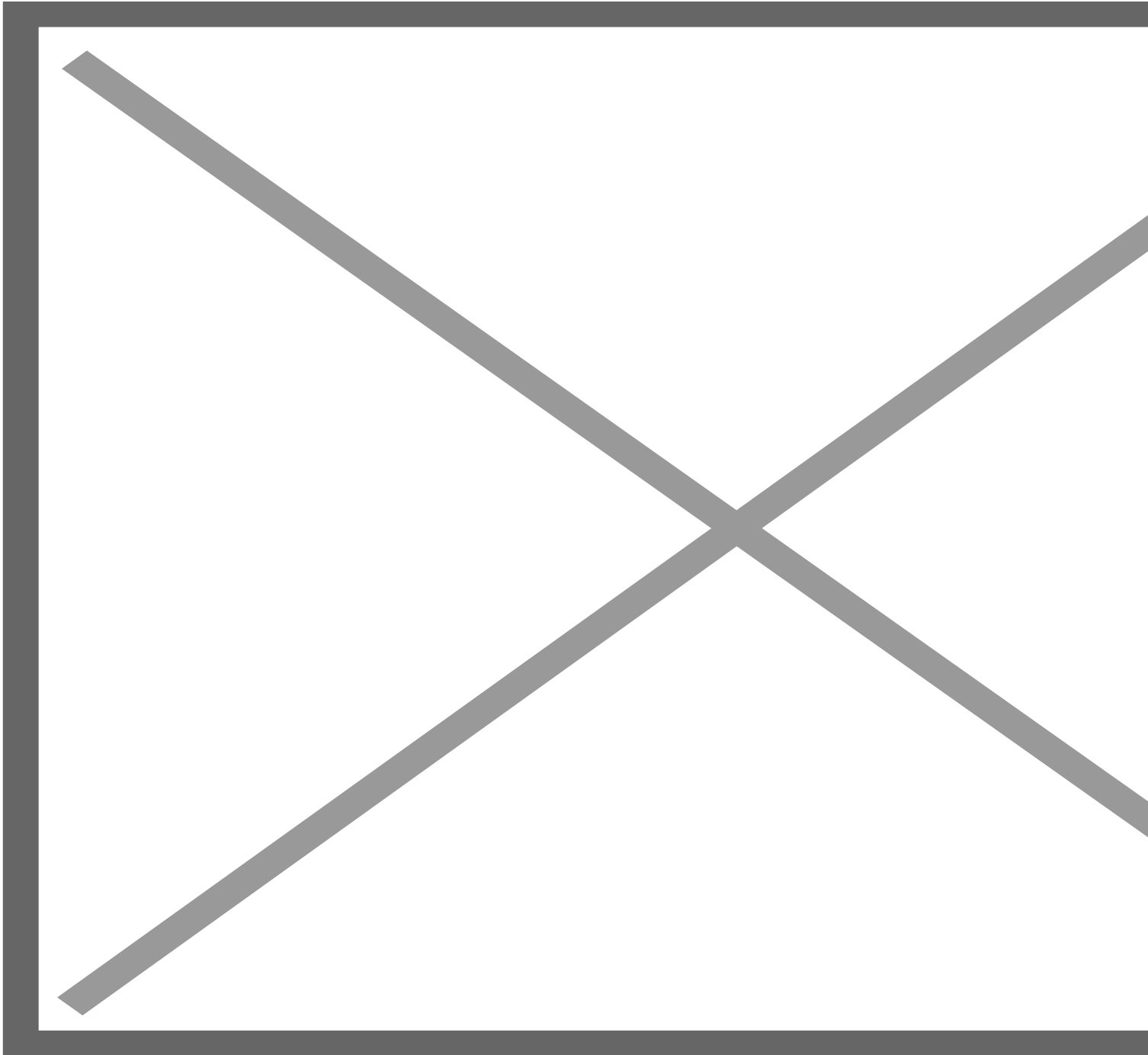


'Vote him out': Israeli-Americans rally against Netanyahu, plan to return to Israel to vote against him

by [Molly Myers](#)

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Offir Gutelzon speaks to the crowd during a protest pushing for change in the Israeli government. (Photo by Molly Myers)

Gripping Israeli flags in Union Square, a crowd of roughly three dozen chanted “Vote him out,” as Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu prepared to speak before the United Nations on Thursday.

