



JULY 2026

Israel's 2026 elections: the ultra-orthodox, annexation and war

Summary

- The issues dominating the public statements of leading Israeli politicians in April–June 2026 ahead of the planned October elections were the ultra-orthodox (Haredi) draft issue, occupation of the Palestinian Territories and the wars with Iran/Hezbollah. Cost of living issues and judicial reform receded to the background as electoral themes.
- Of these, the ultra-orthodox draft issue has the potential to mobilize voters across existing electoral divides because of its salience after nearly 3 years of unrelenting warfare. It could create significant political upheaval, given that Shas and United Torah Judaism are fundamentally opposed to any conscription law and yet remain indispensable to a Netanyahu-centric coalition.
- As to annexation of the Palestinian Territories, there is broad consensus among the religiously-oriented Israeli political elite – including Likud – that it is desirable. It is tactics and speed that are at times a matter for debate rather than the principle itself.
- The wars against Iran and Hezbollah are a potential swing factor in influencing the elections with impact depending on how US-Iran negotiations and hostilities work out. Opposition criticism of the government remains constrained by a shared notion that both wars are necessary for Israel's security.
- In a late-June surprise, Gadi Eisenkot's Yashar party overtook the Bennett-Lapid Together party as Likud's main challenger, with 22 seats projected to Likud's 24.

Introduction

If all goes according to plan, Israeli voters will head to the polls in October 2026. This date could spell a final reckoning with the polarizing and authoritarian politics of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. It could also put some brakes on the acceleration of the Israeli government's ultra-nationalist and ultra-religious policies and practices since 2022. Or it could consolidate this acceleration and might even

keep Mr. Netanyahu in office. Either way, Israel's annexation of Palestinian lands and its wars with Lebanon, Syria and Iran will continue for the simple reason that indecisive battlefield victories are likely to deepen conflict in the absence of a diplomatic resolution. While it is a fool's errand to predict electoral results, it is possible to examine what makes elections tick.

Three briefs between now and November will analyse ten Israeli leaders' public statements on six potential electoral themes in Hebrew on social media and selected news media, including electoral results. Our aim is to develop a better sense of the issues that might influence election results and, ultimately, government policy. In addition, we monitor party polling and public opinion surveys, the latter insofar as they relate to the themes under study. This first brief analyses the election discourse of Israel's political leaders in April–June 2026.

The individuals we are monitoring are Benjamin and Yair Netanyahu (the PM and his son, both Likud), Bezalel Smotrich (Religious Zionism), Yair Lapid and Naftali Bennett (formerly Yesh Atid and New Right, now united in Together), Benny Gantz (National Unity), Mansour Abbas (United

Arab List), Ayman Odeh (Hadash), Yair Golan (formerly Labor, now The Democrats), Aryeh Deri (Shas) and Itamar Ben-Gvir (Otzma Yehudit). Together, they represent a substantial range of political opinion in Israel (see Figure 1 below). The channels we track are X (Twitter), Channel 14 (more right-wing), Kan 11 (more centrist) and Ha'aretz (more left wing).

By systematically parsing these media on a weekly basis, we identified and coded all election-related public statements of said Israeli politicians on six themes listed in Table 1 below. All statements were sub-coded as 'offering support', 'offering critique' or 'other' to obtain a sense of the colour of debates, except for cost-of-living issues for which we used only the subcategories of 'offering critique' and 'other'.

Table 1 Selected themes with potential electoral impact

Foreign policy controversies	Domestic controversies
(1) War with Iran – Public statements about Iran as a strategic, military, or existential issue – including Operation Rising Lion, the nuclear program, the ceasefire, assessments of the war's outcome, and the Iranian regime as actor	(4) Ultra-orthodox draft – Public statements about Haredi conscription, exemptions, funding, burden-sharing and manpower requirements of the Israeli Defence Forces
(2) War with Lebanon/Hezbollah – Public statements about the Lebanese front – including military operations against Hezbollah, the ceasefire, negotiations, security in northern Israel, and Hezbollah as actor	(5) Judicial reform – Public statements about the Supreme Court's legitimacy and authority, including attacks on specific rulings, defences of the court, claims of politicization, calls for structural reform, delegitimization, nominations/appointments
(3) Occupation/annexation – Public statements about Gaza, the West Bank, annexation, Hamas, settlers and the Palestinian Authority – including discourse markers like religious references, existential framing, enemy framing, pejorative terms, triumphalism slogans and delegitimizing language	(6) Cost of living – Public statements about economic conditions affecting Israeli households, including price levels, housing shortages and rent, inflation, taxes, subsidies and the quality of government management of the economy

Figure 1 Israel's political spectrum in mid-2026

Parties and leaders tracked in this brief: current seats and the 29 June 2026 poll projection, each as a share of the 120-seat Knesset.

