

Can Netanyahu Win Israel's Do-Over Election and Form a Ruling Coalition?

An Interview with Gil Hoffman of the Jerusalem Post

by [Jerry Gordon](#) and Rod Reuven Dovid Bryant (August 2019)



Blue and White's Benny Gantz versus Likud's Benjamin Netanyahu

On July 21, 2019 Bibi Netanyahu [became](#) the longest serving Israeli Prime Minister. The occasion should have been a

hallmark of his long political career. Netanyahu could take credit for significant diplomatic, national security and economic achievements, all while contending with threats from Iran in neighboring Syria, Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Gaza. Instead, the reality is that he faces the [daunting](#) task of Israel's first historic do-over election on September 17.

Following the April 9 election, Netanyahu [failed](#) to form a ruling coalition because he couldn't sway secular nationalist Avigdor Liberman of Yisrael Beiteinu or even then-Labor party leader Gabbay to join his coalition, enabling him to reach the threshold of 61 Knesset seats. Liberman allegedly opposed joining the Likud-led coalition over the issue of drafting Haredi Yeshiva students. What Former Defense and Foreign Minister Liberman was endeavoring to do was force the formation of a so-called Unity government with the Center-left Blue and White alliance led by former IDF Chief of Staff Benny Gantz. Current *Ma'ariv* [polling](#) show Likud and the Blue and White alliance in a virtual tie at 33 versus 30 seats, unable to reach the threshold to form a majority government. The bottom line is that it will be hard for Netanyahu to [reach](#) the required 61 Knesset seats to form a ruling coalition. What could emerge is the possibility of someone else being selected by Israeli President Rivlin to form a new government.

That is exacerbated by several developments. There is great [uncertainty](#) about possible right-wing support, including extreme Orthodox-religious parties, given a deadline of August 1 for them to file technical party lists. There is the reforming of the United Arab Party list to [foil](#) a possible ruling coalition. No Arab joint party list would join a ruling coalition but might block a possible majority government for Netanyahu. It is complicated by a possible lower total vote turnout than the 68.5 percent who [voted](#) in the April 9

election. The Israeli polity is turned off by the political personalities and it might result in fewer Israeli Jews voting, and more Arabs voting. There is the resurrection of the Labor Party, given the recent [election](#) of Amir Peretz as party leader. He led Labor in a 2006 election, drawing 19 seats away from the centrist Kadima and Likud then led by Netanyahu.

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