

[Bottlegate, Boehnergate: Why Isn't Likud Suffering?](#)

While the scandal with Congress continues to bubble over, and pressure mounts on Bibi to cancel his speech, Israelis are consumed with...bottles. Scandal after scandal has erupted over the last few weeks against Bibi and his household in such a short amount of time that one might assume a conspiracy has been hatched to oust him from power (no doubt, he believes such nonsense). In addition to Boehnergate and Bottlegate, Bibi must also contend with yet another claim against him, [from a high-level Japanese government official](#) concerning a request for a legal franchise to build a casino financed by (who else?) Sheldon Adelson.

The public has stated, and not for the first time, [that economic concerns trump security in these elections](#). As such, we should be seeing a major shift in the polls, indicating that the citizens of Israel will no longer foot the bill for the Netanyahu family's crooked spending habits, especially in the face of such frustration regarding the economic situation. Couple this with a recent press conference [revealing the Zionist Union's new economic policy](#) in contrast to Likud's lack thereof, and it would seem that a Labor-Livni victory would be, if not a foregone conclusion, then at least a slightly more likely possibility.

Instead, according to the last few polls, we've seen the opposite—not only have we not seen the Likud numbers plummeting, but in some cases, they've [actually risen and overtaken the Zionist Union](#). Nor are we seeing a defection from the Likud to the other like-minded right-wing parties with a cleaner image; the far-right seems to be cannibalizing itself with the addition of Eli Yishai to the Yachad party, those votes coming at the expense of Bennett, not Bibi.

How can we explain this? It's no coincidence that these numbers reflect the public sentiment only days after the flare-up in the north. And as it's happened in every election in the recent past, these types of attacks, however they occur, whether in the form of a suicide bombing or a missile attack, tend to harden

public sentiment concerning issues of security. As those events recede into the distance, polls may shift away from fear of future violent confrontations.

If indeed corruption has become such a non-issue in Israel, [Tamar Herman of the Israel Democracy Institute summarizes public sentiment](#) regarding Bibi: "He's corrupt, so he should at least be competent". It seems that a long history of corruption in Israel may very well have desensitized voters to these types of events. And even when corruption is out of the ordinary, there's an understanding that the public will stay quiet as long as security needs are met.

But it's hard to comprehend what seems like the public's near apathy in the face of an ugly confrontation with the US government, and its view of this rupture as less threatening than the next round of fighting with Hamas or Hezbollah. In fact, if anything were to derail Bibi's claim of 'competence', this should be the smoking gun that his rivals use to great effect against him. No matter that misgivings—and condemnation—have appeared from across the political spectrum, Bibi seems insistent on going through with his speech before Congress, as if to prove a point.

[Bernard Avishai writes in the New Yorker about the lines that have been drawn between Bibi and his 'rivals' in the Democratic Party](#), and indeed we're starting to see the results of this policy. [Talk of key Democrats boycotting his speech is now starting to make the rounds](#), which doesn't portend a sunny future. One would assume that a prime minister assured of his victory on March 17th would do everything in his power to maintain a bearable working relationship with the leader of the Free World who will remain in office for another two years. Instead, Bibi is now likely to reap what he sows in the form of an irritated administration more than happy to pay him back in kind.

This will likely translate into various setbacks for Israel, particularly in the international arena: a US administration more and more likely to allow for the 'internationalization' of the conflict through the UN Security Council, while playing the 'good cop' to an EU that seems more and more eager to punish

Israel for settlement building. And worse still, an angry US is far less likely to offer the diplomatic cover and military equipment than in the past. If that doesn't prove Bibi's complete lack of control on the security front, it's hard for me to convince someone otherwise.