“It’s really an embarrassment that he’s even at the UN,” said Israeli-American protester Steve Lax, who is planning to fly to Israel to vote in the upcoming election.

UnXeptable, an organization founded by Israeli expats who say they are striving to save Israeli democracy, organized the demonstration. While those protesting opposed the Netanyahu government, the rally was intended more broadly to support change in Israel as the [election](#) looms. Roughly three dozen Israelis, Israeli-Americans and Jewish-Americans joined the protest.

Lax, who splits his time between Israel and the US, said he supports Yair Golan and the Democrats. The main issues driving his vote are government corruption, settler violence in the West Bank and “the lack of hope for peace.”

“Jewish terrorism is creating more Arab terrorism,” said Lax, chairman of Naot Worldwide. “The settlers are totally out of control, and unfortunately some of the Israeli army, and certainly [Itamar] Ben-Gvir, have been supporting the settlers in what they’re doing.”

Israeli citizens living abroad may vote in the election if they are physically in the country to cast their ballots and have [resident status](#). This is different from the US, where citizens can vote by absentee ballot while outside the US.

Change, for those at the protest, means supporting one of the many opposition blocs. Offir Gutelzon, the Israeli-American co-founder of UnXeptable, is supporting the opposition [Change Bloc](#), which includes Gadi Eisenkot. Critics of Eisenkot question what significant changes he will bring, as he aligns with Netanyahu on opposing Palestinian statehood. However, Gutelzon said Eisenkot’s stance on internal issues is what really matters to Israelis.

These include opposing judicial overhaul, setting term limits for prime ministers and drafting the Haredim into the military.

“I know that from the outside, everyone is looking at what will be different with Palestinians, what will be different in Gaza,” Gutelzon, who moved to the US in 2011 for business reasons, said. “Most Israeli voters don’t think about that right now. They want to secure the country as a Jewish and democratic state, and then start talking about other things.”

But for Israeli-American Leora Agron, Gaza is one of the main reasons she is flying back to vote.

“Innocent people are dying,” she said. “Let them live. Give them support to do it, because everything is broken.”

Agron moved to Argentina in 1987 at age 30 to be with her husband. The couple considered moving back to Israel when they had children, but were discouraged by then opposition leader Ariel Sharon’s visit to the Temple Mount, which inflamed tensions with Palestinians.

Gutelzon is confident Netanyahu won’t remain in power. Even so, he says the stakes couldn’t be higher, and that if the prime minister doesn’t change, the country will slip into a “messianic theocracy.” This is in part due to brain drain, the concept of highly educated citizens emigrating.

Nearly [300,000](#) Israelis have left the country for at least three months since 2023, suggesting a mass emigration trend, according to a study from Tel Aviv University. Professor Itai Ater, who led the study, said the country is currently able to sustain itself despite these numbers. However, if the trend continues, emigration will severely harm the nation's security and economy.

"We see that it's many, many physicians, engineers, tech people and academics," Ater [told](#) i24 News. "This is the best of Israel in a sense. The Israeli economy depends on human capital."

Citing Ater's study, Gutelzon noted healthcare would be impacted by physicians leaving, along with education if academics emigrate. Additionally, this group of people is paying the highest taxes, he said. They also serve in the military, and are needed given the exemption for Haredim.

Yonatan Schwartz, 19, participated in the protest and said he is reconsidering immigration to Israel. Schwartz, an US citizen with two Israeli parents, attended the UnXeptable protest and said he had been planning to join the Israel Defense Forces. But if Netanyahu is reelected—or a different "right-wing extremist" wins—he said he'll likely stay in the US and go to college instead.

UnXeptable was initially inspired by the [2020 Balfour protests](#) when hundreds of thousands of Israelis took to streets and bridges demanding Netanyahu resign after he was indicted on corruption charges.

"The Balfour protests started with a very simple statement that said that an indicted prime minister is unacceptable," said Gutelzon, explaining how UnXeptable got its name.

The Bay Area-based organization wanted to show Israelis back home that those in the diaspora supported them. So they [demonstrated](#) at their own bridge, the Golden Gate.

Now, the protests have gone beyond showing solidarity with Israelis back home. As Gutelzon puts it, UnXeptable wants to show the world "the other Israel," one that's looking "for change." —The Forward

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