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## Smotrich's surprise appearance at Israel Day Parade sparks backlash from NY and Jewish leaders

New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani, who skipped the parade, said he was “offended” by the far-right Israeli minister’s presence.

By [Grace Gilson](#) June 1, 2026



Israeli politicians, government ministers, public officials and supporters take part in the Israel Day Parade in New York City, May 31, 2026. (Arie Leib Abrams/Flash90)

Amid a record crowd at New York’s annual Israel Day parade on Sunday, one participant is standing out.

A growing number of city, state and Jewish leaders are denouncing the participation of Bezalel Smotrich, a far-right Israeli minister who joined the march without having been announced in advance.

“The facts: Smotrich was NOT invited. Crashed at the last minute. Marched in the back of the parade. Not one New York public official joined him,” David Greenfield, the CEO and executive director of the Met Council, which sponsored a [pre-parade breakfast for elected officials](#) Sunday, wrote in a [post on X](#).

Greenfield was responding to a groundswell of anger about Smotrich's presence at the rally, which is typically framed as a broad Jewish communal celebration of Israel. While the inclusion of Israeli government officials has long been a sticking point for some who would prefer the parade to avoid politics, this year Smotrich's presence in particular has proved galling for several prominent parade participants.

"Bezalel Smotrich is a far-right extremist whose hateful and divisive rhetoric is fundamentally at odds with the values we hold dear in New York," Gov. Kathy Hochul, who joined the march, wrote in a [post on X](#) Monday. "Yesterday's parade was a celebration of Jewish pride, community, and unity. I strongly condemn his participation."

Attorney General [Letitia James](#), who attended the parade, and New York State Assemblymember [Alex Bores](#) also condemned Smotrich on Monday.

The Israeli government had promised its largest-ever delegation this year, in part a show of strength at a time when New York City's anti-Israel mayor, Zohran Mamdani, vowed to skip the parade. But it had not said that Smotrich, who recently said he believed he was facing International Criminal Court charges, would be among the group. Smotrich joined the parade after flying in from Israel early Sunday morning.

Mamdani condemned the inclusion of Smotrich and other ministers in the parade, telling MS Now in [an interview](#) published Monday that he was "offended" by their presence.

"You can see in the participation of the far-right Israeli minister Smotrich, as well as a number of other ministers, a vision of annihilation, a complicity in genocide, and frankly, a belief that does not have much value for even the sanctity of children in Gaza," Mamdani said. "I am offended, as I know many New Yorkers are, by their participation."

Smotrich, Israel's finance minister, has been [sanctioned by several countries for inciting settler violence against Palestinians](#). The head of Israel's far-right Religious Zionist Party, Smotrich has previously advocated for [annexing the majority of the West Bank](#), called for the "[total annihilation](#)" of cities in Gaza, and said that it would be "[justified and moral](#)" to block humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip.



Israeli Finance Minister Bezael Smotrich holds a press conference at the Finance Ministry in Jerusalem, May 19, 2026. (Yonatan Sindel/Flash90)

On Friday, Mark Treyger, the CEO of the Jewish Community Relations Council of New York, which organizes the parade, said he did not know exactly which Israeli officials would be at the parade.

“We don’t have the full details as far as who is or who is not coming from the Israeli delegation,” he told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency at the time.

“That’s usually handled from the consulate office, and I will refer to them as far as handling that,” Treyger added. “But for me personally, it’s really not about politicians. It’s about the people that we are welcoming, as far as families across New York, the state, the region, folks coming in from across the country that are looking forward to this parade.”

Eric Goldstein, the CEO of the UJA-Federation of New York, said in a statement Monday that Smotrich’s political views were not representative of the Israel Day Parade.

“The story of this year’s parade is 50,000+ people with highly diverse opinions from across our community coming together in a powerful demonstration of support for Israel as a Jewish and democratic state,” Goldstein said. “Bezael Smotrich’s political views do not reflect the values of this event or its organizers.”

For some of them, Smotrich’s participation was a blemish.

“Bezalel Smotrich should be sanctioned by American political and Jewish communal leaders – not marching alongside them in the streets of New York City,” the liberal pro-Israel lobby J Street wrote in a [post on X](#). As a political organization, J Street does not officially participate in the parade, but its members typically march as part of liberal delegations.

Other liberal Jewish groups similarly criticized both Smotrich’s presence and New York politicians for participating in the same parade as the Israeli delegation.

“It is shocking to see New York officials march alongside Kahanists like Bezalel Smotrich and Otzma Yehudit members, whose support for illegal settlements and territorial expansion inspire violence, hatred and the further immiseration of the West Bank and Gaza,” New York Jewish Agenda wrote in a [post on X](#).

“We are grateful to Mayor Mamdani for refusing to march in the Israel Day Parade, which featured some of the Israeli politicians who have not only cheered on the genocide of Palestinians, but are part of the government committing that genocide,” tweeted the left-wing group Jews for Racial and Economic Justice, adding, “Shame on every elected official who marched yesterday.”

Israel [had announced](#) several participants in advance of the parade, including Diaspora Affairs Minister Amichai Chikli and Immigration and Absorption Minister Ofir Sofer. Heritage Minister Amichai Eliyahu, who has said he [wants to see Gaza flattened](#) by a nuclear bomb and then [resettled by Jews](#), was also on the list.

Tamar Glezerman, an organizer for Israelis for Peace, which took part in a small demonstration along the parade route to oppose the Israeli government delegation’s presence, told JTA Sunday that she was surprised to see Smotrich in the group.

“They hid that because the Israeli government is, you know, a group of cowards, and they don’t want to get pushback,” she said.

Treyger appeared to respond to the outcry on Monday, writing in a [post on X](#) that while “some individuals who attended were neither invited by JCRC-NY nor known to us in advance, participation in the parade is not an endorsement of any political figure or ideology.”

A spokesperson for JCRC declined to clarify whether Treyger was referring to Smotrich specifically.

“We reject rhetoric that dehumanizes others, fuels division, or diminishes the dignity of any human being,” Treyger continued.

