

What The Bennett-Lapid Alliance Means for Israel's Elections

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Former Prime Ministers Naftali Bennett and Yair Lapid have announced that they will run together in Israel's next elections on a unified list, called Beyachad (Together). The move represents one of the most significant political developments ahead of the 2026 vote – but its ultimate impact remains uncertain.

1. What happened?

Bennett and Lapid's announcement surprised both the public and political insiders. Until recently, Bennett appeared to be pursuing a strategy of consolidating a right-wing alternative to Netanyahu – peeling away disaffected Likud supporters and voters from the Religious Zionist camp Bennett himself comes from. By joining forces with Lapid, he is repositioning toward the political center, while hoping to retain as many right-wing voters as possible. At their joint press conference, Bennett acknowledged their ideological differences but framed the partnership as an act of national responsibility.

2. Why now?

The timing reflects the two leaders' desire to both mitigate risk and pursue future electoral gains. In recent weeks, Lapid's Yesh Atid party had been slipping in the polls, [hovering](#) near 6 – dangerously close to the four-seat threshold. Meanwhile, Gadi Eisenkot, former Chief of Staff of the Israel Defense Forces and a centrist opposition leader who also appeals to right-wing voters, had been [gaining](#) momentum and threatening to challenge Bennett's status as the presumed leader of the opposition. By joining forces, Yesh Atid guaranteed its political future, and Bennett his standing as the consensus leader of the anti-Netanyahu camp.

With elections still approximately six months away, the alliance also has time to build momentum and join forces with additional opposition parties. The timing allows Beyachad to leverage Yesh Atid's strong grassroots operation and significant financial backing to build out a successful campaign. Both sides have also left the door open for additional mergers with other parties and figures, even reserving the number two spot for the possible integration of Gadi Eisenkot and his list.

3. How is this changing the electoral map?

Prior to the merger, Bennett's party was [polling](#) at around 20 seats on average, while Yesh Atid hovered near 6. Early polling following the merger suggests that Beyachad polls at roughly the same size as Likud, with [one poll](#) even showing it overtaking Likud (26 seats to 25). In [most polls](#), however, Likud remains the largest party.

Crucially, the merger [has not expanded](#) the overall anti-Netanyahu opposition bloc, and in some polls it has slightly weakened it. While the longer-term trend remains to be seen, current data suggests the alliance is primarily consolidating the support of current opposition voters rather than attracting new ones. In that sense, the move is better understood as a defensive consolidation targeting other opposition parties rather than a transformative political shift.

4. What is the arrangement between Bennett and Lapid?

According to the [agreement](#), Yesh Atid will receive 12 out of the first 29 spots on the joint list, while Bennett's party will receive the rest. The discrepancy reflects Bennett's significant polling advantage prior to the merger.

The structure also preserves each party's ability to split off after the election – an indication that the merger is motivated more by electoral convenience than ideological unity. This provision has also raised concerns that Bennett could split off from the opposition bloc after the election and form a unity government with Netanyahu. Lapid faced a similar outcome after his 2019 merger with Benny Gantz, when Gantz broke off their joint list to join a Netanyahu-led government.

The agreement also remains open to revision to accommodate additional partners. Lapid has [reportedly](#) agreed to adjust Yesh Atid's position on the list to facilitate a merger with Eisenkot's Yashar party.

5. What are the main challenges facing the alliance?

First, the opposition's coalition math remains unresolved. Even a strong electoral performance may not translate into a governing majority, as reaching the 61 seats needed to form a government will likely require some form of cooperation with the Arab parties. Yet Bennett has emphasized his intention to form a "Zionist government" that does not rely on their support.

Second, the alliance must move beyond a "not Netanyahu" message and articulate a compelling alternative governing vision. The campaign is attempting to reframe the debate around competence and good governance, a narrative reinforced by Bennett and Lapid's recruitment of candidates with senior managerial experience. It is not yet clear, however, how compelling this framing will ultimately be.

Third, the alliance must expand beyond its current base. Early polling suggests it has not yet done so, highlighting the gap between consolidating existing opposition voters and achieving a genuine electoral breakthrough.

6. What does this mean for the broader anti-Netanyahu camp?

With the move establishing Bennett as the presumptive leader of the opposition, the largest outstanding question is whether Eisenkot will continue to run independently or claim the number two spot reportedly reserved for him on the Beyachad list. Joining would all but guarantee that the anti-Netanyahu camp fields

the largest party in the election by a wide margin. Yet there are potential advantages to remaining independent: Eisenkot could leverage his security credentials to win over disgruntled right-wing voters from Netanyahu's coalition who remain wary of a list that includes Lapid, and his Yashar party has been gaining momentum in recent polls. A late-stage merger before the election deadline remains possible and could maximize his bargaining position.

The other parties in the anti-Netanyahu bloc may yet stand to gain from the merger. Center-left Lapid voters wary of casting a ballot for the right-wing Bennett could peel off to Yair Golan's Democrats, while hard-right Bennett voters skeptical of Lapid could shift to Avigdor Liberman's Yisrael Beytenu.

7. What are the implications for issues important to J Street?

For those focused on the health of Israeli democracy and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the implications are mixed.

On democracy, the merger is a genuinely positive development. Bennett and Lapid are united by a shared commitment to restoring effective, accountable government and undoing the institutional damage of the Netanyahu era.

On the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the merger reflects a far less encouraging reality. That Lapid – a moderate who has historically supported a two-state solution – would merge with Bennett, the former head of the Yesha Settlement Council who has vowed never to hand a single inch over to the Palestinians, indicates that resolving the conflict has been deprioritized. With Bennett at the top of the list and the campaign's messaging focused squarely on governance rather than diplomacy, Beyachad is unlikely to advance a credible path toward ending the occupation or resolving the conflict.

That said, a future coalition that includes Yair Golan's Democrats alongside Beyachad – and that excludes far-right extremists like Smotrich and Ben-Gvir – would at the very least halt the unilateral steps that have deepened de facto annexation and enabled settler violence under the current government.