

Israeli Elections Provide No Clear Winner Yet

With 87% of votes counted Wednesday morning, Benjamin Netanyahu's fate as Israel's longest-serving prime minister remains unclear.

In Israel, people do not vote for individuals, but for parties to fill the 120-seat Knesset—or parliament. Sixty-one is the magic number of seats each party is aiming for to seize control of the government. But since no party has ever won a 61-seat majority on its own, parties must partner together to form government coalitions.

Netanyahu's Likud party is currently leading as the largest party, but neither he nor his rivals have enough seats to clinch a majority and end the country's years-long political stalemate.

The latest data shows Netanyahu's right-wing religious bloc with 59 seats, even with a potential partnership with Naftali Bennett's right-wing Yamina party. Meanwhile, the parties that oppose Netanyahu have 56 seats.

Surprisingly, a small Islamist party called Ra'am is dramatically changing the political landscape and could potentially be a kingmaker in this election. Ra'am is projected to win five seats, meaning both Netanyahu and his rivals may need to court this small Arab party to push them over the 61-seat threshold to determine who will be Israel's next prime minister.

Ra'am leader Mansour Abbas told Israeli media he is "willing to negotiate with both sides."

"If there is an offer, we'll sit and talk," he said.

Netanyahu pleaded with his political rivals early Wednesday to put aside their differences and partner with him to avoid a fifth election later this year.

The embattled prime minister said he will be “talking with all MKs” who might be willing to help him form a stable government.

“I stretch out my hand to all MKs who believe in this path. I don’t rule anybody out. I expect all who believe in our principles to act in a similar fashion,” said Netanyahu.

“Join us in this government,” he added.

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