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Jewish Federations of North America

October 22, 2026 – Latest Update From Israel

Prepared by and sent from Jewish Federation of North America's Israel Office.

Overview

- **President Trump endorses PM Netanyahu**
- **NYT: Trump, Netanyahu plan post-mid-terms attack on Iran**
- **Israeli police arrest suspects in West Bank attack on Washington Post photographer**
- **Escalation in Houthi-Saudi conflict**

Israeli Elections

- Israel's final pre-election polling period is underway, with the last public surveys expected Friday ahead of Tuesday's vote. The latest Channel 12 poll gives the Zionist opposition a 55–51 lead over Prime Minister Netanyahu's bloc, with Arab parties projected to win 14 seats; Channel 14, by contrast, projects a 62-seat majority for Netanyahu's bloc, underscoring the wide gap between pollsters and the uncertainty surrounding coalition formation. A poll-of-polls updated October 20 put Netanyahu's coalition at approximately 52–54 seats, the Zionist opposition at about 50–52, and Arab parties at roughly 14.
- While the blocs are ultimately the most important element in forming Israel's next government, the largest party is also an important factor. The October 19 Channel 12 survey projected 24 seats for Gadi Eisenkot's Yashar party and 21 for Netanyahu's Likud, while the October 21 Channel 14 poll put Likud at 30 and Yashar at 20.
- On Sunday, U.S. President Donald Trump endorsed Prime Minister Netanyahu, just nine days before Israel's election. In a Truth Social post, Trump called Netanyahu "a Great Warrior Prime Minister, and an even greater Partner for Peace in combating the Islamic Republic of Iran." About seven minutes after the post went live, Prime Minister Netanyahu took to social media, publishing a video compilation of past instances when he received President Trump's praise. Billboard ads around Israel quickly followed. Vice President J.D. Vance declined to make an endorsement.
- Gadi Eisenkot, Netanyahu's main challenger for the premiership, said he would not join a government led by Netanyahu, even under a rotation agreement that would eventually make him prime minister, declaring that he would resign within an hour if such an arrangement were reached. His unequivocal rejection comes amid speculation that a deadlocked election could force the leading parties into a unity government, and makes clear that any coalition he leads would require a different path to a parliamentary majority.

- The declaration highlights a key uncertainty for voters: even if Netanyahu's parties fail to win a majority, the opposition may struggle to agree on a viable alternative, potentially prolonging coalition negotiations or leading to another election.
- Blue and White chair Benny Gantz announced on Monday that he was withdrawing from the race, as polls showed his party failing to cross the 3.25% electoral threshold for months. Netanyahu and his allies have continued to pressure smaller right-wing parties to leave the race, fearing that votes for parties that fail to cross the threshold could cost his bloc crucial seats and underscoring the critical role small parties could have in the election's outcome.
- Specifically, Netanyahu exerted pressure on Charedi Public, an ultra-Orthodox party led by Moti Leitner, to suspend its campaign. The party, which has more moderate positions regarding IDF enlistment, education, and employment - and has included women on its Knesset slate - has yet to break through the electoral threshold in polling. On Monday, Leitner told Channel 12 that he would not be dropping out and called a vote for his party "a vote for the future." Ofer Winter of the People of Israel Party and Yoaz Hendel, chairman of the Reservists-Economic Party, also remain in the race.
- Yinon Magal, a prominent pro-Netanyahu media personality, sparked widespread condemnation after repeatedly calling Eisenkot a "monkey" during a Channel 14 broadcast while discussing his Moroccan Jewish background and suggesting that Ashkenazi elites were manipulating him. The comments revived painful memories of anti-Mizrahi prejudice in Israeli politics; Netanyahu subsequently condemned the remark, while Eisenkot's allies portrayed it as an example of the racism facing Mizrahi Israelis.
- The controversy has drawn comparisons with the 1977 election, when a derogatory remark about Mizrahi voters at a Labor Party rally sparked a backlash that helped propel Menachem Begin and his Likud party to victory. Analysts caution, however, that today's fragmented political landscape and rapid news cycle may make it harder for the incident to produce a comparable electoral shift. Read more at Times of Israel.
- Meanwhile, Netanyahu proposed an additional $140 billion in defense spending over the next decade, on top of roughly $109 billion already agreed, arguing that Israel must prepare for an increasingly uncertain security environment. Opposition leaders challenged the plan's financing, with Yair Lapid warning that it could require raising value-added tax; the proposal puts national security spending and its economic consequences squarely into the election debate.

Iran and the Houthis

- The New York Times reported that the United States and Israel have developed plans for a renewed round of military strikes against Iran after the November 3 U.S. midterm elections. According to a Financial Times report, Netanyahu was prepared to launch Israeli strikes against Iranian nuclear facilities, regime targets, and energy infrastructure on October 10, but President Trump opposed restarting the war ahead of the November 3 U.S. midterm elections.
- The reports add a significant international dimension to Israel's election campaign, although the Prime Minister's Office has denied that Netanyahu sought to initiate a war before the vote, and it remains unclear whether the United States would have participated in the proposed strikes.
- Iranian officials are seeking to prolong the impasse in negotiations with Washington in hopes of influencing the U.S. midterm elections, according to a Reuters report citing officials familiar with Tehran's thinking.

