

After three years of war, Israelis will head to the polls in October with strong feelings of anxiety about their security. The reality of living under persistent threat, the government's vision of prolonged regional fighting, concerns over the emerging US-Iran agreement, and warnings from Israel's own security establishment have reinforced a growing perception that successes on the battlefield have yet to translate into a stable reality.

At the same time, Israeli politics remains remarkably familiar. Recent [polling](#) continues to show majority support for parties outside Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's governing coalition. However, as in previous election cycles, that majority has not produced a clear path to an alternative government.

Meanwhile, the ultra-Orthodox parties have launched an intensive campaign against the arrest of ultra-Orthodox draft evaders and in support of legislation that would enshrine broad draft exemptions for ultra-Orthodox yeshiva students. The debate touches on one of Israel's deepest internal fissures, especially as the country remains preoccupied with regional security. Together, these developments present the central question of the coming election: not simply whether Israelis want change, but whether any political camp can offer both a convincing security strategy and a governing coalition capable of delivering it.

The Leading Trend: Netanyahu on the Defensive

The most immediate political challenge facing Prime Minister Netanyahu is the fallout from the emerging US-Iran agreement. For years, Netanyahu's close relationship with US President Donald Trump was one of his greatest political assets, reinforcing his image as the Israeli leader best positioned to influence Washington. The Trump administration's imposition of a broadly unpopular agreement on Israel has made that argument more difficult to sustain.

Many Israelis – including voters on the right – view the agreement as falling short of Israel's security objectives. Critics argue that it leaves key issues unresolved, including Iran's nuclear program, ballistic missile capabilities, and regional proxy network. The newly signed trilateral framework agreement between Israel, Lebanon, and the United States adds another layer of uncertainty. While the government presents it as a diplomatic dividend of Israel's military campaign, the public's response will greatly depend on the agreement's ability to sideline Hezbollah and restore security to residents of Israel's northern communities.

Netanyahu is therefore likely to shift his political narrative. Rather than campaigning as the leader with unparalleled influence in Washington, he is expected to portray himself as a leader standing firm under American pressure while defending Israel's vital security interests. That

message – combining external pressure with strong leadership – has historically resonated with his political base and may help contain the electoral damage from recent developments.

In the meantime, Netanyahu is expected to continue efforts to strengthen his control over the Likud party list through [10 reserved slots](#) for candidates of his choice and internal reforms ahead of the primaries to be held on August 4th. With elections expected in October, Netanyahu's governing coalition is currently working at full force to use its remaining months in office to advance legislation, senior appointments, budgetary allocations, and long-term institutional changes. Regardless of the election outcome, these decisions could shape the political and institutional landscape inherited by the next government.

Key Developments to Track

1. The Opposition's Leadership Dilemma

Recent [polls](#) demonstrate that parties outside Netanyahu's governing coalition have support from a majority of the electorate. The opposition's challenge is organizing that majority into a viable governing alternative. This dilemma has come to the fore with the surging popularity of the centrist former IDF Chief of Staff Gadi Eisenkot – who has overtaken former prime minister Naftali Bennett in recent polls. Until recently, Bennett appeared to be the undisputed leader of the anti-Netanyahu camp. Eisenkot's growing support has reopened the leadership contest, while Yisrael Beiteinu party leader Avigdor Lieberman also continues to position himself as a candidate for prime minister.

Gadi Eisenkot's personal journey – from a modest Mizrahi family to becoming IDF chief – combined with his military record, reputation for integrity, and unpolished public style has created an image of authenticity that resonates with many Israelis. The death of his son and two of his nephews during the war in Gaza has further bolstered his public image, allowing many voters to see him as a leader whose understanding of the costs of war is deeply personal. Unlike several of his rivals, Eisenkot has not yet served in a senior ministerial position, enabling him to present himself as an experienced national leader without the baggage of political office.

The challenge for the anti-Netanyahu camp extends beyond personalities. In previous election cycles, the leader of the largest opposition party typically argued that defeating Netanyahu required concentrating votes behind one dominant list. In practice, that strategy often weakened smaller opposition parties without increasing the overall size of the bloc, ultimately making coalition formation more difficult.

Recent [polling](#) suggests that the political partnership between Bennett and Yesh Atid party leader Yair Lapid has yet to reverse this pattern. Rather than generating momentum, both parties have lost support in recent weeks. Whether this reflects temporary volatility or a broader

search for new leadership remains unclear. The opposition therefore faces a strategic choice: it must decide whether success lies in building one dominant party or in organizing a coalition of complementary parties capable of assembling a governing majority after election day.

