Israel's Most Consequential Election?

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Tamar Hermann is an Israeli political scientist specializing in tracking public opinion, particularly regarding national security issues. She currently works as academic director at the Viterbi Family Center for Public Opinion and Policy Research at the Israel Democracy Institute, editor-in-chief of



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Amit Segal, a leading Israeli journalist and television personality, is the chief political analyst for both Channel 12 News and the country's most-read newspaper, Israel Hayom.

Brief Analysis

A panel of top Israeli pollsters, journalists, and political analysts previews the historic October 27 vote, including its prospects for changing Jerusalem's approach to the Palestinians and reversing the plummet in U.S. public sentiment.

On October 15, The Washington Institute held a virtual Policy Forum with Tamar Hermann, Yaakov Katz, and Amit Segal. Hermann, a distinguished political scientist who has spent years tracking Israeli public opinion, is a senior research fellow at the Israel Democracy Institute and academic director of the Viterbi Family Center for Public Opinion and Policy Research. Katz is an Israeli-American author and journalist, a senior fellow at the Jewish People Policy Institute, and cofounder of the Middle East-America Dialogue (MEAD). Segal is the chief political analyst for Israel Hayom *newspaper and Channel 12 News, where he anchors the show* Meet the Press*. The following is a rapporteurs' summary of their remarks.*

Tamar Hermann

Israeli public opinion is not monolithic in its understanding or framing of the issues that will shape the upcoming election. In my recent polling, Jewish respondents who self-identified as being on the political right (roughly 60 percent) were most frequently concerned about security and foreign affairs, while those in the center (25 percent) focused on the economy, and those on the left (15 percent) focused on the relationship between state and religion. These polls point to a lack of consensus about what is at stake in this vote, and such polarization will likely leave large portions of the electorate dissatisfied with the outcome.

My monthly polls focus on four metrics: the future of Israel's national security, democracy, economy, and social cohesion. Recent results show that Israelis of all backgrounds are pessimistic about social cohesion but increasingly optimistic about the country's future. Yet when breaking down the data by political affiliation, one finds the political right more optimistic than the left in every category.

The strong national unity that followed the October 7 Hamas terrorist attack did not last long—common cleavages soon resurfaced on social demography, levels of religiosity, and center vs. periphery. Israeli society is diverse, with differences rooted in beliefs about the relationship between state and religion, management of security threats, and how leaders interact with the international community. For example, when the government announced in March 2025 that it would not extend the Gaza ceasefire reached earlier that year, some Israelis supported the decision, while many on the left argued that the war had been turned into a political gambit to enable Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu to retain power.

In the current election, leading opposition candidate Gadi Eisenkot may wind up forming a minority government if he prevails. In that scenario, one of the ultraorthodox parties may decide to seek a spot in the coalition by offering concessions. Although it is unclear if this is a viable option, it may prove easier than bringing an Arab party into the coalition, since several of Eisenkot's likely partners have recently said they would leave his government if it includes Arab factions.

Observers should also keep in mind that right-wing parties have historically been underrepresented in the polls because some Israelis are hesitant to publicly admit they will be voting that way. Come election day, however, they ultimately cast their ballots for right-wing candidates.

Yaakov Katz

Although U.S. and international public opinion toward Israel has become much more negative in recent weeks, this downturn has not featured in the country's election campaigns or debates as one might expect. No candidates are critiquing Netanyahu about Israel's growing diplomatic isolation. There are two primary reasons for this, both grounded in the fact that security is the number-one issue for most voters.

First, Israelis tend to view the world through a strict lens of "with us or against us." As such, many saw the rapid erosion of international support after the October 7 attack as a manifestation of antisemitism, not a justified criticism of the government's actions. In their view, the Israel Defense Forces fought the Gaza war in the most humane possible way, but this was still insufficient for the international community, so there was no way to win back support. In light of this background, it is difficult to have a nuanced public conversation in Israel about the shift in American public opinion.