Bloc	Party	Leader(s)	Now (25th Knesset)		Projected (29 June 2026 poll)	
			Seats	% of 120	Seats	% of 120
Left	● The Democrats	Y. Golan	4*	3.3%	10	8.3%
Centre	● Together	Lapid + Bennett	24**	20.0%	17	14.2%
	● National Unity	B. Gantz	8	6.7%	—†	—
Right	● Likud	B. Netanyahu	32	26.7%	24	20.0%
Orthodox	● Shas	A. Deri	11	9.2%	9	7.5%
	● United Torah Judaism	Goldknopf / Gafni	7	5.8%	7	5.8%
Far-right	● Otzma Yehudit	I. Ben-Gvir	6	5.0%	8	6.7%
	● Religious Zionism	B. Smotrich	7	5.8%	4	3.3%
Arab parties	● United Arab List (Ra'am)	M. Abbas	5	4.2%	5	4.2%
	● Hadash(-Ta'al)	A. Odeh	5	4.2%	5	4.2%
All tracked parties		<i>of 120 Knesset seats</i>	109	90.8%	89†	74.2%

Rows group parties by ideological family, not coalition status. "Now" = seats in the 25th Knesset; "projected" = projected seats, N12 (Channel 12) poll, 29 June 2026. Percentages are shares of the 120-seat Knesset; parties not tracked in this brief hold the remaining seats. Percentages are rounded, so columns may not sum exactly to the totals shown. **"The Democrats" holds its seats as the former Labor (4). ***"Together" = Bennett-Lapid list ("now" seats held as Yesh Atid, 24). Projections vary between polls. †National Unity is projected near/below the electoral threshold, so it has no seat projection and is excluded from the projected total.

Key developments

During this April-June monitoring period of electoral discourse, it is useful to note, first, that the *ultra-orthodox draft issue* (55 out of 188 public statements, 30%) and occupation/annexation of the Palestinian Territories (43 out of 188 public statements, 23%) were the issues most invoked by the Israeli politicians we are monitoring on the channels listed above. The war against Iran (35 out of 188 public statements, 19%) and against Hezbollah (36 out of 188 public statements, also 19%) formed a middle category. Cost of living and judicial reform issues were mentioned but at a lower frequency, indicating a lack of current salience (see Figure 2 below for a visualization).

Second, polls across April-June indicate that Likud, Together, and – as of June – Yashar (Gadi Eisenkot, currently with no Knesset seats) are converging as the main contenders for

the largest share of the vote. X (twitter) is the medium of choice for Israeli politicians to share their views on key electoral issues with other media trailing far behind. PM Netanyahu is the most significant source of electoral statements, which reflects both his position as head of government and underlines the fact that he has a lot at stake in the upcoming elections. Unsurprisingly, Yair Lapid and Naftali Bennett follow in his wake as the leaders of the main opposition party.

Third, Benjamin Netanyahu's public statements mostly cover the war against Iran or Hezbollah whereas key opposition figures – notably Yair Lapid and Naftali Bennett, but also Yair Golan – focus on the ultra-orthodox draft issue. Aryeh Deri does the same yet from the opposite political perspective (against any changes to

the status quo) and at a lower frequency. Bezalel Smotrich and Ayman Odeh focus their attention instead on the occupation of the Palestinian Territories at respectively a lower and a higher frequency. Itamar Ben Gvir is hardly visible in our media tracking.

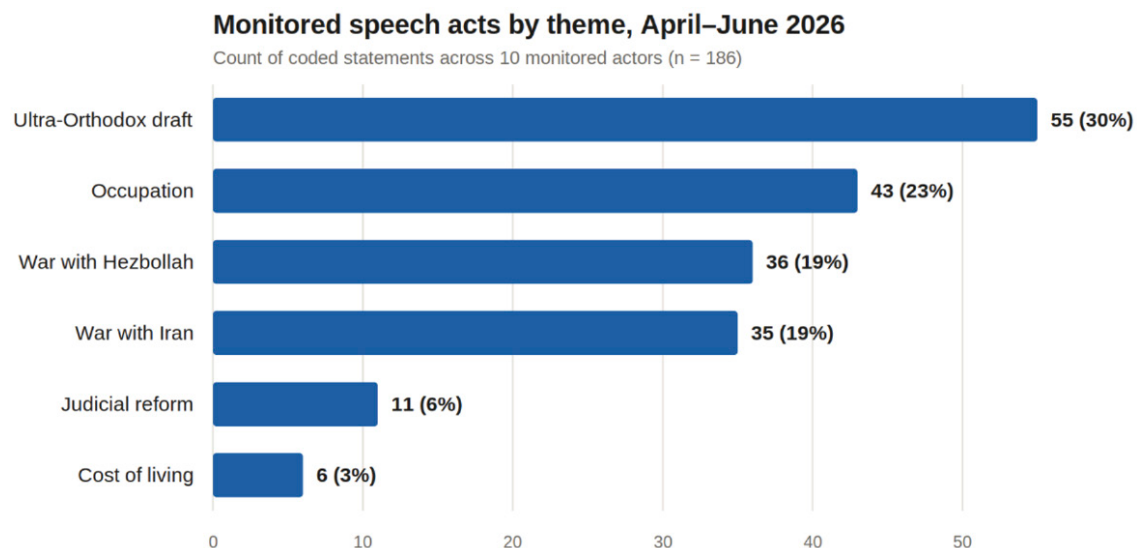
Fourth, the overall societal context in which the electoral discourse takes place is gloomy. A May survey by the Israel Democracy Institute (IDI) found Israeli Jews to be pessimistic about the country's future across every area it asked about – democratic governance, the security situation, the economy and social cohesion, the latter of which featured the worst scores of all. A full 38.5% of respondents identified as 'very pessimistic'. The same survey also found that 57% of Jewish respondents believe that Benjamin Netanyahu should not run in the coming election and 65% support a law limiting the premiership to two terms.¹ The agreement between the US and Iran that terminated the war in principle, including Israeli-Hezbollah hostilities in Lebanon, is seen as a negative development

