

Israel's general election: all the Zionist parties committed to war

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Israel goes to the polls on October 27, with no political party offering an alternative to war and authoritarianism.

Every one of the Zionist parties contesting the elections for the 120-seat Knesset, Israel's parliament—Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's right-wing Likud party, the ultra-Orthodox factions, the far-right fascistic parties and the supposed opposition—is committed to the same programme: the continuation and expansion of the genocide against the Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank, and war against Lebanon, Syria and the Houthis, as part of the broader regional war being waged by US imperialism against Iran and its allies.

On Sunday, October 18, just days before the elections and after months of strained relations, US President Donald Trump sought to bolster Netanyahu's position and secure his preferred candidate to carry out his war aims. He wrote in a letter posted on Truth Social, "If Israel has the wrong Leader, which would be anyone other than Bibi, America will have to do this work ourselves, and I am not inclined to do so."

In the same letter, Trump threatened Iran, writing that "unless they change their ways, rapidly, we will soon finish the job." There is a buildup of US forces in the region in preparation for an assault after the US mid-term elections.

All factions of the Zionist establishment are behind Trump, pledging Israel's services as Washington's proxy in its bid to dominate the resource-rich region and the key transportation routes.

Netanyahu is a war criminal indicted by the International Criminal Court in November 2024 for war crimes and crimes against humanity during Israel's genocidal war on the Palestinians in Gaza. Israel has killed nearly 75,000 Palestinians, as well as countless more due to the lack of food, clean water, sanitation and medicines. Despite a supposed ceasefire agreed last year, Israel has continued the slaughter at a rate equal to four a day and on Wednesday, October 14, imposed a blockade on commercial shipments into Gaza. This comes as the United Nations World Food Programme has been forced to cut aid to the Palestinians, largely due to cuts in its funding by the major imperialist powers.

Netanyahu has vowed to escalate the war against Iran. This criminal war of aggression, launched by the US and Israel on February 28, involved the assassination of Iran's leadership

and the bombing of civilians, including school children, in the very first days.

On Sunday, October 18, in a rare, two-hour long press briefing, Netanyahu vowed to bring down the Iranian regime, declaring, "The regime must fall, and I will bring it down." In a video of a call with Trump, he said, "Donald, we have a job to finish."

He downplayed the level of West Bank settler violence despite a mounting international backlash, and warned that the election, which he called "existential," could determine whether Israel completes its military objectives or returns to what he characterised as the failed security policies of the past.

His fascistic coalition partners, Bezael Smotrich of Religious Zionism and Itamar Ben-Gvir of Jewish Power, are campaigning on annexing the West Bank and Gaza, with Ben-Gvir unveiling a plan for the "emigration" of 1.86 million Palestinians from Gaza.

Almost all of the leaders of the opposition bloc, framed by the media as "moderate" or "centrist," are former military leaders and/or politicians who have served under Netanyahu, agree with him on all essential questions, to the extent Netanyahu's government has been able to complete a full four-year term. This is the first government to serve out a full term without collapsing or dissolving early since the government headed by Golda Meir and Yitzhak Rabin after the 1973 election.

Political instability reflects the massive tensions roiling Israeli society, the product of a capitalist state founded upon the expulsion and expropriation of the majority of the country's Palestinian citizens in 1948–49 and 1967, repeated wars with its Arab neighbours, and its dependence upon an external backer—US imperialism on whose behalf it functions as a garrison state.

The election is little more than a factional struggle within the Zionist ruling establishment over how best to manage the wars, how to distribute the spoils, and how to suppress the growing internal social and economic crisis produced by a society organised around permanent militarism. The wars have already cost a massive \$133 billion—nearly twice the estimated cost of rebuilding Gaza—as defence spending has soared from about 4.2 percent of GDP in 2022 to nearly 8 percent in 2026, among the highest in the world. No faction offers any alternative for the

working class, which must pay for these wars.

