

# *Israeli candidates remain stuck in electoral deadlock*

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Tel Aviv, September 18 (RHC)-- Israel is reportedly stuck in a political deadlock following general elections as neither Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu nor his main challenger Benny Gantz have managed to secure a parliamentary majority, raising the possibility of fresh coalition talks or the end of the premier's rule.

With 92 percent of the votes in Israel's Tuesday elections counted, Netanyahu's ruling Likud party and the centrist Blue and White alliance of former military chief Gantz, failed to garner enough seats to secure a parliamentary majority needed to form an administration, Israeli television channels reported on Wednesday.

Various Israeli media reported that the Likud party and Gantz's Blue and White had 32 seats each of parliament's 120.

For a governing coalition of 61 legislators, each party would have to form a coalition with other parties, including the far-right party of former minister of military affairs, Avigdor Lieberman, Yisrael Beiteinu, which has nine seats in the assembly, according to early results.

Among the others parties, the mainly Arab Joint List alliance became the third-largest force in parliament with 12 seats, the reported results show. Lieberman's party could hold the balance of power, exit polls

show.

The former minister, who used to be a major ally of the prime minister, is now one of his key opponents. He formerly said that he will insist upon a unity government that includes Likud and the centrist Blue and White coalition party. Israel will not hold a third round of elections and the parties will have to deal with the “constellation” that emerges from this vote, he said.

Netanyahu said earlier on Wednesday that he would seek the formation of a new “Zionist” administration that excludes Arab parties. Making no victory claim or concession of defeat, the prime minister told a small group of his supporters in Tel Aviv, “There will not be and there cannot be a government that leans on Arab, anti-Zionist parties.”

His main challenger, also addressed his supporters, saying that Netanyahu apparently “did not succeed in his mission” to win a fifth term. He said that his party appeared to have “fulfilled our mission, but “we will await the actual results.”

It would take more than a week for electoral officials to release the final results. Once the official results are announced, the parties will be involved in weeks of negotiates to form the next government.

The party chiefs will recommend to the president who they plan to back as leader. The president will then task the appointed leader with forming a government. The candidate will have up to six weeks to do so. If he fails, someone else can be tasked with the mission.

Analysts say Gantz could be the next prime minister if he can forge a deal with the Arab parties, and that will bring an end to Netanyahu’s rule.

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