across much of the Israeli political elite and public, particularly because Israel has no seat at the negotiation table (neither do Lebanon or Hezbollah).

Electoral issue #1: The ultra-orthodox, military service and burden-sharing

In terms of domestic electoral issues, the religious-secular divide has overtaken the government's effort to reform the Israeli judiciary as the dominant political debate among Jewish voters, according to the Israel Democracy Institute's 2025 Democracy index.² It is the single most talked about issue in April and May's electoral discourse. The shift is driven by the struggle over Haredi conscription and burden sharing, as well as government funding for Yeshivas (Jewish religious seminaries). In 2024, Israel's Supreme Court ruled that existing, decades-old exemptions from Israel's obligatory military service for ultra-Orthodox men studying in religious seminaries are unconstitutional.

Figure 2 Public statements by electoral theme in April – June 2026, as monitored



1 Tamar Hermann, Lior Yohanani, and Yaron Kaplan, "The Israeli Voice Index - May 2026," Israel Democracy Institute, June 9, 2026, <https://www.idi.org.il/articles/64646>.

2 Tamar Hermann, Lior Yohanani, Yaron Kaplan, and Inna Orly Sapozhnikova, 2025, *The Israeli Democracy Index 2025*, Israel Democracy Institute, <https://www.idi.org.il/books/62331>.

This means that c. 100,000 yeshiva students of draft age (18–28) are now obligated to enlist.³ Since then, petitioners have initiated several cases to demand that the government enforce conscription as the law stands. One immediate major consequence is that the state can no longer legally fund Yeshivas as it is legally premised on students having a recognized deferral or exemption status, which no longer exists. However, funding has continued to flow. With the passage of the 2026 budget in March 2026, allocations to ultra-Orthodox educational institutions, including yeshivas, rose to roughly NIS (ILS) 5.17 billion (US\$1.65 billion) from NIS (ILS) 4.1 billion (US\$1.3 billion) in the previous year, representing c. 0.6% of the total state budget of NIS (ILS) 850.6 billion (US\$271 billion).⁴

Social debate on the matter is both intense and polarizing. Over the past few years, the Israeli army has issued continuous reserve mobilization notices, placing serious strain on reservists and their families and creating a stark contrast between those who serve and those who do not. The Haredi justification is that they contribute to Israel's defence through their Torah study,⁵ some suggesting that their devotion is sufficient to protect the Israeli state from harm.⁶ Religious leaders like Rabbi Yitzhak Yosef (Israel's former Sephardi Chief Rabbi- one of the two heads of the country's official state rabbinate) have even shared the view that no Orthodox men should

serve (not just Torah students), and that those who refuse the draft are “soldiers in God's army”.⁷ Box 1 on the next page provides a snapshot of Israel's ultra-Orthodox community.

The political stakes of the dispute are high as the survival of Benjamin Netanyahu's coalition depends on support from two ultra-Orthodox parties – Shas and United Torah Judaism – whose core demand is the perpetuation of the exemption. At the same time, the opposition converges most strongly on the Haredi draft issue, and it is around this that the electoral campaign was mostly being fought in April–June 2026.

The most vocal opposition voices are Yair Lapid (Together), Naftali Bennett (Together) and Yair Golan (The Democrats). Lapid established the frame by depicting the conflict as being between a “Zionist bloc” of those who serve and a “draft evasion bloc” that is protected by the government for its political survival.⁸ The language he deploys is deliberately polarizing: Haredim who evade service are “evaders”, the ultra-Orthodox parties are “extortionists”, and the funds flowing to their institutions are “illegal”.⁹ He frames the issue simultaneously as a matter of economic injustice and national loyalty. When ultra-Orthodox protesters burned Israeli flags in late April, he used images of the event as evidence of their disloyalty to the state.¹⁰ Moreover, he is against compromise: “There will be no exemptions. Period. Whoever does not enlist will not see a single shekel from the state.”¹¹

3 Shlomit Ravitsky Tur-Paz, October 29, 2025, “The Bismuth Outline for the Military Exemption Law Leaked in October 2025,” Israel Democracy Institute, <https://www.idi.org.il/articles/61986>.

4 Ariela Karmel and Sam Sokol, March 30, 2026, “Knesset approves 2026 budget, Israel's largest ever, sending billions to Haredi institutions,” The Times of Israel, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/knesset-approves-2026-budget-israels-largest-ever-sending-billions-to-haredi-institutions/>.

