

Israel faces a general election with all parties committed to war, repression and social devastation

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Israel is preparing for a general election in which every Zionist party—Netanyahu’s ruling bloc, the ultra-Orthodox factions, and the nominal opposition—enters the race on a single, unifying platform: the continuation and expansion of war.

The debate in the ruling elite is over how best to manage it, how to distribute the spoils, and how to suppress the growing internal contradictions produced by a society reorganised around permanent militarism.

The Knesset’s overwhelming vote to begin dissolving itself was triggered by the ultra-Orthodox parties’ demand for a law exempting yeshiva students from compulsory military service—an exemption they have enjoyed for decades and which has become intolerable to a society now mobilised for total war. When the bill failed, they withdrew support from the governing coalition, forcing the move toward elections.

Netanyahu’s government, nearing the end of its four-year term, follows one of the most politically unstable periods in Israel’s history: five elections in three and a half years, repeated failures to form viable coalitions, and the brief interlude of the Naftali Bennett/Yair Lapid “government of change—an incoherent alliance that collapsed within a year. Netanyahu returned to power in November 2022 at the head of the most extreme government Israel has ever seen, dominated by racist demagogues, settler leaders, and advocates of annexation and ethnic cleansing.

In the last days, Itamar Ben-Gvir, Israel’s Minister of National Security caused international outrage over his treatment of the 450 abducted Gaza flotilla activists who the Israeli armed forces had seized in international waters and deported to Israel. He published a video on social media in which he was seen taunting the activists as they knelt on the floor with their hands tied.

Before October 7, Israel was already in a profound political crisis. Netanyahu’s judicial overhaul—an attempt to strip the courts of even their limited ability to restrain

executive power—provoked seven months of mass protests, police violence, and refusals to serve by more than 10,000 reservists. The opposition leaders, many of whom had served in Netanyahu governments, postured as defenders of “democracy,” but they all shared Netanyahu’s strategic aims: the repression of Palestinians and the maintenance of Israel’s regional military dominance. Their fear was that Netanyahu’s open authoritarianism threatened the interests of Israel’s corporate and financial elite.

The October 7 attack ended even this shallow dissent. The Netanyahu government had spent months provoking a confrontation, ignoring warnings from Egypt and Israeli soldiers, and leaving the border effectively unguarded. At least 360 of the 1,200 Israeli deaths resulted from the Israel Defence Force’s (IDF) own massive military operation, including the use of the secretive Hannibal Directive.

Within hours, the opposition declared full unity with the government and the IDF. Five opposition leaders—including former generals Benny Gantz and Gadi Eisenkot—joined Netanyahu’s war cabinet on October 11. Their later resignations changed nothing. They remain fully committed to the war’s aims.

The government is now pushing a series of bills designed to entrench executive power and reward its settler-religious base. These include splitting the attorney general’s role, restructuring public broadcasting, granting tax benefits to West Bank settlements, curbing academic freedom, tightening political control over senior appointments, and narrowing eligibility for citizenship under the Law of Return. This is not a temporary wartime agenda but a blueprint for a permanently authoritarian state.

The opposition reorganises

The opposition's response has been to reorganise itself on an even more openly right-wing, militarist basis. In April, Bennett and Lapid announced a joint list, Yahad ("Together"), for the 2026 election, led by Bennett. He pledged to lead Israel along the correct "Liberal-Zionist" path—military strength, diplomatic pressure, and uncompromising territorial claims.

Both men boast that their bloc represents "80 percent of the country," a figure that explicitly excludes the 20 percent of the population who are Arab citizens. Lapid said, "Only those who evade IDF service and the extremists aren't invited". They categorically reject any cooperation with the Arab Joint List.

They are courting other right-wing figures, including Eisenkot and Avigdor Liberman. Yair Golan, leading the Democrats (the remnants of Labour and Meretz, the political wing of Peace Now and supporter of the long-vanished "two state solution"), has signalled openness to alliances while running independently. The "centre-left" is now little more than a recruiting ground for generals.

Bennett promises a state commission of inquiry into October 7, universal IDF service, an end to funding for yeshivas and draft dodgers, an eight-year term limit for the premiership, and refusal to concede "a single centimetre" of territory. He insists there can be no peace with Lebanon until Hezbollah is "neutralized." Far from being an alternative to Netanyahu, this is little more than a rebranding of the same programme.

The decisive issues confronting Israeli workers—the genocidal war on Gaza, the deepening occupation of the West Bank, settlement expansion, the US-led war on Iran and confrontation with Hezbollah, and the erosion of democratic rights—are excluded from the electoral agenda as givens. So too is the economic crisis produced by the war and the government's authoritarian restructuring.

Instead, the opposition focuses on a state inquiry into October 7, Netanyahu's corruption trial, ultra-Orthodox draft exemptions, and the growing influence of religious parties. These are secondary disputes within the Zionist state's political leadership that is united on the essentials: war abroad, repression at home and the exclusion of Palestinians from political life.

A permanent war economy

Israel has been transformed into a permanent war economy. Debt-to-GDP has risen to 69 percent. Defence spending reached 8 percent of GDP in 2024 and is set to

climb further as the Iran war continues. The 2026 defence budget of nearly \$50 billion guarantees worsening living costs, a deepening housing crisis—the issue that precipitated mass protests in 2011—and chronic underinvestment in transport, healthcare, education, and welfare. The VAT hike to 18 percent and the end of tax exemptions are already squeezing the middle class.

The workforce has been hollowed out by mass reserve call-ups, especially in the tech and service sectors. Small businesses, particularly in the Galilee and periphery, are collapsing. Construction and agriculture remain crippled by the exclusion of Palestinian labour. Attempts to recruit Asian workers have failed to substantially increase house starts and prevent soaring housing costs.

Israel's global "reputation risk" has surged. Foreign investors increasingly demand that companies base their operations abroad, threatening Israeli jobs and tax revenues. The Trump administration's 15 percent tariff on Israel's key chip and pharmaceutical exports further threatens employment and state revenues.

These pressures are tearing apart Israeli society. The middle class and high-tech workforce—long the backbone of Israel's economy—face falling incomes, rising taxes, and the burden of reserve duty, while watching the ultra-Orthodox secure exemptions and expanded state funding. The result is a society in which every class fraction feels betrayed, overburdened, and increasingly hostile to others.

Israel is a garrison state whose ruling class sees perpetual war as the only means of maintaining its power. The coming election will only determine which faction of the Zionist political establishment presides over a deepening war, an expanding authoritarian state, and a worsening social crisis. The essential programme—militarism, occupation, repression, and the exclusion of Palestinians—will remain untouched.



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