

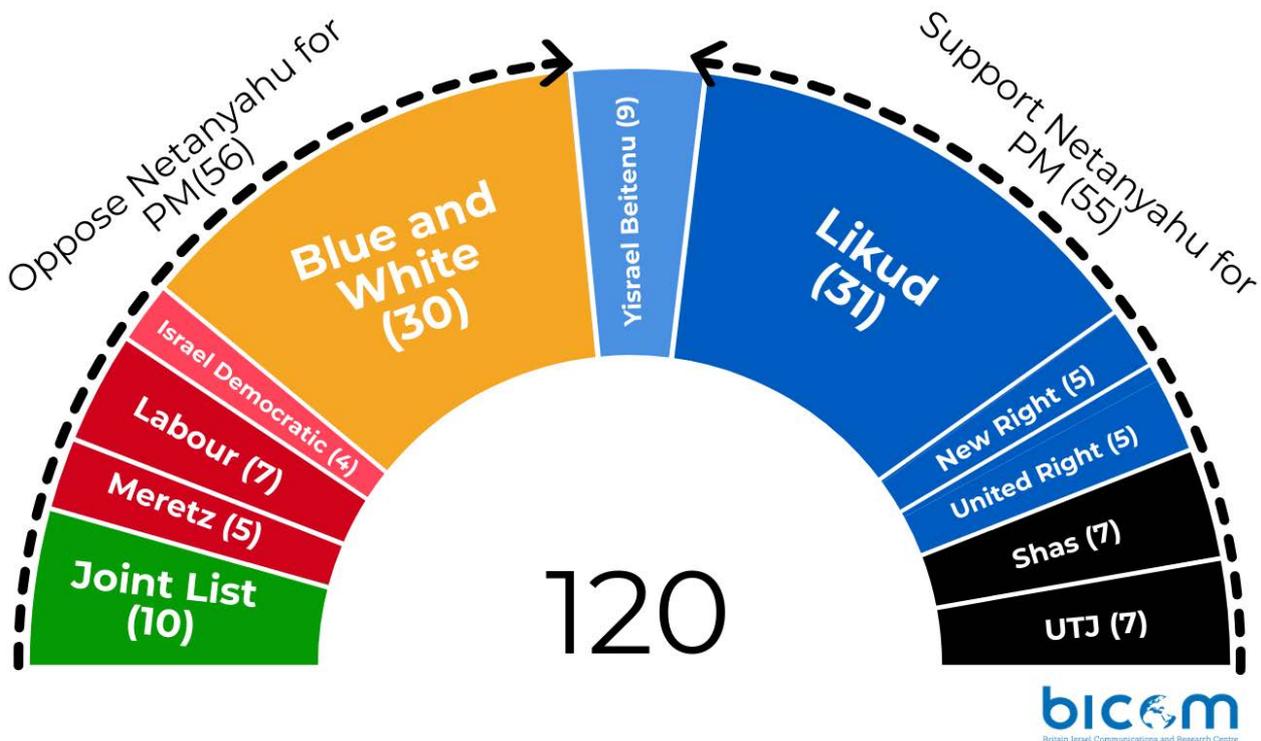
Israeli Elections Bulletin | July 18

On May 29, the Israeli Knesset voted to dissolve itself, triggering a new election after Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu failed to form a governing coalition. Elections will take place on September 17, less than six months after the April 9 elections.

BICOM will be producing regular Election Bulletins with everything you need to know leading up to the September 17 election. Be sure to listen to our [weekly podcast](#) and to follow our [election page](#) featuring our regularly updated poll of polls, campaign updates and analysis of the parties and politicians.