5 Aryeh Malka, May 9, 2025, “Haredi Enlistment: From a Discourse of Principles to a Discourse of Identity,” Tzarich Iyun, <https://iyun.org.il/sedersheni/haredi-enlistment-a-matter-of-identity/>.

6 Ofer Hadad and Amalia Duek, February 19, 2024, “Minister Karhi: ‘One Whose Torah Is His Vocation Protects Us More Than We Protect Him,’” N12, https://www.mako.co.il/news-diplomatic/2024_q1/Article-63ba094f042cd81026.htm.

7 Shilo Freid, July 16, 2024, “Rabbi Yitzhak Yosef: ‘Whoever Receives a Draft Order — Let Him Tear It Up,’” Ynet, <https://www.ynet.co.il/judaism/article/b1e1444000>.

8 <https://x.com/yairlapid/status/2048985011022381468> [28.4.2026].

9 <https://x.com/yairlapid/status/2043345987318534506> [12.4.2026].

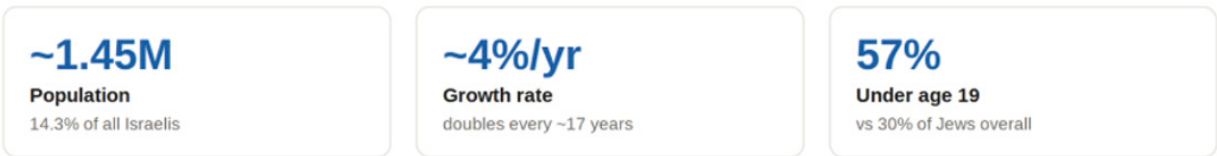
10 <https://x.com/yairlapid/status/2047708399534489867> [24.4.2026].

11 <https://x.com/yairlapid/status/2058611631483961793> [24.5.2026].

Box 1 A snapshot of Israel's ultra-Orthodox community

The ultra-Orthodox (Haredi) community in Israel, 2024–2025

A demographic and social profile of one of Israel's fastest-growing populations

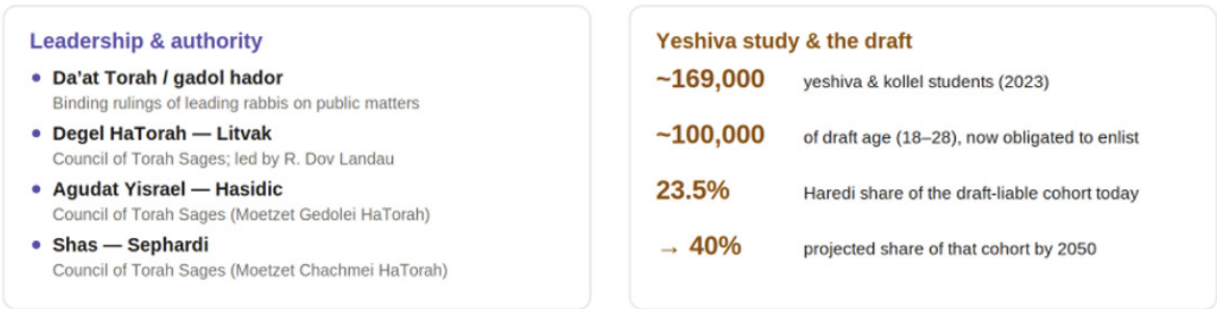


Three main religious currents

The community divides into roughly equal streams, each with its own leadership, customs and political party



Hasidic communities organise in courts under a Rebbe; Litvak around the yeshiva world; Sephardi follow Rabbi Ovadia Yosef's legacy. Chabad (~4–6% of all Haredim) sits within the Hasidic share.



Employment by gender (2024)

Haredi women are typically the primary breadwinners; many men study full-time. Bars show employment rate.



Sources: Israel Democracy Institute, Statistical Yearbook of Ultra-Orthodox Society 2025 & Haredim in Israel 2050 (Jan 2026); CBS. Currents: Israeli Haredi Institute / encyclopedic estimates.

Golan's (The Democrats) focus is on social solidarity: those who do not enlist undermine the national cohesion that sustains the country.¹² He also warned of a severe shortage of soldiers

and has blamed the government for ignoring the problem while catering to narrow political interests.¹³ In late May he accused the Haredi parties of encouraging draft evasion during

12 <https://x.com/YairGolan1/status/2046543378536452149> [21.4.2026].

