

Netanyahu After Tight Election: 'Israel Needs a Strong Zionist Government'

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu addressed supporters at Likud Party headquarters early Wednesday morning and urged the formation of a "strong Zionist government."

"We're still waiting for the results. But one thing is clear—the state of Israel is at a historic turning point," he said. "We are facing immense opportunities and immense challenges, including the existential threat from Iran."

As a result, the Israeli leader said that the country needs "a strong government, a stable government, a Zionist government, a government committed to Israel as the nation-state of the Jewish people."

Netanyahu mentioned that he will begin negotiations with prospective coalition partners in the coming days to create a "strong Zionist government" in order to prevent an "anti-Zionist" government, alluding to the strong showing of the Joint Arab List in exit polls.

Exit polls indicate that the Blue and White Party and Likud are in a dead heat with between 30-32 seats for each party. Polls also indicate that neither party has a clear path to a majority 61 seats in the Knesset.

In his address prior to Netanyahu, Blue and White leader Benny Gantz urged national unity.

"Over a million citizens said no [to] incitement and division and yes to unity. They said no to corruption, yes to integrity. No to an attempt to ruin Israeli democracy, yes to guarding Israel as a Jewish and democratic state. Tonight,

however, it develops from here, the journey to fix Israeli society begins.”

Earlier in the evening, Likud Knesset member Yoav Kisch told reporters, including JNS, “Let’s wait for the final results. We have been in this scenario four months ago, and we have seen the whole picture change.”

Asked if there is a possibility that the country will go to a third round of elections this year, Kisch said, “There is definitely a possibility of going to another election, but we hope it will not get to there, and we hope [Benjamin] Netanyahu will be the next prime minister.”

At the same time, Likud Party leaders dismissed calls to replace Netanyahu as leader of the party.

“Likud is a united party and will continue to be so. Likud is the only democratic party in the political system, headed by an elected leader, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu,” said Yuli Edelstein, who sits No. 2 on the Likud list behind Netanyahu.

“I urge other party leaders not to try to determine who will be our leader—any such attempt will not succeed. Unity is the secret of the Likud’s power over the years, and it will continue to be so in every situation.” {eoa}

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