



By: TA | AP Insight

Netanyahu's main election concern comes from his biggest supporters



As Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu seeks reelection, his main concern these days isn't his political rivals. It's some of his biggest supporters.

A series of small, pro-Netanyahu parties are competing in the run-up to the **Oct. 27 vote**.

But instead of strengthening the Israeli leader, these parties — including hard-line blocs led by polarizing Cabinet ministers Itamar Ben-Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich — risk weakening his chances for reelection by splitting the vote among Netanyahu's base.

The election is largely a **referendum on Netanyahu's** nearly uninterrupted 17-year rule and his handling of a turbulent period marked by **mass protests**, Hamas' Oct. 7, 2023, attacks and nearly three years of war.

A victory would mark a stirring comeback for the embattled leader, while a loss would likely end the reign of a man who has shaped Israeli politics for three decades.

With his legacy on the line, Netanyahu is imploring his erstwhile allies to unite into larger parties that have a better chance of entering parliament.

"When we unite, we win. When we split up, we lose," Netanyahu told Channel 14, a TV station that serves as an unofficial mouthpiece for the prime minister.

Forming a government is tricky

Israeli voters choose between political parties, not individual candidates.

Parties that receive the most votes secure the most seats in the 120-member parliament.

But any party that can muster just 3.25% of the vote wins representation. That means that more than a dozen parties can be part of any given parliament.

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Netanyahu currently heads a **coalition** of religious and ultranationalist parties.

The outgoing coalition faces an uphill battle

Opinion polls have indicated that Netanyahu and members of his outgoing coalition are facing broad public unhappiness as they seek reelection.

The government's popularity has suffered following the Hamas attacks — the deadliest in Israel's history — and the subsequent, inconclusive wars in Gaza, Lebanon and Iran.

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Two parties that ran together in the 2022 elections — Smotrich's Religious Zionism and Ben-Gvir's Jewish Power — have so far rejected Netanyahu's calls to merge again due to rocky relations between the two men.

At the same time, smaller parties led by former members of Netanyahu's Likud party and another list formed by a hard-line retired military general find themselves competing for the same voters.

These parties are differentiated more by the

personalities of their leaders than their ideologies.

Falling short of the threshold could be devastating for Netanyahu

If any of these smaller parties fail to enter parliament, their votes would be lost and Netanyahu's reelection prospects dimmed.

The failure of small parties to cross the threshold contributed to Netanyahu's defeat in a 2021 election, while rivalries among his opponents led to Netanyahu's return to power in 2022.

For this reason, Netanyahu has been urging his ideological brethren to join together into larger blocs.



The parties have until Sept. 8 to consolidate, pull out of the race or continue on their own. Their decision could seal Netanyahu's fate - Itamar Ben-Gvir

That would require some individual sacrifices but improve their chances of crossing the threshold and being part of another Netanyahu-led government.

In a small boost for Netanyahu, one of the small parties agreed Wednesday to be folded into Smotrich's list.

The parties have until Sept. 8 to consolidate, pull out of the race or continue on their own. Their decision could seal his fate.

With time running out, Netanyahu has been

stepping up his calls with increasingly alarmist language.

In his Channel 14 interview, he told a cheering studio audience that only he could defeat Hamas and prevent the establishment of a Palestinian state.

He warned that victory by his opponents, whom he derisively calls "the left," would be disastrous for the country.

"The left is ready," he said. "If we don't unite, we will lose."