

Netanyahu Is Out: Naftali Bennett Sworn In As Israel's New Prime Minister



Naftali Bennett is Israel's new prime minister. He will serve two years before handing the reins to political partner for the remaining two years of the term. The two politicians worked together to unseat Benjamin Netanyahu who served as prime minister for the last 12 years. —Menahem Kahana/AP

For the first time in more than a decade, Israel has welcomed a new prime minister. Naftali Bennett was sworn in on Sunday after a new coalition unseated longtime Israeli leader Benjamin Netanyahu.

The newly elected prime minister was appointed by the Knesset, Israel's

parliament, in a 60-59 vote, with one minister abstaining.



Newly elected Prime Minister Naftali Bennett shakes hands with former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. -Ariel Schalit/AP

Shortly after the votes were tallied, the now former-Prime Minister Netanyahu approached his opponent and the two shook hands. Not long after that, he took to Twitter, instructing his supporters to hold their heads high and keep the faith; vowing to return.

“I ask you: do not let your spirit fall,” he said. “We’ll be back - and faster than you think.”

President Joe Biden released a statement congratulating Bennett and the new Israeli government. “Israel has no better friend than the United States. The bond that unites our people is evidence of our shared values and decades of close cooperation and as we continue to strengthen our partnership, the United States remains unwavering in its support for Israel’s security,” he said.

“I look forward to working with you to strengthen the ties between our two nations,” Prime Minister Bennett responded via Twitter.

The ejection of Israel’s longest-serving prime minister was made possible by a band of unlikely allies from across the political spectrum, brought together by the shared belief that Netanyahu had to go. The new coalition government is made up of eight parties, all of whom have agreed to hold off on major decisions surrounding controversial issues, like the future of the occupied West Bank.

The Palestinian Authority Foreign Ministry in Ramallah said it expected to see “no difference, or perhaps even worse” policies under the new Israeli government. In Gaza, Hamas said Israel continues to be “a settler occupier entity that must be resisted by all forms of resistance, foremost of which is the armed resistance.”

Netanyahu, 71, was first elected prime minister in the late 1990s and then again in 2009. Over the last 12 years, he has used his time in office to allow the growth of Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank, frustrated Palestinian aspirations for statehood and aligned Israel with right-wing leaders internationally.



Benjamin Netanyahu is Israel's longest-serving prime minister. He served 12 consecutive years before being ousted by an opposition coalition. -Ariel Schalit/AP

Among his loyal supporters — he's seen as a strong defender of Israel who made the country an economic success and oversaw an effective battle against the coronavirus. But the former prime minister also faces corruption charges including bribery, fraud and breach of trust — allegations Netanyahu denies. A trial is already underway.

Over the last two years, Netanyahu's support waned and he struggled to stay in power by prompting repeated elections, leading to inconclusive votes.

But earlier this month, Netanyahu's opposition came to a complicated agreement to form a majority. Yair Lapid, former finance minister and head of the centrist Yesh Atid party, led the charge against Netanyahu and joined with the right-wing Bennett.



Israel's opposition leader Yair Lapid will serve the latter half of the four-year prime minister term. Although his party held more seats in the Knesset, he agreed to let Naftali Bennett serve the first two years. -Oded Balilty/AP

Bennett is Netanyahu's former chief of staff. Under the coalition agreement, he will serve for two years before passing the torch to Lapid for the latter half of the 4-year term. Despite Lapid's party holding more than double the seats in the Knesset, he agreed to let Bennett take the first term to maintain political solidarity. Together they helped bring together a diverse government body, including a party representing Arab citizens for the first time in the nation's history.

Netanyahu took to Twitter in the days leading up to Sunday's vote in hopes of eroding trust in his opposition. "Bennett has broken all his commitments to his constituents to become prime minister at all costs," he tweeted Thursday. "This is the scam of the century!"

✘ הליכוד@Likud_Party

When PM Netanyahu speaks about “election fraud” he isn’t referring to the vote counting process in Israel in which he has complete confidence. There is also no question about the peaceful transition of power.

With some of the former prime minister’s words echoing that of former President Donald Trump — a close ally of Netanyahu’s while in office — the Likud party also took to social media and tried to pressure members of the new coalition. But, the coalition held its small majority.

Israel also elected a new president last week, Isaac Herzog, following in his late father’s footsteps. He is the first son of an Israeli president to be elected president. But the presidential role is primarily ceremonial and formal in nature. He is still the head of state, however, the prime minister is the head of the executive branch.

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