

# Why Some Voters in 'Settler Heartland' Are Ready to Turn Their Backs on Netanyahu

**A tour of Gush Etzion in the West Bank finds settlers disillusioned with the Prime Minister and pledging their allegiance to other right-wing parties on March 23. Will 'Bibi fatigue' decide the election?**

[Allison Kaplan Sommer](#)

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Dr. Emmanuel Navon is also playing his part to replace Netanyahu, and support Sa'ar, from his book-lined Efrat home. Raised in Paris, he moved to Israel in 1993 to pursue his academic career, and today teaches political science at Tel Aviv University and Herzliya's Interdisciplinary Center. He is also affiliated with two right-leaning think tanks: the Jerusalem Institute of Strategy and Security, and the Kohelet Policy Forum.

Navon, 50, arrived in the country as a classic European liberal, but shifted right and joined Likud after the second intifada in the early 2000s and after being "horrified by [Oslo](#)." A free marketeer, Navon says he appreciated Netanyahu's push toward privatization as finance minister, and was active enough in the party to – unsuccessfully – run for the "immigrants slot" on the Knesset slate in the 2012 party primary.

But over the years, he recounts, he increasingly became disenchanted with Netanyahu. He was friendly with Sa'ar and was impressed "by the way he stood up to Netanyahu" when the premier attempted to deny the presidency to [Reuven Rivlin](#) in 2015. "Gideon was the only one who told Bibi that this was not a banana republic. And that's what got him on the blacklist of Balfour," he says, referring to the prime minister's official residence.

Navon quit the party in disgust in 2015 after Netanyahu took the country to early elections – only renewing his Likud membership last year to vote for Sa'ar in the party primary.

Likud has become "a North Korean party" full of "spineless people who suck up to Netanyahu" even though he "completely despises them," Navon asserts. "Netanyahu has become the ultimate status quo leader: remaining prime minister is the only thing he cares about."

If Netanyahu continues to fail to get a clear majority, Navon fears "he will keep us in endless elections so he can remain interim prime minister indefinitely."

## French lesson

Navon is doing what he can to advise and assist Sa'ar, who he believes has "principles and courage." In that role, he has taken on the challenging task of holding Zoom sessions for French immigrants to Israel, who, he says, tend to be "Bibi-ists" that idolize Netanyahu and view him as irreplaceable.

“They can’t differentiate between criticizing Netanyahu and criticizing Israel,” sighs Navon, who holds sessions for English speakers as well. Making the case for change after 15 years, Navon uses a comparison he hopes the French can appreciate: Charles de Gaulle, a national war hero and great statesman who nonetheless overstayed his welcome as president.

“I’m the first one to say [Netanyahu’s] done great things in the past – but he’s lost it. He’s been doing a terrible job for the last two years. Do we really want him to be our prime minister for 19 years?” he asks.



Photo Credit: Emil Salman, Ha'aretz