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End of Bibi's era? 'Bleak' prospects for Netanyahu as Israel's embattled PM faces snap elections

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Benjamin Netanyahu will struggle to secure a majority in September's snap elections, analysts told RT, predicting that the Israeli prime minister faces formidable political and legal hurdles if he hopes to keep his job.

Israel's parliament, the Knesset, voted to dissolve late Wednesday night after Netanyahu failed to form a coalition before the midnight deadline. The sizable political hiccup marks the first time in Israel's history that the presumed prime minister has failed to form a government. Less than two months after Netanyahu declared victory in April's elections, Israeli voters will return to the polls on September 17.

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While Netanyahu has proven himself to be a resilient politician, the veteran politician will have to overcome a looming indictment, as well as a crumbling alliance with right-wing and religious parties, if he hopes to remain in power.

A shattered alliance

Netanyahu's problems began immediately after April's elections. Despite claiming victory, his Likud party was only able to secure 35 seats in the Knesset, requiring him to form a coalition to secure a majority in the 120-seat legislature. The fate of the new government depended on the support of the small, ultra-nationalist Yisrael Beitenu party, but the group's leader, former

Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman, broke ranks with Netanyahu over military draft exemptions for Orthodox Jews. Lieberman resigned as defense minister in November after Netanyahu's cabinet agreed to a ceasefire that ended two days of fighting with Palestinian militants in Gaza.



Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu (C, 1st row) and Avigdor Lieberman (L, 2nd row) © Global Look Press

Whether Lieberman's political gambit will pay off in September is an open question, however.

*"It remains to be seen whether Netanyahu or Lieberman will be strengthened by this development,"* Steve Linde, editor of The Jerusalem Report magazine, told RT. He added that, while Netanyahu still enjoys support in Israel, forming a new coalition will be no easy task.

***I think this time he's going to seek other partners. There's already talk of him making alliances with other, smaller parties. He even invited the Labor opposition into the government, but they refused.***

If Netanyahu does triumph in September's elections, it's unlikely that Lieberman will be part of the government, predicted Linde, who said that the two men *"won't budge"* on their clashing policy positions.

A 'doubtful' political future

There's no reason to believe that, after failing to form a coalition, Netanyahu's fortunes will improve in the snap elections, Amir Oren, a defense and political commenter, argued.

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***It's not certain that even if his party, Likud, gets the biggest number of seats in the Knesset, that he will be able to form a coalition. This is exactly what he failed at last night. His chances now look worse than in the previous elections. So it is doubtful, politically, that he can survive.***

Netanyahu's political troubles are only compounded by a looming indictment on charges of corruption. If Israel's attorney general decides to press forward with the case – a decision that will be made in September – it would be "more than doubtful that people will join [Netanyahu] in a coalition," Oren remarked.

*"All in all, the situation is quite bleak"* for Netanyahu, he summarized.

While Oren was less than optimistic about Netanyahu's chances, he acknowledged that anything is possible. After all, Lieberman's party, which controlled only five seats in the Knesset, was able to bring down Netanyahu's budding coalition.

*"Every vote counts,"* noted Oren. *"Any member of the Knesset could change the situation."*

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