

Israel plunged into deeper turmoil following inconclusive election

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Israel's general election has ended in deadlock. With more than 90 percent of the vote counted, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's bloc—Likud, the fascist Otzma Yehudit and Religious Zionism parties and the ultra-Orthodox Shas and United Torah Judaism (UTJ)—stands at 53 or 54 seats in the 120-member Knesset, seven or eight short of a majority.

The opposition “change” bloc headed by former army chief of staff Gadi Eisenkot has 47 or 48. The two Arab-majority lists, the Joint List and Ra'am, have a combined 19.

Up to 480,000 “double envelope” ballots, cast mainly by soldiers, police and diplomats, are still to be counted, with the tally expected to be completed Thursday. Official results will be published on November 4. President Isaac Herzog will then consult party leaders before handing one of them up to 42 days to cobble together a coalition. He pleaded with the parties to come to him with “an open mind” and to do everything possible “to avoid another round of elections.”

For weeks the international media portrayed the election as an historic turning point, a referendum on the Netanyahu era that would finally remove the most right-wing government in Israel's history. This had nothing to do with concern for the Palestinians.

The hope invested in Eisenkot was that a government headed by a former general who shares every essential element of Netanyahu's programme—ethnic cleansing, the destruction of Gaza, war against Lebanon and Iran—would allow Washington's European allies, confronting mass opposition at home over their complicity in genocide, to put some distance between themselves and the politically toxic figure of Netanyahu. They would then find it easier to arm, finance and diplomatically shield the Zionist regime.

Liberal Zionists hoped that a less nakedly criminal government would help rescue Israel from its present standing as a global pariah.

That expectation has been dashed. Netanyahu leads the largest bloc, Likud remains the largest party, and he is the likeliest to be handed the first attempt to form a government. For months to come, Netanyahu will remain prime minister and free to pursue the agenda he has drawn up with US President Donald Trump for a renewed and expanded war against Iran.

Trump, who intervened brazenly in the campaign with

endorsements on October 18 and 25—warning Israelis that if they chose “the wrong Leader, which would be anyone other than Bibi,” America would have to do the work against Iran itself—greeted the outcome by declaring, “A tie is sort of considered a win in that case.”

More fundamentally, as the WSWs explained before the vote, no Zionist party ever offered any alternative to war and authoritarianism. The election was a factional struggle within the ruling establishment over how best to manage the wars, distribute the spoils and suppress the social crisis produced by a society organised around permanent militarism. The result confirms this.

Netanyahu's losses were not the product of a shift to the supposedly more liberal opposition. In 2022 the Zionist parties that now make up Eisenkot's bloc—Yesh Atid, National Unity, Yisrael Beiteinu and Labor—won 46 seats between them. Today, Eisenkot's Yashar (21), Naftali Bennett and Yair Lapid's Together (11), Avigdor Liberman's Yisrael Beiteinu (7 or 8) and Yair Golan's Democrats (8) can muster 47 or 48.

After three years of genocide, an economy bled by military spending that has nearly doubled as a share of GDP since 2022, and a campaign framed as a verdict on Netanyahu, the Zionist opposition advanced by just one or two seats.

Four of Netanyahu's lost seats came from the ultra-Orthodox parties, largely through abstention. Shas fell from 11 seats to around seven, while UTJ held at seven. Turnout in Haredi strongholds fell sharply as their communities registered their anger over the government's failure to legislate an exemption for yeshiva students from military service—the issue over which UTJ quit the coalition and Shas withdrew its ministers.

Moreover, Likud's share of the vote dropped by only around two points, and its raw vote is roughly what it was in 2022. The election showed that there is a core right-wing constituency that has no intention of changing course. Its most worrying expression is in the more than half a million Israelis aged 18 to 22 who were eligible to vote for the first time. Of these, a Channel 12 poll found 74 percent of them describing their views as right or centre-right.

