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Netanyahu set for fifth term as Prime Minister

Benjamin Netanyahu continues as Israel's Prime Minister after provisional results indicate that the Likud narrowly defeats Benny Gantz's Blue and White party - each getting 35 seats but having a clear path to form a coalition with five other parties.

After 97% of the votes have been counted, Likud won 35 seats, Blue and White 35 seats, Shas 8 seats, UTJ 8 seats, Hadash-Ta'al 6 seats, Labour 6 seats, Yisrael Beteinu 5 seats, United Right 5 seats, Balad-Raam 4 seats, Kulanu 4 seats and Meretz 4 seats. So far, the New Right, Gesher and Zehut parties have failed to pass the 3.25% threshold and will not enter the Knesset. Numbers may shift slightly as soldiers' votes continue to be tallied. Updated voting results can be seen [here](#).

As of 6pm today Israel time Likud has won 26.27% of the vote — the party's best result since 2003 (when it won 38 seats under Ariel Sharon), and its best ever under Netanyahu. The Blue and White party led by Benny Gantz and Yair Lapid won 25.94% of the vote. This is the first time since 1996 that the two leading parties both received more than 30 seats.

The ultra-Orthodox parties, Shas and United Torah Judaism are currently in joint third place with 8 seats each. Labour and Hadash-Ta'al came joint fifth with 6 seats each. The New Right party, led by Naftali Bennett and Ayelet Shaked, is hoping soldiers' votes, not yet counted could win them enough votes to enter the Knesset. The final 3% of votes that will be counted today are referred to as "double envelopes," which are the votes of soldiers, hospital patients, prisoners, women in shelters, election officials and Israeli diplomats posted abroad.

The UTJ's 8 seats will be their highest number of seats won in an election. This reflects the high voter turnout among the ultra-Orthodox community.

Labour's current 6 seats is a historic low for the party which dominated Israeli politics and led every Israeli Government until 1977. Meretz's 4 seats is one seat less than it won in 2015.

The results put the right-wing bloc in the lead with 65 seats, while the centre-left bloc won 55 seats. Overall voter turnout is estimated at 68 per cent a decrease of 4 per cent in 2015.



Netanyahu and Gantz declare victory

Benjamin Netanyahu and Benny Gantz both declared victory last night after the exit polls revealed a tie between the two leading parties.

"This is an unimaginable achievement," Netanyahu said: "I am very moved tonight, a night of tremendous victory. I am very excited that the people of Israel once again trusted me for the fifth time, and with greater confidence."

He added: "I have already started talks with the leaders of our right-wing parties, and almost all of them have publicly declared that they will recommend me to form the government, and will do so to our President. There will be a right-wing government, but I intend to be the Prime Minister of all the citizens of Israel, right and left, Jews and non-Jews, I care about everyone, that's how it was and that's how it will be."

Benny Gantz claimed victory hours earlier, as two exit polls showed his Blue and White party beating the Likud.

He told his party's activists: "This is an historic day. Thank you to Netanyahu for his service for the country. There are election losers, there are election winners – and we are the winners. We will win in a way that is respectful to everyone, respectful of the past, respectful of the present, and building a joint future that is yet to come."

Gantz also vowed to move quickly to form the next government. He said: "We have a responsibility to form a government that will serve the State of Israel and not itself," he said. "The sooner we form a government, the sooner we can lead the State of Israel. We have a lot of work ahead of us."

The Experience of Voting in Israel

By: Steven M. Goldberg

AFL President's Club and Adv. Bd Member

One of the reasons I decided to become an Israeli citizen is to have the privilege of voting. I have now voted in two national elections, once in 2015 and for a second time on April 9, 2019. Both times I flew from Los Angeles to Tel Aviv just so I could vote. Both times it was well worth the effort and expense.

I have already written about the thrill of 2015, as the Likud pulled off a major upset by prevailing over the favored Zionist Union. I was in Likud headquarters on election night, brought in by the AFL's Adam Fishman.

This time, the experience was just as meaningful, even though the process was low key. I went to my assigned voting station and showed my Israeli national identity card. I was given a blue envelope, I walked a few feet to my voting booth, where I was confronted with a table containing stacks of small paper slips, each slip bearing the name of a different political party competing in Israel's raucous, heated democratic process. I found the stack of slips for the Likud, carefully removed just one slip, placed it in the blue envelope and then placed the sealed envelope in a slot on top of a box.

Performing this simple act was immensely gratifying. I knew I was playing some role, albeit a tiny one, as a Jew in the world's only Jewish State. I have had my say.

I watched the returns on television with friends, all rooting for Likud. The early results of the exit polls were mixed, with two polls showing equality between Likud and Blue and White, and the third giving Blue and White a four mandate lead. In all three polls, however, it was clear that only Likud could form a coalition, with Blue and White having no path at all.

Notwithstanding this obvious conclusion, the media was desperately spinning the early returns as a shocking disappointment for Prime Minister Netanyahu, with the results being uncertain. This was the case both in Israel and the U.S. It was impossible not to realize that there is, in fact, fake news, motivated by irrational hatred of both President Trump and Prime Minister Netanyahu. I personally took satisfaction when the reality of the situation, that Likud had prevailed yet again and Netanyahu had been re-elected, finally set in and even the media had to relent.

So today, the day after the election, I am celebrating that the Likud party is dominant in Israel and that Benjamin Netanyahu defeated his enemies yet again: I am also profoundly thankful that I had the opportunity to vote in Israel and to be a part, however small, in the miracle of the Jewish State.

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