As far as the opposition is concerned, the core issue is not war but Netanyahu himself—his corruption, efforts to establish an authoritarian state, support and cultivation of religious fundamentalists and his refusal to acknowledge any responsibility for the October 7 attack.

The party leading in the polls is Yashar (meaning straight or honest), the political vehicle of Gadi Eisenkot, a former military chief and unindicted war criminal, who joined Netanyahu's war cabinet for eight months to prosecute Israel's genocidal war in Gaza. Eisenkot is notorious for formulating the Dahiya doctrine that states that in a conflict with non-state militant groups such as Hezbollah and Hamas, Israel should deploy overwhelming, disproportionate force against civilian infrastructure in enemy-controlled territory.

He famously summarised the strategy in a 2008 interview with the *Yedioth Ahronoth* newspaper, declaring: "What happened in the Dahiya quarter of Beirut in 2006 will happen in every village from which Israel is fired on... We will apply disproportionate force on it and cause great damage and destruction there... This is not a recommendation. This is a plan. And it has been approved."

Another opposition party is Naftali Bennett and Yair Lapid's *Yahad* (Together) list. They led a "government of change" in 2021–22, an incoherent alliance that collapsed within a year and paved the way for Netanyahu's return to power at the head of the most right-wing government in Israel's history. They are courting Eisenkot and Avigdor Liberman, who heads the right-wing *Beiteinu* (Israel is our home) party.

Fierce critics of Netanyahu from the right, they argue that his military and political strategies have been too weak and have failed to fully dismantle Israel's enemies. They refuse to concede "a single centimetre" of territory and insist there can be no peace with Lebanon until Hezbollah is "neutralized." They have called for Turkey and Qatar to be removed from any post-war arrangements or peace planning and pledged to formally declare Qatar an "enemy state" for its ties to Hamas.

They are demanding a state inquiry into October 7 and Netanyahu's failure to act upon the warnings he was given about the impending attacks, universal conscription to end the exemptions to the ultra-Orthodox that have been protected by Netanyahu's religious coalition allies, an end to the funding of religious seminaries for the ultra-Orthodox, limits on the prime minister's term of office and the drafting of a written constitution.

The Democrats, formed through the merger of the Labour and Meretz parties that alone of the political parties support the eventual establishment of a Palestinian statelet, is headed by another former military chief, Yair Golan. Golan has promised to collaborate with these far-right opponents of Netanyahu in forming a government if they win the vote, making a mockery of the Democrats' call for an end to settlement expansion and the Palestinian Authority to take control of Gaza.

Under Israel's system of proportional representation, the main opposition parties are dependent upon a high turnout from Arab voters to take seats away from Netanyahu's right-wing bloc even though they refuse to allow them to hold cabinet office.

For this reason, Ben-Gvir sought to disqualify the country's two main Arab-majority political blocs from the elections—Ra'am (the United Arab List) and the Joint List (an alliance comprising the Hadash, Ta'al and Balad parties). This was a naked attempt to disenfranchise Israel's Palestinian citizens who make up about 20 percent of the population.

The ban was overturned by the Supreme Court. But while the parties were reinstated, Sami Abu Shehadeh, leader of the Balad party, was strongly pressured to withdraw his candidacy before an official ruling could be issued that would set a precedent.

Shehadeh's forced withdrawal, the attempted bans and the refusal of the opposition parties to include Arab politicians in a coalition demonstrate the essential character of the Zionist state: founded on the exclusion of Palestinians from political life, now formalised in the electoral process itself. It demolishes Israel's claims to be "the only democratic state in the Middle East."

Irrespective of which faction wins the election, the essential programme—militarism, occupation, the exclusion of Palestinians, repression and a deepening social crisis—will remain the same. Only the independent mobilisation of the working class—Jewish, Palestinian, Arab, Turkish, Kurdish and Iranian—unified with the international working class on a socialist programme can break it.



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