13 <https://x.com/YairGolan1/status/2053478344088342979> [10.5.2026].

wartime while their constituents live “at the state’s expense”.¹⁴ His strongest statement accused Haredi leaders of encouraging resistance to state institutions in times of war – thus framing the issue as a challenge to state authority and not merely as a dispute over military service. He also called for the imprisonment of draft dodgers.¹⁵

In early April, Bennett (Together) focused on the military and economic dimensions of the draft issue. He paints a divide between those who serve – “we and our children” – and those who do not, turning it into a moral and national problem.¹⁶ He also argued that government subsidies disproportionately benefit Haredi families, in which men neither work nor serve, at the expense of working couples who may be struggling given Israel’s mounting cost of living.¹⁷ Later in April and throughout May, he shifted his emphasis from one of fairness to one of life and death, arguing that draft evasion is a direct cause of soldiers dying due to increased duties caused by manpower shortages.¹⁸

High-profile events – like the ultra-Orthodox riots in Ashkelon against the local enforcement of draft orders followed by a break-in at a senior military officer’s home – added fuel to the fire. The section of Israeli society that has been serving for years is now visibly confronted by those who do not. It is in this context that the Bennett-Lapid electoral union of 26 April is best considered. The two men have different political profiles and diverge on a range of issues: Bennett originating in the nationalist-religious right and Lapid in the secular centre. But on the matter of Haredi conscription, they are entirely aligned. Lapid framed it in precisely those terms when the union was announced, describing Bennett as a

“liberal right-winger, decent, law abiding, who had not sold his values to Haredi extortion or to corruption”.¹⁹

In contrast, the governing coalition is fractured and remains largely silent on the matter. On the one hand, there is Arye Deri (Shas) who argued in mid-April that legal efforts to enforce conscription are not about military necessity but about the courts and leftists undermining the “Torah world”, i.e. mounting a cultural attack on religious Jews under wartime cover.²⁰ In late May he issued a warning that aggressively targeting Torah students through arrests and sanctions will push the Haredi community towards confrontation with the state.²¹ On the other hand, Bezalel Smotrich (Religious Zionism) explicitly called for the immediate conscription of Haredim not engaged in full-time Torah study, even though he is highly observant himself.²² Netanyahu remained notably absent from the debate, engaging only in late May. First, he simply praised serving ultra-Orthodox soldiers, describing them as motivated by faith and dedication.²³ Then he borrowed Deri’s language in referring to the “Torah world”, but arguing that Haredim not engaged in full-time study should enlist by insisting it is possible to enter the army as Haredi and leave as Haredi.²⁴ Netanyahu’s late entry and careful wording reflect his bind: he cannot alienate the ultra-Orthodox parties whose votes sustain his coalition, but neither can he afford to be seen as their unconditional defender.

14 <https://x.com/YairGolan1/status/2059531771230695935> [27.5.2026].

15 <https://x.com/YairGolan1/status/2060034812677624087> [28.5.2026].

16 <https://x.com/naftalibennett/status/2042606285858767091> [10.4.2026].

17 <https://x.com/naftalibennett/status/2043703121751199892> [13.4.2026].

18 <https://x.com/naftalibennett/status/2046109326754922765> [20.4.2026].

19 <https://x.com/yairlapid/status/2052615265825812846> [8.5.2026].

20 <https://x.com/naftalibennett/status/2046109326754922765> [20.4.2026].

21 <https://x.com/ariyederi/status/2061164181249020103> [31.5.2026].

22 <https://x.com/bezalelsm/status/2052685096377839948> [8.5.2026].

23 <https://x.com/netanyahu/status/2060009689174204432> [28.5.2026].

24 <https://x.com/netanyahu/status/2061132733988966690> [31.5.2026].

Electoral issue #2: Occupation and annexation dynamics

Public statements from coalition members, Benjamin Netanyahu (Likud) and especially Bezalel Smotrich (Religious Zionism), herald the defeat of terrorism in Gaza and glorify the annexation of the West Bank in, at times, Biblical language. Netanyahu mostly underlines the defeat of Hamas terrorism by citing individual killings of senior militants under overarching phrases like “every terrorist is marked for death”.²⁵ He also underlines the increase of Israeli territorial control over a growing part of Gaza, despite the ceasefire,²⁶ and frames the humanitarian aid flotilla that sailed for Gaza as a terrorist resupply effort.²⁷ In brief, he justifies Israeli military action in a wide-ranging counter-terrorist frame. Smotrich, on the other hand, revels in the expansion of settlement on the West Bank²⁸ and calls for concrete measures to expand it (like offering tax exempt status in addition to subsidies to settlers and settlements).²⁹ He also celebrated the death penalty for Palestinian militants (in this, he is supported by Itamar Ben Gvir),³⁰ calls for the formal cancellation of the Oslo Accords,³¹ and considers international criminal charges against Israeli political leaders as acts of war by the Palestinian Authority.³²

