

The Jewish expat wildcard: How flying voters could end Netanyahu's decade of power

The Israeli-Jewish diaspora, which comes in all dimensions of Judaism and democracy, for the first time, senses the need to actively cast their vote, given its criticality and the yearning for political change.



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Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Jerusalem on 19 March 2026. | File Photo | Ronen Zvulun | Reuters



The State of Israel will have its national elections for the next Prime Minister on 27 October this year. Benjamin Netanyahu, the longest serving Prime Minister, is contesting again for the top job.

He faces several odds this time. First, his judicial 'reforms' – a controversial set of bills to alter the judicial appointment system and to limit the judicial review system of the Supreme Court. In 2022, before the Hamas attacks, it created a

domestic uproar among the masses, which turned hostile, resulting in protests by lakhs and constant riots in major cities of Israel throughout the year. The attacks and subsequent long war(s) in Gaza and elsewhere abruptly ended the protests, but the issue is still outstanding.

Second, it was under his watch that Hamas carried out its terror attacks, killing more than 1,200 Israelis and taking over 250 hostages. Third, his government announced a “fight-whatever-it-takes” policy till Hamas’ “elimination” from Gaza. But that hasn’t happened yet, even after three years of war and a grave humanitarian crisis in Gaza. Fourth, Israel’s international standing has diminished under his leadership over the last three years.

Benjamin Netanyahu still has his traditional base among the nationalists, religious and Mizrahim (Jews of Middle East origins) segments of Israeli society who think he fought well and “demolished” Gaza, assassinated other “enemies” of Israel like Hezbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah in September 2024 and Iran’s Supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in February 2026. The fact that the Israeli army could withstand the multifront wars against Hamas, Hezbollah, Houthis in Yemen and now Iran speaks of resilience rather than defeat. For many in Israel, Netanyahu has also stood firm against international criticism of Israel’s army, and he still is their best diplomat who can defend Israel abroad as well as fight the rising antisemitism.

Israelis are deeply aware of the significance of the upcoming national elections amidst the incomplete wars, internal sharp divisions between liberals and religious, and the pro-Bibi (popular nickname for Netanyahu) and anti-Bibi groups. Due to the persistent domestic divisions for many years, Israel had four national elections between 2020 and 2022. The next two months’ time to the election, is a tense and volatile time for Israelis.

There is altogether a new actor emerging in the upcoming election which wasn’t the case in past elections: the Jewish-Israeli diaspora. These are the Jews outside of Israel who are keen to come home and vote in the 2026 election.

According to [Central Bureau of Statistics of Israel](#), of the global Jewish population of 15.8 million, about half or 7.2 million live in Israel (45% of the world Jewish population). Of these, 6.3 million, or 40% of the world Jewish population, live in the U.S. Beyond the U.S., the largest Israeli communities are in Britain, Canada, Germany and France. Most Israelis have dual or multiple citizenships; hence, an Israeli with a passport and citizenship abroad can come to vote in the country. According to the [Israel Democracy Institute](#), a premier think-tank for domestic surveys and political system, half a million Jews abroad are potential voters in Israel, the only condition being their physical presence for voting as Israel doesn't grant remote voting^[1]. Some Israeli Jews have temporarily relocated, are studying abroad or spending a limited period overseas. But many have chosen to make their lives elsewhere. More Jews now live outside of Israel. Israelis stationed abroad and Jews born in foreign lands make a strong community. Like the Jews inside Israel, the Jews abroad are quite unlike. Even the diaspora in the U.S. is not homogenous: there are reformist, universalists, nationalists and conservative orthodox Jews among them who hold many different views.