Latest polling

Aggregate polling, July 3 - 18



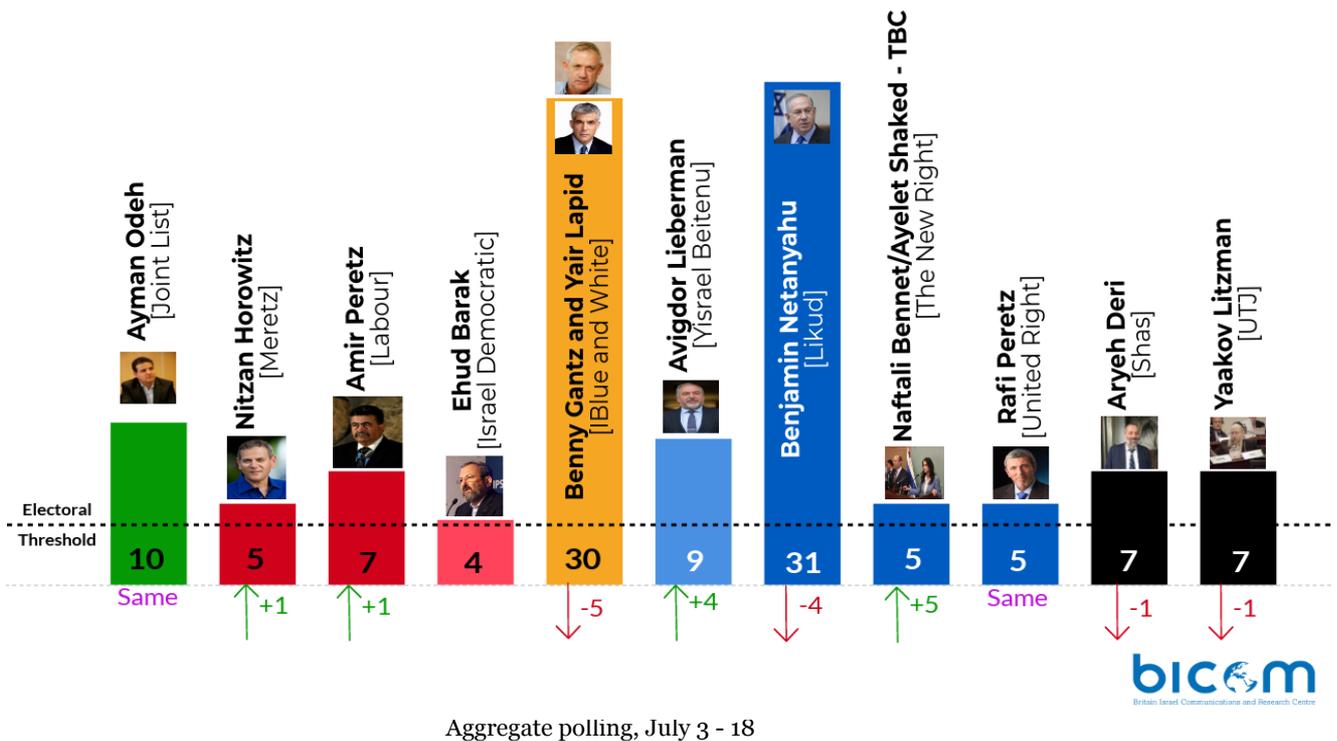
Note: In one of the polls, Barak's party fails to pass the 3.25% threshold and aggregate polls put Zehut, the right wing libertarian party, close to but under the threshold

Getting to a 61 seat majority

The right wing / ultra-Orthodox alliance supporting Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was broken up by the disagreement over ultra-Orthodox conscription. Yisrael Beiteinu leader Avigdor Lieberman has vowed to support a 'national-liberal' unity government after the elections involving the Likud and Blue and White without the ultra-Orthodox parties.

Current polls suggest that neither Netanyahu or Gantz will have enough seats and allies to form a 61 seat majority. A national unity Government is possible but unlikely as long as Netanyahu is Likud leader because Gantz refuses to join a Government with Netanyahu if he is facing a corruption trial.

How the parties and their leaders are shaping up



Mergers and acquisitions

Final lists of parties and candidates must be submitted to the Israeli Elections Central Committee by 1 August, and discussions are ongoing about potential mergers.

Meretz and Labour are said to be close to a merger agreement and polls suggest the combined party could win two more seats than if they stood separately. Rumours of a Labour merger with Ehud Barak's party or even a Meretz-Labour-Barak party have cooled after media reports of Barak's links to Jeffrey Epstein, a US billionaire involved in a sex trafficking scandal.

Naftali Bennett and Ayelet Shaked are still debating whether to merge their New Right party with the United Right party or run separately. The main issues are who will lead the merged party, which candidates will be given ministerial posts and whether the controversial extremist Jewish Power party should be included. Shaked is considered a major electoral asset and a poll by Walla news concluded that 31% of the general public and 36% of right wing voters believed she should lead a united right wing party, a number significantly higher than anyone else. A Channel 12 poll predicted that a merged right wing party led by Shaked would win 12 seats, becoming the third largest party. Rafi Peretz, the leader of United Right was severely criticised for saying in a TV interview last Saturday that he supported gay 'conversion therapy'. More than 200,000 votes for right wing parties were 'lost' in the April elections as they went to parties that didn't win any seats.

The four Arab parties are still discussing whether or not they will form a Joint (Arab) List as they did in 2015. On Monday, a joint press conference was cancelled after it became clear the leaders were unable to reach agreement about the list's composition and designated places for representatives of Hadash, Taal, Raam, and Balad. Hadash leader Ayman Odeh said that: "There's a disagreement about the faction itself: who is going to be the faction chairman; who is going to get appointed to all kinds of committees. Those are natural in politics. The important thing is that within a matter of days we need to form the Joint List."



