

In Controversial Shake-Up, Israeli Lawmakers Give Themselves More Power to Choose Judges

Benjamin Netanyahu, the Israeli prime minister, appears to have returned to the judicial overhaul that divided the country before the war in Gaza.



Listen to this article · 5:47 min [Learn more](#)



By **Aaron Boxerman**

Reporting from Jerusalem

March 27, 2025

Want to stay updated on what's happening in Israel? [Sign up for Your Places: Global Update](#), and we'll send our latest coverage to your inbox.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's coalition enacted legislation on Thursday that handed politicians more control over picking judges, part of a contentious effort to overhaul the Israeli judiciary that roiled the country before the war with Hamas.

Israel's 120-seat Parliament passed two laws after an hourslong overnight debate, in a vote mostly boycotted by the opposition. The legislation revamps the committee that picks judges, including Supreme Court justices, in a way that critics say will politicize the bench.

The law marked the resumption of a two-year effort by Mr. Netanyahu's coalition to expand its control over other branches of government. Before the Hamas-led attack in October 2023 started the war in Gaza, Mr. Netanyahu had attempted similar legislation in the face of mass protests. He suspended the push to preserve wartime unity.

Now, Mr. Netanyahu has returned to the judicial overhaul, along with simultaneous efforts to weaken other state watchdogs. He is trying to fire both the attorney general and the head of the domestic intelligence service.

The laws that passed on Thursday were less far-reaching than the coalition's initial proposals. But they nonetheless threatened to reignite the uproar that swept the country before the war, even as Israel and Hamas are engaging in new fighting in Gaza.

Crowds of protesters rallied outside the Parliament in Jerusalem on Wednesday to demonstrate against the legislation, waving Israeli flags. But in a sign of how the war has split the priorities of Mr. Netanyahu's opponents, many also showed up carrying signs calling for an immediate deal with Hamas to free the remaining hostages in Gaza.



Protesters in Jerusalem on Wednesday night. Shir Torem/Reuters

Inside the Parliament building, Mr. Netanyahu gave a fiery address in which he contended that his government's policies would serve as a long-needed corrective to an unelected "deep state," echoing rhetoric used by President Trump.

"Democracy is not in danger. The rule of bureaucrats is in danger," Mr. Netanyahu told lawmakers. "The deep state is in danger."

Unlike in the United States, in Israel a single nine-member committee is empowered by law to appoint judges, including Supreme Court justices. In a policy designed to ensure judicial independence, five of them were either current Supreme Court justices or expert lawyers from the Israeli bar association. The remaining four were politicians representing both the coalition and the opposition.

But Mr. Netanyahu's coalition has long wanted to give itself more power on the committee, which would allow it to shape the next generation of judges. Yariv Levin, the justice minister who planned the overhaul, originally proposed a law that would effectively allow the coalition to dominate the committee.

Opponents said that granting the ruling coalition greater influence in picking judges who review its legislation would remove one of Israel's few checks on executive power. Israel is a highly centralized state without a formal constitution.

Mr. Levin has framed the legislation that passed on Thursday as a compromise that did not go as far as the government's critics had initially feared. Under the new system, political appointees — one from the coalition and one from the opposition — would replace the two experts from the Israeli bar.

And unlike before, when a supermajority of seven was required to pick a new Supreme Court justice, the legislation enacted on Thursday only requires a simple majority — giving more leeway to politicians and their appointees.

Yedidia Stern, a law professor who has sought to mediate a middle ground on the overhaul, said the changes would still politicize the process of picking judges and would encourage the selection of more extreme justices to the Supreme Court.

Politicians and their representatives will now control six seats on the nine-member committee, meaning that the selection of justices would likely become a matter of political horse-trading, he said.

He argued that by engaging in so many divisive actions at once, Mr. Netanyahu's coalition was seeking to overwhelm an already war-weary and distracted Israeli public, in an attempt to dispel an effective response.

"They have managed to exploit the war — and the energy it has drained from the public — to create tectonic changes in Israeli democracy," he said. "I don't think we can say that Israel is no longer democratic. But if this goes through, it will be a far weaker democracy."

Thursday's legislation is one in a series of moves by the Israeli government that critics view as attempts by Mr. Netanyahu and his allies to cement their power.

Last week, Mr. Netanyahu dismissed Ronen Bar, the head of the country's Shin Bet security service, saying he no longer trusted him. Under Mr. Bar's direction, the Shin Bet has been involved in probing potential Qatari interference in Israeli decision-making, including inside Mr. Netanyahu's own office.

Just a few days later, the Israeli government effectively began the process of dismissing Gali Baharav-Miara, Israel's attorney general. Ms. Baharav-Miara had frequently clashed with Mr. Netanyahu on policy.

She also oversees the country's prosecutors, including those who are currently trying Mr. Netanyahu for corruption. Mr. Netanyahu's critics have noted that a new attorney general could suspend or even cancel his trial. The prime minister denies wrongdoing.

Aaron Boxerman is a Times reporter covering Israel and Gaza. He is based in Jerusalem. More about Aaron Boxerman

A version of this article appears in print on , Section A, Page 8 of the New York edition with the headline: Israeli Lawmakers Vote To Expand Their Power To Shape the Judiciary