Consequently, Netanyahu and his government are concerned about a campaign called "[Fly and Vote in Israel's Crucial National Elections](#)" by the America Israel Democracy (AID) Coalition, a prominent Jewish organization in the U.S. Most Israelis living abroad have opposed the current government for the 2022 Judicial 'Reforms' which divided the whole country over fundamentals of the state, judicial independence, rule of law and most importantly the principles of checks and balances in democratic states. Likud, Netanyahu's party, perceives this whole mobilization directed against them, to be masterminded by the Jews abroad who are now planning to come vote in October. According to the *Times of Israel* ^[2], the Likud party wants to restrict this mission because it is directed against Netanyahu personally.

The majority, two-third of the American Jews, have negative views of Netanyahu's leadership in Israel as well as his foreign policy according to the Associated Press-NORC Centre for Public Affairs Research survey from July 2026.^[3] Influential American-Jewish analysts say Netanyahu doesn't appreciate

the American Jews and their political values. Most vote Democrat, believe in the American dream of a free society and a liberal state that supports pluralism based on equality and liberty according to the latest survey by the U.S.-based Jewish Electorate Institute which focuses on Jews' electoral behavior.^[4] On his part, Netanyahu has been closer to the Republican party base with its Evangelical Christian ethos, and has made it explicit that he prefers leaders like Donald Trump over Joe Biden or Barack Obama.

In Israel, Netanyahu has been supporting the religious parties that push Israel toward political and religious conservatism at the cost of its democratic ethos. Like under his leadership, the Kotel agreement for an egalitarian place of worship for women at the Holy Wall in Jerusalem was not implemented in 2017 because of the political push from the religious coalition. Women of the Wall^[5] is a movement that began in Israel in 1988, to support equal rights for men and women to pray at Jewish holy places. Large segments of the Jewish diaspora support this.

In 2018, when the Nation-State Law (Nationality Bill) was passed – which reinforced Israel as Jewish land, Hebrew as the national language, Jerusalem as the capital and Jewish settlements as a positive development – many global Jewish diaspora groups expressed deep concern and opposition to its exclusionary nature and viewed it as a threat to democratic values. [Major diaspora organizations](#) like American Jewish Committee (AJC) bitterly criticized the legislation for sidelining non-Jewish minorities and weakening the pluralistic ties between Israel and world Jewry.^[6]

Right after these two disgruntlements, came the issue of radical judicial reforms in 2022, which the [majority of the global Jewry](#) in various countries demonstrated against as well as funded protest movements inside Israel, determined to keep the country's judicial independence and checks and balances. The civil society movement, known as Kaplan Force^[7], received unusual support from the high-tech industry and the startup companies which has a large Israeli presence abroad and who feel that Netanyahu has shaken Israel's democratic foundations.

Netanyahu has his struggles with the diaspora, but the State of Israel itself has had complex relations with Jews born or living abroad. Israel's first Prime Minister, David Ben-Gurion did not like the fact that the American Jews didn't come home, "[to the holy land ending life in exile](#)", after Israel's establishment in 1948. American Jews didn't suffer classical antisemitism or ghettoisation and pogroms as in the case of Russia and Europe, and they argued with early Israeli leadership that they would better contribute to the well-being of Israel from afar through aid, advocacy and solidarity.

Now, Israel as full-fledged state has a vibrant and often divided society constantly in a clash with itself or the state. Israel doesn't grant absentee votes because the direct intervention of the diaspora can hurt its fragile sovereignty. Yet, one of the mandates of Israel's [Declaration of Independence](#) was that the State of Israel will belong to all the Jews and they have a right of return. Therefore, the Jews living abroad or born elsewhere but have Israeli nationality, are eligible to come physically and exercise their vote on 27 October. There have been various studies and legislative bills that sought to establish criteria for voting by Israelis from abroad in order to balance the right to vote to those whose centre of life and existence is not in Israel.^[8]

The religious and ultra-orthodox communities abroad also travel to vote according to their preferences and faiths. Thus, not everyone from abroad will come to vote against the current government. There is massive mobilisation this year in the light of the events of the last four years of this government that the secular, liberal, internationalist Jews and peace activists of all kinds have expressed their intention of having a say on election day.

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Views are personal.