Opposition public statements instead emphasize the government’s failure to conclusively defeat Hamas, pointing to its regrouping and restoration of control in parts of Gaza. In fact, after an

early-April Channel 12 investigation revealed Hamas’s continued presence, all leading opposition figures – Bennett (Together), Lapid (Together), Gantz (National Unity) and Golan (The Democrats) – took the opportunity to turn the government’s claims of victory against it. Gantz wrote that this proves “anything but total victory”, warning that “if we settle for half measures, the next 7 October is only a matter of time”.³³ Lapid framed the survival and regrouping of Hamas as a strategic failure: “Instead of total victory, we got a loss of control.”³⁴ Bennett added, “The people have once again revealed their greatness, and the government has once again disappointed.”³⁵ Golan put it most starkly: “Where is the total victory you sold us? It is a complete fraud.”³⁶ In addition, Golan is currently the only Israeli politician, besides Ayman Odeh, who warns against the security risks to Israel that result from ignoring Jewish violent extremism in letting settlers run rampant in the West Bank, with annexation proceeding apace.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Ayman Odeh (Hadash) is the clearest voice in the electoral discourse about occupation and annexation. He points to the many injustices that are part and parcel of the settler enterprise, querying how security and stability can be achieved in this manner. He also underlines the limitations that occupation imposes on the West Bank’s Palestinian inhabitants, like movement restrictions and reduced school attendance, as well as the killings of Palestinians by settlers. Like Yair Golan (The Democrats), he points to the rising tensions on the West Bank and how these could result in new episodes of violence.

25 <https://x.com/netanyahu/status/2055702200903409676> [16.5.2026].

26 <https://x.com/netanyahu/status/2055296648834634097> [15.5.2026].

27 <https://x.com/netanyahu/status/2056340807238537704> [18.5.2026].

28 <https://x.com/bezaleism/status/2046920824897032326> [22.4.2026].

29 <https://x.com/bezaleism/status/2060031878015381833> [28.5.2026].

30 <https://x.com/bezaleism/status/2053930343434990025> [11.5.2026].

31 <https://x.com/bezaleism/status/2055228579768623333> [15.5.2026].

32 <https://x.com/bezaleism/status/2056695800604811330> [19.5.2026].

33 <https://x.com/gantzbe/status/2044493026534305796> [15.4.2026].

34 <https://x.com/yairlapid/status/2047208876303384601> [23.4.2026].

35 <https://x.com/naftalibennett/status/2045138063987257663> [17.4.2026].

36 <https://x.com/YairGolan1/status/2047214972883648981> [23.4.2026].

Electoral issue #3: The wars against Iran and Hezbollah

In terms of the electoral public statements monitored, Israel's wars against Iran and Hezbollah can be summarized as follows: (1) the ruling coalition has been making every effort to paint these wars as victories by treating military victory and government leadership as synonymous; (2) the opposition has praised military performance but criticized the government's lack of a political strategy for these wars; and (3) the Israeli public has high levels of trust in the army and its wartime performance, but declining trust in the government that ordered the wars it fought. Moreover, an April 2026 Israel Democracy Institute survey found that 92% of Israeli Jews rated the Israel Defense Force (IDF)'s handling of the wars highly, compared with 38% for the government's.³⁷ In the same month, another survey by the same Institute indicated that 57% of respondents had come to see the United States as the principal decision-maker on Israeli security.³⁸

Benjamin Netanyahu's (Likud) war narrative weaves together four threads to support his victory claim. The first thread delegitimizes the enemy. His most repeated label in April and May was the "axis of evil", which refers to the Iranian government and its presumed proxies. In his Passover message, for example, he identified the axis as including Hamas, Hezbollah, terror cells on the West Bank, the Houthis and the former Assad regime in Syria.³⁹ This frame recurs across the entire monitoring period, alongside the parallel label of "terror regime" that is meant more exclusively for Iran. The objective of such rhetoric is to paint enemy regimes and groups arrayed

against Israel as immoral and illegitimate, which, by contrast, makes the war legitimate. At the same time, Netanyahu's public statements carefully distinguish between the Iranian government and the Iranian people,⁴⁰ as well as between Hezbollah and the Lebanese state.⁴¹ The objective here is to augment popular discontent and encourage division in those countries. Zooming out, the problem with this discursive method is that it is contradicted by the scorched-earth tactics and targeting of civilian infrastructures and civilians by Israeli military forces.

Netanyahu's second narrative thread emphasizes the existential nature of the wars, raising the stakes from hostility to survival. Netanyahu's language frames Iran as an existential threat to Israel situated in a much longer context of historical persecution. He made his most explicit statements of this kind on Holocaust Remembrance Day, when he compared Iran's nuclear sites to WWII extermination camps and argued that Israel had acted to prevent another Holocaust.⁴² This framing converts military action from a choice to an obligation.

His third narrative thread borrows war-legitimizing authority from the outside. Netanyahu's frequent references to President Trump and the United States intend to signal external validation for the wars. Notably, Netanyahu posted a video on 6 April that recounts a phone call in which president Trump thanked him for Israel's assistance against Iran.⁴³ On 15 April, Netanyahu described operations in Lebanon as being coordinated with the United States.⁴⁴ On 17 May, he was still making mention of discussions with president Trump and US-Israeli alignment against Iran.⁴⁵ Such claims

37 Tamar Hermann, Lior Yohanani, and Yaron Kaplan, April 14, 2026, "Flash Survey — End of Operation 'Roaring Lion': A Quarter of Jews and 70% of Arabs Felt Relief at the Ceasefire Announcement," Israel Democracy Institute, <https://www.idi.org.il/articles/63913>.

