

Israeli Election Update: A Frozen Political Map — But No Clear Government

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The State of Play

With fewer than three months to go before the October 27 election, Israel's political map is still far from settled. Yet if you step back from the week-to-week polls, a remarkable fact emerges: for more than three years, the electorate has repeatedly settled into roughly the same three-part map — about 50 seats for Netanyahu's coalition, 60 for the opposition, and roughly 10 for the Arab parties. Israeli media commonly presents the map in these three groups. That convention has political significance because several key opposition figures have pledged not to form a government that depends on an Arab party, as the previous "change government" did when Ra'am joined the coalition. We follow that split here to explain the political arithmetic, rather than as a normative endorsement of treating the Arab parties as separate from the opposition.

What remains in flux is the composition of the camps. Netanyahu's coalition is considerably more homogeneous today than the coalition that won the 2022 election. It appears to have lost voters in two distinct waves: first during the fight over the judicial overhaul, and again after October 7. Over time, it recovered much of the support lost after the Hamas attack — but not those who had already broken with it over the judicial overhaul. The fight over Israel's democratic character appears to have left the more durable electoral mark.

The result is an unusually rigid electorate. In the latest [Channel 12 poll](#), 9.8% of voters were undecided, but only 1.3% — roughly 90,000 voters, or about two Knesset seats — were actually undecided between the Netanyahu and change blocs. Almost everyone else was choosing among parties within the camp they already preferred.

And yet neither side has a clear path to 61. Party mergers remain unresolved, candidate lists do not close until September 7, and several parties are hovering around the electoral threshold. Another potential reservoir sits outside the country: roughly 540,000–570,000 eligible Israelis live abroad and, with narrow exceptions, can vote only by returning to Israel. Even limited mobilization [could matter](#) in such a close race. **The central question may therefore be less who can persuade voters to change camps than who can rearrange this remarkably stable map into a governing majority.**

Segalovich and Ra'am: One Possible Route to 61

It is against this arithmetic that one of the more intriguing developments of recent weeks should be understood: Yoav Segalovich may join Mansour Abbas's Ra'am. Segalovich, a former deputy public security minister from the centrist Yesh Atid party, is closely identified with the previous government's serious effort to combat crime and violence in Arab communities. He is well regarded

among many Arab Israelis while remaining a mainstream Jewish-Zionist political figure. If the move materializes, he would become the most prominent Jewish — and certainly Zionist — politician ever to join Ra'am.

For Abbas, this would be much more than an unusual recruitment. It would strengthen his effort to position Ra'am as a pragmatic civic party capable of building Jewish-Arab political partnership around concrete domestic issues, with crime and personal security at the top of the list. More importantly, it could begin to change the coalition equation. With the opposition excluding the Arab parties still short of 61, making cooperation with Ra'am more acceptable to Jewish voters — and to opposition parties — could become critical after the election. Eisenkot has already left that door open, saying he could sit with any party that supports national service — military or civilian — and Israel's right to exist as a Jewish state. Segalovich joining Ra'am would not resolve the political difficulty of such cooperation, but it could begin to change its terms.

The Other Route to 61: The Battle for the Soft Right

The other possible route to a majority runs through Israel's soft right — and since our last update, that space has become considerably more crowded. The soft right consists of moderate right-wing and centrist voters who combine right-leaning views on security and the Palestinian issue with strong opposition to ultra-Orthodox draft exemptions and subsidies, discomfort with dependence on Arab parties, and growing exhaustion with political polarization.

Two new parties have now been established to compete directly for this constituency: one led by [Yoaz Hendel and Chili Tropper](#), and another by [Gilad Erdan and Yuli Edelstein](#). They join Eisenkot, Bennett, Liberman and Likud itself in a crowded competition for essentially the same pool of voters. The question is not simply whether the soft right moves toward the opposition, but where those votes land, which parties clear the threshold, and what they choose to do the morning after the election.

For now, Eisenkot appears to be benefiting most. He has continued to rise in the polls, and a [July survey](#) found that he had overtaken Netanyahu on suitability to serve as prime minister, 41% to 37%, reversing Netanyahu's advantage in May. But Eisenkot cannot capture this electorate alone. The proliferation of parties competing for the soft right could strengthen the opposition collectively — or fragment precisely the votes it needs.

Netanyahu's Counterstrategy

Netanyahu's response is essentially twofold: consolidate every possible vote on the right and make the coalition that could replace him politically unacceptable. Likud initially tried to weaken Eisenkot directly, portraying him as a left-wing politician who would rely on Arab parties and support a Palestinian state. The attack has so far failed to stop his rise. The negative campaign has therefore increasingly shifted toward Yair Golan and the Democrats: if Eisenkot himself is difficult to discredit, present the coalition he would need as too left-wing — and cooperation with Arab parties too politically costly — for soft-right voters and parties to support.

At the same time, Netanyahu is once again managing the edges of his own bloc. Ahead of the 2022 election, he personally helped broker the reluctant alliance between Smotrich and Ben Gvir that ultimately won 14 seats. With [Smotrich again teetering above the electoral threshold](#), Netanyahu may have to perform a similar exercise, with right-wing figures [Moshe Feiglin](#) and former senior IDF commander [Ofir Winter](#) among the additional pieces available to bolster Netanyahu's coalition.

His more difficult balancing act is with the ultra-Orthodox. Netanyahu needs their parties to preserve his existing bloc, but many soft-right voters strongly oppose the draft exemption and subsidies for ultra-Orthodox men who do not serve. Hence the apparent contradiction between legislative concessions to his Haredi partners in recent months and Netanyahu's simultaneous embrace of calls for a future "broad Zionist coalition" without either Arab or ultra-Orthodox parties. While he is campaigning for votes, he is also seeking to keep his options open for the morning after.

But there is another dimension to this strategy. Netanyahu does not necessarily need to produce 61 seats of his own if he can prevent the other side from forming a government that is regarded as legitimate. Israel has been here before: between 2019 and 2021, four elections produced repeated political deadlock, allowing Netanyahu to remain prime minister throughout that period. This time, the sustained campaign against cooperation with Arab parties could serve a similar purpose. By portraying a government dependent on Arab votes as illegitimate before the ballots are even cast, Netanyahu is contesting not only who can assemble a majority, but which majority will be accepted as legitimate.

The Missing Strategic Debate

There is an irony in all this increasingly sophisticated discussion of how to reach 61 — and even whose 61 will be considered legitimate: far less is being said about what the next government ultimately wants to do with that majority.

National security is again at the center of the campaign — Gaza, the West Bank, October 7, Iran and the conduct of Israel's wars are everywhere. Yet researchers Shaul Arieli and Maoz Rosenthal [find](#) that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is being discussed overwhelmingly as a security problem rather than as a debate over Israel's political destination. Of 1,175 social-media posts by party leaders addressing the conflict, 1,102 focused on the status quo and ongoing security events; only a small number addressed either annexation or a two-state solution.

But the absence of a political debate does not mean the reality on the ground is frozen. Arieli and Rosenthal note that the pro-annexation camp has something most of its competitors do not: both a defined agenda and the institutional power to advance it. Its discourse has become increasingly operational — hundreds of new settlements and outposts, territorial contiguity, maps and facts on the ground — while the government continues to deepen Israeli control in the West Bank.

That leaves a striking gap at the heart of the election. Israeli politicians are offering increasingly elaborate answers on how to build the next government — and even which government should be

considered legitimate. They are offering far fewer answers to the more fundamental question: what would they actually do with power, and where are their policies ultimately meant to lead?