Second, politicians have leveraged these attitudes to argue that their leadership is necessary to defend Israel from a hostile world, creating a self-serving cycle. For example, when the United Kingdom recently imposed sanctions on West Bank settlements, it inadvertently empowered pro-settlement politicians. Many Israelis do not believe the situation is as dire as the polls indicate—in their view, they already lost Europe's sympathies long ago, and while there may be no way to win back Democratic Party support in the United States, they are convinced that President Trump and the Republicans remain sympathetic to them. They have not yet recognized the deeper trends stretching across American party lines, nor what these shifts might mean for the bilateral relationship.

The common perception that a new prime minister would change everything is naive. While removing Netanyahu would likely lower the temperature and toxicity, Eisenkot shares the incumbent's rejection of a two-state solution to the Palestinian conflict and is unlikely to withdraw Israeli forces from Gaza.

Even so, a new government could take welcome steps right away. The easiest would be to exert more pressure on extremist settler violence by allowing authorities to reinstate administrative detention for Jewish suspects in the West Bank, which could be done almost immediately. Indeed, the current government has set the bar for conciliatory action so low that even previously rejected proposals—like Netanyahu's 2009 "economic peace" plan, which was derided as wholly insufficient by an Obama administration focused on the two-state solution—would be seen as meaningful concessions today.

As for the possibility that Eisenkot may have to form a minority government if he wins, his supporters could find one aspect of this scenario appealing: it would allow them to establish a commission of inquiry into the October 7 attack. Yet this move would immediately trigger a vote of no confidence in the new government and another round of election campaigning—during which Netanyahu would no doubt tell the public that Eisenkot's bloc broke its campaign promises and sided with the Arab parties.

Amit Segal

Two weeks before the election, many are still wondering if President Trump will publicly endorse Netanyahu. Yet there are several reasons why this seems unlikely. For one, Trump generally likes winners, and the polls he has seen indicate that Netanyahu's best-case scenario is a draw. Meanwhile, much of the president's team no longer views Netanyahu as a partner. Trump also took note when Vice President JD Vance's endorsement of Hungarian President Viktor Orban failed to prevent an embarrassing loss. The U.S. midterm election plays into his calculations as well—even if Netanyahu makes gains in the polls and among Trump's team, the president may not want to risk backing an Israeli candidate who might still lose, since this could hurt the prospects of the U.S. congressional candidates he is endorsing back home.

Moreover, Israeli support for Trump is not what it was at the height of the Iran war. His favorability rating dropped significantly after his administration seemed to mishandle the ceasefire deal with Iran and made proposals that could give Tehran undue sway over the situation in Lebanon. As such, a Trump endorsement may not have as much of an effect on Israeli voters as in the past.

Regarding the potential policy impact of a change in government, the differences between Netanyahu's coalition and the preceding Bennett-Lapid coalition have been relatively narrow on major issues such as the West Bank, Gaza, and Iran's nuclear program. Yet differences between the current government and a potential new opposition government could have more far-reaching implications in the coming years, especially if the next U.S. administration elected in 2028 is more hostile to Israel. Such an administration may demand that Israel take dramatic actions on the Palestinian issue and other files, and may even threaten sanctions if Jerusalem fails to comply. The different parties in Israel's main opposition bloc are currently united by their goal of ousting Netanyahu, but once he is gone, their political differences will likely leave them divided and weak. These divisions would only be magnified by increased pressure from a less friendly U.S. administration.

Ultimately, the only functioning Israeli government is a unity government, since that is the only way to secure an uninterrupted four-year horizon for implementing its policies. A minority government would simply end up facing another round of elections well before then. If both camps find themselves dramatically short of the majority they need after this month's vote, they will have to break their pledges about not working with certain factions.

Eisenkot's primary concern is to at least make sure he wins the premiership, so that he can gain ground politically in preparation for the next round of elections. In reality, however, any scenario in which he sits with Arab parties would greatly damage the center-left's credibility and aid Netanyahu in the long run.

Alternatively, if Netanyahu moves away from either the far-right politician Itamar Ben-Gvir or the ultraorthodox parties, the result could be a functioning and lasting unity government. Yisrael Beitenu party leader Avigdor Liberman has pledged to avoid any government that is endorsed by Arab parties, but he might be willing to break that pledge if he could become prime minister.

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