38 Tamar Hermann, Lior Yohanani, and Yaron Kaplan, May 5, 2026, "April 2026 Survey: 62% of the Public Think the Chances of a Return to Large-Scale Fighting with Iran Are High," Israel Democracy Institute, <https://www.idi.org.il/articles/64183>.

39 <https://x.com/netanyahu/status/2040022833372254587> [3.4.2026].

40 <https://x.com/netanyahu/status/2041524834044174772> [7.4.2026].

41 <https://x.com/netanyahu/status/2042304085605396967> [9.4.2026].

42 <https://x.com/netanyahu/status/2043714292193649075> [13.4.2026].

43 <https://x.com/netanyahu/status/2041208172442997031> [6.4.2026].

44 <https://x.com/netanyahu/status/2044480943398814204> [15.4.2026].

45 <https://x.com/netanyahu/status/2056032902891065354> [17.5.2026].

have since been put in doubt by Israel's exclusion from direct US-Iranian negotiations based on an initial agreement that is viewed negatively in Israel.

The fourth thread claims a win for Israel by fusing the moral case for war, its existential necessity and its external (US) validation, with an array of operational military successes summarized under headers like "Israel is stronger than ever, Iran is weaker than ever".⁴⁶ Or, "we broke the fear barrier",⁴⁷ which he first mentioned in his Jerusalem Day message of 15 May 2026. Such military successes include regular boasts like the elimination of Nasrallah and the "pager attack" against Hezbollah,⁴⁸ the killing of Iranian officials⁴⁹ and the possibility of peace with the Lebanese government, which he presents as the diplomatic payoff of military strength.⁵⁰

The opposition backs both wars as they are widely perceived as necessary across Israel's political elites and society.⁵¹ But it separates the army's performance, which it praises, from the government's leadership, which it condemns. The public statements of Yair Lapid (Together), Naftali Bennett (also Together), Benjamin 'Benny' Gantz (National Unity) and Yair Golan (Democrats) nearly converge on the matter.

As with the ultra-orthodox draft issue, Lapid set the frame. He posted a 6 April tweet saying "Israel is fighting well and being managed poorly – Netanyahu has failed at all the war's objectives."⁵² He then defined those objectives

as regime change in Iran, elimination of the nuclear threat, removal of the ballistic missile threat and the crushing of Hezbollah. He doubled down two days later, calling the Iran ceasefire a "diplomatic disaster".⁵³ Bennett made the same case, arguing that the government's boast of total victory is disconnected from reality, even though the goals themselves remain valid and worth pursuing.⁵⁴ On Lebanon, he even went as far as accusing the government of turning IDF soldiers "from hunters to hunted" by forcing them to fight "with one hand behind their back".⁵⁵ Gantz pushed in the same direction, tweeting that "Israel must initiate another powerful move in Lebanon and finish the job."⁵⁶ Golan stated it most bluntly when he wrote "Netanyahu lied" after the Iran ceasefire on 8 April. "He promised a 'historic victory' and security for generations, and in practice we got one of the gravest strategic failures Israel has known." His closing line embodies the trust gap as a slogan: "The IDF wins, Israel loses. Not because of the fighters, but because of a failed, extreme, and dangerous government that doesn't know how to translate military achievements into political security."⁵⁷ The same logic ran through his statements on Lebanon. On 4 April he argued that a long-term agreement with the Lebanese government was the right path to lasting security, but one the current government is incapable of reaching.⁵⁸

Looking across our entire data set for the period April-June, it is worth noting that several Israeli political leaders among those monitored appear to understand military performance mostly, if not entirely, in terms of the total destruction

46 <https://x.com/netanyahu/status/2041208172442997031> [6.4.2026].

47 <https://x.com/netanyahu/status/2055296648834634097> [15.5.2026].

48 <https://x.com/netanyahu/status/2045906374140338536> [19.4.2026].

49 <https://x.com/netanyahu/status/2041087275627376966> [6.4.2026].

50 <https://x.com/netanyahu/status/2042304085605396967> [9.4.2026].

51 Tamar Hermann, Lior Yohanani, and Yaron Kaplan, March 5, 2026, "Flash Survey — 'Roaring Lion': 82% of the Public Support the Operation Against Iran," Israel Democracy Institute, <https://www.idi.org.il/articles/63630>.

52 <https://x.com/yairlapid/status/2041046393599528960> [6.4.2026].

53 <https://x.com/yairlapid/status/2041743545137057858> [8.4.2026].

54 Ana Fines and Gili Cohen, April 8, 2026, "Lapid: Netanyahu Reached a Bad Result; Bennett: 'This Government Cannot Achieve a Decisive Victory,'" Kan, <https://www.kan.org.il/content/kan-news/politic/1024698/>.

55 <https://x.com/naftalibennett/status/2050161665186897956> [1.5.2026].

56 <https://x.com/gantzbe/status/2048689165273808911> [27.4.2026].

57 <https://x.com/YairGolan1/status/2041776258023899517> [8.4.2026].

58 <https://x.com/YairGolan1/status/2040453201858642132> [4.4.2026].

of the enemy. Otherwise put, military success disregards scorched-earth tactics, potential war crimes and the potentially negative long-term effects on Israeli security of applying such methods. The opposition chiefly criticizes the government's lack of political strategy, not its methods.