However, organizing a coalition requires more than complementary parties—it requires someone with the political authority to organize the camp itself. Unlike Netanyahu, who remains the undisputed leader of the right and can influence decisions about alliances and electoral strategy, no opposition figure currently holds comparable authority.

2. The Search for a New Center-Right Governing Formula

In recent Israeli elections, the decisive votes have not come from the ideological left or right, but from the so-called “soft right” – voters who move between political blocs from one election to the next and often determine who forms the next government. As the election approaches, leaders seeking to attract these voters have increasingly focused on the idea of a “unity government” – a broad Zionist governing coalition that includes parties from both the Netanyahu camp and the opposition.

After years of electoral deadlock, some soft-right and centrist voters appear less focused on replacing Netanyahu than on reshaping the coalition around him. Their preferred outcome is a broader, more pragmatic government that is less dependent on the far-right and ultra-Orthodox parties, while avoiding reliance on Arab parties.

This political space has fueled several overlapping efforts to create new center-right parties that emphasize national unity. Senior figures on the right, including former Ambassador to the United Nations Gilad Erdan, former Minister of Justice Ayelet Shaked, and former head of the Security and Foreign Affairs Committee Yuli Edelstein, are exploring a new right-wing party aimed at voters dissatisfied with both Netanyahu’s dependence on extremist parties and the existing opposition. Separately, former Communications Minister Yoaz Hendel’s Reservists party has been negotiating a possible alliance with Benny Gantz, Dedi Simhi and other centrist or center-right figures. These efforts are competing for a similar constituency: voters who emphasize military service, civic responsibility and national solidarity but want a coalition that is not dependent on the ultra-Orthodox parties, the far right or the Arab parties.

Whether any of these initiatives produces a viable new political party may prove one of the defining questions of the campaign. It would not simply redistribute seats among parties in existing coalition blocs; it could redefine the coalition options available after election day.

3. Arab Parties and the Limits of Coalition Building

If a new governing coalition formula does not emerge, the Arab parties will once again become central to coalition arithmetic. Yet along with Jewish party leaders’ opposition to cooperation,

difficulties the relatively small Arab parties have had in forming a joint list leave the possibility of Arab participation in a future coalition in doubt. Most polling suggests that Arab voters prefer a unified list, believing it would increase turnout and maximize political influence. But the Arab parties disagree over how their electoral strength should be used. Ra'am views participation in, or support for, a future Zionist-led coalition as a legitimate and potentially effective way to advance the interests of Arab citizens. That objective also shapes its approach to a joint list, which, in Ra'am's view, must allow each party political flexibility to join coalitions.

The other main Arab parties, Hadash, Ta'al and Balad, reject that premise. While they differ on some issues, they all prefer to retain the freedom to judge any prospective government by its policies and currently appear more likely to exert influence from outside the coalition than to enter it formally.

The debate extends well beyond Arab Israeli politics. Although recent polling consistently gives the opposition a parliamentary majority, most Jewish parties – across both the coalition and much of the opposition – remain reluctant to rely on Arab parties as decisive coalition partners, particularly on matters of national security and the character of the state. The left-wing Democratim and Eisenkot's Yashar are the only exceptions.

This political reality has become one of Netanyahu's most effective campaign themes. By repeatedly arguing that figures such as Gadi Eisenkot would ultimately have to rely on Arab parties to form a government, Netanyahu seeks to raise doubts among moderate right-wing voters about the viability of an alternative coalition. This message has proved salient in previous election campaigns and is likely to remain a central feature of this one.

Another noteworthy electoral variable is the addition of approximately 640,000 first-time voters aged 18 to 22. Surveys indicate unusually high expected turnout. Unlike younger electorates in many Western democracies, early [polling](#) suggests these voters are more likely to support parties on the right than the left. Their impact may therefore be felt less in the balance between the blocs than in the balance of power within the right itself.

Lastly, the leaders of the grassroots Arab-Jewish unity organization Standing Together recently announced the formation of a new Arab-Jewish party, A Place for All. While its electoral prospects remain uncertain, the decision by this new party whether to run independently could influence broader efforts to maximize Arab turnout, or weaken the Arab and left-wing bloc by peeling off voters and failing to cross the threshold.