in Jewish Power's favor by turning it into a natural alternative to Likud. Other times it works against Jewish Power, because Likud maintains its racist audience by promoting hate speech, which in turn helps it hold on to its supporters.



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