



Itamar Ben-Gvir: From Terrorist Supporter to Kingmaker

Ahead of the Israeli parliamentary elections on October 27, FokusIsrael.ch is profiling the most important political leaders. This week: Itamar Ben-Gvir (50) of the far-right party Otzma Yehudit (Jewish Power).

By Jan Kapusnak 

Itamar Ben-Gvir is best known for provocation, confrontation, and his ability to turn fear and anger into votes. Once an extremist outside the realm of legitimate politics, he is now Minister of National Security and oversees the police, prisons, and internal security. He also leads the far-right [Otzma Yehudit](#) (Jewish Power) party, which has significant electoral potential and is therefore once again important to current Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in the upcoming elections.

The ideology of Ben-Gvir's ultranationalist party is rooted in [the movement](#) founded by Rabbi Meir Kahane. Kahane had advocated for stripping Arab citizens of their political rights and expelling Arabs from Israel and the disputed territories. His Kach party was excluded from the 1988 Israeli election for inciting racism and was banned as a terrorist organization in 1994.

Ben-Gvir claims to have moderated his views and says he no longer supports expelling all Arabs, but only those he considers disloyal. Yet Otzma Yehudit is hostile to Israel's democratic character. It combines anti-Arab nationalism, rejection of Palestinian statehood, the annexation of Gaza and the West Bank without granting Palestinians equal political rights, and demands complete control over the Temple Mount.

Ben-Gvir became active in the Kahanist movement as a teenager. Later, in , he was discharged from military service because of his ties to Kach. In 1995, a few weeks before the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin, he appeared on television holding a Cadillac emblem that had been stolen from the prime minister's car and warned, "We got to his car, and we'll get to him, too." He has since expressed regret over the incident.

For years, Ben-Gvir displayed a portrait in his home of Baruch Goldstein, a U.S.-born Israeli doctor and Kach activist who murdered 29 Muslim worshippers in Hebron in 1994. , he did not remove the portrait until 2020, when he was seeking greater political legitimacy.

Ben-Gvir studied law and later became known for defending ultra-nationalist Jews



who were charged with hate crimes and terrorist attacks against Palestinians. He himself has at least eight criminal convictions to his name, including for incitement to racial hatred and supporting a terrorist organization—Kach.

Netanyahu needed Ben-Gvir to return to power

Given this track record, Ben-Gvir became a member of the government solely because Netanyahu needed him to return to power. Before the 2022 election, Netanyahu had worked to unite Ben-Gvir with Smotrich so that their votes would not be lost below the 3.25% electoral threshold required to win seats in the Knesset. Their joint list with Noam won fourteen seats, which helped Netanyahu's bloc secure a parliamentary majority and form a government. For Ben-Gvir, this meant legitimacy at the center of power.

Netanyahu subsequently appointed Ben-Gvir as Minister of National Security, and the Knesset passed the so-called Ben-Gvir Law, which expanded his powers over the police. Ben-Gvir argued that police policy should be determined by elected officials, while critics accused him of misusing the police for political purposes and interfering in senior appointments, investigations, and police operations.

During demonstrations critical of the government, Ben-Gvir sometimes visited police command posts and urged commanders to make more arrests and take tougher measures, and he encouraged the illegal use of stun grenades against demonstrators who opposed the government's judicial reforms.

In January 2024, Israel's Supreme Court barred him from issuing operational directives regarding certain protests. A year later, the same court affirmed his authority to set general police policy but suspended the provision until 2025, prompting Arab leaders to accuse the police under his authority of neglecting their communities.

Ben-Gvir has made harsher conditions for Palestinian prisoners a political hallmark and boasts of having reduced their treatment to the "legal minimum." He maintained this policy even after the Supreme Court criticized it, stating that the prisoners were not receiving enough food.

He also turned prison visits into political spectacles and published footage of himself confronting Marwan Barghouti —a convicted terrorist serving five life sentences who



has nonetheless become a cause célèbre for segments of the radical left in the West—in his cell. Ben-Gvir subsequently advocated for a law imposing the death penalty on Palestinians convicted by military courts in the West Bank for deadly terrorist attacks, and celebrated its passage with a birthday cake decorated with a noose.

Temporary Resignation in Protest Against the Hostage Agreement

When Netanyahu accepted a hostage release agreement with the terrorist organization Hamas in Gaza and a ceasefire in January 2025, Ben-Gvir resigned from the government and condemned the agreement as a “victory for terrorism” that left Hamas undefeated. Two months later, he returned after Israel resumed major military operations in Gaza. In October, he also rejected the Trump-brokered deal to return all 48 remaining Israeli hostages—both living and deceased—in exchange for convicted Palestinian terrorists and other prisoners.

The Temple Mount in Jerusalem is at the center of Ben-Gvir’s agenda. Under the long-standing status quo, Jews are allowed to enter it but not to pray there formally. Muslims are permitted to do so. The Temple Mount is administered by the Islamic Waqf Authority, which operates under Jordanian supervision. The unequal treatment of Jews and Muslims is undoubtedly open to criticism. For Ben-Gvir, however, this is not merely a question of freedom of religious practice, but a [struggle](#) for Israeli sovereignty over the Temple Mount.

Ben-Gvir therefore prayed openly on the grounds and advocated for the construction of a synagogue. During his tenure, the police increasingly tolerated open Jewish prayer, group worship services, and public Torah lessons, which accelerated the gradual erosion of restrictions— —that had already begun before he took office. Despite documented changes, Netanyahu claims that the status quo remains unchanged. But Ben-Gvir’s actions lend credibility to Arab claims that “Al-Aqsa is under threat” and increase the risk of a major conflict at one of the world’s most sensitive religious sites.

Ben-Gvir also supports judicial reform aimed at limiting the Supreme Court’s power vis-à-vis the government. This is because the courts, prosecutors, and the attorney general have curtailed his attempts to influence the police. In response, Ben-Gvir

accused them of an “attempted coup.” His rhetoric reflects a majority-oriented view of democracy, in which elected politicians embody the will of the people and those who restrict them are dismissed as illegitimate.

Ben-Gvir thrives on confrontation, but his provocations and actions have damaged Israel’s international reputation. In June 2025, several Western countries imposed sanctions on him for inciting violence against Palestinians in the West Bank.

Ben-Gvir Could Once Again Become a “Kingmaker”

Ben-Gvir is heading into the October 27 parliamentary elections from a position of strength: Polls predict that his Otzma Yehudit party will win about nine seats in the Knesset. Without him, Benjamin Netanyahu will therefore have no chance of becoming prime minister again. That is why Ben-Gvir has not yielded to Netanyahu’s pressure to form an alliance with the other far-right parties once more. He believes he can dominate the religious right even without his government colleague Bezalel Smotrich of the Religious Zionists (HaTzionut HaDatit).

If Netanyahu loses the election, Ben-Gvir’s time as a minister is likely to be over. Netanyahu’s challenger, Naftali Bennett, initially said he would not “boycott” Ben-Gvir. However, he later stated that Ben-Gvir would have no place in a government led by him.

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