The concept of a more progressive form of Zionism has been decisively refuted by these results. According to polls, only four percent of Jewish Israelis thought the assault on Gaza had

gone too far and still backed the eventual formation of a Palestinian state. An Israel Democracy Institute survey from 2026 found that over three-quarters of Jewish Israelis supported continuing the war against Iran.

Those who genuinely desire peace and an end to conflict will never see this by voting for a different grouping of war criminals.

The opposition parties' pitch to voters is not that Netanyahu wages war but that he wages it badly. Eisenkot is the author of the Dahiya doctrine, the application of "disproportionate force" to inflict "great damage and destruction" on civilian areas, first used against Beirut's southern suburbs in 2006. He sat in Netanyahu's war cabinet for eight months to prosecute the genocide in Gaza and left only to attack Netanyahu for failing to finish the job.

Eisenkot has pledged to destroy Hamas's military wing and end its rule within 18 months and declared that "two states for two peoples is a mistake," insisting that Israel must hold overriding security control "from the River to the Sea. He supports the prevention of an Iranian military nuclear capability, by force if necessary.

What changed most decisively in the election was the mobilisation of the Palestinian citizens of Israel, who make up around a fifth of the population. Arab turnout, around 55 percent in 2022, exceeded 80 percent this year. The two Arab parties not only nearly doubled the 10 seats they won in 2022 but by raising the overall turnout also shrank the seat totals of the large Zionist lists under Israel's proportional representation system.

It is being suggested that the Arab vote might deliver a government headed by Eisenkot. But throughout the campaign Eisenkot set four conditions for any partner, including recognising Israel as a Jewish and democratic state and Hamas as a terrorist organisation, and stated flatly that he saw no Arab party that met them.

Asked about joining forces with Arab parties, he said, "It is against my principles." Should he break that promise, he said, he expected his own party members "to take a stand." Eisenkot's appeal is for a realignment within Zionism. "I will make efforts to bring in more Zionist parties," he explained, "because Israel needs a broad coalition." Liberman's and Bennett's parties have said the same.

The role of the two Arab parties is politically damning. The leader of the Islamist Ra'am, Mansour Abbas, sat in the 2021–22 Bennett-Lapid government that bombed Gaza and presided over a surge in killings in the West Bank. He declared on election night that most voters for Eisenkot's bloc wanted a government with Ra'am and senior figures had discussed a deal with him before the vote.

Joint List leader Yousef Jabareen heads an alliance of his Hadash, which emerged out of the Stalinist Israeli Communist Party, and is aligned with the secular nationalist parties Ta'al and Balad. Hadash has said he is "ready and prepared to pave

the way to oust the Netanyahu government," proclaiming that "change runs through a Jewish-Arab partnership."

That both parties declare themselves amenable to installing a government headed by a war criminal who opposes a Palestinian state, champions the destruction of civilian infrastructure and is committed to war with Iran, exposes their hostility to the fundamental interests of the Palestinian masses.

In the longer run, the fact that Palestinian citizens of Israel can determine the composition of the government of the Zionist state will be treated by every faction of the Israeli ruling class as an existential threat. It will spur them to step up the offensive against the Palestinians and to carry it deeper into Israel itself.

Meanwhile, Netanyahu has a free hand to carry out his vow that the Iranian regime "must fall, and I will bring it down," telling Trump, "Donald, we have a job to finish." His operational plans, he says, are "ready, waiting for Trump's approval," with the US building up its forces in the region for an assault expected after the November 3 US midterm elections.

The real historic character of this election lies not in any prospect that it could rescue Israel from its mounting crisis. It is in its confirmation of the reactionary essence of the Zionist project, of a state founded on the expulsion and dispossession of the Palestinians, organised as a garrison state for US imperialism, sustained by permanent war, and resting on the Apartheid-style repression of a fifth of its own citizens.

The only way out is the unification on a socialist internationalist programme of Jewish and Palestinian workers with their class brothers and sisters throughout the Middle East and internationally, in a struggle against Zionism and imperialism and for the United Socialist States of the Middle East.



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