Netanyahu uses election deadlock to ramp up Iran war threats and retain power

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Results published on October 29 confirm that Israel's election produced no clear winner, with neither of the two Zionist blocs having the 61 seats needed for a majority in the 120-seat Knesset. The deadlock deepens Israel's political turmoil, making it ever more likely that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu will seek war as a means of perpetuating his rule.

Netanyahu's Likud party declared victory, having won the most seats at 27, securing along with its fascistic and ultra-orthodox allies 53 seats. But while that gives him an advantage in the negotiations ahead, it does not guarantee he will form the next government. The main opposition party, led by former army chief Gadi Eisenkot, won 21 seats, with his "Change" bloc winning 48 seats.

It was an election campaign fought between two war criminals on how best to prosecute the genocide against the Palestinians in Gaza and extend it to the West Bank, and continue the ongoing wars against Lebanon, Syria and above all Iran.

Netanyahu has been indicted for war crimes and crimes against humanity by the UN's International Criminal Court, while Eisenkot joined Netanyahu's war cabinet for eight months to prosecute Israel's war on Gaza. Eisenkot is notorious for formulating the Dahiya doctrine that calls for the use of overwhelming, disproportionate force against civilian infrastructure in enemy-controlled territory, Israel's modus operandi in all its wars.

The election contest was a racist campaign against the Palestinians, both abroad and at home, embraced by the ultra-nationalist and "liberal" Zionists alike. It flowed inexorably from the fundamental logic of the Zionist state, founded upon the expulsion and dispossession of the Palestinians.

All the Zionist parties contesting the elections are committed to the continuation and expansion of the wars against the Palestinians. They all back US President Donald Trump's war on Iran, pledging Israel's services as Washington's proxy in its bid to dominate the resource-rich region and the key transportation routes.

Almost all the leaders of the opposition bloc, framed by the media as "moderate" or "centrist", are former military leaders and/or politicians who have served under Netanyahu and agree with him on all essential questions, to the extent Netanyahu's government was able to complete an almost unprecedented full four-year term.

Despite the loss of Netanyahu's majority, support for the two blocs remained largely the same as in the 2022 election. A clear majority of voters supported ideologically right-wing parties, including Netanyahu's bloc and at least two clearly right-wing opposition parties led by Avigdor Lieberman and Naphtali Bennett, which together hold 72 seats.

The Democrats, led by former general Yair Golan and supported by Israel's "liberals" who support the long-dead two-state solution at some indeterminate time in the future, secured 8 seats, doubling their parliamentary strength.

It was the record 80 percent turn out by Israel's Palestinian citizens, who constitute 20 percent of the population and traditionally boycott Israel's elections, that changed the outcome of the election under Israel's system of proportional representation. The two Arab parties—the Joint List, led by Yousef Jabareen and Ahmad Tibi and Ofir Cassir of the Hadash anti-Zionist Arab-Jewish leftist party, and the United Arab List (Ra'am), the conservative Islamic movement led by Mansour Abbas that joined short-lived 2021-2 "government of change"—secured 11 and 8 seats respectively, the highest for Arab parties in the Knesset, denying Netanyahu's bloc a majority.

This record turnout reflected the fear and anger among Israel's Palestinians over Religious Zionism leader and Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich's incitement of settler violence, with his racist calls for "Judaizing" the Galilee and the Naqab (Negev), areas of Israel where hundreds of thousands of Palestinians live. Also of concern is the decades-long institutional neglect that has led to organised crime and gang violence, including unprecedented numbers of homicides, that has escalated sharply on Jewish Power leader and National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir's watch.

Neither of the Arab parties offer any progressive way

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forward, effectively signing up to the Zionist state's agenda and testifying to the utter collapse of the Palestinian nationalist perspective. Ra'am leader Abbas said his party wanted to be part of the next government, while Joint List chairman Jabareen said his party was prepared to help pave the way for Netanyahu's removal from power from outside.

With the opposition to Netanyahu—Eisenkot's Change bloc and the Arab parties—together holding 67 seats, Eisenkot has demanded the president should call on him to form a government. But a majority government would be dependent upon Eisenkot and his allies' forming a coalition with the Arab parties. While Democrats leader Golan has called for such a coalition, Eisenkot, Bennett and Lieberman have rejected it, declaring their intention of relying only on "Zionist" parties to form the new government.

On Saturday, several thousand demonstrated in Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, Haifa and northern Israel to urge the Israeli opposition to make a deal with Arab parties to remove Netanyahu's government. The Tel Aviv rally was met with a counterdemonstration by Netanyahu's young, far-right supporters.

Netanyahu and his fascistic allies have intensified their campaign of delegitimising such an alliance. He has accused the Arab parties of "stealing" the election, supposedly with funding from Qatar, without evidence, and claimed that any government dependent upon them would "endanger Israel". Ben-Gvir has called for the arrest of Arab party leaders and Smotrich for them to be subjected to Shin Bet interrogation. The Central Elections Committee and the police have rejected the claim that Arab parties "stole" the election.

Their campaign seems likely to succeed: the possibility of the opposition leaders going back on their word and cooperating with the Arab parties to depose Netanyahu appears to be waning. Without the cooperation of Arab lawmakers, Eisenkot would be unable to form a government, leaving Netanyahu a route to power without a majority.

President Isaac Herzog must now consult the parliamentary factions and choose the party leader with the most realistic chance of building a coalition. Netanyahu may now try to cajole opposition lawmakers into joining his coalition to build a majority, seek a national unity government or remain caretaker prime minister if negotiations fail and the country heads towards another election, which would leave him in power for another six months.

The struggle between the rival blocs will unfold under the shadow of a likely resumption of the war against Iran. Another war would serve Netanyahu's political interests: delaying the possibility of forming an alternative government, bringing Israel back to a state of emergency, pressuring political rivals to join a unity government and wiping out the opposition.

On Sunday, Golan, the Democrats leader, warned that Netanyahu could exploit a new military attack on Iran to remain in power. Writing on social media platform X, he said, "The likelihood of another round of fighting with Iran is growing".

His remarks came after numerous Israeli and US reports and statements suggesting that Israel and Washington are preparing to launch another attack on Iran after the US midterm elections. CNN reported shortly before Israel's election that Netanyahu was planning to attack Iran within days, but US officials asked him to hold off, indicating that a joint operation was imminent. According to an Israeli source, IDF Chief of Staff Eyal Zamir's warning that an attack could disrupt the elections helped persuade the Trump administration to wait.

The actions being prepared include reinforcement of American forces in the region and warnings sent to Gulf allies that they should prepare for an intense military campaign. The Pentagon has dispatched additional air defences, ammunition and supplies and relocated personnel from vulnerable bases. An additional Patriot battery is being moved to Israel amid concerns about interceptor shortages.

Bomber and fighter preparations, reductions in diplomatic staffing and the withdrawal of exposed personnel all point to preparations for American attacks and Iranian retaliation. Iran has said it would respond to any new attacks by striking at US, Gulf and Israeli infrastructure targets in neighbouring countries.

According to the *Wall Street Journal*, Trump and Netanyahu spoke on Saturday morning over the phone as the US set out its plans to resume strikes on Iran. On Sunday, Trump told reporters in Palm Beach, "We still have to take care of, I would say, one or two sites, but we can do that in 10 minutes… You probably could look at Pickaxe Mountain, and you have to take care of that." Pickaxe Mountain is believed to be a site used to store nuclear material that has not been struck yet by the US.



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