[Our latest podcast](#)

[Episode 60 | Israel's election race heats up](#)

James Sorene speaks to Richard Pater and Calev Ben-Dor about the latest polling and Ehud Barak's new party

Best Cartoons

This week's political cartoons are also focused on potential mergers, Barak's re-entry into politics, and which party Ayelet Shaked will decide to run with



Israeli media have focused on the impact of Ehud Barak's return to politics. A [Maariv](#) cartoon (July 8) shows Ehud Barak parachuting onto a small melting ice cap on which the leaders of Blue and White, Labour and Meretz stand while telling them to 'make space'. While Barak claims he will increase the size of the centre-left bloc, others argue that he will further divide it, making it more likely that smaller parties fail to win any seats.

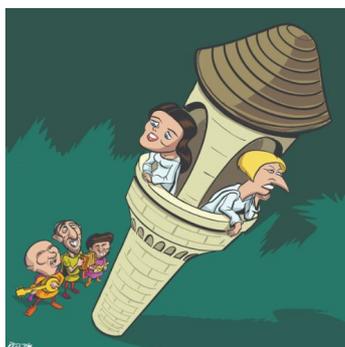
[Yediot Ahronot's](#) cartoon (July 9) 'who will grab the wheel?' also relates to Barak's entry, showing him trying to hitchhike a ride from Amir Peretz, the new leader of the Labour Party, but asking to drive. Barak has called for alliances between parties, but many believe his intention was to lead it himself (something Barak denies).



A cartoon in [Haaretz](#) (July 12) displays the various conversations with different leaders – Amir Peretz of Labour, Nitzan Horowitz of Meretz, Tzipi Livni formerly of Hatnua (which together with Labour ran as the Zionist Union in 2015 and gained 24 seats), and Ehud Barak – over potential mergers.



Discussions of mergers have also continued within the right-wing, with Ayelet Shaked – the former Justice Minister who ran as number 2 on the New Right list in April – considered to be most popular among the wider Israeli public. A [Yediot Ahronot](#) cartoon (July 7) suggests Shaked will 'return to her roots' and run with Naftali Bennett and the New Right rather than with Likud or Jewish Home.



This [Maariv](#) cartoon (July 9) shows leaders of the right wing parties (New Right and United Right) trying to win Shaked's affections, as Tzipi Livni (who was rumoured to be re-forming the Zionist Union with Amir Peretz's Labour) looks forlornly on.

Bottle Cap Challenge comes to Israel



Ehud Barak has been very active on social media, uploading a [video](#) about buying Falafel at the ‘magician restaurant’ and explaining to Netanyahu – who critics say never pays for anything out of his own pocket – what a credit card and cash are used for.

In another [video](#) that went viral with over 100,000 views, Barak brought the bottle cap challenge into the Israeli political arena. Using his finger to dislodge the bottle, Barak told Netanyahu to ‘drink something, calm down...we’re just getting started’.

The video generated a number of responses.



During a Facebook Live [chat](#) with members of the public Netanyahu took out a nasal spray that was in his pocket and flicked off the top.

Number 2 in Blue and White, Yair Lapid just took the [cap](#) off with his hand, saying ‘why complicate things? Vote Blue and White and change the government’.



Sharren Haskel of Likud [knocked](#) the cap off a cranberry juice bottle with a roundhouse kick, before drinking it and saying it was ‘sour’ (chamutz). It relates to when Netanyahu called the opposition and the media ‘sourpusses’ (chamutzim) for their constant criticism of him.

Blue and White Chairman Benny Gantz took a [different](#) tact. ‘After finishing with this cap challenge, we need to focus on life itself and the real problem of traffic jams and lack of public transportation’ The word for cap and traffic, pkak, is the same in Hebrew. And the phrase ‘life itself’ refers to when Netanyahu pushed back against criticism on the cost of living to say he was focused on ‘life itself,’ namely dealing with the Iranian nuclear project.



How we got here | news stories from BICOM

Israeli Education Minister says he supports gay conversion therapy | [15 July](#)

Israeli leaders meet amid merger rumours | [8 July](#)

Amir Peretz elected Labour leader | [3 July](#)

Meretz chooses new leader for September election | [28 June](#)

Ehud Barak launches new party | [27 June](#)

Lieberman backs unity government | [17 June](#)

Attorney General refuses to delay Netanyahu hearing | [7 June](#)

Stav Shaffir to run for Labour leader | [7 June](#)

Ultra-Orthodox party sought segregation in public places | [4 June](#)

Netanyahu sacks Bennett and Shaked | [3 June](#)

Netanyahu says Liberman 'drunk with power' | [31 May](#)

Netanyahu fails to form government | [30 May](#)

Kulanu to join Likud for early election | [29 May](#)

Knesset votes for new elections | [28 May](#)

Coalition talks deadlocked over conscription bill | [24 May](#)