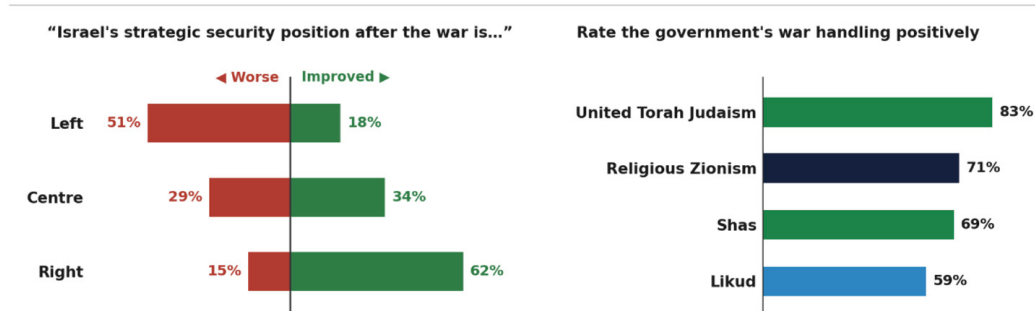
The trust gap between army and governance is, however, more nuanced when one examines

different voter groups. An April 2026 public survey by the Israel Democracy Institute following the Iran ceasefire suggested that criticism of the government is less uniform and less profound than opposition and coalition parties' public statements might lead one to believe. See Figure 3 below.

Figure 3 Popular perceptions of the war with Iran (impact and management)

IDI 14 April 2026 survey results

Jewish sample. Left: assessment of Israel's strategic security position after the war, by political camp. Right: share of each coalition party's voters rating the government's handling of the war positively.



"Worse" combines "somewhat" and "much" worse. Camp percentages do not sum to 100; remaining responses (e.g. "no change" / "don't know") are not shown. Party colours as in Figure 1.

The electoral debate so far

Electoral discourse during April–June 2026 indicates that, for now, the ultra-orthodox draft issue has the greatest potential to influence voting in October, simply because so many Israelis and their families have experienced military service and its risks over the past few years. What they perceive as the ultra-orthodox refusal 'to do their part' could be sufficiently salient to overcome established divides in the Israeli electorate (note that 42.7% of Israeli Jews over the age of 20 identify as secular).⁵⁹

In contrast, annexation of the Palestinian territories does not appear to be a potentially

defining theme for the October elections, despite featuring in a relatively high number of public statements in the discourse we monitored. The explanation might be twofold. First, a substantial number of public statements are criticism of the government's perceived failure to eliminate Hamas. They are not principled reflections about the consequences of annexation. Second, a substantial number of Ayman Odeh's remarks are made as an individual (17 of 43 recorded public statements). Zooming out, there is broad consensus among most of the Israeli political elite, excepting perhaps Yair Golan and Israeli Palestinian leaders, that annexation of the Palestinian Territories (especially the West Bank) is desirable. It is rather tactics and speed that are at times the subject of debate.

⁵⁹ Central Bureau of Statistics, September 17, 2025, "Israel in Figures — Rosh Hashana: Selected Annual Data 2025," Central Bureau of Statistics, https://www.cbs.gov.il/he/mediarelease/DocLib/2025/304/11_25_304b.pdf.

Finally, the perception among the Israeli political opposition and some of the public that the wars against Iran and Hezbollah have failed does seem to have potential to direct votes, especially if Israel remains excluded from US-Iranian negotiations, the ceasefire holds and/or the US compels Israel to abide by it and any ultimate deal is unfavourable to Israel. Because these factors are difficult to assess at the moment, this issue has substantial variability in how it may influence (or not) the October elections. Either way, opposition criticism will remain constrained by a shared assumption that both wars were and are necessary for Israel's security.

In a surprise twist, with a projection of 22 seats, Gadi Eisenkot's Yashar party became Likud's principal challenger in late June 2026. This scored close to Likud's 24 projected seats and displaced the Bennett-Lapid Together party that is projected at 17 seats.⁶⁰ This success was largely propelled by the party's focus on ultra-Orthodox conscription. In contrast, the religious parties that oppose any conscription law, Shas and United Torah Judaism, remain indispensable for a Netanyahu-centric coalition.⁶¹

In all, the electoral campaign remains wide open despite serious doubts about government policy regarding the ultra-orthodox draft issue and its management of the wars with Iran and Hezbollah.

60 Dafna Liel, June 29, 2026, "Eisenkot Strengthens at Bennett's Expense, Likud Also Gains a Seat | Channel 12 Poll," N12, https://www.mako.co.il/news-politics/2026_q2/Article-6987bb8ede31f91026.htm.

61 Dafna Liel, June 29, 2026, "Eisenkot Strengthens at Bennett's Expense, Likud Also Gains a Seat | Channel 12 Poll," N12, https://www.mako.co.il/news-politics/2026_q2/Article-6987bb8ede31f91026.htm.

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