- The Iran-backed Houthis in Yemen claimed responsibility for attacks against Saudi energy, airport, and military targets - including an Aramco site, King Khalid International Airport in Riyadh, and the Abha airport. They also struck a camp for Yemeni government forces in the country's south, killing at least 20 soldiers, according to the Yemeni military. The renewed fighting between the Houthis and the Saudi-backed Yemeni government forces has led U.S. embassies across the region to issue security alerts for American citizens traveling to or from the Middle East.
- Germany summoned Iran's ambassador after a court convicted two men of spying for Iranian intelligence and plotting attacks against Josef Schuster, head of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, and Volker Beck, a prominent German advocate for Israel. The case highlights continuing concerns about Iran's use of operatives to target Jewish communities and Israel supporters abroad; the defendants received prison sentences of eight and a half years and four and a half years.

West Bank and Gaza

- Following violent weekend attacks against EU diplomats and an American-born Washington Post photographer in the West Bank, Israel announced the arrest of 10 individuals suspected of involvement. The arrests followed mounting international pressure to take action, including U.S. condemnation of the attack on Levine and the EU stating that it expected "full accountability as well as effective measures to prevent continued acts of violence." Israel Police dubbed the arrest operation "Olive Leaf," a nod to the incidents taking place during the Palestinian olive harvest, and worked in coordination with the Shin Bet and the IDF.
- Israeli forces on Wednesday detained former New York City comptroller Brad Lander, the Democratic nominee for a New York congressional seat, along with approximately 80 rabbis and other volunteers accompanying Palestinian farmers harvesting olives near Bethlehem. Lander was released with a warning after several hours, while Israeli authorities said the group had entered an area requiring prior coordination; the incident drew criticism from Jewish religious movements and renewed scrutiny of Israel's response to settler violence during the olive harvest.
- During a tour group's travel through the West Bank on Monday, Palestinians attacked several vehicles, including one carrying People of Israel candidate Fleur Hassan-Nahoum, a former deputy mayor of Jerusalem. The People of Israel Party criticized the government for failing to crack down on terrorism following the incident, while Israeli police stated that they have launched an investigation, without confirming Hassan-Nahoum's involvement.
- Also in the West Bank, the IDF on Sunday announced the arrest of two Palestinian terror suspects who were reportedly planning an "imminent terror attack and operating to establish terrorist infrastructure." The Duvdevan Commando Unit raided Kafr Aqab, taking the suspects into custody, and transported them to be questioned by the Shin Bet.
- Two IDF airstrikes in Gaza over the weekend eliminated several Hamas operatives, including Hamas cell commander Majed Ahmed Mustafa Sabbag, Hamas engineer battalion member Amer Bashir Mohammed Khourani, and Abdullah Mohammed Khamis Jaber, a key member of Hamas's arms productions division. The IDF noted that the three were involved in "advancing attacks on troops and Israeli civilians, and attempting to restore Hamas's capabilities" in the Strip.

- An official of the U.S.-led Board of Peace told the Times of Israel that about 500 Moroccan personnel have been trained ahead of a planned deployment with the International Stabilization Force in Gaza, adding that there has been "modest progress" on a proposed UAE-backed compound for displaced Palestinians in the part of Gaza controlled by Israel. Despite delays in the implementation of the Board of Peace's initiatives, including water, sewage, and sanitation projects, officials expressed hope that they would move forward faster after Israel's election.
- Due to a lack of funding, the U.N.'s World Food Programme (WFP) said this week that it would end monthly aid to 500,000 Gazans. With the reduction, the WFP assists 1.1 million Palestinians in Gaza, either in food or cash aid.
- Qatar and France called for implementation of the Gaza ceasefire and the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz, linking the humanitarian and security challenges in Gaza with wider regional instability. The diplomatic appeal highlights the continued international focus on translating ceasefire arrangements into durable progress while tensions over maritime security persist.

Other Developments

- On Monday, U.S. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth made an unannounced visit to Israel, meeting with Prime Minister Netanyahu at an air force base in the Negev as tensions with Iran intensified. The discussions reportedly focused on Iran and potential joint military strategies, underscoring the close security partnership between Washington and Jerusalem amid speculation about renewed strikes.
- As France remains engulfed in widespread rioting and protests, vandals attacked Jewish-owned shops in the city of Marseille and a synagogue in Paris. The Jewish Community Protection Service, however, stated that there was no evidence that Jewish sites were deliberately targeted, and members of the Ohalei Yaakov synagogue in Paris believe the rioters were looking for money. Although there was significant damage, the synagogue's Torah scrolls remained unharmed.
- A new Brandeis University study found that one in 10 Jewish graduate students have been subjected to antisemitic remarks or ascribed personal blame for Israel's actions, with hostility to Jews and Israel being more prominent among PhD students in the humanities. Overall, the study found that most graduate students in the U.S. express "little prejudice toward Jews and other minority groups, and most do not express hostility toward Israel." Among the five issues that respondents were asked about, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict ranked last, behind the Trump administration and American democracy, racism, immigration, and LGBTQ+ issues.
- Croatian leaders and Israel's embassy condemned pro-Nazi and antisemitic chants, including "Crush the Jews," ahead of a soccer match in Croatia. The incident underscores the persistence of antisemitism in European public life and the visibility of anti-Jewish rhetoric in sporting environments.

For Further Reading

- Call Me Back: Three election scenarios nobody is talking about
- WINEP: Israel's Most Consequential Election?
- JTA: Oct. 7 reshaped Israel. Three years on, its political map remains largely unchanged
- JPost: Israel's leaders talk about security, but what happened to peace?